

# Empowering Women in Irrigation Management — The Case of the Gender Pilot Plan in Peru

BY ERWIN DENYS, VICTORIA STANLEY, AND ALISON MILLS

The aim of this case study<sup>1</sup> is to highlight, within the context of a Gender Pilot of the Peru Sierra Irrigation Project, how women's different needs were identified to facilitate their access to training and to increase their participation in the management of water users' organizations (WUOs). It was designed upon the request of Peru's Ministry of Agriculture and included a gender diagnostic to assess barriers that hinder the attendance and equality of participation of women in trainings and meetings. Following the diagnostic participatory discussions around the importance for communities to include women in water management were held. In response to these diagnostics and subsequent discussions, the water users resolved to set specific targets for becoming more inclusive organizations, and shaped the content and timing of their activities to allow a greater number of women to participate. The Pilot improved women's technical skills, their positions in the WUOs, and self-esteem and has raised awareness among the community members about women's specific needs and expectations related to water management for irrigated agriculture. The participatory methodology used in this Pilot was designed with the support of the World Bank Gender Action Plan, and is currently being scaled up under the World Bank-financed Irrigation Subsector Project (Proyecto Subsectorial de Irrigación, PSI) PSI Sierra.

## 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In Peru, over 75 percent of management positions, at all levels of public and private enterprises, including water users' organizations (WUOs) are held by men.<sup>2</sup> A variety of cultural and structural limitations restrict women's participation in water management and although women were involved in agricultural activities, their contributions were mainly considered to be supporting roles and undervalued compared to men. The participation of women in WUOs was closely linked to land ownership and

with women owning less than 25 percent of the land in Peru,<sup>3</sup> their participation was limited.

During the 10 years of implementation of the PSI on the coastal strip of Peru,<sup>4</sup> it became clear that social and technical barriers for women existed. These barriers hindered the attendance and participation of women under conditions of equality in WUO meetings and training events. The government of Peru decided in 2007 to expand PSI to the Sierra Region,<sup>5</sup> with the objective of improving the technical level of irrigation systems and infrastructure, thus increasing the profitability of the agricultural sector. A major objective of the project was to strengthen WUOs, this time incorporating a gender dimension.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. GENDER PILOT

Prior to the start of PSI Sierra, a Gender Pilot Plan (GPP) was carried out from September 2007 to June 2009, involving the WUOs of Chonta and Colca, located in the regions of Cajamarca (northern Sierra) and Arequipa (southern Sierra), respectively. The objective of the Gender Pilot was to contribute toward improving the position of women as members of WUOs and strengthening their status as agricultural producers. The methodology to strengthen women's positions included participatory tools and demonstration techniques and promoted the following goals in WUOs:

- Establish clear, precise rules for incorporating women in water management
- Strengthen the role of women, improving their ability to enhance their self-esteem, degree of integration, and position, and increasing their democratic participation in water management
- Train women in production issues
- Highlight and value women's contribution to their household's economy.



The Gender Pilot used a participatory methodology for inclusion of women that started by bringing women and men together to create mutual trust and facilitate knowledge sharing about the roles of men and women. The gender diagnostic identified interests, needs, limitations and expectations by collecting and analyzing data differentiated by gender, making it possible to design, validate, and execute training and awareness activities aimed to allow women and men to participate in equal capacities in water management. Activities were first separated by gender and later jointly facilitated.

The following tools proved to be useful: agricultural activities calendar, field clock, life history, Ven diagrams, chart indicating roles, and chart of trends. The diagnosis focused on four main concerns: 1) gender interests and needs, 2) women’s capacities and potential in relation to water management, 3) gender roles, and 4) gender barriers and demands. The results of the assessment were presented and discussed at local and District level WUOs, National Women’s events, and among PSI staff.

### 3. INNOVATIVE ACTIVITIES

The GPPs smart economic approach allowed for it to be implemented in just 15 months and included approximately 2,000 participants, over half of which were women. It consisted of participatory, action-oriented activities which not only identified the gender gaps, barriers and constraints in the selected areas, but also developed gender-sensitive proposals and methodologies to mainstream and institutionalize gender in the PSI-Sierra. These activities included:

- Technical trainings on irrigation management, roles and responsibilities of WUOs, and water regulations
- Specific “self-esteem” workshops for women to improve their leadership and communication skills, to counteract the common perception of men as being better leaders
- Specific workshops for male leaders and users to raise awareness of the importance of a gender focus in WUOs and on water policies with an emphasis on gender equity
- Workshops with the joint participation of women to raise

**It was observed that women restrict themselves (due to shame or fear) from expressing their ideas when men, especially their husbands, are present. It was therefore decided to form separate women’s users’ committees to help them become leaders and producers, thus strengthening their self-esteem for participation later on in groups comprising both genders.**

awareness on the contribution and value of the work of female users

- Study tours to share experiences with women from Peru’s coastal region who hold decision-making positions in WUOs.

Finally, dissemination efforts were carried out, such as the organization of a national “Gender and Water Management” event, in which women leaders presented the experiences gained during the development of the Gender Pilot, disseminated their results to over 200 female water users in Peru, and prepared and distributed the brochure *Los roles de varones y mujeres en las actividades productivas y en su organizacion del riego* (“The roles of men and women in productive activities and in their irrigation organizations”) to acknowledge and value the work of women.

### 4. BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

The final reports indicated that both male and female irrigation farmers in both regions reacted positively to their participation in the GPP in both regions. The GPP training activities raised awareness among the community members about women’s specific needs and expectations related to water management in agriculture, and allowed women to improve technical skills, and gain self-confidence. Importantly, the contributions of women in decision-making and water management are increasingly being recognized by WUO members. In Cajamarca, for instance, during the implementation of the GPP, water management at the field level improved and there were fewer water conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Women found the technical training in water management, as well as agricultural and livestock production (especially dairy cattle) valuable, because in addition to gains in self-confidence it also improved their income.

Presenting and discussing the results of the GPP gender assessment with the WUO authorities at the local and district levels led to increased awareness of how women in the WUOs were under-represented and rarely participating in training and workshops. The WUO authorities also realized they had no training plans to address the specific needs of female water users. In response to this, the authorities decided to set specific targets, as pictured in the table on page 3.

The National Water Authority agreed to include gender in the water management regulations and passed the regulation, known as the Reglamento 0266-2012 ANA-Resolución Jefatural, which specifies that women’s participation in leadership positions in the WUOs is crucial. Although the total number of positions held by women in the WUOs had not increased significantly throughout the limited duration of the Gender Pilot, women’s voice and representation in WUOs has been strengthened and at present, women hold positions of importance for decision making (vice



**Table. Gender assessment Baseline Values (2009) and targets (2011) set by WUOs**

Baseline values	Targets to reach by 2011
Composition of WUOs: 7 of every 8 members are men, women rarely hold a management position	The WUOs have at least one woman in a relevant management position (President or Treasurer)
20 percent of women attend meetings	30 percent of women attend meetings and present their opinions
Fewer than 10 percent of women participate in training	Over 60 percent of women participate in training; men support women's skills development
Only 20 percent of women leaders perform their duties in WUOs	40 percent of women leaders perform their duties and assume decision-making positions
The WUOs' policies do not include specific conditions for improving women's participation	The 2011 annual plan specifies means of increasing women's participation
Female users are not specifically recognized in WUO activities	Men and women are specifically recognized, thus avoiding exclusions

Source: Empowering Women in Irrigation Management. The Sierra in Peru, 2012.

presidents, treasurers, deputy treasurers, secretaries, committee members and delegates).

The learning experiences and the participatory methodologies developed during implementation of the GPP encouraged the inclusion of gender in the second project, the PSI-Sierra. The following actions were taken to further mainstream gender in at least 10 WUOs:

- Water engineers and technicians are being trained on gender in water management. They are assessed and monitored by the PSI gender specialists during their field activities.
- The PSI-Sierra is specifically integrating gender in its management tools, including terms of reference for the pre-investment study and profiles of water user's training in the WUOs.
- Gender has also been integrated in the agricultural and irrigation technical assistance activities by differentiating the beneficiaries by gender.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

- **There was limited exertion of authority by women in elected WUO board positions** either because they were not invited to board meetings or were unaware of their duty. GPP-developed training demonstrates that women can assume authority as effectively as men. Field evidence indicates that they tend to collect the water fee on time, distribute and control irrigation turns adequately, and correct irregularities during the water distribution.
- **Women at times had insufficient information on WUOs and especially on the rules governing water management.** These limitations discouraged women from voicing their opinion in the WUOs or in community meetings and women's opinions were not always welcomed, especially

if they were illiterate. This could be one of the reasons some widows or divorced women preferred to ask their male family members to attend meetings on their behalf.

- **WUO meetings were scheduled according to men's time preferences**, creating an additional barrier for women's participation.
- **Communication was a barrier** because the meeting discussions are in Spanish, whereas the language of daily communication is Quechua (Runa Simi), especially in the Colca Valley. Moreover, technical language, which is sometimes difficult for women to understand with limited training, is often used particularly when sharing information about credit and irrigation projects. In addition illiteracy, especially among the monolingual, is a reality in the Andes, therefore capacity-building programs should design appropriate training methods, services and information in line with the existing socio-cultural context.
- **There was a differentiated appreciation of the roles of women and men with little recognition of women's role in the productive process.** Household chores and women's contributions to agricultural production were generally considered supporting roles and undervalued compared to men's because they did not generate income (except for cattle raising). Unskilled labor by men requiring physical strength was usually appreciated more than skilled labor by women (for example milking).
- **Land ownership represents a barrier for women's participation in WUOs to the extent that it is linked to WUO membership.** Land ownership is attributed to the head of the household, which is typically male. Few women are considered to be heads of the household (widows, single mothers, and in rare circumstances, separated or divorced women). Additionally, women who do own land sometimes lose control over it after marriage.



## 6. LESSONS LEARNED

- **Deeply seated cultural norms about women's and men's traditional roles and their responsibilities are difficult to overcome.** It is generally accepted that the domestic chores are tasks for women whilst men should voice their opinions and take decisions in the WUOs or at community meetings, as the family representative. Unless husbands have migrated, it was rarely accepted that wives would do the same.
- **Trust building within WUOs at the very outset of the project is crucial to its success.** The effectiveness of gender-sensitive capacity building projects and organizational strengthening of the WUOs is largely dependent on the willingness of local leaders to facilitate implementation. Active participation during the identification and scoping process means more engagement in the design and implementation of the project. Encouragingly, in the case of GPP there were male leaders who not only supported its implementation but continued to encourage participants to consider gender parity beyond the cycle of the project.
- **The ANAs regulation regarding the importance of female participation on the board of the WUOs (Reglamento 0266-2012 ANA) constituted a landmark for women to claim their right to participate in the decision-making process.** For instance, during the election of a new (all-male) Board in one of the WUOs in Cajamarca, a woman holding a printed version of the legal act in her hand insisted that female candidates must be included in the Board. After this assertion two women were elected as candidates.
- **Women and men appreciated the technical trainings to improve their production techniques and generate income.** Such trainings included new irrigation methods, the management of dairy cattle, and post-harvest processing. This was an effective means of not only increasing improved production but also actively engaging water users.
- **Sustainability and continuity of the activities initiated by the program should be addressed.** The different training programs and participatory discussions have generated increased aspirations from both male and female users for improving their productive activities, as well as organizational strengthening and empowerment. With the current base-line data, a continuation of the gender activities would allow the project (PSI-Sierra) to assess the impact of these gender activities on the parity and quality

of gendered participation and the empowerment of women in water management, as these changes involve a long-term process.

- **In the event that other gender mainstreaming activities are planned it would be advisable to give the responsibility for implementation to PSI staff, not consultants.** The staff (especially the engineers, technicians, and administrators) need to internalize and appropriate the gender sensitive policies and include them in everyday practice. To this end, they need to be trained, assessed, monitored, and coached. While advisable to include at least one gender specialist per region, the role of the specialist should be supporting and coaching core staff who will ultimately be responsible for implementing the gender policies. **Water professionals must be aware of the local context as it relates to irrigation systems and gender dynamics.**<sup>8</sup> Most of the Andean irrigation systems are designed, constructed, and maintained by the communities and are managed under a plural system of norms: customary, official, and religious. For instance, in most Andean communities women and men assume important authority duties—as water mayors—under the customary norm rather than in the official system. Those who occupy this position often gain more respect and recognition in the community than any person holding a higher position (such as municipal mayor). Consideration of these norms is crucial to successful project design and implementation.

### Endnotes

1. This case study is largely based on the World Bank's Latin America and Caribbean Region *Environment and Water Resources Occasional Paper: Empowering Women in Irrigation Management—The Sierra in Peru, 2013*. Authored by Erwin De Nys, Carmen Hidalgo, Marie-Laure Lajaunie and Lara Chinarro. Additional contributions provided by the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA).
2. CEPALSTAT: Data Bases and Statistical Publications, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Statistics and indicators: gender: women in power and decision-making. <http://websie.eclac.cl/infest/ajaz/cepalstat.asp?idioma=i>.
3. OECD 2010.
4. PSI is an entity under the Ministry of Agriculture that has the mandate to promote the modernization of irrigated agriculture in Peru. The World Bank-financed project that targeted irrigation schemes along the coastal area of Peru had an investment of \$95 million and closed in 2009.
5. PSI Sierra (\$48.33 million) was declared effective in 2010.
6. A video on the Gender Pilot, which preceded the PSI Sierra, can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDB6ZVw6w>.
7. See "Diagnóstico de Género. Juntas de Usuarios del Río Chonta y Mashcon. Casos: Comisiones de Regantes de Tres Molinos, La Copla, Carahuanga y Tartar Grande." Banco Mundial, Cajamarca 2008, and "Promoviendo la inclusión de mujeres y jóvenes en los espacios de toma de decisiones en las organizaciones de usuarios de agua de riego en la Sierra del Perú." PSI Internal Document.
8. More information on gendered traditional water management in Colca Valley can found in the following study: <http://edepot.wur.nl/188580>

