

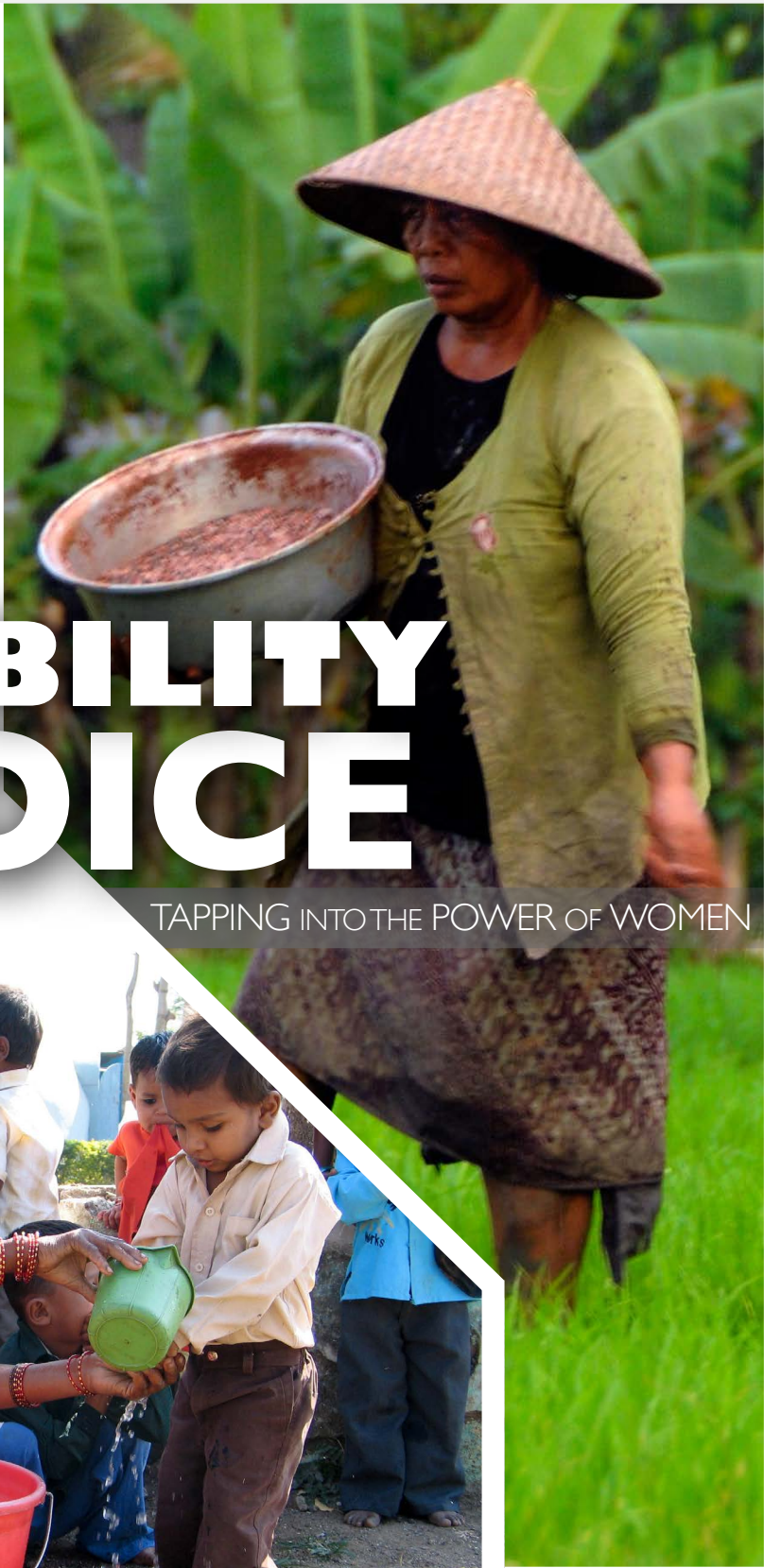


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GLOBAL WATERS

VOLUME IV ISSUE 4 JANUARY 2014



VISIBILITY & VOICE

TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF WOMEN





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Women are half of the world's population, but their voices too often go unheard. The USAID Water and Development Strategy prioritizes empowering women and promoting gender equality through water programs. We dedicate this edition of *Global Waters* to these key issues.

In our Perspectives piece, Gemma Bulos, director of the Global Women's Water Initiative, calls on the development community to train more women to become WASH leaders. She shares stories of women who were inspired through education to transform their lives and help bring their communities out of poverty.

Our cover story builds on this theme and looks at the ways USAID programs have targeted women to become leaders on water issues—and the challenges they have faced. While projects often encounter social and cultural obstacles, the benefits of this engagement can be seen from Tajikistan to Indonesia, where women are rising up and leading initiatives to improve agricultural productivity, education, and child health.

Our In Focus story introduces readers to a community of women fish processors in the picturesque coastal village of Cayar, Senegal. The women spend every day singing, dancing, and working together to improve the environment, make fisheries more sustainable, and increase their community's resilience to climate change. It is a heartwarming story of the unstoppable power of a determined community of women.

Finally, we are proud to bring you an interview with Vikki Stein, the new director of the USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Office. Ms. Stein began her development career working on water issues in Honduras and feels strongly about the link between water and women. She says that integrating gender into all of USAID's activities around the world is the key to helping those who need it most. We look forward to working alongside her to foster a world where men and women alike are empowered, educated, and unburdened by lack of access to water.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Global Waters*.

The Water Office
waterteam@usaid.gov



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: USAID empowers women farmers in Ethiopia.

Photo Credit: Freweni Gedre Mariam, IFPRI

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Global Waters Staff:

Celia Zeilberger
Editor-in-Chief

Caitlin Wixted
Design Director

Amy Gambrell
Executive Editor

Research:

Cydney Gumann
Sue Hoye

Contributing Writers:

Katie Unger Baillie
Carol McCarthy

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by ME&A.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

By Gemma Bulos



Gemma Bulos

“Can you train my wife to do what you do?” is a question Grace Mushongi often hears from local men when she builds rainwater harvesting systems and tanks in villages around Bukoba, Tanzania. Her husband likes to brag about her skills, especially to other masons. He recommends they seek help from his wife because, after all, she is a mason, too.

If you had met Grace two and half years ago, she would not have been able to tell you how to mix cement, explain the elements of a rainwater harvesting system, or even identify a basic trowel. But since participating in a water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) leadership training program, Grace has developed and built systems that provide water to more than 2,000 people. These efforts have

had a disproportionate impact on women, who previously had to walk as long as eight hours a day to fetch unsafe water from the river.

Other women around the world have similar stories of training transforming them into entrepreneurs and community leaders. By learning skills from masonry to medicine, women



STEPPING UP: Catherine Wanjohi, above, was elected as chair of her local water board after completing a WASH training program sponsored by the Global Women's Water Initiative (GWWI).

Photo Credit: Gemma Bulos

are not only able to improve their own lives but also bring entire communities out of poverty.

Prior to receiving WASH training in Kenya, Catherine Wanjohi's only experience with water was using it for her domestic chores. But now she serves as chair of a local water board where she works to increase women's participation in community water activities. She also works as a counselor and vocational trainer who counsels sex workers to pursue alternative livelihoods and to become community leaders through her organization, Life Bloom Services International.

Phionah Mbugua is one of the women Catherine touched. Phionah left her life as a commercial sex worker after receiving training in masonry. She now makes an income by working to improve her community's WASH infrastructure and training other sex workers to follow in her footsteps.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization recognizes that the "exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure." Nevertheless, the voices of women often go unheard. When this happens, entire communities pay the price.

USAID took an important step to ensure that women's voices are taken into account with the 2013 release of its Water and Development Strategy. The Strategy seeks to ensure that women are empowered to effectively advocate for their perspectives and priorities, and that they are able to fully engage as managers, partners, and entrepreneurs in water-related activities and enterprises. This is a promising start, but much work still needs to be done. It is now up to us, the development community, to



EMBRACING ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS: Commercial sex workers are trained to build WASH technologies.

Photo Credit: Gemma Bulos

THE VOICES OF WOMEN OFTEN GO UNHEARD. WHEN THIS HAPPENS, ENTIRE COMMUNITIES PAY THE PRICE.

put these ideas into practice and to go to villages around the world and listen to women's voices.

Women around the world are a massive source of untapped potential, especially in the water sector. By supporting local women with skills in construction, advocacy, entrepreneurship, and

leadership, we as a community have an opportunity to institutionalize WASH practices that can be passed on from generation to generation. Hundreds—sometimes thousands—of people benefit from every woman trained to transform her life and give back to her community. The ripple effect is real.

Gemma Bulos is a multi-award winning social entrepreneur recognized for her work designing community-driven WASH solutions. She serves as the director of the Global Women's Water Initiative (GWWI), which trains women in the developing world on sustainable WASH solutions and supports female leadership in the water sector. Follow them on Twitter: @womenwater (GWWI) and @gemmabelle (Gemma Bulos)



LEADING BY EXAMPLE: In Afghanistan, mothers are trained in improved hygiene practices as part of USAID's MCHIP project.

Photo Credit: Save the Children and Unilever/Lifebuoy

TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL ROLES

EMPOWERING
WOMEN TO
IMPROVE THEIR
COMMUNITIES

Mamlakat Abduqahorova is a Tajik farmer, wife, mother, and grandmother who dreams of making a difference. “Women have the potential to be the ideal leaders,” she said. “Working in the fields, we experience firsthand how lack of water affects the ability of crops to grow. As mothers, we understand the plight of other families and see the impact on the nutrition of our children.”

Around the world, scores of women like Mamlakat have the drive and knowledge to lead in the water sector. Nevertheless, social and cultural barriers often restrict women from playing meaningful decision-making roles or holding influential positions of power in community water management.

USAID is working to dismantle these barriers. “Because women tend to be the most impacted by water

scarcity issues and play a central role in the management, distribution, and safeguarding of water, they have a wealth of knowledge of the most critical issues within their communities,” said Tamara Shaya, communications specialist with USAID's Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. “USAID thus desires to ensure we listen to the voices and experience of women to reduce gender inequality.”

WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD

In Tajikistan, a USAID Feed the Future project enabled women like Mamlakat to harness their knowledge to lift their communities out of poverty.

Eighty-six percent of rural Tajik women work in agriculture. But most of them lack land ownership rights, which has prevented them from serving on water user associations where they could play a role in decision-making.

USAID, along with implementing partners DAI and Winrock International, established legal aid centers that help female farmers gain land-use rights and secure positions in water user associations.

The project has benefited thousands of men and women. The women leaders educated themselves and others on how to renovate outdated irrigation infrastructure, reduce waterborne diseases, improve food production, and boost children's

nutrition. This led to concrete changes. They repaired the dilapidated irrigation systems that had previously languished, unimproved for over a generation. The improved irrigation technology is expected to bring 80,000 hectares of new land into production, increasing community members' ability to grow healthy food to feed their families.

Consequently, villagers are starting to discard long-held prejudices. "In Tajikistan we are seeing changing attitudes about women in leadership positions," said Aviva Kutnick, a USAID agriculture development officer in Tajikistan. "Women leaders can be role models for women who might not have access now. That can have a transformative effect."

"It is important to have women in any organization, as a woman does her work with a mother's care and kindness." *Ughuloi Abdulloeva, chairwoman of the Obchakoron Water User Association*

Ughuloi Abdulloeva, chairwoman of the Obchakoron Water User Association, has seen attitudes change firsthand. "At the beginning of my work, both farmers and the local government looked at me with suspicion thinking, 'How can a woman manage an organization?' But after working together and more closely for some time, especially when solving some problems in the district, they changed their minds and began treating us differently, with respect." Now, the biggest farms come to Ms. Abdulloeva for advice and consultations on how to attract and involve women into the work. "It is important to have women in any organization, as a woman does her work with a mother's care and kindness," she said.



HYGIENIC & HEALTHY: USAID's MCHIP program in Indonesia trains mothers to make simple hygiene changes that save lives.

Photo Credit: Save the Children and Unilever/Lifebuoy

PASSING DOWN HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

While women's roles as community leaders may be relatively new, they have long managed the health and well being of their families. For this reason, USAID's flagship Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP) works in over 50 countries around the world to educate mothers about simple hygiene changes that can lead to major reductions in disease like the treatment and safe storage of water, safe feces disposal, and handwashing with soap. In Indonesia, MCHIP, which is implemented by Jhpiego and a consortium of partners, works with mothers to promote handwashing before food preparation, after cleaning a baby's bottom, and after using the toilet. These women have grown into hygiene leaders who influence their families and communities to take control over their health.

Handwashing with soap is a low cost and simple solution, but its effects are tremendous. The key is helping women and their households gain regular access to water and soap and persuading them to build designated handwashing stations such as "tippy taps," which can be easily made using inexpensive, locally available materials.

Proper hygiene must extend to schools so girls can grow into women who will make a difference. Without sanitary, private latrines in schools, girls may find it impossible to attend, especially after they reach puberty and begin menstruating. Staying home to avoid inadequate facilities can lead to girls missing 10 to 20 percent of class days, at an obvious cost to their education and future prospects.

USAID/Zambia launched the Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene (SPLASH) program in 2012 in cooperation with the USAID-funded, FHI 360 and CARE implemented WASHplus project,

the Bureau for Global Health's flagship environmental health activity. SPLASH works in 634 schools in Zambia to build toilets, improve or install water points, educate students about hygiene, and ensure schools are healthy environments for girls and boys.

This has made a big difference, especially to teenage girls. "If a girl misses five days of school a month, it exacerbates the already-existing disparities in female education," said Renuka Bery, WASH integration specialist at WASHplus. "Small actions—something as simple as having

a refuse bag on the wall—or separate toilets with washing areas for girls, can help girls feel more comfortable going to school." Improved attendance means more educated women equipped to make a difference.

In less than two years, SPLASH has observed a 15 percent increase in attendance as a result of these interventions. Teenage girls are especially grateful. Maria, a 16-year-old from Lundazi District, said the improved sanitation has changed her life. "At last I can stay at school and not miss anything throughout the term!"



SAFE SPACE: A "talking wall" on the exterior of a girls' latrine at a primary school in Lundazi District in Eastern Province, Zambia, where SPLASH is working to improve WASH in schools.

Photo Credit: Sarah Fry, WASHplus



MAKING A SPLASH: Simple innovations like this "tippy tap" at a primary school in Lundazi District in Eastern Province, Zambia, encourage children to wash their hands where there is no running water.

Photo Credit: Sarah Fry, WASHplus

BREAKING BARRIERS

While many strides have been made to better educate women and empower them as leaders, culture, tradition, or religion can make them difficult to reach.

USAID project staff report that even the simple act of making contact with women to provide educational materials, training, or support can be a major obstacle.

MCHIP's staff in Zimbabwe encountered a culture in which women are discouraged from seeking health care openly due to religious

practices and local customs. Health workers are often not welcome in homes. To overcome this, MCHIP sought out workers who were trained to operate discreetly and already part of the village networks, making it easier to reach more women. In some cases, this means workers may refrain from wearing uniforms or publicly announcing the reasons for their visits, to make sure they are able to get their messages out to the women who need them most.

Other USAID programs, such as the West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program (WA-WASH), have

encountered similar obstacles when trying to reach women in conservative communities.

"In our outreach to women we have to be very careful in terms of not making it look like a revolution," said Dr. Lakhdar Boukerrou, WA-WASH director. "You have to be cognizant of what's going on in the community." Dr. Boukerrou said that the biggest challenge is fostering a sense in women that they have a role to play in advancing their communities, a role beyond the traditional roles that have connected them so intimately with water for generations.



BOOSTING NUTRITION: Women in Tajikistan work together to improve food production and child nutrition.

Photo Credit: USAID/Central Asia Republics, Tajikistan

The project, which works to improve WASH services and community hygiene in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger, and is implemented by the Global Water for Sustainability (GLOWS) Program at Florida International University, was forced to get creative. They trained men as “gender champions” to combat discrimination and encourage the women in their communities and were careful to respect local norms when reaching out to women. The male gender champions worked with other community members to slowly change their attitudes and enable women to access the resources they needed

to thrive. “Behavior change is very complex,” said Dr. Boukerrou. “It doesn’t happen with the snap of your fingers. You can’t just go to a village and dump an idea from outside. In the end, the local people must take ownership of the ideas and see their importance for the development of their communities.”

This sustainable approach is paying off around the world, as more women take their communities’ health and welfare into their own hands. Mamlakat of Tajikistan became a water user association leader and spearheaded the drive to upgrade her community’s infra-

structure. The local women are now determined to never let it—or their community’s welfare—languish. “We put a lot of our time and effort into this process and as a result will never let it collapse again,” Mamlakat said.

K. Unger Baillie

More Information

[WASHplus Website](#)

[MCHIP Website](#)

[WA-WASH Website](#)

CURRENTS

Water and sanitation professionals work tirelessly to improve health, promote food security, and boost livelihoods. To further USAID's knowledge sharing goals, the Water Office holds learning events that present solutions and challenges common to water programs. In Currents, we share the solutions discussed at the events and other forums. Email us at waterteam@usaid.gov if you would like your project to be considered for *Global Waters*.

GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT HARNESSES TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL WATER USE

Over 70 percent of the world's water is used for growing and producing food. Experts estimate that by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population may be impacted by water shortages stemming from climate change and other environmental factors. These shortages will impact farmers' abilities to produce enough food to eat, feed their families, and earn a living.

The USAID Water and Development Strategy calls for leveraging science and technology to promote efficient water use in agriculture. To this end, USAID has teamed up with the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) to find and harness more sustainable and scalable solutions to the global water crisis.

On September 2, 2013, at the opening session of World Water Week, the partners announced Securing Water for Food: A Grand Challenge for Development. This \$25 million challenge aims to identify and bring to scale promising new innovations that use existing water resources more efficiently, improve water capture and storage technology, and reduce salinity of existing resources to provide new sources of water for agricultural production.

The Grand Challenge is accepting applications until January 17, 2014 for technical and business model innovations with the power to address water challenges in the developing world. The founding partners will select up to 40 winners who will receive funding and acceleration support to scale up their business ventures.

To learn more, visit [The Grand Challenge website](#) and follow [@securingwater](#) on [Twitter](#).



Photo Credit: Roque Giovanni Guillen

PROJECT WET FOUNDATION PROMOTES HYGIENE IN LATIN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Sustainable behavior change is key to improving public health. The Project WET Foundation uses its expertise in water education to customize WASH education materials that facilitate behavior change in project communities.

Using Project WET's USAID-sponsored WASH education interventions in 15 African countries as a model, the U.S.-based nonprofit worked with UN HABITAT to develop human values-based WASH education in Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru. The materials were customized for local audiences through on-the-ground workshops and translated into Spanish. The curriculum was implemented using a train-the-trainer model and reached approximately 3,000 teachers and 100,000 students.

Evaluations showed 93 percent of teachers who used the educational materials saw an increase in the number of students who improved their

hygiene habits and conserved water. Teachers also reported that students exhibited a greater understanding of water resources and showed more compassion and care for the environment.

Small demonstration projects to show how WASH education can empower meaningful local action were also part of the curriculum. Teachers from the pilot countries submitted applications to carry out action projects via a Spanish-language Internet educators' portal, and projects in Bolivia and El Salvador were selected. In El Salvador, a school director who was trained to use Project WET's WASH education materials used the grant to upgrade the school's food preparation, sanitation, and drinking water facilities.

Project WET is currently applying their model to a similar WASH and solid waste management education program in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

To learn more, visit the Project WET [website](#).

AFRICA BIODIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE GROUP ESTABLISHES FRESHWATER CONSERVATION GUIDELINES

Water, livelihoods, and the environment are intimately related. In places like sub-Saharan Africa, where 40 percent of the population lacks access to improved drinking water sources, holistic approaches that strengthen the link between freshwater conservation and WASH initiatives are needed to improve access to potable water, reduce poverty, and promote green growth.

Recognizing this need, two members of the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group (ABCG), Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy, led the charge along with non-governmental organizations, academics, USAID, and other donors to produce "Freshwater Conservation and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Integration Guidelines: A Framework for Implementation in sub-Saharan Africa."

Many WASH and conservation practitioners contributed to the guidelines' development and technical review, including Absolute Options, African Wildlife Foundation, Catholic Relief Services, Conservation International, FHI360, Global Environment & Technology Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resource Defense Council, Millennium Water Alliance, USAID, U.S.

Forest Service, Water for People, WASH Advocates, Wetlands International, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Winrock International, World Vision, and World Wildlife Fund.

The guidelines provide direction to health, development, and conservation professionals in sub-Saharan Africa on how to plan, coordinate, develop, and achieve mutually supported WASH and freshwater conservation outcomes. The guidelines draw on the evidence base and lessons learned from integrated projects referenced in the 2012 ABCG publication, "Linking Biodiversity Conservation and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene: Experiences from sub-Saharan Africa" and a workshop held in May 2013 to improve understanding of the value of integrated programs and gather inputs.

The guidelines are available on ABCG's [website](#).



Photo Credit: David Bygott



BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP

A STRONGER ROLE FOR WOMEN IN SENEGAL'S FISHERIES

THE DAILY CATCH: People in Cayar, Senegal eagerly await the delivery of the day's catch. In Senegal, fish provide over three-quarters of the population's animal protein.

Photo Credit: Anne Delaporte



It's a mosaic of sights and sounds: A group of women in brightly colored dresses sitting in a circle laughing, singing, beating on drums, and clapping. In the middle, two women move to the music, bending down and dancing. These women are fish processors in the coastal city of Cayar, Senegal, and they exchange ideas, improve their livelihoods, and celebrate life through song and dance.

WOMEN WORK TOGETHER

In 2011, the USAID/COMFISH project started working with these women to pioneer eco-friendly fish processing methods and boost their incomes. The project, which is managed by the Coastal Resources Center at the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography, works across Senegal to in-

crease the resiliency of coastal communities to climate change and to build an ecosystem-based management plan for six priority fish species, which provide much of the dietary protein for people in Senegal.

To successfully use an ecosystem approach, local fishers, processors, and the community must all take part in fisheries management to address a range of human and ecosystem needs simultaneously. As part of this process, USAID works with leading women's fish processing associations to organize into committees with specific responsibilities, such as ensuring hygienic standards for fish processing.

At first, many women fish processors lacked the tools and resources to reach their full potential. So the project set a goal: To establish environmentally



VITAL SOURCE OF REVENUE: A women's collective processes sardinella in Senegal, where over 7,000 women work in fisheries.

Photo Credit: Bruno Demeocq, UN Women



FROM FISH TO FOOD: A Cayar fish processor salts the catch.

Photo Credit: Cayar2013 @ APTE



A VIBRANT COMMUNITY: Cayar women gather on the beach, waiting for the daily catch.

Photo Credit: Cayar2013 @ APTE



sustainable processing sites for them. But this involved attaining land and permits from local authorities, some of whom discriminated against women. Project staff spent a lot of time lobbying stakeholders and explaining the ways women processors could benefit the environment, the economy, and the community. It was an arduous process but it paid off when they obtained land for a new processing unit for women in Cayar.

The site, which is home to fish smoking ovens and a modern 1,500-square meter processing facility, allows the women to work more productively and collaboratively. Over 200 women work there to salt, ferment, dry, and roast the fish. They manually process the fish into different products such as the fermented and dried fish known as *gej*, the salted and dried fish known as *sali*, and the roasted and dried fish known as *keccax*.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY

The women are working together to improve their processing methods. With support from USAID/COMFISH, they developed a code of conduct to govern their trade, the first of its kind in the women's fish processing sector. The code ensures that fish are processed in a hygienic and safe manner that complies with environmental regulations. One section of the code requires that the women not buy or process immature or juvenile fish, a prohibition that contributes to the fishery's resilience against climate change impacts. These new standards will enable the women to sell the fish products with a recognized label guaranteeing their quality, making them much more lucrative.

But illiteracy made it challenging to ensure all women could understand and adopt the code. To make sure they understand the intricacies of the new processing methods, USAID developed easy-to-understand literacy modules on hygiene, quality, and other topics.

The project also embraced the power of culture, community, rhythm, and melody. Project staff engaged the processors in performing traditional women's songs and dances in *Wolof*, the local language, that explained the code. The lyrics address the freshness of the fish, cleaning the work area, and personal hygiene—and dances bring them to life. "I can easily understand and memorize the code of conduct

Fisheries in Jeopardy

Fisheries fuel development. Over half a billion people earn their incomes from fish and over 2.6 billion people rely on fish for protein. But climate change puts critical fish stocks at risk and harms the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities. Rising sea temperatures cause coral bleaching, which threatens critical fish habitats, and rising sea levels damage coastal ecosystems like mangroves and salt marshes. Extreme climate events like cyclones and floods can further damage fish stocks. USAID is working with coastal communities in Senegal and around the world to adopt an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management that helps them mitigate and increase resiliency to climate impacts.

through our local songs and dance," said Fatou Kiné Diop, a fish processor in Cayar.

The women are now working together to build their business and help each other grow. They gather each month over tea and biscuits to discuss their work and plan initiatives to boost their productivity and earning capacity. USAID/COMFISH helps organize these meetings and put their plans into practice. Among the successful initiatives is a literacy program to enhance livelihood opportunities and to further empower them. "With the literacy program, I am now able to write my name, dial a number on my mobile phone, and, more importantly, hold my accounting in a notebook," said local fish processor Outé Yade.

As the women gain skills and confidence, they are better equipped to pursue alternative livelihoods, further reducing pressures on the fish and the ecosystem. Khady Sane Diouf, USAID/COMFISH project director, said the project has benefited the entire community. "Fish processing by women in Cayar is a shining example of empowerment, environmental protection, and poverty reduction."

C. McCarthy

More Information

[USAID/Senegal Website](#)

[USAID/Senegal on Facebook](#)

[Coastal Resources Center Website](#)

INTEGRATING GENDER INTO OUR WORK

A Conversation with USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Director Vikki Stein

In 2012, USAID released the Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy to ensure that all USAID projects take into account gender issues and work to reduce gender gaps. Leading this effort is the USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GenDev) Office. Vikki Stein stepped up as the new GenDev Office director in October 2013. She brings to the position over two decades of experience. Throughout her career, she has worked on public health, gender issues, and community-based development, managing programs in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. *Global Waters* spoke with Ms. Stein to hear her thoughts on women, water, and the future of USAID.



Vikki Stein

Global Waters: As its new director, what are your goals and hopes for the GenDev Office?

Vikki Stein: USAID's leadership realizes that integrating gender into our development work produces better results. We must address the unique needs that men, women, boys, and girls have as they relate to equal access to resources and opportunities. My hope is that we continue to advance and operationalize USAID's policies to achieve our goal of integrating a gender perspective into all sectors of our work.

What is the importance of USAID's work in gender as it relates to development, especially in the water sector?

I started my work in development as a Peace Corps Volunteer working on water issues in Honduras, so I am especially sensitive to integrating gender into the work we do to increase access to vital resources, like water.

Since the burden of collecting water falls largely on women and girls, lack of access to water resources has



TOMORROW'S LEADERS: Girls at a newly refurbished school in Yemen take their exams.

Photo Credit: USAID/YMEP

the most significant effect on them, and can negatively impact their health, increase their daily workload, and make them susceptible to violence, especially when gathering water during conflict. Women are under-represented in the “water world,” as men often dominate careers and training in water management.

Sufficient access to water, sanitation, and hygiene is relevant to ensuring that women and girls are able to obtain an education – as lack of clean water and poor sanitation is one reason why girls are often kept out of school. Girls are often not permitted to attend schools that do not have latrines, due to a concern for their privacy and for modesty reasons. Moreover, the absence of clean and private sanitation facilities may discourage girls from attending school when they menstruate due to an inability to access clean water in schools. Improved access to water and sanitation in schools has been shown to increase school attendance amongst girls, illustrating that improving water resources can have a positive impact on education.

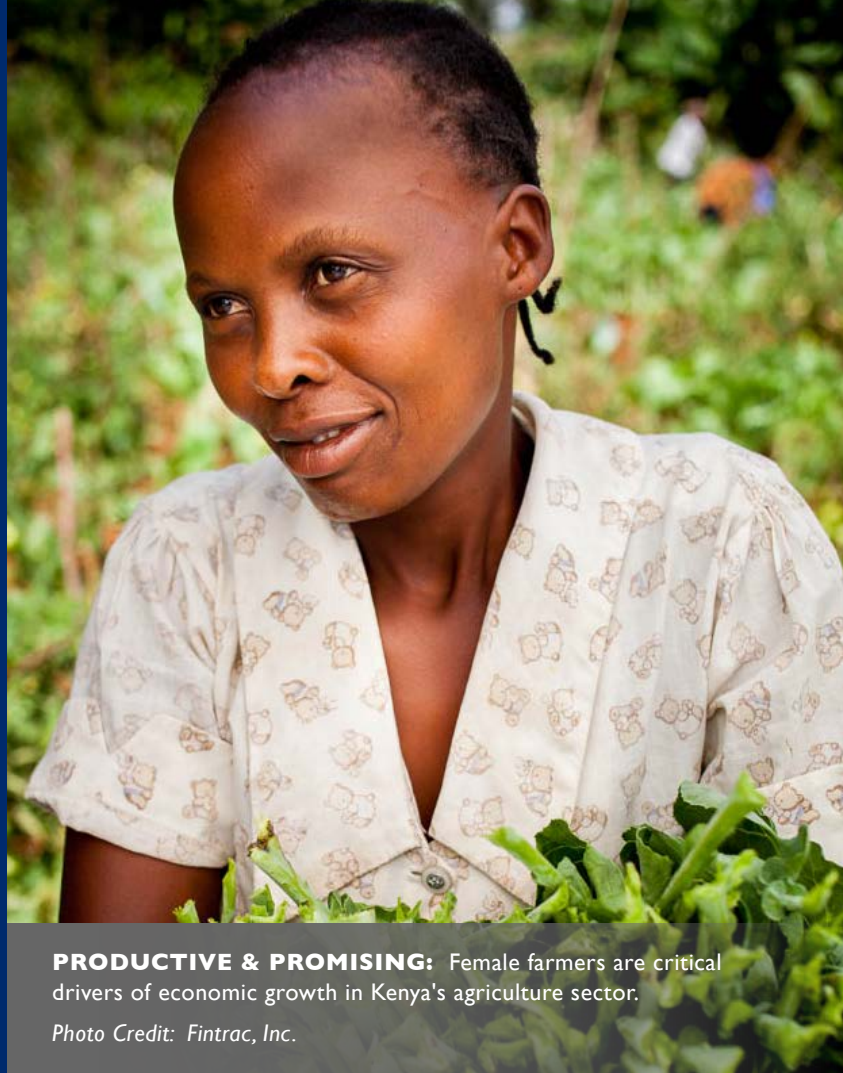
One of the USAID Water and Development Strategy’s eight key operational principles is to “promote gender equality and female empowerment.” What are some of the ways that USAID can accomplish this?

USAID can advance gender equality and women’s empowerment through the Water and Development Strategy by taking a gendered perspective in our programs. As new activities are designed, GenDev will work with Agency actors, including the Water Office, to ensure gender integration in programming, thus developing more efficient programs. This will help us contribute to the body of evidence on why integrating gender into our work is smarter development; it will also help us continue to foster gender equality and female empowerment.

What are the biggest challenges facing women and girls and how can USAID and the larger development community work together to overcome them?

Some of the biggest challenges facing women and girls include trying to change community gender norms to foster women’s leadership in resource management and ensuring that women have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. Gender-based violence is another area that impedes women’s ability and reduces women’s productivity and mobility. These cultural attitudes do not change overnight.

There are a variety of ways the development community can help address these challenges. Identifying men



PRODUCTIVE & PROMISING: Female farmers are critical drivers of economic growth in Kenya’s agriculture sector.

Photo Credit: Fintrac, Inc.

who are gender champions and see the value in working alongside women is one major way to overcome barriers; working alongside men is a vital way to advance our gender goals. Educating women and girls is one of the best investments one can make, not only because it opens up opportunities for women, but also because education can have a positive impact on women’s families and communities. Research also shows that education can reduce poverty. Ensuring that women have control over reproduction is also key to encouraging their mobility and reducing maternal mortality and reducing diseases. Furthermore, providing economic and political opportunities to women is key to overcoming development challenges and advancing better development results.

C. Zeilberger

More Information

USAID GenDev Office

USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Strategy

U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security



U.S. Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Tel: (202) 712-0000

Fax: (202) 216-3524

www.usaid.gov