



EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY FOR WATER AND SANITATION IN RURAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality are two of the most significant sustainable development goals that should be pursued in relation to the water and sanitation systems in rural India. In spite of the many attempts taken by both the government and non-profit organisations, women and girls living in rural regions continue to bear a disproportionate part of the burden for addressing the water and sanitation needs of their homes. Within the scope of this study, the ways in which gender, water access, and sanitation practices all interact with one another are investigated in great detail. Specifically, it emphasises on the ways in which empowerment initiatives, such as groups of women who use water, community hygiene education, and inclusive WASH policies, have the potential to alter the lives of people living in rural territories. The purpose of this article is to investigate the cultural and societal barriers that prevent gender-inclusive planning from occurring. In addition to evaluating the role that participatory governance plays in ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation services, the essay also goes further into these barriers. According to research, rural WASH efforts that place an emphasis on gender equality not only improve health and hygiene outcomes, but they also provide women the ability to take responsibility of their communities. Consequently, the incorporation of gender into the administration of water and sanitation in rural areas is not only a need from a policy standpoint, but it is also a step towards inclusive development.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Empowerment, Rural India, Water and Sanitation, WASH, Women's Participation, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

A person's health, sense of dignity, and general quality of life are all strongly impacted by elements such as the availability of clean water and good sanitation, both of which are inalienable rights for every individual. Because they have traditionally been the ones who have been required to collect water and keep the house clean, women and girls in rural India suffer a disproportionate part of the burden of water and sanitation concerns. This is because they are the ones who have been expected to do these things. As a consequence of the gendered division of labour, women are subjected to a disproportionately heavy mental and physical burden. This, in turn, affects the prospects for progress that women have in their employment, in their

communities, and in their pursuit of higher education. The lack of private facilities that are also clean poses a threat to the health, privacy, and safety of women, especially during the menstrual cycle and during times of pregnancy.

Nation-wide sanitation programmes in past

According to the Census, the rural sanitation coverage in India was only 1% in 1981.

The first nationwide programme with a focus on sanitation was the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP), which was started in 1986 to provide sanitation facilities in rural areas. Later, in 1999, CRSP was restructured and launched as the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC). While CRSP was a supply-driven infrastructure-oriented programme based on subsidy, TSC was a demand-driven, community-led, project-based programme organised around the district as the unit.

By 2001, only 22% of the rural families had access to toilets. It increased further to 32.7% by 2011. In 2012, TSC was revamped as Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) to accelerate the sanitation coverage in rural areas through saturation approach and by enhancing incentives for Individual Household Latrines (IHHL).

In comparison to rural sanitation, fewer programmes were enacted to tackle deficiencies in urban sanitation. In the 1980s, the Integrated Low-Cost Sanitation Scheme provided subsidies for households to build low-cost toilets. Additionally, the National Slum Development Project and its replacement programme, the Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana launched in 2001, were programmes that aimed to construct community toilets for slum populations. In 2008, the National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP) was announced to manage human excreta and associated public health and environmental impacts.

On October 2, 2014, the Swachh Bharat Mission was launched with two components: Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), to focus on rural and urban sanitation, respectively. While the rural component of the Mission is implemented under the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the urban one is implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. In 2015, the Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan under NITI Aayog had observed that the key difference between SBM and previous programmes was in the efforts to attract more partners to supplement public sector investment towards sanitation. In spite of this, infrastructure is not sufficient on its own. It is only possible for these projects to be effective and long-lasting if they empower women and ensure that

gender equality is achieved. When it comes to the administration of water and sanitation, the phrase "empowerment" refers to the process of providing women with a greater voice in the formulation of policies, as well as increasing the opportunities available to them for leadership and access to information.

Research has shown that the inclusion of women in water and sanitation projects across their entire lifetime, from planning to execution to monitoring, is beneficial to the success of these efforts. It has been seen that community-based sanitation programs, self-help organisations, and water user committees that are led by women have all experienced improvements in the delivery of services and accountability. Gender-sensitive WASH (Water, Sanitation, and cleanliness) education is needed in order to remove cultural taboos, increase awareness of cleanliness, and facilitate the development of community resilience.

Despite the existence of progressive legislative frameworks and excellent examples to follow, women continue to be under-represented in the administration of water and sanitation owing to sociocultural obstacles, a lack of expertise, and long-standing patriarchal practices. This is the case even though there are good models to follow. For this gap to be closed, it would need comprehensive efforts that involve communication on habit change that is particular to rural areas, capacity development, community mobilising, and policy reform. In addition to conducting an in-depth analysis of the effects of gender equality and empowerment, the purpose of this project is to enhance the quality of water and sanitation services implemented in rural areas of India. Through the examination of laws, case studies, and grassroots initiatives, the purpose of this project is to demonstrate how inclusive WASH solutions may contribute to the advancement of social justice and sustainable development.

OBJECTIVE

1. To examine how women's empowerment affects rural India's access to and administration of water and sanitation services.
2. To assess how community involvement and gender-inclusive policies affect the attainment of equitable and sustainable WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) results.

GENDER AND WATSAN IN INDIA

When examining the resources that WatSan provides, gender is an important consideration since it determines who is able to utilise them, who can contribute to their creation, and who can supervise their maintenance. There are a lot of people that confuse gender and sex with one another. Individual creatures are classed as either female or male according to their reproductive capabilities. This classification is based on sex. In addition to the viewpoints of women, the concept of gender incorporates the views of males as well, irrespective of their financial standing. Individuals who identify as transgender raise concerns that are both legitimate and relevant about the nature of gender problems, despite the fact that this research does not include transgender persons. "The socially constructed identities, roles, and responsibilities of women, men, and the relationship between them" is the way Ahmed explains the concept of gender. The expectations that are put on men and women in society, as well as the rights and responsibilities that are associated with each gender, are shaped by cultural and historical circumstances. There are a number of factors that contribute to

the fact that males are more likely to have access to and participate in the establishment and administration of WatSan systems. The manner in which men and women interact with one another in relation to the resources of WatSan is influenced by several social systems, including as religion, class, race and ethnicity, income and wealth, and caste structure. There may be nuances to these ideas depending on the nation, region, state, hamlet, or even the country in which they are being discussed. There are certain men and women who are not on equal footing with regard to their rights, responsibilities, and obligations. Not only are men and women distinct from one another, but they also have distinct goals and needs. According to the findings of the study, women and other members of disadvantaged groups in India are under-represented in the design, management, and access to WatSan opportunities.

There is a lack of equality in the allocation of water resources, particularly with regard to women and groups who hold disadvantageous positions. The majority of women in rural India use water for drinking, bathing, and cooking; yet, in some regions, it is prohibited for women to use public water sources when they are menstruating. This is because women are more likely to break their menstrual cycle. The concept that women are essentially filthy when they are pregnant or menstruation originates from Hindu traditions that have been around for a very long time. Water is vital for women's production in many rural Indian businesses, including agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries; yet, in rural regions, people with higher social status often have better access to water. This is because females are more likely to be employed in these industries. Additionally, patriarchal standards either hinder women from purchasing property or refuse to acknowledge their ownership rights. This is a similar situation. The institutions that are responsible for the management of irrigation water either do not involve them or fail to take their requests into consideration when making decisions about these systems. Even though they are a marginalised caste group in general, members of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) caste group in particular rural communities in India are prohibited access to water sources such as wells and communal stand-posts. This is the case despite the fact that they reside in such areas. This originates from the long-held notion among Hindus that solar collectors are inherently filthy and have the potential to taint water sources that are otherwise pure.

When it comes to sanitary supplies, women and persons who are marginalised are often left out in the cold as well. Because of the cultural customs that are prevalent in rural India, it is often accepted for men to relieve themselves outside of the house. It's possible that many people won't feel the need to construct their own toilet at home because of this. Because they are unable to control their periods, one out of every ten girls and young women who attend schools that do not have adequate sanitary facilities drop out of school when they reach the age of puberty. There are instances when those who are on the periphery of society have a difficult time affording the supplies that are required to construct a toilet inside. A disproportionate number of women and other marginalised groups are negatively impacted by inadequate access to WatSan. A significant proportion of India's home water collectors are young women, often falling between the age range of fifteen to thirty-five years old. All aspects of these young women's lives, including their health, their educational possibilities, and their personal development, are negatively impacted. In many cases, women are required to get up early, remain up till late, or drive significant distances in order to get water. In general, women would prefer use water for practical or household purposes (like washing clothing) than for their own personal hygiene (like taking a bath). This is because women tend to focus on practical and domestic tasks.

The workdays that they have are long and exhausting. Document the everyday activities that rural Indian women engage in, including but not limited to caring for animals, children, the elderly, and the sick, as well as gathering water and firewood, cultivating crops, preparing meals, and washing dishes. If women do not have access to adequate facilities, they may have feelings of insecurity when they need to use the restroom throughout the day or very early in the morning. They run the risk of being subjected to sexual harassment or assaults by animals as a result of this. As a consequence of this, women are at an increased risk of experiencing medical concerns such as constipation and a reduction in their food intake. Due to the fact that they are required to manually pick up human rubbish, there are regions in India where people who are classified as SCs are more likely to suffer from illnesses associated to sanitation.

The perspectives of women and other members of disadvantaged groups are often disregarded in the planning and management of WatSan. There is the possibility of excluding women from the planning and administration of WatSan, independent of their caste or the socioeconomic background they come from. "Such decision making is public and socially identified as masculine, the domain of powerful men," reports the author, who ties this to a long history of women's marginalisation. "This domain is the domain of powerful men," the author says. When women are not provided with genuine opportunity to voice their opinions and have an influence on decision-making, it is possible that their involvement will be inconsequential. The most vulnerable women, those who live in South Carolina and those who do not have property, are not even solicited for their input when it comes to discussions over the pricing of water and the placement of standposts. It is possible that pour-flush toilets will make things more difficult in the event that there is not a nearby water source. It is customary for women to be the ones who clean the toilet system. If the wrong products are used to clean the toilets, the cleaning process will take much more time.

All aspects of WatSan systems, including access, planning, and administration, are enhanced when women and other excluded people are integrated in the organisation. When women and girls have greater access to water, their health improves. This is especially true for girls. If women are able to make more money as a result of increased access to water, this will have a positive impact on the economy of the local community (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2017). It is possible for a greater number of young women and girls to attend school when facilities for sanitation are improved. In order to guarantee that WatSan systems are developed and maintained in a manner that satisfies the requirements of the whole community, it is essential to include women and groups that are marginalised in the planning and management procedures. In addition to fostering a feeling of community, it provides individuals with the opportunity to acquire WatSan systems for the long run. Through a number of studies, it has been shown that WatSan systems that feature women in positions of authority are more likely to be sustainable over the course of time.

EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

There is a wide variety of ways in which the concept of empowerment has been articulated. At its heart, empowerment is synonymous with power. Through the application of the relational concept of empowerment, individuals who were previously rendered powerless are provided with the chance to become powerful. It's possible that this is a reference to having control over resources that are material, human,

mental, monetary, or ideological. One definition of empowerment states it as a transition "by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability." According to her, the process of empowerment has a number of different components, including the acquisition of resources (whether they be material, human, or social), the acquisition of agency (a sense of inner power, decision-making, negotiation, resistance, deception and manipulation, or analysis and reflection), and the accomplishment of goals (objectives such as fundamental necessities). It is essential to have a healthy sense of self-esteem in order to take part in the process of empowerment. The academic literature does not devote enough attention to discussing the mental aspects of an empowered person. As a prerequisite for initiating any form of action, it is essential to have self-assurance and trust in one's existing capabilities. These feelings are strengthened even more when one takes action and then enjoys the results of that activity, which results in positive feedback loops. Empowerment should come from inside an individual or group of individuals, but it is sometimes facilitated by organisations that are located outside of the individual or group. The idea derives from Paolo Freire's thesis of conscientisation, which he devised to explain how the impoverished learn to question established authority figures and take command of their own destiny. The notion was designed to describe how poor people begin to question authority figures.

One definition of gender equality is that it constitutes a situation in which men and women are treated in the same manner and are provided with equal opportunities to realise their full potential as human beings. Consequently, it implies that men and women are entitled to the same rights to exercise control over resources. Explain the differences between gender equality and gender equity. Gender equality is a given on all levels, including the legal, the opportunity, and the expressive levels. In order to achieve gender equality, we must first acknowledge that men and women have different requirements, and then collaborate in order to discover solutions that will result in outcomes that are fair for both sexes respectively. It is important to note that caste, class, race/ethnicity, financial level, and religion all have a role in determining the rights, duties, and opportunities that are available to women and men. For the most part, gender is determined by historical and social variables. In order to ascertain whether or not there is equality or disparity between the sexes, it is necessary to examine a number of aspects.

Although the notions of gender equality and empowerment are connected to one another, they are not the same. The process of empowering individuals and working towards gender equality often involves happenings on the levels of the household, the community, and the political system. Equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women are two distinct but interconnected sets of ideas. The term "empowerment" refers to the process that might start when oppressed individuals, such as women or other people, are provided with the resources they need to become agents of change. A bottom-up approach is needed for development that places an emphasis on empowerment. Women and other disadvantaged groups continue to battle for equitable decision-making and resource distribution, despite the fact that they are aware of the power imbalance that exists. The promotion of gender equality in development may be accomplished via the employment of both top-down and bottom-up techniques. In the context of a top-down approach to gender equality, projects, policies, and programs that promote fair resource allocation and decision-making are beneficial to women and other disadvantaged groups. At the communal level, gender equality may be

implemented via the empowerment of individuals, and at the political level, it can be accomplished through the empowerment of communities.

MEASURING EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

There have been several attempts made by persons from a wide variety of areas to measure empowerment. These fields include, among others, social work, community service, education, and development. As part of this investigation, the definitions of resources, agency, and achievements will be used in order to evaluate the process of empowerment for women. In spite of the fact that they seem to be straightforward, resources such as access to WatSan should display the possibility for agency and successes in order to serve as a helpful signal. When doing an evaluation of agency, such as when a person decides to pursue a WatSan goal, it is necessary to take into account their cultural and social circumstances. The concept of free will is attempted to be quantified by some academics via the use of many elements such as decision-making ability, power, control, and choice. It is possible for accomplishments, such as accomplishing WatSan objectives, to represent universal ideals such as providing sustenance, health, and shelter. The definition of 'achievement' that reflects the ideals of those who are engaged in assessing moves the attention away from the choices that women make or even the values that their communities hold. Along with the capacity to mobilise and exercise influence on other people, the ability to develop networks for communities or groups, the ability to form coalitions and pool resources are all potential components of success.

The technique that is being used to evaluate empowerment is fraught with a great deal of difficulty. The ability to attain empowerment, together with the means to do so. Agency assessments that only take into account the number of women and people from disadvantaged groups who are participating in decision-making present a simple image of a reality that is more nuanced than it otherwise seems. Despite the fact that women have participated in the development and administration of WatSan, there has been very little progress made towards the empowerment of women via the organisation. According to the findings of their investigation, women in WatSan have the opportunity to gain empowerment in four different areas: skilled occupation, decision-making, understanding of cleanliness methods, and money creation. On the other hand, in India, these women are unable to fully participate due to societal restraints such as caste, age, social status, and ethnicity. Women may make assessments that are not evident to those who are looking in from the outside. This is an additional complexity. Empowerment tends to concentrate on differences in individual's capacity for decision-making rather than variations in people's actual decision-making, and achievement measures need to take into account the likelihood that different people could make different judgements.

There are, however, a few different avenues that a researcher might pursue in order to properly document empowerment. Taking into account resources, agency, and achievements as a whole is essential due to the connection that exists between these three factors. Indicators should be checked against one another to ensure accuracy. When doing research, it is usual to ask the question of how the agency influences successes or how the resources affect the agency. Keeping a record of the events that have occurred over the course of time is an excellent approach to document the learning process. Either by conducting life-history interviews with the participants or by collecting empowering indicators from two separate time periods, it is feasible to

accomplish this goal. The process of empowerment could be better understood via the use of qualitative data. When it comes to evaluating the influence of empowerment on the household, community, and political levels, research that is tailored specifically for certain projects and programs has a tendency to produce more accurate findings.

A bit less complicated are the measures that measure gender equality. The term "gender equality" is defined in this article as the distribution of all rights and responsibilities that are pertinent, as well as all opportunities, control, and access that are further pertinent. Context is a factor in determining gender equality. The following categories of elements should be taken into consideration: historical, geographical, cultural, social, and normative. In the event that men and women do not partake equally in the distribution of the aforementioned dimensions of gender equality, we refer to this phenomenon as gender inequality. Women's willingness to tolerate prejudice based on their gender might sometimes guarantee that it continues to exist. "When women come to terms with their own inferior status in society, they tend to accept it and even discriminate against other women in that society." It is possible that women have internalised subordination and learnt to cope with their lower status in communities or cultures that are patriarchal. Despite the fact that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential for convincing policymakers, very few organisations keep track of gender equality or opportunities for empowerment. It is possible for organisations to make use of measures in order to provide evidence in support of their claims of gender equality and empowerment. It is important for organisations to ask themselves continual questions about the consequences of projects on people's lives and the empowerment process. Given that the concepts of empowerment and gender equality are inextricably linked, it is imperative that their evaluations be carried out simultaneously. Measurements of gender equality and empowerment inside the organisation may be used to establish whether or not women are made aware of the power imbalances that continue to exist in the world and whether or not WatSan activities provide outcomes that are equitable. It is true that many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) organise WatSan programs with the intention of empowering women; however, Joshi and Fawcett (2001) point out that when they speak about empowerment, they focus primarily on the number of women who engage in the programs rather than the quality of the programs themselves. One of the goals of this study is to evaluate gender equality and empowerment via the use of quantitative measurement. With the use of these indicators, we are able to ascertain whether or not WatSan is operating as it was designed to.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative that women and girls be given more agency in order for the water and sanitation initiatives in rural India to be successful over the long term. Despite the fact that significant progress has been made via national programs and grassroots efforts, true sustainability can only be achieved when women are actively involved in decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes. This is the only way to achieve true sustainability. Women's empowerment not only makes water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services more efficient, but it also improves the health of communities, the development of economies, and the general well-being of individuals. However, women continue to confront societal and cultural barriers that hinder them from attaining their full potential and taking the lead in this profession. Since this is the case, it is of the utmost need to move towards policymaking and planning that is more gender-sensitive and

inclusive. If water and sanitation projects in rural India integrate empowerment strategies, it may be easier to achieve gender equality and sustainable development in such areas.

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