

Discussion Paper: Gender in the Cuvelai Basin

Addressing Gender in water and sanitation calls for understanding, the social, cultural and traditional attributes that are learned or acquired through socialization of members in the given communities. It involves assessing the division of labour, access to benefits, as well as the intended and unintended effects of interventions on men and women. Several studies on gender and water reveal that women's control over natural resources is limited because of societal values and practices that make men custodians of resources including water and sanitation projects (adapted from AMCOW, 2010).

Gender context in the Cuvelai Basin¹

In the Cunene Province in Angola it is estimated that women make up 54 percent of the agricultural labour force. In this pastoralist and mixed farming system, livestock play an important role in supporting women and improving their financial situation, and women are heavily engaged in the sector. The burden of traditional farming activities such as weeding, harvesting and threshing, water carrying, livestock keeping and caring for home gardens is generally left to women. However, in terms of the domestic or child-rearing responsibilities, there is little change from traditional gender roles. As elsewhere, women's concerns are broader and relate to overall family well-being (including access to water, education and health in post-disaster conditions). While women's vulnerability to climate change and disaster in the Cuvelai Basin is similar to those of men, they do have specific additional concerns, linked to their key roles in the society and households, for example: (i) The need for the provision of water and firewood; (ii) Damage to seeds and failing of crops under drought and flooding events; and (iii) lack of access to markets and hence sale of products/ generation of cash.

In the Namibian part of the basin, a much higher percentage of homes are headed by women than elsewhere in the country, largely as a result of the high rates of emigration by men to work elsewhere in Namibia. On average, three out of five homes in the Basin are headed by women. The figures in the table are percentages of homes headed by women. A high proportion of women-headed families support orphans and/or the children of parents who are working elsewhere. The structure of rural and urban populations is quite different. Rural residents consist of large numbers of people younger than 20 years, and rather few people of working ages in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. Above the age of 25, there are also many more women than men in rural areas.

With many women being heads of households and with them being very much involved in agriculture, one could establish the hypothesis, that they play a unique role in the Cuvelai Basin and often take over tasks that would traditionally be carried out by men. It still has to be comprehensively studied, whether Gender roles in the Angolan and Namibian Part of the Basin are homogeneous and whether they have comparable needs and are affected similarly by activities within the basin.

Guiding questions for CUVECOM (examples)

Stakeholder Participation and Decision Making:

- How to ensure women's participation in decision making?
- How to ensure gender equity considerations are made in stakeholder consultations?
- What is the level of individual empowerment? Is this different for men and women?

¹ sources: UNDP/GEF Project document; CUVELAI Atlas, Chapter "People"

Communication and Awareness Raising:

- Should women and other vulnerable groups in rural areas be approached in Oshikwanyama rather than in English or Portuguese?
- How are communities sensitized about gender issues and the needs of men and women?

Project implementation:

- What are the main activities in the area (of intervention)? What are the general risk factors? Are they different for men and women?
- What to consider when it comes to floods and droughts? How are women affected differently?
- What are the consequences or unintended effects if gender norms, roles and relations are not adequately considered?

Socio- Economic factors:

- What is the socio – economic environment in the basin? What are the opportunities?
- Who benefits the most, and which groups are the most excluded?
- How is access over resources and benefits managed and distributed. Who makes decisions around this?

Recommended next steps:

- Carry out a stock take of studies and assessments previously done in the Basin by various stakeholders
- Sensitise stakeholders on the relevance of Gender Mainstreaming and gauge their interest or willingness
- Promote the dialogue and collaboration of Gender Experts in the Basin, who can support activities on an ongoing basis
- Train all CUVECOM technical task teams and other relevant project steering committees on the value of Gender Mainstreaming, and provide concrete support
- Integrate Gender mainstreaming in the Flood Risk Forecasting Systems

Available Documents on Gender in the Cuvelai Basin:

- SADC Gender Guidelines
- Water and Gender (Mujimba)
- Gender Study Ondjiva
- Gender analysis and baseline survey for the Kunene transboundary water supply and sanitation project
- Cuvelai Atlas (2013)
- Guidelines for Strengthening River Basin Organisations