SIMPLE GUIDELINE FOR WATER USER ASSOCIATIONS (WUAS)

Strengthening Women's Participation in Leadership and Decision-Making



Blue Victoria
For blue economy & thriving ecological biodiversity

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1. INTRODUCTION



This guideline has been developed to support Water User Associations (WUAs) in improving women's participation in leadership and decision-making rel ated to the use, conservation, and management of water resources. Women are major users of water in households, agriculture, livestock keeping, and economic activities. However, they are often underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles. This guide provides simple and practical approaches to ensure equal participation for sustainable community development.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDELINE

- Increase women's participation in Water User Associations and community leadership
- Strengthen participatory decision-making in water resource management
- Improve accountability and management of water resources
- Promote gender equality in communities
- WUAs should aim for gender balance in executive committees
- Where this is not immediately feasible, progressive steps should be defined (e.g. reserved seats, deputy roles).

1.2 SCOPE OF THE GUIDELINE

This guide applies to:

- Water User Associations (WUAs)
- Village governments
- Water committees
- Development stakeholders



2. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS



What is a WUA?

WUA stands for **Water User Association**
It is a group of water users from a common source who collaborate to manage water use sustainably.

What is Gender?

Gender refers to roles, responsibilities, and expectations that society assigns to women and men.

Gender Equality

A situation where women and men have equal opportunities in decision-making, leadership, education, and development.

Women's Leadership

Refers to women participating in decision-making positions such as chairperson, secretary, treasurer, or committee member.

Participation in Decision-Making

This means that ensuring that everyone, especially women, youth, and marginalized or vulnerable groups has the opportunity to express opinions and take part in decisions.

3. FUNCTIONS OF WUAS

- Manage water use fairly and sustainably
- Protect and conserve water sources (rivers, springs, wells)
- Resolve water-related conflicts
- Provide community education on proper water use
- Ensure participation of women, youth, and marginalized or vulnerable groups
- Collaborate with government and stakeholders in water resource development

4. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING LEVELS

Objective

To assess whether women genuinely participate in leadership and decision-making within Water User Assosiations (WUAs).

Key Considerations

Leadership

- Are women at least 40–50% of the leaders?
- Are women included in key committees?
- Do women hold top positions such as chairperson or secretary?
- Do women leaders manage budgets, enforcement, or conflict resolution — not only social roles?

Meeting Participation

- Do women attend meetings?
- Are women given opportunities to speak?
- Are their opinions considered?
- Are women's proposals reflected in final decisions?

Safe Environment

- Are meetings held at times convenient for women?
- Is there freedom from intimidation or ridicule?
- Is the meeting venue safe for women?

5. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING IN WATER USERS ASSOCIATIONS

Women are major users of water in households, agriculture, livestock farming, small businesses, and many daily activities. They are directly involved in accessing, using, and conserving water, and therefore have a strong understanding of water-related challenges.

Their participation in leadership positions and decision-making levels within Water User Associations (WUAs) is important for the following reasons:

- **Makes better and more Practical Decisions**

Women have direct experience in daily water use. Their participation ensures decisions reflect real family and community needs.

- **Promotes Equality and Fairness**

When women participate in decision-making, this promotes gender equality and fairness in water distribution, services, and development opportunities are strengthened.

- **Improves Water Resource Management**

Women are often guardians of water use at home and on farms. As leaders, they can strengthen water conservation, efficient use, and protection of water sources.

- **Reduces Water Conflicts**

Women have strong abilities to promote understanding and resolve conflicts through dialogue. Their involvement helps reduce conflicts related to water use.

- **Enhances Accountability and Transparency**

When women are given leadership opportunities, they often promote accountability, proper resource management, and transparency in community decisions.

- **Builds Women's Capacity (Confidence and Skills)**

Leadership opportunities help women build confidence, communication skills, and decision-making capacity.

- **Promotes Overall Community Development**

Communities that involve both women and men equally develop faster, sustainably, and with benefits for everyone.

6. GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

Before the Meeting

- Provide early notice
- Send invitations directly to women
- Choose a convenient time
- Ensure the agenda is clear

During the Meeting

- Allow everyone to speak
- Use small groups if women feel shy
- Invite women individually to share opinions
- Respect all contributions

After the Meeting

- Record decisions
- Follow up on implementation
- Collect feedback

7. PLAN FOR PROMOTING WOMEN LEADERS

- Identify capable women
- Provide leadership training
- Give them leadership opportunities
- Offer mentorship and guidance

Understand Their Needs

What do they need?

- Confidence in speaking
- Leadership education
- Knowledge of water management
- Conflict resolution skills

Provide Opportunities

- Lead small meetings
- Serve on committees
- Represent WUA in external meetings

Provide Mentorship

- Connect them with experienced leaders

8. COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Women often face a lot of difficulties which hinder their participation in water governance.

Common barriers to women's leadership

- Heavy unpaid care and water collection workload
- Limited literacy or formal education
- Cultural norms discouraging women from speaking publicly
- Lack of access to information or networks

Objective

To reduce resistance to women leaders and increase community understanding.

Key Messages

- Women are major water users
- Their participation improves services
- Women's leadership benefits families and communities
- Engaging male leaders and members as champions of gender equality
- Encouraging shared domestic responsibilities so women can attend meetings

Approaches

- Village meetings
- Community discussions
- Women's testimonies
- Youth groups
- Engagement with elders and religious leaders

9. PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

5 Steps

1. **Identify the Problem**

Example: water shortage or conflict of water uses.

2. **Collect Opinions**

Gather input from women, men, youth, and leaders

3. **Discuss Solutions**

Compare different approaches on solving problems

4.**Make a Decision**

Use consensus or voting

5.**Document and Communicate**

Record decisions and assign responsibilities

10. FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Objective

To provide safe spaces for members especially women, to share opinions, complaints, or suggestions, through discouraging harassment, ridicule or punishment to women leaders.

Methods

- Simple process to report and respond should be developed and implemented
- Women-only meetings
- Phone communication
- Trusted person for receiving feedback

Important Considerations

- Maintain confidentiality
- Address feedback
- Inform members of actions taken

11. ACOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING

This section aims to track progress on gender outcomes, beyond general feedback.

Gender responsive indicators

- % of women in executive positions
- % of meetings where women actively speak
- Number of decisions proposed by women adopted
- Existence of at least one woman signatory on accounts

12. CONCLUSION

A Water User Association (WUA) with active participation of women achieves better decisions, stronger accountability, and improved water management. Providing women with leadership opportunities is not favoritism but it is a foundation for sustainable community development.



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