

Women and Water Conservation: A Review



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Abstract

Women live all around the world and are closely connected to the water. In recent years importance has been given to central role that women play in providing, managing and safeguarding water. Women also play a role model in the family and society in the issues of clean drinking water and sanitation. It is very crucial to ensure the full participation of and equal involvement of women in water related development efforts and to approach water and sanitation issues from gender perspective. The present study is to emphasise the role of women in water conservation.

Keywords: Water, Conservation, Sanitation, Women.

Introduction

Water has become the most scarce and commodified product of the present era. The stress on the multiple water resources is a result of a multitude of factors. Green Revolution agriculture and the rapidly rising population and changing lifestyles, have increased the need for fresh water, intense competitions among users – agriculture, industry and domestic sector, is depleting the ground water table. Diversion of river waters for intensive irrigation and urban industrial use, has left our rivers dry. What remains is polluted water, with dumping of industrial and urban wastes, making our lifelines like the Ganga and Yamuna, unfit for drinking.

Water has traditionally been treated as a natural right – arising out of human nature, historic conditions, basic needs, or notions of justice. Water rights as natural rights do not originate with the state; they evolve out of a given ecological context of human existence.

Most women struggles everyday for a bucket of water in the country. The virtually dry and dead water resources have led to acute water scarcity, affecting the socio-economic condition of the society. The drought conditions have pushed villagers to move to cities in search of jobs. Whereas, women and girls are trudging still further. The time lost in fetching water can very well translate into financial gains, leading to a better life for the family. If opportunity costs were taken into account, it would be clear that in most rural areas, households are paying far more for water supply than the often-normal rates charged in urban areas.

Objective of the Study

Women play an important role in the conservation of water. A gender approach to water resources management, for example, strives for a balanced division between men and women. A gender approach to water resources management, for example, strives for a balanced division between men and women in the following areas: access to information; physical work; contributions in time and cash; decision-making; and access to and control of resources and benefits. The objective of the present study was as follows

1. To recognize the role of women in conservation and development of water bodies through people institutions.
2. To bring out the significance of decision making by women in agriculture.
3. To evolve the policies for women focused water development initiatives.
4. The differences between women and men interests, even within the same household, how these overlap or conflict and how they are negotiated.
5. The conventions and hierarchies that determine men's and women's position in the family, community and society at large, which often lead to the subordination of women

Role of Women in Water Management

On an average, a rural woman walks more than 14,000 km a year just to fetch water. Their urban sisters are only slightly better off – they do

not walk such distances, but stand in the long, snaking queues for hours on end to collect water from the roadside taps or the water lorries. Increasing water problems has necessitated the need for consumers, especially women, to play a more active role in water conservation, notably via domestic water audit and other water demand management (WDM) tools. The role of women is pivotal in curbing domestic wastage, but ensuring wise use and conservation. Since domestic consumers use roughly more than half of the country's total water demand, WDM is a vital conservation tool. Women are the managers of the family's water budget. Because of the fact that women use water for most of the domestic chores in the home, they are considered vitally important in water conservation. Women also make decision on the installation of water saving devices. When women save water in the home, they also educate their children and family members about the importance of water conservation. Finally, women themselves need to cut down on water use via substitution of water-saving methods and other personal adjustments. Women who work can similarly exert their influence in the office by impressing upon colleagues and the employer about the benefits of water conservation. Overall, water conservation via involvement of the public can be effective when women are actively involved as they are the key players towards achieving sustainable management of water resources

In every household, in the rural areas in Rajasthan, women and girl children bear the responsibility of collecting, transporting, storing, and managing water. In places where there is no water for farming, men migrate to urban areas in search of work leaving women behind to fend for the old and the children. Women spend most of their time collecting water, with little time for other productive work. This impact on the education of the girl child, if the girl is herself not collecting water, she is looking after the home and her siblings when her mother is away.

In India, there are many villages either with scarce water supply or without any source of water. If there is no source of potable water within 2.5 km, then the village becomes a 'no source water' village or 'problem' village. In many rural areas, women still have to walk a distance of about 2.5 km to reach the source of water. She reaches home carrying heavy pots, not to rest, but to do other household chores of cooking, washing, cleaning, caring of children and looking after livestock. Again in the evening, she has to fetch water. Thus, a rural woman's life is sheer drudgery.

Problems of the rural women in water Collection:

1. Water source being open dug well, the quality of water is poor; dirty, saline and has turbidity.
2. Women have to make at least three trips at 5 am, 11 am and 5 pm, sometimes the number of trips is more
3. Total distance traveled is 9-10 km, even higher, total time spent is 6-9 hours.
4. Total number of pots/buckets is about 3 pots 30-45 litres (one pot of 10-15 litres per trip)

5. Due to long distance, they have to take rest in the middle of the way. Dust storm aggravates their problem.
6. At some villages water from tube well is too saline to drink. Even animals particularly cow gets indigested after drinking this water, so the villagers add water from the dug well.
7. Entire life of women in rural like Jaisalmer is spent on water collection and cooking. Even the girls of 8-10 years cannot be spared. They cannot afford the luxury of school.

In district such as Sriganganagar, canal is the main source for drinking water. However, during the crisis period (either being no water in the main canal/sub canal or due to the erratic power supply), the rich remain unaffected. In such crisis women from poorhouse hold draw water from the village diggiss, which is totally unfit for any kind of human activity. They use this water not only for washing cloth and bathing but also for drinking. Due to the formation of algae, water becomes greenish and filthy. Women add alum to purify it.

To mitigate the women water burden, a few measures can be adopted:

1. Restore the conventional methods of water conservation like Baolis, Jhods, Ponds, Tankas.
2. Introduce rainwater harvesting.
3. Change the cropping pattern of agriculture. Instead of growing water intensive crop like paddy and sugarcane, introduce crops like millet, ragi, which consume less water.
4. Proper water conservation measures should be used. People should be made aware and trained on the techniques of water conservation.
5. Government schemes should be implemented properly.
6. Involve Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and NGOs in the management of rural water supply.
7. Women should have community control over water. So that they can manage water for the sustainability of the eco-system, their families and villages. They should be trained as water managers for the better utilisation of water.

Conclusion

While the role of gender in water management is vital in many countries experiencing water scarcity, such as in the African continent and Indian Sub-continent. This is strange considering the escalation of water problems in the country in recent decades due to climate change and social, political and economic reasons. Though the country is rich in water resources, mismanagement causes water supply to lag far behind fact, in most societies, the private ownership of water has been prohibited. However, the emergence of modern water extraction technologies has increased the role of the state in water management.

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