

# Woman Waterkeeper?

## Women's Troubled Participation in Water Resource Management

*Richard Bagonza Asaba<sup>1</sup> and G. Honor Fagan<sup>2</sup>*

### Introduction

Despite women's recognised responsibility as domestic water keepers, albeit a traditional and culturally and politically constructed role, the fact remains that they have been under-represented and constrained in their participation in the governance of water resources. However, their traditional responsibility as water keepers, given their daily work in accessing water for domestic use, has increasingly been seen by policy-makers as a rationale for their inclusion in community management water schemes. This has led to legislation being enacted to ensure their numerical participation in new public management and governance frameworks for Community Based Management Systems (CBMS) in rural water supply.

This chapter looks at the dynamics at play in the expanded role of women, from domestic water-keeper to community water-keeper, in one particular Ugandan rural locale where the legislation advocates equal participation in community water management. The subtleties and highs and lows of the fluctuating process of their inclusion are traced in the words and stories of men and women from fifteen villages in a Ugandan parish where this study took place. The outcomes of the study point to the fact that women's participation in management of water resources remains peripheral and is deeply marked by patriarchal domestic structures.

### Women as Community Water-keepers

There are gendered dynamics at play in expanding the role of women to include community responsibility for safe water provision. Traditionally in Uganda, women have borne the burden of being domestic water-keeper and now their role has been expanded from that to

---

<sup>1</sup> School of Gender Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

community water-keeper. As in most developing countries, the governance framework of neo-liberal New Public Management (NPM) advocates equal participation of men and women in CBMS for a safe and sustainable water supply. Thus, securing the success of CBMS, and indeed the community's cash contribution, wherein the community has to act as providers and beneficiaries of public water services, now involves the inclusion women. So it is within this policy framework of CBMS for safe water provision that we examine the instance or progress of what could be considered 'women's empowerment' as community water-keepers. The current dominant trend in development of 'instrumentalizing women as key providers of development for their families, communities and countries' (Porter and Wallace, 2013) provides the context for our question - can women be the community water-keepers?

First we look at the key water actors and assess women's involvement at this level, and then we consider their role in the construction of pumps and wells. Finally their involvement and participation in Water User Committees (WUCs) is examined closely from the point of view of the villagers themselves. The field work<sup>3</sup> for this study comprised of a socio-economic survey of the case study area, it being fifteen villages in a rural parish in Lwengo district. This was followed by a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups in four of the villages. The key actors or 'water service provider groups' (van Koppen *et al.* 2009:28) were identified in the case study area where CBMS was in place. These included water users, non-governmental actors, and government actors.

The WUGs for each water source were comprised of men, women, boys and girls with varying socio-cultural backgrounds. Water users, or what are sometimes described as 'beneficiary communities' in rural water policies are *inter-alia*, required to participate in 'all aspects' of community-based management (broadly classified as preconstruction and selection of an "improved" water source; construction of the water source; and post-construction, or operation, repair and maintenance), with equal representation or involvement of women and men. The main civil-society actors were Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), particularly the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM's) who had funded the

---

<sup>3</sup> The field work was undertaken with technical and financial support from the Water is Life: *Amazzi Bulamu* Project (WIL) which was funded through the Irish Aid/HEA Programme of Strategic Co-Operation.

construction of most of the shallow wells, and World Vision and UNICEF who had constructed the only protected spring in the Parish.

The main government or local government actors included: Water User Committees (WUCs) and Village Chairpersons at village level; the Hand Pump Mechanic (HPM) and Health Assistant at Sub County level; and the District Water Officer (DWO) at District level<sup>4</sup>. The Sub County HPM played a very important role, in that his relationship with the local water users and Village Chairpersons, among others, determined the functionality of pumps and the ability of women and children to obtain safe water for their households. Through these relationships, he also had the potential to influence the participation of men and women in the management of their water sources. The Water Statute and Uganda National Framework for Operation and Maintenance of Rural Water Supplies (UNFOMRWS) state that responsibility for many aspects of water management, for example, supporting and training WUCs and water users, lies with both the Sub County Health Assistant and the Community Development Officer (CDO) But in this Sub County all these roles were assigned to the Sub County Health Assistant (SHA) who, himself, acknowledged that he was supposed to work with the DWO, CDO and NGOs in the execution of his duties but did not have adequate resources to do so. The Sub County and District Local Government had established water sources in the area, many of which were bore-holes.

While there is multi-level involvement in the organisation of the water resources in the case study area, the major actors in water delivery are men, or are led by men, the exception being one key non-governmental organisation, The Medical Missionaries of Mary (a Catholic order of nuns, all non-Ugandans). For example, the DWO and SHA were men; all the Village Chairpersons and HPMs were men; and the WUCs were led and dominated by men, contrary to rural water policy provisions. Despite the fact that the identification of HPMs, including those trained during preconstruction and construction phases of water points, should be gender sensitive, the position was locally maintained and stereotyped as a 'man's job'. One local leader commenting on the absence of female HPMs in the Parish, Sub County and District said:

---

<sup>4</sup> Also generally or specifically stipulated in the Water Statute and NFOMRWS (GOU 1995, 2011a).

Culturally, HPMs are known to be men. If a woman becomes a pump mechanic, people will say she is kikulasaja [she is a ‘man-like’ woman]. Others say ‘how do they see a woman repairing a pump? It looks awkward’.

(Male District Key Informant)

In this locale the government actors such as the SHA and DWO took gender issues in the governance of water resources as more of an addition than an integrated component. Despite their mandate as stipulated in the NFOMRWS, a degree of insensitivity to the gender issues was expressed by them in interview situations and they did little to emphasize the active involvement of women in water management or even support and train water users and WUCs. It was explained to us that the District Water Office ‘lacked staff with social and gender skills’ necessary to adequately implement ‘software’ activities.

The failure by government actors to perform such important ‘software’ activities has been reported previously in some rural parts of Uganda (e.g., Kanyesigye *et al.* 2004; Asingwire 2011). The explanations for such failure included inadequate finances and inadequate gender focused training. . In Uganda generally, both female and male community members are trained to make minor pump repairs in rural and peri-urban communities, but the numbers of trained females are fewer by far (e.g., Kanyesigye *et al.* 2004:16). There are also few female HPMs: for example in 2011 women constituted only 16 percent of HPM trainees in Kiboga District (GOU 2011a). Another study revealed that, across 16 districts in the country, 97 percent of “improved” water source technicians (such as HPMs<sup>5</sup>) were male (Asingwire 2011:26). Earlier research has cited constraints faced by serving female HPMs, such as restriction of their movement by their husbands or partners to avoid being ‘in the company of men and in isolated areas’, and lack of ‘enormous energy’ to carry heavy tool kits or perform repair or maintenance tasks (GOU 2011a:18).

And so despite the rhetoric of inclusion, and indeed, legislative provision to promote inclusion, significant impediments remain to women being recognised as key actors or community or government level water-keepers.

---

<sup>5</sup> Others were plumbers and GFSAs or masons who construct rain water tanks for example.

## Gender and Construction of Water Technologies

Following current theorisation of water planning (Panda (2007); Lockwood (2004); and Rydhagen (2002)), greater involvement of women in the establishment of water technologies is one of the potentially transformative, participatory ways to achieve sustainable water governance. Local water policies (e.g., GOU 1999; 2011) also state that both women and men should be involved in the construction of “improved” water points.

Asked to assess the way safe water service delivery programmes involved them in decision making on level and location of water service the majority of survey respondents (65% of the females and 35% of the males) rated them as only ‘fairly good’. Most of these cited their participation in planning and pre-construction meetings (59% of the females and 40% of the males), whereas those who rated the programmes as bad alleged that the programmes involved ‘just a few community members’ (61% females and 40% males); or never involved them at all (57% females and 43% males). These statistics show that more female than male survey respondents were dissatisfied with their inadequate involvement in pre-construction programmes.

Men tended to dominate the activities involving the actual construction or ‘sinking’ of the water points. Traditionally, culturally men were presumed to be more ‘energetic’ and this guaranteed that they would have a greater representation in setting up the water sources compared to women. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants noted that communal activities that required a lot of ‘physical force’, such as the construction of ‘improved’ water sources and the carrying of materials (such as bricks) were the preserve of men.

*It was mainly men who attended and participated in the construction of our shallow well. This was because men have more physical energy than women. The construction work itself was strenuous...it involved carrying bricks, stones, gravel and lifting pipes and other metallic parts of the well, tasks which are best performed by men.*

(FGD with WUC members)

*During the construction of our shallow well, men worked more than women. They [manually] dug the hole where the shallow well*

*was sunk and carried gravel and stones for the concrete that was used. Women did lighter tasks, although a few also carried gravel. Women brought food for the male builders and also cooked it.*

(FGD with Women, Misaana Village)

The above indicates that, some women attended the construction of improved water sources and participated in what was perceived as less strenuous work, such as cooking food for the labourers, or what Coles and Wallace described as ‘ancillary labour’. Indeed, during the field work, we observed that the local patriarchal ideologies were observed, evident in men’s higher involvement in the repair of a bore-hole (an activity that required similar tasks as those undertaken during construction) in one village. At the request of the Chairperson of the village for volunteers to undertake the repair, up to eleven male water users turned up, including a number of youths. . They helped the HPM to lift the tool box to the site, open up the bore-hole and also lift the pipes. In his own words, the HPM said: *“It is very difficult to repair a bore-hole without the presence and help of male community members. Men are more energetic than women and can help you to lift the tool box and the tools”*.

## **Representation in Water User Committees**

Under Uganda’s CBMS , Water User Committees are the established and recognised bodies responsible for the management, operation, maintenance and sustainable use of improved water sources (see GOU 1999, 2011). According to Agarwal (1997), Cornwall (2003, 2008) and Cleaver (2004), women (or the disadvantaged) are represented in decision-making in development, collective action institutions or natural resource management through being members of relevant groups or committees. Institutions such as formal water-user groups and water management committees are key decision-making arenas in which the inclusion of men and women in water governance can be assessed (Plummer and Slaymaker 2007; Singh 2008; Cleaver and Hamada 2010), and in which women can assert control over their own lives (Cleaver 2004). Women’s membership in water committees may, however, be shaped by what Foucault (1977) calls acquiescence, as well as patriarchy, or ‘cultural messages’ that prompt women to view themselves as shy, self-doubting and lacking entitlement (O’Grady 2005).

In the case study area all the improved water sources had WUCs, but many of them were inactive. The primary reasons for this inactivity were their failure to act promptly whenever the water sources broke down, and their failure to convene regular meetings for water users to get to know the committee members. A higher number of female survey respondents (43%, compared to 36% of the males) were unaware of the existence of WUCs for water sources in their villages. Also, more male than female community members occupied positions on WUCs (including key positions). Of the 602 survey respondents, only ten indicated that they were members of WUCs for particular improved water sources in their villages. Seven of the ten were women (three *de jure* female household heads and four *de-facto*). Most of the survey respondents who knew that their improved water sources had WUCs indicated that they believed the committees had more male than female members

77 % of the survey respondents did not know the required gender make up of WUCs. Of those that had some knowledge, only 32 % of females and 25 % of males knew that a WUC ought to have an equal number of women and men<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps the main reason why most of the survey respondents did not know their WUCs or the make-up of their membership was that the committees rarely held meetings with the water users. In the case of inactive committees meetings never took place and nor did they take steps to repair the pumps whenever they broke down. It is important to note here that, whereas a number of the survey respondents did not know the WUCs or their members, many knew the Village Chairperson or village committees, which again shows the recognition that the former, as local administrative institutions had, hence their higher power and influence in improving access to water.

In our study, the situation in four villages was examined in more detail to better define the patterns. One of these villages had females in some key positions while the other three had males in all of the key positions. All four WUC's had male chairpersons but the one which had three females in key positions (treasurer, vice-chairperson and secretary) was reportedly functioning best. A number of Parish key informants (and a few survey respondents) expressed the view that the particular WUC was one of the most active in the case study area, arguing that it collected repair fees promptly and acted swiftly whenever the pump broke

---

<sup>6</sup> 50%, as outlined in the revised NFOMRWS; earlier versions and policy documents hinted at 33% for female WATER USER COMMITTEE members, and some respondents and Key Informants mistakenly took it as the recommended composition.

down. The women on the WUC were considered to have good mobilisation skills and this was confirmed in the community meeting by a number of water users. Focus groups in the four selected villages also confirmed that female water users were more willing to pay the repair fees than men but there was a particular difficulty which was that most women were reliant on men to pay the repair fees. The leadership qualities of women on WUCs were also generally perceived to be key to improving the performance of the local water organisations:

*Women on WUCs perform better than men. They possess a spirit of ownership of the water facility that is unlike that of men. Men have little time for water-related community work.*

(Male Parish Key Informant)

*Communities that have many women on their committees seem to have their water sources functioning well for most parts of the year. I have examples of K... and T... villages that I know very well in K... Sub County [another Sub County in Lwengo District]*

(Male District Key Informant)

It was clear that where female leadership was employed it worked well, and there was a view from those most involved in ensuring that water sources functioned that women in leadership roles on committees were effective. However, the cases remained infrequent.

Further dialogue in focus groups and interviews on how to include women in leadership roles revealed some non-inclusive processes and patriarchal ideologies that privileged men, hence men's domination of WUC positions. Female members in one focus group (who used a particular protected spring) complained about the election of its WUC:

*Our current WUC members were elected when a few people had gone to clean the protected spring [many were men as local norms assigned them this role]. While they were there, elections were organised. So the committee members we have were elected in the presence of only a few people who had gone to clean and de-silt the spring.*

(Women's FGD)



This means that the process and timing of the election of the WUC members of the protected spring was 'functional' or 'instrumental' (Pretty 1995; White 1996. By virtue of the location and timing of the meeting, it was attended only by men, who were seen as being took responsible for the cleaning of the spring. . Thus, because the meeting to elect the committee took place when a particular type of work, defined as male, was being carried out, women were excluded from the possibility of membership.

Also playing a key role are the culturally embedded ideologies that reasserted men's superiority over women with regard to representation on WUCs for deep bore-holes and shallow wells. For example, both female and some male survey respondents reasoned that men had more physical energy or were more 'energetic', a quality that made it easier for them to perform tasks required of members on WUCs, such as helping in lifting heavy parts of the hand pumps (e.g., whenever the HPM was doing repairs) or even doing minor repairs on the pumps as required for one to be a Caretaker. Many female respondents also perceived that some of the tasks of the WUC members required unwavering or 'strong personalities'. They gave examples such as: caretakers, who have to deal with, and sometimes discipline children who misuse the pumps Chairpersons and other committee members who are required to make household visits to collect repair and maintenance fees and also to deal with water fetchers from defaulting households where sometimes it is necessary 'forcefully' collect fees from them.

However it is also additionally acknowledged by the women that the processes of exclusion go beyond simple 'consensual' cultural gender role arrangements and into the terrain of female subjugation and harassment. The unequal nature of the gender order is internalised, enforced and re-enforced as women in a focus group put it:

*The Chairperson of our shallow well has to be a man because he commands more respect. People tend to undermine us [women] if we take up such a position. Men undermine us most. They say 'how can a woman ask me to go to for a meeting?' Even the Caretaker needs to be a man because when a man talks, he can be listened to and will not be disrespected. If a woman becomes a Caretaker, the people who come to collect water will abuse her- even young boys can abuse you.*

(Women's FGD)

As has already been discussed there are some men who are cognisant of the requirements for inclusion and of the success of women in leadership roles and who are trying to involve women. But they still explain the lack of women on WUCs in cultural rather than political terms -

*We try to emphasize the fair representation of women on the WUCs, including the four key positions of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. But in most of the communities, women are shy.... In some communities, we even fail to get women who can volunteer to be on the committees and yet we cannot force them. Basing on my experience, I usually get only two women who are willing to be on the committee.*

(Male NGO Key Informant)

*When we are electing WUCs, we want women to at least hold some key positions. For example, women are very good at keeping money and making accountability, and so a lady can be chosen as a Treasurer. We also need somebody from the political wing, who is at least someone from the Village Local Council, and a youth. A Local Council person on the same committee can help women to enforce the by-laws, while a youth can guide his fellow youth. The only challenge we face is that women fear to take up these positions...When some people in the meetings nominate them for various positions, they say no, not me.*

(Male District Key Informant<sup>7</sup>)

Another Key Informant concluded:

*Women can take up these positions [on WUCs] but after being sensitised. Among the Baganda [the dominant ethnic group], there are many beliefs that make women inferior to men, and these prevent women from taking positions on water committees.*

(Male Parish Key Informant)

In other words, the inferiority of women to men and boys is built into the terrain of the cultural practices of the majority and this has to be tackled or overcome through training or ‘sensitisation’ of men and women to the degree that women are allowed into a position of authority.

From the above analysis, it is clear that non-inclusive and undemocratic election processes, cultural beliefs and practices that hold women as inferior, women’s fear of being regarded as inferior and the reality of them being regarded as inferior limits their ability to serve on WUCs. Although there is both regulation and policy to support the inclusion of women, without training, and both men and women ‘being sensitised’, under-representation will continue within the patriarchal organising structure of the case study area.

### **Conducting Meetings**

When women step up and involve themselves there is further struggle involved. As theorised by White (1996), transformative or ‘empowering’ participation offers the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions and taking collective action against unfairness. Agarwal (1997) and Cornwall (2008) add that this involves an individual’s ability to attend or be ‘physically present’ in an activity., In the case of water governance, it involves the physical presence of men and women in local governance spaces (e.g., Franks and Cleaver 2007; Singh 2008; Cleaver and Hamada 2010). In the case study area gender sensitivity in community participation and involvement in ‘all levels of decision-making’ (including post-construction and maintenance) is a pre-requisite (GOU 1999, 2011). However, and unfortunately, WUC meetings for the operation and management of improved water sources were rarely convened and thus there was little or no formal engagement between the WUCs and the water users in the area. This means that the spaces and places where women and men would dialogue on issues of their interest in water were limited. This was affirmed in most of the FGDs, and by some Key Informants:

*We always encourage the WUCs to meet regularly and make reports to their respective communities of water users, but they often fail to do so. Instead, they tend to meet when there is a break down [that is, when a pump has broken down]. In fact, it is not*

*good for them to wait for a break down in order to meet or raise contributions from the community.*

(Male NGO Key Informant)

Village Chairpersons (sometimes with a few members of the village council or WUC) convened the few water meetings that took place, and also had the responsibility of inviting water users. Unless the Village Chairperson was also the WUC Chairperson, or worked closely with him, it was very difficult for a WUC to convene meetings. By virtue of their authority, Village Chairpersons had more power in this regard than either the WUC members or Chairpersons.

While water meetings occurred infrequently in the case study area, it is noteworthy that where they did occur, more women than men were reported to have been in attendance. Most of the FGD participants and Key Informants confirmed that water meetings were mainly attended by women. This fact was also reflected in the community meetings conducted in the case study villages, where women out-numbered men. Also women were more likely to remain until the end of a meeting whereas men drifted away slowly and quietly through the course of the meeting. Thus by the time a meeting concluded, the attendance consisted of significantly more women. For example, one village meeting had about 30 men and 33 women present at the beginning, but only 15 men stayed until it ended.

According to women:

*Most of the meetings we have been having since our bore-hole was constructed are attended by women....It is us who are responsible for all water-related issues in the household...We are more concerned about water because we fetch it [with children]. Do men collect water?...They just sit down and wait for us to give them water for drinking and bathing...You are the one who fetches water, washes utensils, bathes the children, cooks and everything else you wash requires water. So it is our concern and responsibility for water in the households that encourages us to attend water meetings.*

(Women's FGD)

*We attend water meetings more than men because we care more about water. Men do not care about water and so prefer to do their own things when meetings are called. Men do not care about where and how you get water...all they want is water in the household. When the shallow well breaks down, it is us who walk a distance of over one kilometre to M... [a neighbouring village] to fetch clean water from another [functioning] shallow well.*

(Women's FGD)

According to men active in keeping water resources flowing:

*It is women who attend water meetings because they usually stay at home. Women are more responsible for water issues compared to men.*

(Male Village Key Informant)

*Women attend water meetings more than men. Women use water most and suffer the consequences if water is not available. In fact, when water is not available, you can expect domestic violence to occur in a household [i.e., men becoming violent against women].*

(Male Village Key Informant)

Both male and female FGD participants attributed men's low attendance at water meetings to a combination of laziness, men's lower level of mobility, limited interest or indifference and the lack of monetary or other material reward.

## **Setting the Agenda**

As theorised by Lukes (1974), power is exercised not only through securing desired outcomes in decision-making processes, but also through procedures of preference shaping as social forces and 'institutional practices' of bias mobilization and control over political agenda. For example, Stewart and Taylor (1995) argue that determining which issues a community are allowed to be involved in, and controlling the agenda for discussion, is a covert dimension of power central to an understanding of participation and empowerment.

We have seen that men determined who attended water meetings while women were more physically present in the meetings. Men, as the primary conveners of water meetings were also the ones who set the agendas and also dictated the tempo of meetings by virtue of chairing them. Despite their generally being in the majority at meetings, female water users had little input into the agendas. The issues of repairs and raising of repair fees dominated WUC meetings, while cleanliness, hygiene and safeguarding of the water sources were the dominant items on the agendas of the first post-construction meetings (or when the water sources had just been handed over to the communities by either NGOS or the Sub County Local Government). Other issues discussed in water meetings included the safeguarding of water points (perhaps related to maintenance), running of WUCs and child fights at the water sources, many of which were raised by women

*...the foremost issue that we often discussed in the meetings was the broken-down pump [a shallow well] and how to repair it. And of course the payment of the fees was the most important thing. We discussed the amount to ask from every individual and once it was agreed, the WUC [Chairperson or another committee member] communicated it to the various households in our village. And whenever you had your own money, you would pay it to the committee there and then without having to go home and asking your husband to give it to you.*

(Women's FGD)

As theorised by White (1996), Cornwall (2003, 2008) and Gaynor (2010), the ability of marginalised groups to have voice offers the potential to transform societal and gender relations and the direction of development. This resonates with Agarwal's (1997) notion of women 'being heard' in meetings.. In formal water resource management institutions, this ability to exercise voice and choice also offers the potential to transform gender relations (Cleaver *et al.* 2005, Plummer and Slaymaker 2007, and Cleaver and Hamada 2010). Women's power or voices in water institutions, or their ability to resist male-dominated water spaces can be affected by patriarchy, in which they may see themselves as powerless, anxious, shy or even lacking entitlement (O'Grady 2005). This is also akin to Foucault's notion of a 'normalizing gaze' in which individuals, in this case, women may behave in

certain ways because men will classify and judge them.. Men's power during water meetings was summed up in the following FGD:

*In our culture, men are more powerful and women have to follow what they say. A man's decision cannot be overturned. Some women, especially young ones [such as those who have been 'sensitised' or have attended various trainings on water and other aspects of community development] do not know what they need to do to achieve what they want. They think they should also give rules and do everything that men do.*

(Male FGD Participant, WUC)

It is apparent that, regardless of training, patriarchal men cannot accommodate women as rule makers nor even as equals, but rather must keep them within patriarchal norms of obedience to men<sup>8</sup>. Women's participation in water governance, particularly in meetings, was challenged by patriarchal beliefs, and men felt uncomfortable with women's articulation of their views and interests. A Key Informant explained how training and attendance at relevant sensitisation workshops was necessary to encourage better participation:

*The few women who can state their views in meetings are those who attend various trainings and sensitisations or development-related workshops in our Parish, and those who are actively involved in women's associations. The women who do not attend these workshops and those who are not members of associations, such as housewives [the majority] are usually very quiet in the water meetings and cannot air out their views freely.*

(Male Village Key Informant)

Certainly, observations in the community meetings held in the four case study villages revealed that fewer women contributed to the discussions. A number of women were silent during the meetings and some, who perhaps had important issues that should have been

---

<sup>8</sup> This view was expressed in the context of a male on male interview, hence we see the subject position of a male investigating gender as particularly useful in uncovering the patriarchal order.

considered, were seen murmuring among themselves. It was also observed that most of the women who tried to express themselves held more socially recognisable positions in the villages. They included 'elders' (50 years and above), those involved in businesses such as shop attendants or owners, a nurse and members of women's village or community-based associations. The domestic patriarchal arrangement can be seen to directly undermine the involvement of women here in that the women who attended with husbands were seen to be much less willing to contribute,

*Some women attend water meetings with their husbands and when the husband talks, she keeps quiet. You [referring to women] may say something in a meeting which a man [husband or partner] may not be happy about.*

(Women's FGD)

It is noteworthy that, the majority of the FGD participants (both male and female) and WUC members all observed the degree to which women's voices, needs and interests were subjugated in water meetings. It was noted that men had more opportunities to raise their views during water meetings, and that women's needs and interests were rarely taken into account by the respective WUCs:

*In most cases here, men take the floor more than women, unless the Chairman says 'let us also listen to women'. Depending on what idea you propose during the meeting, men can challenge you. Women's ideas may not be taken into account. If a woman comes up with a good idea, there is a small likelihood that it might be considered. Women are usually dull in the meetings because they are shy. You may propose an idea and they [men] quash it or do not take it as important, so you also decide to keep quiet and just let the meeting move on while you only listen.*

(Women's FGD)

In addition to not being heard because they might not be so forthcoming or can be easily 'quashed', their concerns may be quite different to those of men specifically arising from their domestic caring role as mothers.



*... a woman's views may not be taken seriously. For example, we raise issues concerning our children who collect water from the shallow well, such as fights between themselves and the Caretaker denying them access to the well even after we have paid repair fees. ....The mistreatment of our children because of 'not paying repair fees' is often not adequately discussed and is not taken seriously by the Chairperson of the meeting and his committee.*

(Women's FGD)

The above responses indicate that women were not entirely free to express their opinions in water meetings and that their specific concerns were not given much priority in the meetings.

A few FGD participants and Key Informants expressed the view that things were changing and that women were now participating more fully in WUC meetings and being heard some of the time. .

*In the past [1960s and 1970s], women were reticent in all village meetings. But these days, women can raise their views in water meetings and are even capable of discussing issues better than men.*

(Male FGD Participant, WUC)

*....these days, women can talk in meetings because our communities have been sensitised about gender by various organisations and NGOs such as World Vision and the MMM. Some women even encourage their fellow women to be more active in meetings [and other social gatherings].*

(FGD with WUC)

*During the last meeting we had on cleaning [and de-silting] our protected spring, both men and the few women who attended were given an opportunity to talk. For example, I was able to speak, and I proposed a name for one of the committee members [when electing the committee] and it was seconded.*

(Women's FGD, Makondo Village)

*I think that women's views are considered during water meetings [in K\_\_\_\_\_]. During one of the meetings for our shallow well, Miss Carol [not real name] proposed that we should re-fence the well. Her wish was granted later on, as the committee re-fenced the well after a fortnight.*

(Male Village Key Informant)

Another example was given of a case where women had an impact on decisions and indeed personnel.

*Some women make good contributions during water meetings for our shallow well. At one time, women who attended our meeting argued that the treasurer on our committee was 'misusing his powers' by giving his children preferential treatment whenever they went to the well to collect water. He, for example wanted his children to jump the queue. Because the women insisted, it was decided that the treasurer should be replaced by a woman and this was done.*

(Male Village Key Informant)

While the above examples indicate that some women did speak out in water meetings about issues that concerned them, and in some cases, influenced outcomes, the evidence is, as the majority of the FGD participants and Key Informants asserts, that men generally had more power and privileges during water meetings.

This in essence resonates with Andrea Cornwall's (2003) idea that representation does not guarantee voice. What we see here is Foucault's (1982) disciplinary or 'normalising' power of traditional patriarchy, where 'empowerment' is 'given' through policy designed to ensure female representation and voice in WUCs, it is challenged in cultural practices. Women's silence in water meetings can further subjugate them and privilege men or reproduce men's domination (Kerfoot and Knights 1994; Connell 2005). And, apart from a few occasions in which women tried to resist the patriarchal norms, such as the election of WUC members, replacing an under-performing WUC member, and fencing of a water source, there is limited

evidence of women's water choices being respected and implemented in the male-dominated water spaces.

## **Conclusion**

How do the words and experiences of the poor women and men in this rural locale help our understanding of current development processes for securing safe water? Returning to analysis of the strategy to create women as community water-keepers given their traditional domestic role as domestic water-keepers what lessons can we learn?

Traditionally women, as carers, have borne the burden of being domestic water keeper and now their role has been expanded to that of community water-keeper in a neo-liberal New Public Management arrangement. This arrangement, in line with some development theory, advocates equal participation of men and women in CBMS for the maintenance of a safe and sustainable water supply in Uganda. Securing the success of CBMS, and indeed the community's financial contribution to those schemes, is now intended to involve women in their governance; this despite the fact that, as carers in poor communities, they have the least likelihood of having access finance to meet water maintenance fees.

We would contend that this case study indicates that, though the policy is presented as incorporating women in governance as if they are empowered actors, it takes no account of the fundamental constraints on female participation in the economy and polity arising from the persistent gender inequalities which shape their lives. A façade of opportunity is presented in these policy arrangements wherein women's empowerment is conceptualised as an outcome. Conceptualising equality as an outcome, without challenging the dominant sexist norms and the gendered constraints on women, may in fact create an additional burden on them. At best it presents an impression of opportunity that the women have little or no way of seizing.

Legislation promoting the increased participation of women in new public management and governance frameworks for CBMS has failed in that regard. It has instead furthered the myth of women being unencumbered by gender relations (Cornwall, 2012). In this chapter we have endeavoured to unfold the encumbrances at play in the dynamics of instrumentalizing women as community water-keepers. Women's participation in choice, maintenance and

management of water resources remains peripheral despite, and probably because of, the prevalent agenda in neo-liberal development policy which seeks to override, as opposed to reverse, the reality of poor women's lives. Gender-transformative and sustainable water governance can only occur when women effectively participate in all the political processes of decision-making and when they have a voice (White, 1996; Panda, 2007; Cornwall, 2003, 2008).

## References

- Agarwal, Bina. 1997. "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household." *Feminist Economics* 3:1-51.
- Asingwire, Narathius 2011. "Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Community-Based Maintenance System for Rural Water Supply Facilities." Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) and Directorate of Water Development (DWD), Kampala.
- Cleaver, Frances. 1999. "Paradoxes of Participation: Questioning Participatory Approaches to Development." *Journal of International Development* 11:597-612.
- Cleaver, Frances. 2004. "The Limits of Participation in Development " in *The 16th Danish Sahel Workshop, 5-6 January 2004: Current politics in West Africa; The Use of Local Knowledge in Applied Research; Participation in Project Planning and Capacity Building* ", vol. Occasional Paper No. 17, edited by Lykke, Anne Mette, Mette Kirkebjerg Due, Metus Kristensen, and Ivan Nielsen. Aarhus Sahel-Sudan Environmental Research Initiative (SEREIN)
- Cleaver, Frances and Kristin Hamada. 2010. "'Good' Water Governance and Gender Equity: A Troubled Relationship." *Gender & Development* 18:27-41.
- Connell, Raewyn W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd edition, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2002. "Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development." in *IDS Working Paper 170*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2003. "Whose Voices? Whose Choices? Reflections on Gender and Participatory Development." *World Development* 31:1325.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2008. "Unpacking Participation: Models, Meanings and Practices." *Community Development Journal* 43:269-269.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2012. "Framing women in international development" presentation at Development Studies Association, London, November 2011.
- Cornwall, Andrea, Elizabeth Harrison Ann Whitehead 2007. *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Challenges and Contestations*. Zed Books: London.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and the Power." Pp. 208-226 in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by Dreyfus, H.L and P. Rabinow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Franks, Tom and Frances Cleaver. 2007. "Water Governance and Poverty: A Framework for Analysis." *Progress in Development Studies* 7:291-306.

- Gaynor, Niamh 2010. *Transforming Participation? The Politics of Development in Malawi and Ireland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GOU. 1999. "The National Water Policy." Kampala: Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment.
- GOU. 2011. "Water and Environment Sector Performance Report, 2011." Kampala: Ministry of Water and Environment.
- Kanyesigye, Juliet, Joseph Anguria, Edison Niwagaba, and Tim Williamson. 2004 "Are National Water and Sanitation Objectives Achieved on the Ground? A Review of Service Delivery, Planning Monitoring and Evaluation in Tororo and Wakiso Districts." WaterAid, Uganda, Kampala.
- Kerfoot, Deborah and David Knights. 1994. "Into the Realm of the Fearful: Power, Identity and the Gender Problematic." Pp. 317 in *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, edited by Radtke, Lorraine and Henderikus J Stam. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Lockwood, Harold. 2004. "Scaling up Community Management of Rural Water Supply: Thematic Overview Paper." Hague: IRC International Water and Sanitation Center.
- Lukes, Steven. 1974. *Power: A Radical View*. London: British Sociological Association.
- Lwengo District Local Government, Uganda. 2011. "Lwengo District Water and Sanitation Development Report." Lwengo: Department of Water and Sanitation, Lwengo District Local Government.
- Macri, Gloria, Aine Rickard, Asaba B. Richard, Firminus Mugumya, Fagan G. Honor, Ronaldo Munck, Narathius Asingwire, Kabonesa Consolata, and Susan Linnane. 2013. "A Socio-Spatial Survey of Water Issues in Makondo Parish, Uganda." Water Is Life: Amazzi Bulamu Project, Dublin.
- Panda, Smita Mishra. 2007. "Women's Collective Action and Sustainable Water Management: Case of Sewa's Water Campaign in Gujarat, India." in *International Research Workshop on 'Gender and Collective Action', October 17-21, 2005*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Institute of Rural Management (IRMA).
- Plummer, Janelle and Tom Slaymaker. 2007. "Rethinking Governance in Water Services." vol. Working Paper 284. London, SE: Overseas Development Institute.
- Rydhagen, Birgitta. 2002. "Feminist Sanitary Engineering as a Participatory Alternative in South Africa and Sweden." Blekinge Institute of Technology, Karlskrona.
- Singh, Nandita. 2008. "Equitable Gender Participation in Local Water Governance: An Insight into Institutional Paradoxes." *Water Resources Management* 22:925-942.

- Porter, Fenella and Tina Wallace. 2013. "Introduction" in *AID, NGOs and the Realities of Women's Lives – A Perfect Storm* edited by T Wallace, F. Porter and M. Ralph-Bowman. Practical Action Publishing: UK
- White, Sarah C. 1996. "Depoliticising Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation." *Development in Practice* 6:6-15.