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Integrating Gender Dimensions in Water Management

**Insights from Morocco's Evolutionary Approach and Collaborative
Strategies**

By: Omar Ayouni



Summary

Over the past decades, Morocco has prioritised gender equality in its national water management strategies, emphasising the link between gender, water access, and climate change. This transformative shift has been backed by key policies, ranging from the seminal water regulations 1969 to the recent "Programme National pour l'Approvisionnement en Eau Potable et l'Irrigation (PNAEPI) 2020-2027¹." Gender integration has been further bolstered by Morocco's partnership with UN Women, yielding the innovative "Stratégie

d'Institutionnalisation de l'Intégration du Genre dans le Secteur de l'Eau (SIIGSE)²". Morocco's commitment to a holistic, gender-inclusive water management paradigm is evident in its comprehensive approach that blends international expertise with local knowledge and priorities. The Moroccan case provides insightful examples of how gender considerations can be inclusively embedded within broader policy frameworks, demonstrating an approach that goes beyond mere inclusion to actively coordinating and aligning policies across different sectors.

Introduction

In recent decades, Morocco has undergone a transformative shift in human and women's rights. This change, amplified by governmental and royal initiatives, emphasises the interplay between gender, water access, and climate change.

Especially for women in rural areas, the water crisis is deeply personal, impacting their health, education, and economic stability. Climate change further intensifies these challenges, heightening the need for a gendered approach to water resource management. Morocco's strategic partnership with UN Women has led to the development of the Strategy of Institutionalising Gender Integration in the Water Sector (SIIGSE), which embodies a robust action plan for gender integration across various water-related initiatives. By delving into this

intricate relationship, we can envision more effective and equitable solutions for the future.

Policy Background and Normative Foundations: Tracing Key Institutional Actors and Gender Equality Commitments

Morocco's water management strategy has evolved significantly over the past decades, with a strong focus on sustainability, inclusivity, and modernisation.

The National Water Strategy (2014), along with key programmes like the National Sanitation Programme and the National Irrigation Water Saving Programme³, has shifted towards water demand

¹ National Programme for Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation (PNAEPI) 2020-2027.

² Strategy for Institutionalising Gender Integration in the Water Sector.

³ These programmes, covering 550,000 ha and 500,000 ha respectively, were complemented by a World Bank-supported project that improved water services for 6,811 farmers and encouraged 2,305 farmers to adopt more efficient irrigation technologies.

management, wastewater reuse, and decentralisation.

The National Programme for Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation 2020-2027 reflects this contemporary vision⁴, aiming to enhance resilience to climate change and ensure sustainable water supply across various demographic groups.

Parallel to this, Morocco's dedication to gender equality, championed by the Royal Mandate and enshrined in the 2011 Constitution, has embedded gender considerations at the core of both public policy and societal reforms.

The Ministry of Equipment, Transport, Logistics, and Water has been instrumental in implementing the Governmental Plan for Equality⁵ by integrating gender perspectives in water policies. It has also worked on enhancing the capacity for gender-inclusive budgeting and promoting women's representation and decision-making roles.

These efforts are supported by the Organic Finance Law, a higher legal framework institutionalising gender consideration, particularly due to the impact of climate change on vulnerable groups like rural women and girls. A significant development in this domain is the Strategy of Institutionalising Gender Integration in the Water Sector (SIIGSE), created in partnership with UN Women, which outlines a comprehensive action plan for gender integration in water-related initiatives. The Ministry's commitment to gender inclusivity is evident in its collaboration with other global partners (GIZ and Enabel) and in regulatory advancements like the Water Law 36-15.

These efforts have led to a notable increase in women's representation in water governance, with women now holding 30% of leadership roles in the

Ministry. Nevertheless, this increased representation does not automatically translate to improved water access for rural women due to existing structural and societal challenges.

The Green Morocco Plan (2008-2021) revealed that despite its ambitious goals, rural women remain marginalised in development projects due to issues like lack of consultation, illiteracy, and isolation. Their valuable traditional ecological knowledge is often overlooked in water management.

Innovative Problem-Solving in Water Management: The Multifaceted Approach to Gender Integration in Morocco and the Drivers of its Evolution

Morocco's collaboration with UN Women, embodied in the Strategy for Institutionalising Gender Integration in the Water Sector (SIIGSE), exemplifies its commitment to a gender-centric approach in water management. This collaboration has introduced a multidimensional analysis, focusing on developing lasting institutional capacities and integrating gender across various aspects of water management. It involves enhancing gender equality in human resource management and water-related professions and embedding gender perspectives into the programmes and projects of the Water Department.

This comprehensive approach ensures that gender considerations are fundamental to the planning and operational processes, going beyond just identifying challenges to offering strategic actions targeting both superficial and systemic issues. The strategy emphasises the need for robust institutional capacities for gender equality, like reinforcing the gender committee and developing standards and values for the water sector. After outlining strategic

⁴ These include the construction of major and small dams to enhance storage capacity, establishment of new seawater desalination stations, modernisation of irrigation networks through localised irrigation, and the reuse of treated wastewater for golf course irrigation projects across various regions.

⁵ The "IKRAM" and "ICRAM 2" plans in Morocco, aimed at promoting human rights and good governance, reflect the country's commitment to gender equality. While not solely focused on water management, these plans influence the integration of gender perspectives in water policies.

actions, it is important to recognise the potential overburdening of women in decision-making roles.

This highlights the necessity of involving a variety of stakeholders to address the complex factors influencing water management, promoting a more inclusive and balanced approach.

The underpinnings of this innovative approach can be traced back to several factors. Collaboration with UN Women likely amalgamated international expertise with Morocco's local context and challenges.

Furthermore, the strategy's emphasis on holistic integration signifies a departure from siloed initiatives, advocating for the infusion of gender considerations across all spheres of water management. This integrative approach is further bolstered by an acute acknowledgment of existing gender disparities, particularly in leadership roles and human resource management.

This recognition posits that transformative change necessitates addressing entrenched systemic biases, such as gender-bias representation in decision-making Bodies, access to resources, land ownership, cultural norms and practices, not just the formulation of gender-neutral policies.

However, despite the increase in female representation in water management, rural women in Morocco still face significant challenges regarding water access. Some of these challenges and initiatives aimed at addressing them include:

Burden of Water Fetching: Rural girls and women traditionally bear the burden of fetching water for

their households. Projects like the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project by the World Bank aimed to alleviate this burden to improve school attendance for girls⁶.

Access to Clean Water: Over 1.1 million people in remote villages in Morocco have been connected to a reliable and safe water supply through projects like the World Bank-funded Rural Water Supply Project, which also aimed to reduce water-borne diseases and improve the quality of life for Moroccans⁷.

Improved Irrigation Services: Between 2010 to 2017, a project improved irrigation services for 6,811 farmers, including 622 women, in Morocco. Additionally, 230 of the farmers who adopted more efficient irrigation technologies were women, comprising over 43 percent of the project area⁸.

Wastewater Treatment in Rural Areas: Morocco has prioritised wastewater treatment in rural areas to tackle hydric stress. Efforts include providing municipalities with adapted treatment technologies and promoting non-conventional water reuse⁹.

Water Scarcity: Morocco faces a major water shortfall due to expanding demand and climate change-induced reduction in precipitation. This scarcity disproportionately affects rural areas where women are traditionally responsible for managing household water use¹⁰.

What can we learn?

Morocco's model demonstrates the effectiveness of embedding gender considerations within all phases of policy planning, offering a holistic and interconnected strategy for other stakeholders.

⁶ National Programme for Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation (PNAEPI) 2020-2027 ([Access here](#)).

⁷ World Bank Project Connects More than a Million Moroccans to Clean Water ([Access here](#)).

⁸ Moroccan Farmers Improve Water Productivity through Irrigation and Increase Agricultural Production ([Access here](#)).

⁹ Women entrepreneurs catalysing change in wastewater treatment sector in Morocco ([Access here](#)).

¹⁰ Publication: Water Scarcity in Morocco: Analysis of Key Water Challenges ([Access here](#)).

This approach, evident in Morocco's collaboration with entities like UN Women, aligns global expertise with local needs through interdisciplinary partnerships. It includes engaging in cross-sector collaboration to bring international insights into local contexts, enhancing gender-focused initiatives.

The model also highlights the importance of community-based approaches, involving local communities, especially women, in decision-making processes for water management solutions. It emphasises the integration of indigenous and local women's knowledge in water management strategies, recognising the value of traditional knowledge in sustainable solutions. Additionally, adopting gender-sensitive budgeting, as seen in Morocco, ensures financial resources effectively address women's specific needs in water management projects.

Strengthening institutional capacities to support gender equality, mirroring Morocco's efforts to

enhance women's representation in water governance, is another key aspect.

Finally, the development of comprehensive policies that integrate gender considerations from the outset, similar to Morocco's National Water Plan, ensures gender perspectives are integral to every policy stage.

Morocco's model not only illustrates the importance of incorporating gender considerations throughout all policy stages but also showcases how this integration fosters a synergistic effect, where each aspect of policy development—from planning to execution—is enhanced by a gender-sensitive lens.

This approach demonstrates that true integration means creating policies where gender considerations are not just additional elements but are interwoven into the very fabric of policy objectives and outcomes, ensuring more equitable and effective solutions in water management.

Brief methodology

This PICS methodology entailed an extensive review of policy documents coupled with a rigorous analysis of Moroccan policy discourse, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of water management and gender integration within the nation's context.

About the research

This research is part of a Ph.D. project at the University of Mohamed V Rabat, within the Department of Economic Studies, Laboratory of Applied Economics (LEA).

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About the author

Omar Ayouni is a PhD Candidate in Applied Economics, Laboratory of Applied Economics, Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences- Agdal, Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco.

Email: omar-ayouni@hotmail.fr

MENASP Contacts

Middle East and North Africa Social Policy Network
University of Birmingham
Birmingham
B15 2TT
United Kingdom

Website: www.menasp.com

Email: info@menasp.com

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