From “women” to “gender relations”: assessing the impact of drinking water supply interventions in the Morni-Shivalik Hills of North-West India
Vishal Narain, MDI

Bhutan+10: Gender and sustainable mountain development in a changing world
Water collection and women’s quality of life

• Time spent collecting water and distance to water source important indicators of women’s drudgery in water collection
• Reducing time spent collecting water an important policy objective
• Interventions focus on bringing sources of water closer homes
• In mountain contexts this means reducing the drudgery of negotiating steep terrain
Focus of this paper

- Move away from assessing the impact on “women” to “gender relations”
- Changes in time spent collecting water and distance to water sources at best only partially reflect the impact of water supply interventions
- Consider instead how water use practices change with water supply interventions
- Implications are for gender-based division of labour around water collection and management
Context and research design

Village Mandhana in the Morni Hills and village Dhamala at the foot-hills of the Shivaliks in the North-West Indian state of Harayana

Qualitative research design
PRAs
Time Budget Exercises
Semi-structured interviews
Mandhana

- Located in the Morni Hills in the Shivaliks
- Agriculture is mainly rainfed
- Main water sources: *johads* and *bawdis*
- Each settlement (baas) has one *johad* (pond) and one *bawdi* (spring)
- Water obtained from *bawdis*, often negotiating steep terrain
- Several functions such as washing and bathing were performed at *johads*
Impact of drinking water supply interventions

- Women no longer had to walk steep terrain to the *bawdis* to collect water
- Saved time and energy as water was now made available through public stand-posts
- However, they carried more water on their heads
- Functions earlier performed at communal sources were now performed at home; men wanted to bathe in their homes and expected water to be carried by women for these purposes
The demise of the *johads*

- The institutions surrounding the maintenance of the *johads* died down
- Practice of desilting for carrying silt for houses disappeared
- Word of elderly and the role of norms was eroded
- Men more conscious of hygiene no longer wanted to bathe in them, as they were used now mainly by livestock
- Functions performed at *johads* were now all performed at home and water had to be carried for all these purposes
Dhamala village

- Dhamala located in Kalka Tehsil at foot-hills of the Shivaliks, near Sukhomajri village
- Impact of drinking water supply interventions similar to that in Mandhana
- With piped water supply, functions performed by men at public water sources were now performed at home
- Women had to carry water for all these purposes
- Little interest in the maintenance of johads after the introduction of piped water supply
Women not a homogenous whole

- Impacts on women were differentiated along lines of class and caste
- Main beneficiaries were upper caste women who had exclusive private taps
- Lower caste women who used shared stand-posts had long waiting time and received water at inconvenient times
- Increased conflicts among women over water collection
- In times of failed water supply, depended on social capital
  - Obtained water from a private tubewell
Inferences for policy-makers

• Need to shift emphasis from policy outputs to policy outcomes
• Need to shift emphasis from “women” to “gender relations” to understand better the impacts of drinking water supply interventions
• Shift emphasis from conventional quantitative indicators like time spent collecting water or distance to source of water to qualitative processed based indicators that capture changes in water use practices and institutions with drinking water supply interventions
• Deconstruct the notion of “women” as monolithic entity to understand segregation along caste and class
Implications in a changing world

• Migration and urbanization can add to women’s tasks of water collection in societies where these tasks are performed by men
• Modernization and urbanization erode women’s social capital and can add to the stress caused by water collection tasks
• The feminization of agriculture adds to women’s work load and daily tasks and chores
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