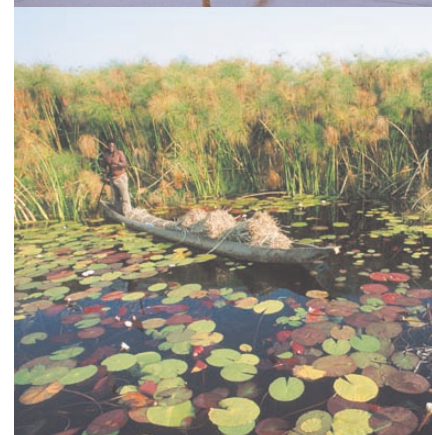


## Gender Makes the Difference

- Among the many environmental services that ecosystems provide, one of the most critical to humans is the supply of clean water. Today, more than 1.7 billion people live in 40 countries with critically low levels of forest cover, and nearly 250 million people in 20 countries experience both forest and freshwater scarcities.
- Because women are more reliant upon common property forest resources for survival and income, and women and their daughters are more often responsible for fuelwood and water collection, degradation of watersheds negatively affects the health, income, and work burden of women and girls.
- Watershed management initiatives that exclude women as stakeholders ignore half the population, decreasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions promoted.
- In the Surguja district, India, a watershed management committee did not take women's needs and priorities into consideration, and did not invite women to participate in the development of the watershed management plan. As a result, only men benefited from income-generating soil conservation and water management activities.
- In the lower parts of watersheds, women are often heavily involved in pre- and post-fishing activities, including handling, processing, marketing, distribution, maintenance of nets and tools and preparation of meals for fishing trips.
- By participating in stakeholder dialogues on management of communal forests in Mexico and protected areas in Petén, Guatemala, women gained improved access to craft-making and horticultural resources and earned higher income.
- Legal constraints can affect women's rights to control water resources. In Kenya, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme appropriated all available land, investing control in the hands of male managers. Women lost rights to land they had traditionally used to grow subsistence food crops. Consequently, they became more dependent on men and were forced to turn to their husbands to buy food.
- In developing countries, women have had to choose between feeding their families or paying the water bill as a consequence of water mismanagement and privatization.

In watersheds, socio-economic and biophysical systems interact in a complex and dynamic manner. Their behavior is a reflection of how water, soil, flora and fauna resources are managed and of the human productive activities, policies, infrastructure and other elements existing in the upper, middle and lower areas of a watershed.



#### FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

IUCN- Gender and Environment  
[www.genderandenvironment.org](http://www.genderandenvironment.org)

SIDA. Equality Prompt # 13: Irrigation & Equality between Women and Men  
[www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Policy/\\$file/13-irrigation.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Policy/$file/13-irrigation.pdf)

Women's Major Group Dialogue Paper for CSD-12. Women, Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements – On Track or Distracted?  
[www.mondialeo.nl/uploaded\\_files/MG%20paper%20women.doc](http://www.mondialeo.nl/uploaded_files/MG%20paper%20women.doc)

Gender and water articles-studies and methodologies  
[www.genderandenvironment.org](http://www.genderandenvironment.org)

Gender and Water Alliance  
[www.genderandwateralliance.org/](http://www.genderandwateralliance.org/)

Beijing Platform for Action Objective K: Women and the Environment  
[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/environ.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/environ.htm)

Capacity Building Network for Integrated Water Resources Management  
[www.cap-net.org/](http://www.cap-net.org/)

#### SOURCES:

Gender and Water Alliance.  
**Tapping into Sustainability: Issues and Trends in Gender Mainstreaming in Water and Sanitation.**  
A background document for the Gender and Water Session 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum.  
Kyoto, Japan. 2003.

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Background paper, No. 4.  
Stockholm, Sweden. 2000.

Seeley, J., *et al.*  
**Women's Participation in Watershed Development in India.**  
Gatekeeper Series no. 92. IIED.  
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Siles, J. and Soares, D.  
**The Force of the Current: Watershed Management with Gender Equity.**  
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San José, Costa Rica. 2003.

The use of a gender approach in dealing with the socio-environmental dynamics of watersheds can open avenues and opportunities for achieving equity between women and men by considering their unique interests, demands and expectations. A gender-sensitive approach to watershed management also considers the ethnic-cultural characteristics of the population and emphasizes affirmative actions to address women's disadvantageous position and condition in many societies.

Women have considerable knowledge about water resources, including water quality and reliability, and are key to the success of water resources development and protection. Yet women's knowledge and roles in watershed management is still largely unrecognized, and social and economic norms often reinforce unequal participation and decision-making in community organizations such as water users' associations.

#### WHY GENDER EQUITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

- The use of a gender-sensitive approach to watershed management ensures that both women's and men's unique needs, priorities, and knowledge are incorporated into management plans and policies. Specifically, a gender equity approach can:
  - Increase men's and women's participation in decision-making processes related to watershed management;
  - Promote more equitable access to, control over, and distribution of natural resources among social groups;
  - Ensure that watershed management interventions do not adversely affect one social group more than another.
- Consideration of gender in water management allows for the identification of women's and men's different roles in the use, supply, administration, and conservation of water resources.
- Adopting gender-sensitive watershed management policies empowers women, men, and local organizations to promote more equitable relationships between stakeholders. This, in turn, can reduce unwanted competition and conflict.
- Gender-sensitive watershed management plans encourage local ownership of management responsibilities, as well as a more equitable distribution of environmental and economic benefits. For example, in Monterrey, Mexico, the city's water problems became a political concern and a national priority after women took action to protest water scarcity in their communities.
- A gender-equity approach to watershed management recognizes that men and women have particular needs, knowledge, interests and aspirations, and thus contribute to the conservation of water resources in different ways. Recognition of this reality is essential to achieve more effective and sustainable natural resource management in all regions of the world.

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IN COLLABORATION  
WITH THE  
COMMUNITY  
CONSERVATION  
COALITION:

