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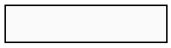

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16 Women’s participation in water management

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Background[edit | edit source]

Briefing Materials

The following materials illustrate concepts, interventions, outcomes and lessons learnt, including through stories from community members.

Slide decks

• Gender equality and women's empowerment

Case studies

• Women water heroes: women championing good water management
• Enhancing women's leadership
• Women's leadership in WMA polder organisations

Videos

• Women's Empowerment (Bangla with English subtitles)

Water management has always been seen as a male domain in Bangladesh due to the traditional belief that women should not engage in public spheres. In addition, women often expressed more interest in domestic water supply than in water resources management. The government, however, recognised that participatory water management is a concern for men and women; this is reflected in the 30% quota for women as executive committee members of Water Management Organisations as stipulated in BWDB's Participatory Water Management Guidelines of 2000.

A study published in 2014 on WMOs in coastal areas showed that the inclusion of women as executive committee members of WMOs was usually achieved, but on average at the rate of 20% rather than 30%. As the rationale for women's participation in WMOs the study mentioned that "*it can improve the integration of their needs within water management and therefore improve their livelihoods*". The study also observed that WMO's are especially in charge of the productive uses of water, but rarely consider other uses that are important for women, such as drinking water, bathing, livestock and homestead garden irrigation.

The study referred to earlier project evaluations that found that women WMO representatives were often token members with no real power in WMO decision-making processes. Own FGDs in early 2012 by the study's authors revealed that women were often not notified of, or involved in, water

management meetings, although they were formally included in the WMOs. Interestingly, the study found some exceptions on "women's participation as a tokenism" in the two IPSWAM polders included in their study, ie polders 30 and 22. In these two polders, the study writes, "*gender awareness training of both male and female WMO members was perceived to have increased the confidence of women engaging as active executive committee members in the WMOs.*"

Blue Gold approach[edit | edit source]

The Blue Gold Program had also committed itself to achieve the 30% quota for women in WMO executive committees. The main challenge, however, would be ensuring the active and meaningful participation of women in WMO decision-making, avoiding that women are only member on paper. Apart from the 30% quota, Blue Gold set two internal targets for women's participation, ie 40% women in the general membership of Water Management Groups and at least 5% (later increased to 7%) of the three key positions in WMO executive committees (president, secretary and treasurer).

Various BGP interventions supported the achievement of the above. Over time, such interventions became fine-tuned and/or better focused. Key interventions to promote women's participation were:

- Awareness creation for all community members (M/F) on why participatory water management is important.
- Motivating that also women became active WMG members, in meetings and in court yard sessions. With the result that 43% of WMG membership were female by the end of BGP.
- Promoting that the best available women were selected as candidates for executive committee members, in particular for important positions.
- Gender and Leadership Development training – next to other training such as FFS-, which built (also) capacities of potential women leaders, but also enhancing awareness among men about gender equality and equal opportunities.
- Blue Gold staff actively promoting that women in WMGs speak out and take up leadership positions. Over time, when examples and successes of women's participation became visible, staff motivation also increased.

Above interventions were implemented as a mix of separate activities (such as the gender and leadership training) and integrated in regular Blue Gold activities (such as motivating women to speak out).

Why is water management important for women?[edit | edit source]

At the start of BGP it was still common that women brought up concerns related to domestic water supply when the topic of water was raised in the presence of women. This completely changed over the years. BGP experience demonstrated that once women have gained insight in water management, they also realise that it is also important to them, because:

- Women now understand that good water management benefits agricultural production and hence contributes to increased incomes and economic development
- Women's active roles in agriculture are increasing, hence they better feel the need for water management, see chapter 24 which also discussesd feminisation of agriculture
- Women realise that WMG decision-making can also affect their needs and interests
- Water management, especially in-polder, also benefits homesteads, such as reduced risk of flooding and increased access to irrigation water.

“When I understood the impact of water for agriculture, I also understood the importance of water management for women” — Monimjan Akter, WMG treasurer, WMA joint secretary and president of catchment O&M committee

Why are women important for water management?[edit | edit source]

At BGP’s start, there was still some scepticism on why women should be motivated for participatory water management, even though the 30% and 40% quota was adhered to by all. In the course of BGP also practical reasons emerged why women can be important for water management, apart from the principle of gender equality (equal opportunities for women and men). These practical reasons can be summarised as “*more hands on deck for better water management*” or:

- Larger pool of potential WMG leaders
- More diversified leadership, representing better the interest of local communities, including of women polder dwellers, and taking better decisions
- Some women successfully engaged in conflict resolution: more neutral than men, less politically biased
- Women contribute to maintenance -“*cleaning water hyacinth*”- and to in-polder water management.

“Women dig most of the small field channels” — CDF in Patuakhali

Below are examples of women who show commitment to participatory water management, also taking initiatives:

"*Souda regularly attends the monthly meetings; before every meeting she identifies the problems of the WMG members (M/F) and the water management situation. Then during the meeting she discusses with other WMG members and take decisions together.*" *— from case study on Souda Begum, WMG treasurer*

"*Noyantara, as WMG president, took the initiative to address their water logging problem, motivating the farmers to build seven cross-bundhs. She ensured a contribution of BDT 10,000 from the Union Parishad; benefiting farmers contributed the rest. Now 100 farmers at 200 acres have a second crop.*" *— from case study Noyantara*

"*Morjina, as WMG vice-president, well understands that water management is needed for agricultural improvements. She took a lead in realising two box culverts at Amtoli khal as well as a cross-bundh in front of Pokhiapara sluice khal, the latter to keep sweet water available for irrigation. This was jointly financed by the Union Parishad, the WMG, and the benefiting farmers.*" *— from case study Morjina, polder 47/4*

Results[edit | edit source]

The explicit attention of Blue Gold to including women in WMGs and promoting their meaningful participation contributed to gradual but significant changes:

- More women holding important positions of president, treasurer and secretary (from less than 5% in the first years to 9% in 2018/19).

"*In the first years of BGP there were 1-2 women WMG presidents in (then) 311 WMGs; now 17*

women presidents in 511 WMGs. There are now 27 women secretaries and 95 women treasurers. The latter means that 19% of the WMG treasurers are women."

- Women in Executive Committees are now more active and vocal than at start of BGP.

"In the first years of Blue Gold women were selected who did not have any experience and exposure, because such women were not available. But due to training women got knowledge and voice, and became available as candidates. So the recently selected women (executive committee members) are better than in first years of Blue Gold." — CDF involved in BGP since 2014

- Ample examples of women who have a high level of understanding on water management, which enhances the quality of WMO decisions and initiatives.

"She demonstrated a better understanding of water management than many male candidates" — BGP staff member about a woman WMG/WMA leader

- Women are now more often in WMO leadership positions due to their capacities rather than due to quota.

Examples: (i) women are also represented in catchment O&M committees, which have no quota; (ii) 10 of the 12 Executive Committee members of Kanchan Nagar WMG (P29) are women, including the president.

- Women also participate in decision-making on CAWM / in-polder water management.
- Women's empowerment: many women who engaged in participatory water management became empowered in several ways:
    - social empowerment, by increased networks, mobility and confidence.
    - increased women's leadership, also more accepted by men; membership of WMO executive committees form a springboard for other leadership positions, such as UP member. In 2016, 93 UP members were selected from among WMO leaders, including 25 women.
    - economic empowerment through (in-polder) water management contributing to increased productivity of women engaged in agricultural production and increased wage labour opportunities for poor women.

A more elaborate discussion on how BGP contributed to women's empowerment is in chapter 24.

Enabling factors and challenges[edit | edit source]

Factors that enabled or enhanced successful women's participation in PWM include BGP's starting point that WMG membership is not limited to one person per household, allowing that also women can join whose husbands aspire membership. The high participation of women farmers in training, such as FFS, contributed to women getting knowledge and insights, also raising their interest to engage with (in-polder) water management. The good proportion of female field staff (50% at the start; later about 33%) functioned as role models.

Challenges remain: Improvements in women's positions and leadership are not observed equally in all WMGs in all polders. And women remain substantially under-represented in the higher levels of WMO organisations, especially in key positions in WMAs and in Catchment O&M committees. Still, momentum has been created for change.

"Elderly men still want to sit in the front and have the women in the back (during WMO meetings),

but it has become more and more common that some women sit also in front rows and are included as speakers" — Zonal staff member

See also[edit | edit source]

Previous chapter:		Next chapter:
Chapter 15: WMO capacity building	**Blue Gold Lessons Learnt Wiki** **Section D: BGP Interventions: Participatory Water Management**	**Chapter 17: In-polder water management**

Section D: BGP Interventions: Participatory Water Management		
Chapter 14: Consultation and participation in planning	**Chapter 15: WMO capacity building**	**Chapter 16: Women's participation in water management**
1. Polder Development Plan 2. WMG Action Plans	1. From individual to group capacity 2. From transferring knowledge to promoting behaviour change 3. From dependence to self-reliance 4. From autonomous WMGs to networked organisations	1. Background 2. Blue Gold approach 3. Why is water management important for women? 4. Why are women important for water management? 5. Results 6. Enabling factors and challenges
Chapter 17: In-polder water management	**Chapter 18: The Water Management Partnership**	**Chapter 19: Operationalisation of the PWM concept**
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Chapter 20: Way Forward		
Blue Gold Wiki		

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A defined set of temporary activities through which facilitators seek to effect change

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

Bangladesh Water Development Board, government agency which is responsible for surface water and groundwater management in Bangladesh, and lead implementing agency for the Blue Gold Program

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

Water Management Organizations - The common name of organizations of the local stakeholders of a water resource project/sub-project/scheme. The concept WMO typically refers to WMGs and WMAs (and/or WMFs) together

A process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.

A livelihood is a way of making a living. It comprises capabilities, skills, assets (including material and social resources), and activities that households put together to produce food, meet basic needs, earn income, or establish a means of living in any other way.

Water Management Organizations - The common name of organizations of the local stakeholders of a water resource project/sub-project/scheme. The concept WMO typically refers to WMGs and WMAs (and/or WMFs) together

Focus Group Discussions - in which a group of participants from similar backgrounds or experiences gather to discuss a specific topic of interest, guided by a group facilitator who introduces the topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion amongst themselves

Integrated Planning for Sustainable Water Management

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households or a population of just over 1,500.

Blue Gold Program

Male / Female

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households or a population of just over 1,500.

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

Gender equality exists when men and women, boys and girls are attributed equal social value, equal rights and equal responsibilities; and men and women have equal access to the means (resources, opportunities) to exercise those rights and responsibilities. This does not mean that women and men will become the same, but rather that rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether someone is born male or female.

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households or a population of just over 1,500.

human intervention in the capture, conveyance, utilisation and drainage of surface and/or ground water in a certain area: a process of social interaction between stakeholders around the issue of water control.

An area of low-lying land surrounded by an earthen embankment to prevent flooding by river or seawater, with associated structures which are provided to either drain excess rainwater within the polder or to admit freshwater to be stored in a khal for subsequent use for irrigation.

Water Management Association - In Blue Gold, the polder-level representative of WMGs, and signatory to an O&M Agreement with BWDB

actions taken to prevent or repair the deterioration of water management infrastructure and to keep the physical components of a water management system in such a state that they can serve their intended function.

In-polder water management; term used in Blue Gold to describe water management interventions which aim to deliver excess water from the field through field drains to secondary khals and thence to primary khals for evacuation through the sluice/regulator

Community Development Facilitator - a member of the Blue Gold technical assistance team who lived and worked in a specific polder, and provided the main point of contact between the project and the polder communities

Bangladesh Taka

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

drainage channel or canal

small earthen embankment or dam

A vertical gate to control the flow of water; also referred to as 'regulator'

Community-led Agricultural Water Management - with DAE, Blue Gold established a network of schemes for demonstration purposes where locally-applicable annual cropping patterns are introduced along with water level control facilitated by small-scale water infrastructure, and the development of value chain skills in farmers

empowerment is a process, enabling people to make choices and convert these into desired actions and results. In doing so, people take control of their own lives, improve their own position, set their own agenda, gain skills, develop self-confidence, solve problems, and develop self-sufficiency. Empowerment leads to genuine participation of all actors as it is a process of gaining self-confidence for individual development as well as to contribute towards development of others.

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

Water Management Association - In Blue Gold, the polder-level representative of WMGs, and signatory to an O&M Agreement with BWDB

Namespaces

Variants

This page was last edited on 16 December 2021, at 14:38.

Blue Gold Program Wiki

The wiki version of the Lessons Learnt Report of the Blue Gold program, documents the experiences of a technical assistance (TA) team working in a development project implemented by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) over an eight+ year period from March 2013 to December 2021. The wiki lessons learnt report (LLR) is intended to complement the BWDB and DAE project completion reports (PCRs), with the aim of recording lessons learnt for use in the design and implementation of future interventions in the coastal zone.