

GENDER AND PRIVATE COMPANIES IN WATER SUPPLIES PROGRAMS, CASE OF LYDEC IN CASABLANCA

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ABSTRACT

Since the INDH was launched in 2005, LYDEC has the obligation to provide water access to 180 000 households in various shantytowns of Casablanca before 2009. To promote the numbers of households connected, LYDEC started a program based on traditional urban and technical diagnostic methods but also on a social diagnostic. The first results, after one year and half of investigating, planning and implementing new water supplies have shown the importance to ensure the participation of communities in the process and more specifically, to develop participatory methods based on gender approach. In most developing countries, the role played by female users in water and sanitation is predominant and has been proved. In the case of LYDEC, the promotion of participatory methods wanted to improve women's awareness of health and hygiene issues related to the use of clean water but also to increase their involvement in the public community. The methodology adapted included a gender distinction and a gendered posture limiting women as being beneficent and repetitors.

Key words: Gender theories; Participatory methods; Shantytowns; Sustainable development; Water access.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Access to basic goods in Morocco: the INDH

On May 18th 2005 in Agadir, His Majesty the King of Morocco Mohamed VI launched a major national initiative and challenge to Morocco: the INDH, the National Initiative for Human Development. Five years after the beginning of his reign, Mohamed VI took a major political stand for the development of his country with the INDH. It is important to underline the choice of the term Human Development; the international public sphere (Habermas, 1970) tends indeed to prefer eco-development, social development and more specially, sustainable development. By Human Development, the royal discourse meant a new model of living and behaving together as a society. The Human Development calls for solidarity, citizenship and conviction.

More concretely, the King targets the eradication of poverty by ensuring access to basic goods for all. Such implementation of those basic infrastructures will bring major social changes like a better health, access to education or improvement of women's status. Women are considered as direct beneficent from economic and social development. Programs targeting the promotion of development should therefore include a gender approach (Boserup, 1970).

1.2. A Gender perspective

Gender refers to the sexual distinction between male and female. The term refers to a social construct rather than a biological condition. It assumes that a wide variety of phenomena have gendered characteristics to identify men and women on social norms in contrary to male and female bodies. Gender also included the different values that carry men and women. Gender supposes

therefore a distinct conception of water resources management. The gender approach have been widely used and promoted by the “gender and development” theories starting with the work of E. Boserup first published in 1970 (Boserup, 1970; Moser, 1993; Braidotti R., Charkiewicz E., Hausler S. and Wieringa S. 1994; Benería L. & Bisnath, S. 2001). The gender approach insists on the role of women to international development issues.

The 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 was the first international conference to define gender and its impacts in development. It attempted to redefine the ways to reach a better understanding of the gender approach throughout various societies of the world. The purpose of Beijing was to help the gender approach to get operational applications and results. Beijing also accepted the importance of the national situations’ diversity: general rules cannot be applied to local contexts, adaptation is key. The important point with Beijing is the definition of an official concept for gender concept and its links with development. Throughout World Conferences from Rio in 1992 to Mexico in 2006, one fact has been accepted, proved and ensured: without women, no development. It has been particularly underlined for the water field.

From this international frame to the local, regional and national development: how gender is really applied and understood? By referring to the gender approach in the case of LYDEC in Casablanca, we want to analyse how deciders and managers integrate the gender concept and more particularly, how male and female users are effectively taken into account at the different stages of urban hydraulics projects (Allély D., Drevet-Dabbous O., Etienne J., Francis J., Morel à l’Huissier A., Chappé P. and Verdelhan Cayre G., 2002; Vézina M., Dabbous O., Désille D., Durany Jacob J. and Etienne J., 2007).

1.3. Case study: LYDEC in Casablanca

This study will focus on one of the leading company of Morocco: LYDEC. LYDEC, Lyonnaise des Eaux de Casablanca, is in charge of distributing and managing water, electricity and sanitation infrastructures since 1997. The city and LYDEC have signed a contractual relationship that are usually tailored to each individual local authority, whereby it retains complete control in order to provide consumers with the best possible service. By signing with LYDEC, the Moroccan public authority wanted both to capitalize on the company previous experience in providing access to basic infrastructures like water and electricity and to benefit from the SUEZ expertise. Indeed, LYDEC is part of SUEZ, a French multinational company delivering services in the fields of electricity, natural gas, water and waste services. The group is divided into two branches, SUEZ Environnement in charge of water and waste services and SUEZ Energy dealing with electricity, gas and energy services. LYDEC is the only SUEZ company based in Morocco and was the first company to sign such a contractual relationship in Morocco.

The choice of Casablanca is also particularly relevant to consider risks and social changes in the broader context of urban water. This city is facing spontaneous urbanization, growing immigration from rural zones and strong poverty. In 2005, the Wilaya of Greater Casablanca counted 180 000 households without water and electricity infrastructures (Koulm, 2006). Only 20 000 of these households were legal habitation and 160 000 without any legal existence for the city. At last, 50% of those 180 000 households are in urban area and 50% are in a rural area.

Since the launch of the INDH, LYDEC and the Wilaya of Greater Casablanca have signed a new convention enlarging LYDEC’s prerogatives to further develop access to basic goods. Since 2005, LYDEC has the responsibility to connect 180 000 households to water, electricity and sanitation, and created a dedicated department called INMAE, development in Arabic. Various sites have already benefited from this program. Two different sites were chosen to further analyze the methodology of LYDEC: (i) in Rmel located in Douar Bouazza in the West of Casablanca and (ii) in Lamkenssa in the South of Casablanca close to the highway which draws the limit between urban

and peri-urban areas. Both sites (“douar” in Arabic) are extremely poor, illegal settlements and characterized by unemployment. They represent 214 and 295n households.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study has two objectives:

(1) to question from a gender approach, what is the user’s role in water access program of private company like LYDEC. It will focus on the women’s image, role and integration in the project and methodology.

(2) to determine how the concept of gender is perceived, understood and applied within the program and the company communication.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Coping with the local reality

To cope with its new obligations, LYDEC adopted a methodology based on a general “picture” of the selected shantytown. This “picture” consisted in describing habitation types, transportation, current water access (public fountain, water vendors, wells, etc.), sanitation and public infrastructures. The method focused on operational aspects including a general description of the community in terms of consumption habits and needs. It excluded a sociological short portrait of the population composition. This fact can be explained by the importance to first establish if water supplies can be physically implemented but also to evaluate the community needs and financial issues related to the new water supplies.

The main and most predominant first issue LYDEC had to deal with is the legal issues which need to be solved with the political authorities. To obtain the community adhesion and support to get the authorization both with the authorities and with owners; LYDEC further developed ties with the local communities thanks to a stronger social diagnostic.

The social diagnostic is a crucial step to get the community confidence and to transform the inhabitants of shantytowns - used to illegal situations - into clients. The social diagnostic is based on participatory methods which suppose regular focus groups, information meetings and daily contact with the community. For I. Pechell, in charge of the social accompaniment of the community for INMAE, the main issue is “to coordinate information, to comprehend inhabitant’s needs and to establish confidence by daily contacts with the community resource persons”. The social diagnostic is based on three different steps for the water implementation project:

- (1) “Before water”, a step during which the company establishes a “picture” of the targeted households. This picture is actually an important urban diagnostic consisting in mapping, listing households and evaluating needs. Before starting building the second phase, property issues must be resolved and the community must adhere to the project.
- (2) “Implementing water”, a step when the works start. During the overall period, crisis can occur and the company has to keep the population informed of the stages of the process.
- (3) “After water” - the company wants to ensure the users became clients. It’s important that the new clients knew their responsibilities but also the services they can benefit from LYDEC. For the company, it’s an important moment to give some basic rules on water uses in order to avoid water and sanitation infrastructures misuses.

With this methodology, the company developed an expertise in social accompaniment and better coped with the strong local demand asking for more participation into the implementation program.

3.2. A local demand for participation

The different implementation phases have shown a strong women's interest towards new water supplies. It is a fact that women are in charge of water collection and storage for the family. The water chore is perceived as a waste of time and they expected radical changes from water supplies. Their participation to water management project is however more conflictual.

In the cases of Rmel and Lamkenssa, women's implication to the project hasn't been a major obstacle, most of men accepted that LYDEC contacted and worked with them. Resource persons however refused mixed focus group which means that water projects don't have the same meaning and consequences depending on gender.

What has been particularly interesting to observe is the strong women's will to be part of the project. They asked several times that LYDEC organized focus groups for them but also for their children. For most women, water supplies are an important change in their everyday life and they are particularly interested by the water cost and the benefit for their children's health. Pascale Guiffant, part of "water for all" program at SUEZ Environnement declared, "at the local scale, the gender approach is included by itself. The first concerned by water are women, the gender concept is therefore already integrated to the process". The information on health and hygiene issues showed how the private company indeed "already integrated" a gendered posture and messages.

3.3. Information to community: a gendered posture

To foster the users' awareness of water issues and uses, INMAE developed information and communication towards future users and new clients on hygiene, health, sanitation or price and cost. The supports developed by INMAE are gendered based and adapted to the context with few written supports that accompany the meetings or the focus groups. The communication of INMAE is not yet well structured but already clearly differentiated targets. It conveyed a certain image of the household and the task repartitions limiting a possible evolution of the women's status.

In the case of messages on health, for instance, the educational role of women is strengthened. The various issues tackled by the social animator will usually develop the different illness caused by unclean water and how to avoid its transmission with simple habits. LYDEC will insist on the mother's responsibility to educate her children but also to adopt simple good gestures because women are considered as more interested by these aspects. They usually asked "more accurate questions on water uses than men and seek ways to get rid of water chores. Both men and women are interested by these aspects but women will be the first affected by water changes" observed Morad Belmine, social animator at Lamkenssa.

Related to hygiene, issues like sanitation and waste will also be the occasion to introduce simple gestures to avoid abusive use of water even if the targeted population will usually not exceed a monthly consummation of 6m³. The gesture to avoid waste will usually be presented as a way to limit excessive bills, a strong argument to convince the target as women and men are both strongly interested by water price and payment. The administrative steps and ways of paying bills would usually equally interest both sexes; women however have a greater interest to limit waste than men. For the social animators, to change behaviours regarding waste and sanitation suppose raising women's awareness of those issues. They are perceived as the first actor of the households who can actually integrate changes in their everyday life.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Gender diffusion within the company

Gender as a term is not used in the communication supports or in the discourses of the different persons working for the water implementation unit. Mostly, deciders have a strong knowledge of the gender theories and usually worked with specialized agencies like the AFD or the PSEAU. It is important to underline that the more we drew to the local scale of the project, the less the “gender” term itself is used even if it’s usually vaguely known.

The semio discursive of the Internet website dedicated to “water for all” (the program that promote access to basic goods in the SUEZ group) or the different brochures showed a strong communication on women: pictures, testimonies and impacts conveyed the importance of women in water projects. They are not seen as deciders but direct beneficiaries of the service. For instance, women are considered as a minority like children: “water has important impacts on people’s everyday life: to walk kilometres in order to find it or to spend the day to fill buckets - and therefore not being able to work for women and not being able to go to schools for children” (“Water for all”, SUEZ Environnement, 2006).

The value of the example is also particularly important; women’s testimonies legitimate the taken actions. Free time, new professional activities, education... The impacts are measurable and easy to communicate for the company. This representation led to “biased visions of the project within the company and a reproduction of women traditional roles in the local contexts” explained F. Raoult, the communication manager of SUEZ Environnement. Women are only seen as beneficent of the water new supply like children, they are not seen as actors (Figure 1). This remark questions the understanding of gender at SUEZ, LYDEC and in the two sites of Lamkenssa and Rmel.



Figure 2: Brochure “Water for all”, SUEZ Environnement, March 2006.
Visual similar treatment between women and children.

4.2. The Gender Conscience

It is interesting to note that the term of “gender” is better known in Morocco than in France where the concept is not widespread. Many people know the term but may not know what it means or will have a vague idea of its principles. O. Dabbous from the AFD highlights that the term itself “will be appropriated in function of the local context but also depending on financial backers involved in the project”. It will also depend on “the emotional beliefs related to water” for A. Mathys of SUEZ Environnement. Gender is therefore to adapt to the context.

For LYDEC, the term “gender” is not used but the conscience of women and men’s distinct roles is strong. For Abdelmajid Hilal, responsible and social animator for Rmel, the difference between male and female users exists, “during the preliminary phase in order to establish the social

diagnostic, we could see the differences of perceptions of water supplies expected effects. Women have strong expectations and we have to answer them by providing adequate answers and information". Women's interest - despite the men's reluctance to see women's on the public area – ("they don't want their wife to be taken in picture for instance. We can talk with them but we shouldn't show them..." explained Abdelmajid Hilal) – shows the concrete need to integrate gender in water project and to ensure a correct knowledge of its principles within the company.

4.3. Perception of women: "Key Repetitors"

An important step to promote participation and adhesion is to contact key persons within the community. These persons will support LYDEC to better communicate messages to the community. For the social animators, it is particularly important to identify and to get the confidence of the influential men and women of the community. From the two sites experiences, resource persons' profiles have been defined. For the next operations, the social animators will have to contact these persons at first.

In the case of men, resource persons are the "caïd" (the local and political authority), the doctor, the institutor, the "fker" (the religious authority) or the "hajj" (Arabic term for a person who made the pilgrimage to Mecca), elders (traditional authority), responsible(s) of existing association(s).

In the case of women, it is interesting to underline that women's resource persons are the wives of men's resource persons' profiles, a sort of "female version" of men's typology. To these profiles, the method added the midwife and young women like students who are particularly involved in the community life. It is interesting to emphasize that women are seen as "repetitors". Indeed, to select the wife of a resource person is another way to reach a male resource person. Women got thus a double status; they are "repetitors" and influential persons. Some women have therefore a strong influence in the community life like old women and "hajja" (the feminine term for "hajj").

The distinction made between male and female resource persons shows the integration of a gender approach. This distinction is also concretely declined in the different communication supports. Abdelatif Abdarazzak, responsible and social animator for Lamkenssa, insisted on the importance to differentiate between men, women and children "because they don't have the same center of interests and conception of water managing resources".

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that gender is not really widespread as a term within the company but it's understood as a reality and an actual fact related to water uses. In the case of LYDEC, the diffuse gender conception is declined at a local scale as resulting from women and resource persons' demands. The first wants to be part and is naturally a part of the water implementation projects, the later wants to avoid conflict with inadequate mixed animation campaigns or focus group. This last remark shows that gender is understood but still problematic as a political concept supposing changes of women's status. The company seems to imitate its message to a traditional role of women in the households. The gender approach however ensured a greater participation of the community thanks to the "double agent" women status: influential authorities and key "repetitors". Even if gender is not yet a subject of communication, its concrete applications and success could lead the top of LYDEC and SUEZ Environnement to further promote the gender approach when implementing water supplies.

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