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Gender Incorporation in Rural Drinking Water Sector in Sri Lanka for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Building

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Abstract

Incorporating gender considerations in rural water management is essential for effective climate change adaptation and resilience building, especially in vulnerable rural communities. In many regions, including Sri Lanka, women are primary managers of household water use and play a central role in ensuring water security. However, traditional gender norms have often excluded them from decision-making processes related to drinking water management. This study focuses on the integration of gender perspectives into community managed rural water supply interventions as a key component of climate adaptation strategies. Drawing on data from rural community water supply schemes and other interventions in Sri Lanka's dry zone, the study examines how women's participation in water management of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and committees of household drinking water systems, as well as their involvement in decision making, implementing and operation & maintenance them, enhances both water access and climate resilience. The research involved surveys, outcome from monitoring committees, Community Action Planning (CAP) sessions and focus group discussions to gather insights into how rural drinking water systems and water management have been improved through a gender-sensitive approach. The findings indicate that when women are actively involved in decision-making, during planning, designing and implementing water supply systems are built with more community contributions, more efficient, and sustainable, and contribute to equitable climate change adaptation. Moreover, targeted capacity-building initiatives have empowered women with the technical and managerial skills necessary to manage and maintain community water supply systems, improving overall community preparedness for climate-related water shortages. These initiatives have also strengthened social cohesion by fostering inclusive participation, ensuring that water management strategies reflect the needs of both women and men. However, challenges such as unequal access to resources, limited leadership opportunities, and persistent gender stereotypes continue to hinder the full potential of women's contributions. The study concludes that incorporating gender considerations into rural water systems from planning to management is crucial for enhancing climate resilience and ensuring long-term water security. By prioritizing women's participation and leadership in rural water supply systems, as decision makers, as employees in CBOs and communities can build more adaptive, equitable, and sustainable water management systems that are better equipped to handle the impacts of climate change.

Keywords: *Climate change adaptation, Community managed rural water supply systems, Gender*