



USAID/E3 Water Communications and Knowledge Management (CKM) Project

GLOBAL WATERS RADIO

Annabell Waititu on Gender and Water Management in Kenya

Interview Transcript

Global Waters Radio: You are tuned into Global Waters Radio, a podcast series produced by the Water Team at the U.S. Agency for International Development. The series offers listeners insights from USAID officials, development partners, thought leaders, and experts from across the water sector, as they discuss current USAID water programming and cutting edge research from around the world.

This week on the podcast, Annabell Waititu, executive director at the Institute of Environment and Water Management in Nairobi, Kenya. Annabell is a gender and water expert who has helped mainstream gender into natural resource management for more than 15 years. She's recently promoted the successful gender integration of Kenyan water utility workforces as part of the USAID-funded Sustainable Water and Sanitation in Africa Program, or SUWASA, which concluded in 2015. More recently, she's been involved with the USAID-funded Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program, or KIWASH. We reached Annabell recently at her Nairobi office to discuss the role of women in Kenya's water sector, hear about some of the progress Kenya's making in mainstreaming gender into water management, and to get her thoughts on Kenya's prospects for achieving Sustainable Development Goals' water and sanitation targets.

So to get started, Annabell, gender mainstreaming has been a big part of your work. Can you describe for listeners some of the ways that greater women's involvement contributes to improved water management and service provision?

Annabell Waititu: The contribution that women's involvement in water management and water service provision makes to the water supply enhances good water governance, which includes greater accountability in service provision, and it also enhances integrity because by bringing women on board to also become decision makers, then you are increasing transparency and accountability.

Efforts to mainstream gender also help water service providers to align investments with the need of both men and women. So when you meet people's needs, of course what

happens is that customers are more willing to pay for water services. They are more willing also to protect the infrastructure, so they become more involved, so they're able to actually pick up responsibility in terms of ensuring that the infrastructure is not getting vandalized. So it increases a lot of, you know, sustainability of water service infrastructure.

From my experience, we have also found that water service providers have a way of thinking that customers are the men, because they think water service provision is always paid for by men. But then the moment we begin to include women in, you know, issues of gender within their programming and service provision, then this makes them to begin to respect women—and to treat them as customers. And so what happens is that of course we begin to see everybody can become a customer, which enhances the customer base, and in turn also increases the economic viability of all the water service providers. So the whole aspect of gender equality mainstreaming also contributes a great deal, enhancing the capacity of women and men. And so basically what you see is that there is more improved performance in terms of people being able to be more productive as a team.

GWR: In Kenya, what would you say are some of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of women being involved in water management beyond the household?

AW: Yeah, I think one of the barriers that we have experienced, is that even though we have been trying to ensure and increase the participation of women, and particularly in technical or engineering areas, is the fact that we have very few women who have got those kind of backgrounds. One of the interventions that we have seen, like, for example, the Nile Basin Initiative had a program that was focusing more and encouraging women to take job opportunities in the water sector, and so they were providing women graduates with internships, just as a way of encouraging them to join the water sector.

On the national level, I see Kenya Water Institute, which is the first institute of the Ministry of Water, has also been trying to encourage girls through school outreach to undertake technical courses. So you find that is also contributing a great deal to bringing more and more women on board, and to ensure girls can begin to pick up opportunities in the water sector, and particularly take courses that are technical, like engineering. And I think also the other thing of course that we have seen is the lack of adequate communication or well-targeted communication that would ensure that women have got more access to information about water supply. So even if you want to find information about water supply, issues of water connection, then you find that how do women get that kind of information?

GWR: So talk to us about the role that the Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Program is now playing. How are some of KIWASH's interventions trying to further integrate women into Kenya's water sector?

AW: Yeah, KIWASH—Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Program—has an ambitious goal to reach up to one million people in the next five years. And it tries to ensure that both women and men are adequately trained in this whole process. We are going to be working more with water companies, the county governments, basically just to ensure that we support their targets and their goals for water in their own counties.

So in terms of gender equality mainstreaming, we are working in line with USAID's commitment to ensure that gender equality and female empowerment objectives are integrated into all aspects of the program. And KIWASH has taken certain steps to ensure that gender integration and women's empowerment is going to be part of this process.

So KIWASH also hopes to promote champions of change among women and men that they are going to be working with, especially in small-scale businesses. And the aim here is to just be able to foster change, and develop leadership of good men and women in terms of water and sanitation.

It is also working a lot, especially in corporate governance, to encourage water companies to involve both women and men in leadership of the water companies. For example, KIWASH has supported quite a number of water utilities on corporate governance, where they provide three-to-five day training on corporate governance, and one of the topics that is covered at this training is "Effectiveness of Gender Equality Mainstreaming in Strengthening Corporate Governance."

KIWASH is working with the companies to ensure that all obstacles and barriers that impede women from accessing water and sewerage services are addressed. For example, we have noted that in many companies, they always require that if you have to get out a connection, you would have to produce a title deed. And because many women and poor people don't have title deeds, we are working a lot with the companies to look for alternative ways of ensuring that everybody can be able to be within the requirements and the conditions. So basically, those are the kinds of the things that KIWASH is doing, and soon we are hoping that in meeting its target of one million people by the end of the five years, that women will also find an opportunity to be able to participate in this whole process, but also in accessing services and benefits that come in this project.

GWR: So, looking at the big picture going forward, how do you see Kenya's path unfolding as it works to achieve the water and sanitation targets for the Sustainable Development Goals?

AW: Yes, I know that we are moving quite slow, and of course even though we are committed to the SDG goals, we are still a long way in the sense if you look at the sewerage coverage, right now it is at 19 percent, you know, in the whole country. And when you look at the amount of money required right now, it is huge deficit that is

there. But again, there is a huge potential that this is likely to happen because Kenya is already beginning to embrace quite a number of different financing methodologies. They may be complex, but I think the different methodologies of financing the water sector will help us for what the government is actually planning to achieve, and would be able to make a huge progress in the next few years. And I think for me, I'm excited that the government, you know, has become more responsive and keen on ensuring that we can be able to achieve the targets for SDGs and our own targets for 2030.

GWR: Well, Annabell, it has been a pleasure, thank you so much for joining us.

AW: Thank you, and look forward to hearing again from you.

GWR: For more information on USAID/Kenya's water programming and the work of Kenya's Institute of Environment and Water Management, please have a look at the links below. And as always, if you have a topic you would like to see covered on a future edition of the podcast, go ahead and drop us a line at waterteam@usaid.gov.

This is Global Waters Radio.