

1 DAY AGO

FEATURE : Why water budget should be gender sensitive

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In Summary

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Dar es Salaam. Reforms in the water sector are crucial in empowering women. As the Water budget is tabled in the next coming days, it is important to take note of how these proposals affect women, and what can be done to seal the loopholes in the existing policies.

There has been a positive response from the current administration in addressing water shortages, and acknowledging how the problem affects women. In his address to Parliament last year, President John Magufuli pledged that his government would relieve women of the water burden.

In a Kiswahili, he said what his government would do is “Kumtua mwanamke ndoo kichwani” (to take the water bucket down from a woman’s head). His pledge echoed the cries of gender activists, such as the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), who in 2015 introduced a water campaign with the slogan “Tua mwanamke ndoo kichwani, kura yako mustakabali wako”, literally translated to “take the bucket of water off a woman’s head, your vote counts.”

SDG 2030 Agenda

The government's pledge also corresponds to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target of ensuring 100 per cent access to water by 2030. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated goal on water and sanitation (SDG 6) that sets out to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all."

SDG 6 expands the MDG focus on drinking water and sanitation to covering the entire water cycle, including the management of water, wastewater and ecosystem resources.

Although promises are sweet music to the ear, implementation has not been as desired. Looking back, the trend shows that budget allocation to the Water sector has been decreasing throughout the years.

In the 2012/13 fiscal year, 74.3 per cent of the budget was allocated to Water; it was 27.6 per cent in 2013/14, 26.4 per cent in 2014/15 and 25.8 per cent in 2015/16.

The national budget of Sh29.54 trillion for financial year 2016/2017 shows that only Sh1.02 trillion was allocated to improving the Water sector, which was only 4.8 per cent of the total budget.

Moreover, 25.4 per cent of the budget was allocated to transport and transportation services; 22.1 per cent to education; 9.2 per cent to health. This downward trend in budgetary allocation to the water sector raises concerns as to whether the SDG target will be met by 2030.

It is evident that water and sanitation do not get enough allocations, especially when compared to other basic social services such as education and health, which tend to get the first priority. Even though access to water seems to be rapidly increased with noticeable investment in infrastructure, this is not reflected in resource allocation.

More so, there is a negative trend that reflects fluctuations in line ministries; for example, the President's Office (Local Government Authorities) shows that only 60 per cent of the money allocated to water programmes was disbursed. Only 52 per cent was released to urban authorities by December 2015, while only 21.5 water points were constructed by March 2016.

The budget plan to attain 72 per cent water coverage is not being supported by evidence on the ground, and hence the doubt that country would meet the SDGs target by 2030.

Signs of progress

Yet there have been signs of water supply progress in both rural and urban areas. The sector has been growing at an annual average of 5.15 per cent over the past three years. The highest growth was observed in 2010 during which the sector grew by 6.3 per cent.

In the following year, it grew by 4.0 per cent and 4.9 per cent in 2011 and 2013, respectively.

But for rural water supply, the original Five-Year Development Plan -- FYDP I (2011/12-2015/6) -- target was invalidated by a new survey by the Big Results Now (BRN) initiative that showed that the initial proportion of rural population with access to water in June 2013 was 40 per cent.

The detailed analysis of water point data found that due to degraded infrastructure, the actual baseline coverage was about 40 per cent with 5.3 million rural residents having lost supply because of inadequate maintenance of infrastructure. Since then, there has been a slight improvement in rural water supply, reaching a population proportion of 55.9 per cent by April 2015.

In its 2016/2017 budget speech, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation noted that through the implementation of BRN, access to water in rural areas increased to 21.9 million people from 15.2 million in July 2013, equivalent to 72 per cent.

Including women in the process

However, there is need for gender mainstreaming in the water sector, particularly to ensure that the needs and plight of schoolgirls from the primary level are addressed in national programmes, and supported by adequate funding.

Mr Selemani Bishagazi, a gender activist who resides in Kipunguni, says the shortage of water in schools mostly affects girl students. Speaking to The Citizen, he cited the example of Kilimani Primary School where there are only eight toilet holes to cater for over 2,000 students. This implies that every hole accommodates over 250 students. And with the shortage of water, the situation is even worse. This has affected girls' attendance and performance because they have to stay home during their menstrual periods or skip a few hours of class to go home for cleaning up.

The Kipunguni case is just the tip of an iceberg. It's a problem across the country, affecting especially rural girls.

In a nutshell, water policies need to go hand-in-glove with the recognition that both men and women play substantial, though different roles, in the national and households economy.

Sadly, women and girls are often excluded in planning and decision-making regarding water and sanitation development. As a result, their views are often underrepresented.

For this reason, it is important to include a gender expert in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring at the national and LGA level to ensure concrete gender mainstreaming on water use and management. This will also help to align these with the target set by the Ministry of Health Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children.

It is a fact that women carry the bigger and heavier chunk of the water burden; therefore, they should have full control in decision-making on water management.