

*Céline Hervé-Bazin*

*Water management and gender issues: terms of discussion.*

*Publication IWA - Young Water Professionals Program, University of Berkeley, July 2008*

### **Water management and gender issues: terms of discussion.**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Gender tends to be more and more used as a tool in development programs and management. 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 includes the different values that men and women carry. The gender approach has been promoted by “gender and development” theories starting with the work of E. Boserup first published in 1970 (Boserup, 1970; Moser, 1993; Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler & Wieringa, 1994; Benería & Bisnath, 2001). Gender supposes a distinct conception of water resources management but also of management in the water field.

This study wants to establish what gender can bring to water management by focusing on private water companies. It will examine how gender is taken into account to better answer local needs in water implementation projects and sustainable development policies. It will focus on SUEZ, a major water private company through a comparative study in France and in Morocco with two study sites in Dunkerque and Casablanca. The aim is to further understand local needs and realities when facing water access issues.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

“Promote gender equality and empower women”, the third goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) deals with equality between men and women in order to promote a better and sustainable development. Since the World Women Conference held in Beijing (1995), gender has been increasingly used in international conferences and declarations. It has been internationally accepted that promoting women’s implication and status is key to a country development.

This recent theory taken from social sciences is full of promises for women in our society. In terms of development, gender is mostly seen as a tool to encourage women’s participation in development programs. The study and use of gender has greater repercussions than the promotion of women’s involvement in development starting with the work of E. Boserup (Boserup: 1970). It refers to a social construct rather than a biological condition. Elements of gender differentiating men and women make more sense than sole anatomical remarks. Gender also conveys the various and different values carried by men and women. It questions social roles including politics and power structures within a society.

In the realm of sustainable development, the study of gender leads to adopt a participative approach and governance based on equity. When referring to water issues like resources management, nature preservation or property access, gender has become particularly relevant. Since the conference of

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Dublin (1992), women have been both seen as necessary allies to water management and associated to water implementation programs. For international organizations like the UNESCO, the UNIFEM, the World Bank or cooperation funds like CIDA Canadian International Development Agency, AFD Agence Française de Développement.... Gender is a necessary tool in progressing towards sustainable water management and water access. Why is gender-related issues considered a useful tool to reach a more sustainable development? Why did gender become particularly relevant in water implementation programs?

This study wants to establish what gender can bring to water management by focusing on private water companies. It will examine how gender is taken into account to better answer local needs in water implementation projects and sustainable development policies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Preamble to gender and water management**

This paper examines SUEZ, a major private company providing water access worldwide through a comparative analysis of two of its subsidiaries in France and Morocco. This study took benefit from a comparative approach taking into account that gender tends to be studied in “Developing countries” and scarcely in “Industrial countries”.

The comparative approach is considered as a useful method in social sciences to better grasp cross-national phenomena like gender, women’s status and sustainable development. It’s also interesting for target-oriented research, to get common traits and differences, to give a better global perspective in the context of globalization. Comparative approach helps to explain and to accompany social transformations in the international scene.

SUEZ is therefore a particularly enriching case study as it is a multinational company managing

subsidiaries from all over the world with very different cultural origins. Its activities cumulate

international and local issues.

### **Observations as a young professional**

SUEZ is a leading company in the water sector. Counting subsidiaries worldwide, this study will compare two entities; LYDEC, in Morocco and Lyonnaise des Eaux (LDE), in France by focusing on a program “Water for all”. Since 2001, SUEZ participates in the MDG through the program “Water for all”. This project initiated after Gérard Mestrallet, chairman of SUEZ, asked for water access for all in *Le Monde* after September 11<sup>th</sup>. It aims to implement water access in shantytowns where the company has a relationship contract.

To get relevant results, several observations were conducted while working at LDE and LYDEC during 15 months for each entity. This study draws conclusion from three complementary methods comparing the three levels of the company: SUEZ and SUEZ Environnement (international level), Lyonnaise des Eaux and LYDEC (national and local level).

First, 35 interviews have been realized targeting the same departments: Human Resources, Sustainable Development, Communication and the Water Department. These interviews were conducted on three major related aspects: women’s roles in the water company; sustainable development, women and water access; and gender.

The second analysis is a semio discursive study of several documents produced by SUEZ, SUEZ Environnement, LDE and LYDEC focusing on institutional publications as annual reports, brochures and guides targeting clients edited from 1997 to 2007.

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The third analysis consists in studying the sexo specific portrait of the four entities. SUEZ has initiated a strong politics on women in 2005 and several studies have been done.

### **Description of the two study sites**

Two study sites have been chosen to further analyze gender in these two different locations. The aim was to investigate which methodology is adopted to target communities and other actors like NGOs, local associations and public services.

#### *Lamkenssa (Casablanca)*

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 is usually tailored to each individual local authority, whereby authorities retain complete control in order to provide consumers with the best possible service.

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, when the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) was launched, Casablanca counted 180.000 households without water and electricity infrastructures. The INDH is the Moroccan's government main strategic program seeking to address service gaps in low-income areas in the short to medium term. Since the launch of the INDH, LYDEC has the responsibility to connect 140.000 households to water, electricity and sanitation, and created a dedicated department called INMAE (Development in Arabic) which is specifically dedicated to the INDH initiative.

This study will focus on Lamkanssa located in South Casablanca. This site is extremely poor and characterized by unemployment representing 7.996 households. This specific site is particularly interesting as one of the three pilots Output-Based Aid grants that the World Bank is supporting in Morocco. These pilots are intended at testing an innovative result-based targeted subsidy mechanism.

The methodology itself is particularly interesting. In order to accompany the water arrival, the company created a specific department dedicated to community's relationships. Its objectives are: to obtain people's adhesion to the project, to raise people's awareness on water issues and to accompany the community during the works and the project. The department called "Clients Accompaniment" takes benefit from social engineering methods and social work. Based on three steps procedure, the department also conducted impacts studies after water implementation.

The first step wants to establish a "picture" of targeted households. This picture is actually an important urban diagnosis that consists in the district's mapping, listing the number of households, its typology and evaluating needs.

The second step is related to the start of works. During this period, crisis related to floods or odours can occur and the company has to keep the population informed of the process.

At the last stage LYDEC wants to ensure that users became clients. New clients must know their responsibilities and rights. For the company, it's an important moment to give some basic rules – best practices - on water uses in order to avoid misuses of the water and sanitation infrastructures.

Finally, LYDEC conducted several impacts studies on hygiene, property, lifestyle, etc. Impacts on women have been clearly underlined and the different studies revealed impacts on health and housing but also on women's place in the community, in the household as the budget manager or on employment. For instance, most of them will find legal work whereas men will keep informal work...

#### *Saint-Pol-sur-Mer (Dunkerque)*

Lyonnaise des Eaux is in charge of producing and distributing water in France. The company was founded in 1880, it first signed contractual relationships in the South of France like Bordeaux. In

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1997, Lyonnaise des Eaux merged with the Compagnie Financière de SUEZ. Since 2003, LDE is the French subsidiary for water distribution of SUEZ Environnement, the environmental branch of the SUEZ Group. In 2008, Lyonnaise des Eaux distributes water to 9 millions French customers.

Providing services in a “developed” country, LDE was not part of the program “Water for all”. (This program is focusing on shantytowns worldwide like in Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Jakarta, etc.) The current program was actually initiated by a local agency in the North of France. Since then, this initiative has been duplicated to every district and cities with whom LDE has a contractual relationship in the North of France.

In 2006, this initiative has been included in the Sustainable Development Charter that the company signed and launched to promote 12 commitments in favor of Sustainable Development. Its seventh engagement wants to help the poorest to pay their water bill, a social responsibility that the company wants to downscale at a national scale. Since then, the initiative was baptized “Water for all”. LDE however worked on water access to families facing financial difficulties for 15 years.

In 1992, the city of Dunkerque asked Lyonnaise des Eaux to reconsider water cut for families with economic or social difficulties. The demand emerged from social services willing to stop social crisis related to water cuts. This study case will focus on Saint-Pol-sur-Mer, one of the poorest suburbs of Dunkerque counting 23.350 inhabitants where unemployment is very high especially for young people under 30 (rates can reach 50%).

The methodology is based on a strong partnership with public structures. When LDE discover a case of unpaid bills, it will contact social services. Social services will get information on the family with LDE. The two of them will also work with local associations related to social activities and housing issues. The three actors want to elaborate financial solutions to budget problems. As soon as the family accepts to follow a social accompaniment, LDE accepts not to cut water.

What is interesting to observe is the impact of water as a medium to reveal a social difficulty. For social services, the project helps them to know who needs help and to contact these persons. Most of the concerned households are women having single-parent families or families with social problems related to budget, violence... In the case of the threat of water cut, women will come to declare the family problems. Women are usually the first interlocutor to the company or social services. LDE also noticed that in the majority of cases, it’s better if women from social services come to families to start talking with them.

Since the launch of the program, LDE reduced its unpaid bills, opened a recovery service dedicated to help people in debt and strengthened its relationships with the city. For them, the program helped to establish strong relationships with social services but also with the city mayor and other elected representatives. This program helped to foster a better client relationship and to offer social responses to customers. This program is also an indirect way to ensure the continued contract relationship in Dunkerque.

## *FINDINGS AND RESULTS*

Influence of the international sphere

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It is important to underline how influential the international scene may be towards the company. SUEZ as an international company participates in the MDG by joining Global Compact in 2000. Launched by former UN-Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Global Compact targets governance, ethics and environment. This membership reveals how SUEZ as an organization must answer to international issues. It is particularly important for water issues.

Water, as a vital resource, is a necessary good to every human being. The announced water battle tends to bring different water management conceptions and debates around the right to water. By signing his article asking for water access for all in 2001 (SUEZ: 2003), Gérard Mestrallet adopted a strong stance on water access worldwide. In the frame of "Water for all" the different entities further entertain strong relationships with NGO's and the public sphere.

On gender, the relationships between stakeholders, UN entities and other major international actors pushed SUEZ to integrate gender elements in its strategy. Within the company, SUEZ is leading a strong policy towards women since 2005. The company created a Women Observatory, a place to network and also to access research and resources concerning women's vision and their place and role in society and in the workplace. The Observatory is working on five major aspects related to women's network, women careers and positions, etc. In terms of management, it led to encourage positive recruitments policies for women, to promote debates and training within the company to avoid visible gendered images.

On the institutional level, SUEZ contracted a partnership with the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society in 2005. SUEZ Environnement also signed a partnership with ALMAE, a Moroccan association working on water and gender. Lyonnaise des Eaux and SUEZ Environnement signed a brochure with Aquafed (Water and sanitation for Women, Aquafed, 2007) on women and water. These actions show a visible interest to promote women's participation in the organization's life and the society.

At a local scale, this influence is particularly relevant in the case of Lamkensa. As a pilot project benefiting from the GPOBA, water impacts are very important to measure in order to reach the MDG. The methodology itself already included a gender approach but the influence of the World Bank urged the organization to conduct gender impacts studies. From this international influence, the study of gender diffusion supposes to consider how gender elements and tools are used within the company.

### **A gender versus a gendered methodology**

The study of gender in water implementing projects and management showed that local entities have to adopt the reality to pursue the process. Within the company exists a complementary approach of gender from top to bottom (Hervé-Bazin: 2007): a "gender reality" versus a "gendered methodology".

A "gender" approach wants to start from the target by integrating the targeted persons' needs in the program. A "gendered" posture wants to implement a methodology established by theories and to push for a stronger gender conception. This stance tends to conduct gender-biased representations of reality whereas a gender approach may perpetuate the same women's roles and representations in the society. By linking the two methodologies, gender is a useful tool when considering management of change.

In this study, "Water for all" clearly articulates a gender methodology with a gender reality at different levels of the company. Starting from SUEZ and SUEZ Environnement, the semio discursive analysis of communication publications showed a strong communication on women: pictures, testimonies and impacts conveyed the importance of women in water projects. Women are not seen as deciders but as 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

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women and not being able to go to schools for children" ("Water for all", SUEZ Environnement, 2006).

The value of the example is particularly important because women's testimonies legitimate the taken actions. Free time for education, new professional activities, community implication: the three traditional women roles (Moser: 1993). 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, Communication manager of SUEZ Environnement. Women are only seen as beneficent of the water new supply like children, they are not seen as actors. This remark questions the understanding of gender in Lamkensa and Saint-Pol-sur-Mer.

To promote community adhesion meant to contact key persons within the community or in the public sphere. These persons will better communicate messages to the community or within households. For social animators, it is particularly important to identify influential men and women of the community or households. For the two sites, resource persons' profiles are clearly defined.

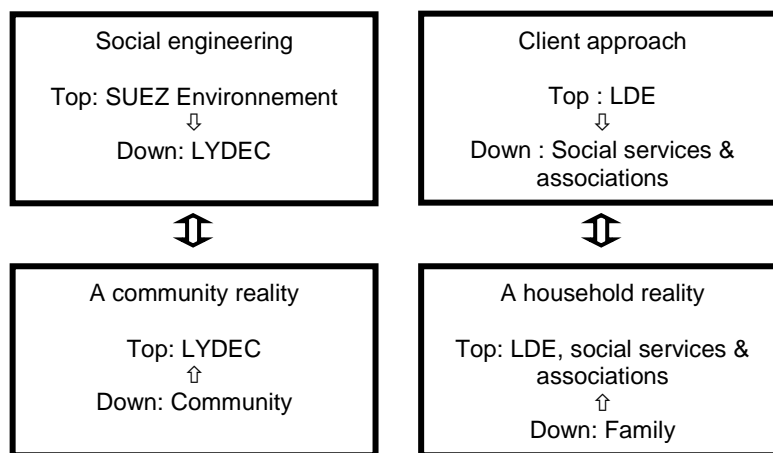
In Saint-Pol-sur-Mer, the existing social structures help the company in its methodology. Social workers and associations are the first resources persons to be contacted when a case is identified. The following step is to contact families. For LDE, women are the first person to contact as they will inform the rest of the family. They are the person with whom Lyonnaise des Eaux will work to resolve financial problems. In France, social services are characterized by individualism, administrative procedures and a client approach that LDE included in its method.

It is very different from Morocco where the absence of social services, public structures and local associations urged LYDEC to foster its implication. In Lamkensa, social animators had to identify resources persons directly in the households. This identification was based on the community profile. It is important to note that the Department had to work at a community level to obtain a dynamic within the community. The methodology however clearly included differences between men and women.

In the case of men, resource persons are the "kaïd" (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 masculine 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.

If comparing study sites, the two of them have the same target: to accompany habitants in their client relationship. This relationship is fostered for habitants with social and economic difficulties. The objective is to guarantee payment thanks to a trustworthy relationship between habitants – clients and the organization. The relationship surpasses a simple contractual relationship by including mutual understanding, social methods, participative approach and strong relationships with public structures when they exist.

From a gendered method to a gender reality, the two study sites have to adapt to their local contexts. At Saint-Pol-sur-Mer, the method is based on a client approach with a strong relationship with social services whereas in Lamkensa, the methodology issued from social engineering has been adapted to the absence of local structures. It resulted in a stronger implication from the organization that LYDEC is trying to counterbalance by including international stakeholders for financial issues and local associations to maintain a social accompaniment of the community. (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1: Top / Down communication**

In the process of gender diffusion, gendered posture and gender reality will meet. In the case of LYDEC, the company has direct relationship with reality but only with the community. In the case of LDE, the company has a semi-direct relationship with reality but a direct link with families and individuals. Both programs want to ensure a client relationship based on responsibilities and trust.

In this study, women are seen as “repetitors”. For both sites, women have a double status; they are “repetitors” and resource persons. In the case of Lamkenssa, they are also influential persons towards the community. Some women have 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 widespread in different communication supports. A. 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”. It is important to question this cultural water conception and its impacts for water access and management.

### **A non-visible conception of women and water**

The gender approach revealed non-visible ties between women, water and sustainable development within the company. This non-visible conception can be observed thanks to the comparison between entities. By comparing communication supports targeting customers, the four entities maintain a certain idea of women and water.

If women are seen as beneficiaries from water projects, they are also seen as housewife or household responsible. For instance, at LDE, the client magazine called “L’eau et vous” (You and water) is directly aimed at women. This magazine wants to help women in their daily relationships with water. A quantitative study of communication managers showed that the magazine wanted to help women with a women magazines type of communication.

Looking at the visual aspect of the magazine, there is a strong representation of women and girls. Men are very few and advices are women oriented based on health, beauty, sports, cuisine... For the communication manager of LDE, D. Ogeron, the magazine addresses women because they are seeking for this kind of information.

At a local scale, the strong relationship between women and water is also obvious. To better communicate on its program, LDE tends to animate various forums or water city bars to target associations and families. In many cases, many households don’t know how to manage their water consumption. Social animators noted that women buy bottled water to guarantee a certain comfort to their kids. Many women have a strong unconscious relationship to water and hygiene. “Mothers asked us about water consumption but mostly about water quality. Even if their economic resources are limited, they will prefer to buy bottled water in order to guarantee comfort to their kids. When you asked them why, they will answer that it is a way to give what they can’t give otherwise, it’s like assuring their feeding function for them” observed V. Tordeur, communication manager in Dunkerque.

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The global discourse on water and women, sustainable development and women suggests that women are better to preserve the environment. In Dublin, Beijing, Rio, Johannesburg or Mexico, women are seen as a key for development. They convey different values that will ensure a sustainable development and the success of MDG. They are more responsible, more pragmatic... "Women are seen as privileged environmental managers, a source of solutions for the environmental crisis" (Braidotti: 1994).

The international conferences proceeding are usually providing case studies to argue and prove their discourse. This affirmation based on reality implies a strong symbolic relationship between women and life, nature and environment that SUEZ has naturally integrated and taken into account in its communication supports and water implementation projects.

## *SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACTS*

### *Clients, citizens and individuals... A stronger relationship*

The comparative approach further underlined gender impacts. The main difference between the two countries is social infrastructures. An outstanding feature of Morocco's WSS is the virtual absence of government subsidies: the sector is almost entirely self-financed through tariffs, beneficiary contributions, urban-to-rural cross subsidies, and cross-subsidies from electricity distribution. In terms of water implementation, it has a direct impact on the company's organization. It supposed a stronger implication from LYDEC at a community level. LYDEC is the only company in Morocco to have a dedicated department to communities' accompaniment.

Lyonnaise des Eaux in Dunkerque is also a precursor for the company and social animators have a strong knowledge of the family's issues. In their daily relationships with social services, they will share very private details to better understand situations and to adopt their response to families. This method based on social methods can be considered as intrusive; it shows however what private organizations are asked in the broader frame of sustainable development and water management.

Sustainable development asks for a deep societal change. For organizations like SUEZ, it means to foster their social responsibility in the limit of their status. The examples of Saint-Pol-en-Mer and Lamkensa showed how the company try to articulate its social responsibility with a customer relationship. Their approach tend to spread within the organization underlying the need to establish stronger relationships between users and organization.

This need is related to the status of water. This rare and vital resource called for responsibility, dialogue, global management... To answer to debates related to the right to water, the organization has to develop local actions. To target women may be a choice, but it is also a natural and logical posture learnt from experience. "I didn't know I was doing gender before the World Bank used the notion in front of me. For me, it is mandatory to address women when you want to implement water access, they are the ones first concerned and the ones spreading messages for us" says I. Pechell, manager of the Client Accompaniment Department at LYDEC.

In France, if women don't have water chores anymore, water quality and services is a key in their daily life. Water cut will usually have a direct impact on their family life. For social animators, before cutting water connection, it is very important to verify that they are not cutting water to a family with children. "We know that it can have grave consequences however, it will also push the family to appear. Water reveals the social situation hidden by the house door. It's a way to build a bridge with families and to search for solutions" says J.-L. Dezoomer, responsible of the program "Water for all" in Dunkerque. As both a vital and a cultural good, water is connected to habitudes that will give keys to understand client practices and uses.

### *Gender as a tool: cultural and social keys*



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Gender analysis for a water implementation project is usually carried out as part of the overall process. Thanks to participatory methodologies and data collecting including gender criteria, the gender approach can help the organization to better understand water uses, attitudes and practices. This approach is also important for sanitation and hygiene knowledge. A gender analysis gives a transversal overview of the company and tools to better adopt local needs.

When examining an organization, gender will question responsibilities repartition, governance and power structures. It will also investigate what obstacles women may encounter to evolve and to access new positions. In the case of SUEZ, the sexo specific analysis showed that differences emerged between men and women during the key period of 30-45 years. There is a loss of women in the top management with an under representation of women called the glass ceiling. This expression defines situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is halted at a particular level because of some form of discrimination or other non visible reasons like availability, adaptation capacity, stereotypes, etc.

Gender is therefore a useful tool to get relevant information within a short and medium term. It is a social method providing a complementary diagnosis to water implementation projects but also for management, Human Resources or Sustainable Development. As a method, gender directly questions non-visible issues revealing cultural and social keys that may encounter a good management. The study of gender underlines the importance of company or society organization and therefore, its power structures.

### **Participation and governance**

The gender approach calls for men and women participation to development. It questions governance and politics within a society. By promoting women's roles within the company, in water access and management, SUEZ wants to promote sustainable development. Governance usually refers to the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage society's problems and affairs (World Bank, 1992). In the realm of sustainable development, it called for reasonable water uses, citizenship, ethics... The program "Water for all" and other actions led by SUEZ want to promote this global movement of changes in the sense of sustainable development.

This strategy can be observed at a local scale. The two departments target the same objective: to raise awareness on water uses, responsibilities and rights. This demarche is part of a sustainable development by promoting sustainable habitudes and fostering citizenship. In the communication of LYDEC, to provide water access is part of its citizen involvement for Casablanca and to target women is mostly seen as a way to promote development.

At Lamkenssa, water access gave more responsibilities to women. They gained stronger influence within the community and they also became the family budget manager. In focus groups, women are very curious about administrative steps and financial solutions to pay water connection. Water access fosters their roles as they are generally the first concerned and to experiment water implementation benefits. The study of gender revealed this change in power structure and in the community life.

To integrate gender as a tool help organization to accompany their policy targeting sustainable development by measuring impacts, considering policies, etc. Gender is not just limited to promote diversity; it is calling for broader changes in the sense of equal participation between stakeholders, individuals and the company.

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Gender and water management means to face a gender diversity, to consider traditional roles and representations, to develop social diagnosis and dialogues, to integrate gender in managing methods and to promote gender as a tool in WSS. To bring stronger changes within a society and an organization, it means to consider internal and external factors to lead strong policies towards women and governance, a major stake for water and sustainable development.

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