

GENDER ACCESS TO RURAL WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) has become a prevalent issue in Nigeria. Many communities lack WASH facilities in the country. Women in Nigeria are responsible for WASH. To ensure WASH in the family, women depend directly on the availability of WASH facilities in the communities. Despite the important roles women play in ensuring WASH in the house, they face various challenges. These challenges call for research. Therefore, this study examines gender and WASH and adopted a mix methodology. A total of 1,300 participants responded to the household survey questions, 480 participated in the focus group discussion and 60 key informants were interviewed. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for household survey, FGD and KII. Questionnaire, interview and direct observation were utilized in collecting data. Findings of the study revealed that socio cultural practices, Socio-economic factors, poor government commitment and poor capacity/lack of agencies implementing WASH programmes in rural communities in Benue State was responsible for poor gender access to WASH services. The study recommended that awareness on WASH programmes, construction of WASH facilities as well as provision of water treatment chemicals to rural dwellers as well as Empowering of women and men in the communities.

Keywords: *Gender, Rural, Water, Sanitation, Hygiene*

- ▶ **Water supply, sanitation and hygiene are vital for a healthy society. Due to its importance, it has become a subject of serious attention as reflected in their inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The inclusion is an indication that access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are very vital for a healthy individual, family and society across the globe.**
- ▶ **Due to the importance of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, access to safe water supply and sanitation is therefore a serious issue across the globe. In Nigeria, more than half of the population is affected by lack of access to safe**



In Benue State, where this study was conducted, water supply, sanitation and hygiene is very poor. Benue state is one of the states in north central Nigeria which its records on general access to water supply and sanitation facilities by the citizens remain very poor. Benue cities in particular are fraught with inexorable rise of squatter settlements, overcrowding dwellings, breakdown of



Gender perspectives are important in rural areas like Benue when examining water supply, sanitation and hygiene due to the role of gender in utilization of WASH services. Women and girls typically take responsibility for fetching water, and this can take hours out of their day, reducing time for farm work, education, childcare and rest (UNDP, 2008). When relatives become sick because of poor hygiene, it is also women and girls who bear the greatest burden of care. Rural women also tend to spend more time than men in the home and are also more directly exposed to environmental hazards of poor sanitation—such as diseases caused by poor drainage, contact with human feces and decomposing rubbish. Yet, little or no attention is paid to gender issues in the design and implementation of rural water and sanitation programs which has widened the health, social and economic benefits to women and their communities.



Women in rural areas in Benue State perform all domestic tasks relating to WASH and also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly. In rural communities, the lives of women, and their income generating opportunities are greatly impacted by the lack of water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities (Crow & McPike, 2009). When improvements in water supply, sanitation and hygiene are accompanied with opportunities for women to generate income through small gardening and other micro-economic activities, the time freed from water collection can be converted into income earning as well as greater opportunities for children to attend schools (Crow & McPike, 2009).

Inadequate potable water, sanitation and waste disposal in rural areas of Benue State leave the general population vulnerable to water-borne and other environmental diseases. These conditions of inadequate potable water, sanitation and waste disposal in rural Benue State are compounded for women by some unhelpful or even dangerous socio-cultural norms and practices.



Availability of WASH facilities enhances personal and community health. However, potable water can only be conveyed to the people through adequate safe water supply facilities such as boreholes with hand pumps, public standpipes and hand dug wells. Inadequacy and non-utilization of WASH facilities can hinder access to wholesome drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene which eventually may lead to consumption of contaminated water with attendant consequences and poor sanitation and hygiene.



OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to examine

- i. cultural, political and socioeconomic issues affecting women access to rural WASH in Benue state
- ii. prevailing gender gaps in the design and implementation of rural WASH programs in Benue state
- iii. gender dynamics affecting access to urban WASH services in Benue state.
- iv. To carry out an in-depth understanding on the capacity of WASH implementing partners on gender based WASH programming, and
- v. To suggest programmatic actions to address availability of WASH for women in the rural communities.



METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mix methodology which helped in gaining generalized and in-depth understanding of WASH in rural communities in Benue State. These mix methods and techniques illustrated below enabled the acquisition of specific data needed to achieve the objectives of the study.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); involving between 8-10 participants with the common characteristics of being adult male, adult female, young girls and young boys resident in the community were conducted in each of the 20 communities selected in Katsina-ala, Logo and Ukum LGAs. Three (3) FGD sessions were held in each of the 20 communities.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs); were held with purposively selected respondents who were considered critical stakeholders with appreciable knowledge in WASH facilities and services in Katsina ala, Logo and Ukum LGAs.

Case Studies; case studies were conducted involving consenting marginalized female and male. Criteria for selection included age, state of health, residency, and disability status.

Transect Walks; were used to observe WASH related facilities available in the LGAs. A scanning of the environment revealed reasons why men and women, marginalized persons were excluded WASH services.



Socio-cultural Impact on WASH

Socio-cultural orientation of people in rural communities ascribed the role of water collection to women. Rural communities dweller believe that women are responsible for collecting water and ensuring hygiene such as washing of dishes, taking care of feces from babies, cleaning the environment with men as the key beneficiaries of these activities. Furthermore, it was found that men and even women view the duty of collecting water and other WASH related activities in the house as the responsibility of women and girls. However, some men are of the view that they go to the stream to bath thereby lessen the burden of the women in water.

Lack of WASH Facilities

Another factor highlighted during FGD was lack of WASH facilities in the communities that participated in the study. It was found during the FGDs that lack of WASH facilities such as water supply points (boreholes), sanitation and hygiene facilities are critical factors that limit women access to improved WASH services in the selected communities in Benue State. Construction boreholes and even protected hand dug well in communities and particularly in homes of those without these facilities will make it possible for women and girls to have access to WASH services which will go a long way in empowering women economically and preventing illness and diseases and infant mortality in communities

Poor Government Commitment

The government lack the political will in providing basic amenities to the people is a factor limiting women's access to WASH facilities in rural areas. Government has not provided water to meet the needs of the people in rural communities. Provision of portable water in rural communities is subject to interest of the government and need for electoral support. Most of the communities in which FGDs were conducted; participants clearly stated that there has not been government presence in the provision of basic amenities in their communities. They stated that their communities lack basic water supply that the government should have provided. They further stated that government officials come to the communities only when canvassing for votes after which they are not seem again once they are voted into power.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sex roles, parental teaching, poor government commitment (poor and obsolete policy formulation), poor income and lack of implementing partners in communities are factors militating against women accessing WASH facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Awareness creation:
- ii. Construction of WASH facilities as well as provision of water treatment chemicals to rural dwellers
- iii. Empowering of women and men in the communities:
- iv. Ensuring Good Governance and Policy

Sex roles, parental teaching, poor government commitment (poor and obsolete policy formulation), poor income and lack of implementing partners in communities are factors militating against women accessing WASH facilities.

Recommendations

Awareness creation:

Construction of WASH facilities as well as provision of water treatment chemicals to rural dwellers

Empowering of women and men in the communities:

Ensuring Good Governance and Policy

As researchers or practitioners what are the possible interactions/collaboration with practitioners resp. researchers to improve/upscale your activities

- ▶ Possible interactions is through engagement of academicians in conducting practical researches, ensuring the combination of academic and practical researches in the university.
- ▶ Ensuring students mostly postgraduate students conduct their research in consultation with the development or humanitarian sector

What are the potential aspects of the research that can be transformed into practice?

- ▶ This research findings such as the cultural belief regarding water collection is the duty of women, formulating policies on WASH can be transformed into practice.
- ▶ Also, creating awareness to the public in rural areas, drilling of boreholes, hand dug wells, construction of toilets and empowering of women in the communities

PICTURES

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