

AN ANALYSIS OF SANITATION POLICIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA:  
THE CASE OF GENDER POLICIES IN SANITATION IN SOUTH AFRICA,  
ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE

By

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## **Introduction**

Access to sanitary means of human excreta, solid waste and wastewater disposal is regarded as a universal need and, indeed a basic human right, which is key to human development and poverty alleviation. It is in the light of the importance of sanitation to the well being of society that national governments, NGOs and international organisations have put a lot of effort to improve sanitation in the past more than twenty years. Yet, despite all these efforts a report by the WHO and UNICEF (2000) presents the “shameful” state of the world’s sanitation situation. According to the report 2.4 billion people (40% of humanity) had no access to sanitary means of excreta disposal at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while 4 billion did not have access to sanitary means of wastewater disposal. Consequently 4 billion cases of diarrhoea were reported each year between 1990 and 2000, resulting in an annual toll of 2.2 million deaths.

Poor sanitation affects some groups more than others, often related to gender. Internationally the need to address gender issues in sanitation programmes and projects has long since been recognised. The crucial role of women in ensuring the health of the family and therefore the need for their participation in sanitation programmes is widely appreciated. Gender mainstreaming was established as a global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Platform for Action from the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all spheres so that women and men benefit equally. However, progress in gender mainstreaming varies among countries and sectors within a country. This report analyses sanitation policies in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe in relation to gender.

## **POLICIES IN SOUTH AFRICA, ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE**

### **National Gender Policies**

South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe rank 88, 129 and 107 respectively in the global gender related development index. This generally reflects the low status given to gender with respect to access, control and ownership of economic resources and decision-making positions. Therefore, more work has to be done to ensure that gender imbalances among men and women, rich and poor are addressed adequately

At the national level the three countries have national gender policies. The general goal of the gender policies is to achieve gender equality and equity in all sectors and at all levels. All organisations and institutions in the respective

countries are expected to mainstream a gender perspective in all their policies, strategies and activities. However, whereas the Zambian national gender policy addresses sanitation in specific terms the South African and Zimbabwean policies do not. The Zimbabwean gender policies give comprehensive strategies for water supply but sanitation is not mentioned and as for the South African one a passing reference is made of water services. The Zambian national gender policy identifies key problems in the sanitation sector and makes which include the following:

1. The government should promote and encourage the involvement of women in the decision-making processes in the provision of water and sanitation facilities.
2. The government should promote partnerships between women and men in the provision of water and sanitation.
3. The government should ensure the use of gender friendly technologies in water supply and sanitation.

### **Water and Sanitation Policies**

For a long time sanitation has been addressed through projects and programmes that combined water supply and sanitation. However, experience with such projects and programmes show that sanitation is marginalised under such arrangements. For example, water and sanitation issues in Zambia and Zimbabwe are combined and guided by water and sanitation policies. Sanitation issues in the two policies are not given enough attention. Whereas detailed institutional, financial, implement and operation and maintenance arrangements are presented for water this is not the case for sanitation. On the other hand South Africa which separates sanitation from water has a clear policy focused on the provision of sanitation facilities and services. The policy aims to provide all South Africans with a basic minimum level of sanitation by 2010. The necessary institutional, implementation and financial means to achieve this goal are clearly set out in that policy.

Urban informal settlements have been given little attention in sanitation policies. Although rural sanitation coverage in developing countries lags far behind urban coverage, the urban poor live in overcrowded slums and informal settlements and often have to contend with inadequate or non-existent sanitation services. Rapid urbanisation coupled with the urbanisation of poverty means that specific policies are needed to deal with the growing health threat posed by poor sanitation in informal settlements. Whereas South Africa and Zambia have policies that cover urban informal settlements, Zimbabwe does not. This is because all informal settlements in Zimbabwe are still considered to be illegal.

The Zambian Water Supply and Sanitation policy (1997) and the Zimbabwean Master Plan for Integrated Rural Water and Sanitation Programme (1985) do not mention gender at all therefore they can be regarded as being gender insensitive. The two policies refer to communities without specifying the roles of

women and men in the provision of sanitation services. South Africa's White Paper on Basic Household Sanitation (2001), which is a further development of the 1996 National Sanitation policy, does not address gender in specific terms but refers to the need for sanitation services that take into consideration the needs of women, girls, the elderly and the physically challenged.

However, having realised the weaknesses of earlier policy documents in terms of addressing gender, Zambia has since adopted a mainstreaming gender strategy specifically for the Water and Sanitation sector. In order to ensure that gender is mainstreamed, the Mainstreaming Gender in Water and Sanitation Strategy (2000) recommends the formulation, adoption and implementation of internal gender policies by organisation and institutions that are involved in the provision and promotion of sanitation and use of gender sensitive participatory approaches in needs assessments.

Zimbabwe also recognised the weaknesses in its rural water and sanitation master plan and adopted the Sustainability Strategy for the National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme. The strategy recommends measures to enhance women participation in rural sanitation programmes including traditionally male-dominated chores such as latrine building.

A programme called 'Gender Mainstreaming in South Africa' (GEMSA) has also been developed which aims to build up the National Community Water and Sanitation Training Institute (NCWSTI) into a resource centre for water and sanitation with a mandate to mainstream gender in the sector. NCWSTI is the national coordinator of GEMSA and is supported by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC). The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) is also looking at the possibility of developing a national gender policy for the water and sanitation sector and recently (2001) sub-contracted Gender Links to undertake a literature review on mainstreaming gender into the water and sanitation sector.

However, the omission of gender in the original policy documents and other sanitation initiatives generally shows that gender is treated as a peripheral and not an integral part of sanitation programmes.

### **Institutional Arrangement**

Institutional arrangements are necessary to ensure not only the efficient implementation of programmes but also to make sure that gender is considered in the process. One of the causes of poor sanitation is the lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the various players. Sanitation programmes in the three countries are implemented by a variety of organisations. These include government ministries, NGOs, donors and community based organisations. Local government has the overall responsibility for providing sanitation services in the three countries. The institutional arrangements are focused on facilitating the

implementation of sanitation programmes and not gender mainstreaming. A notable gap in most organisations, which are responsible for the provision or regulation of sanitation services, is the absence of internal gender policies to indicate their commitment to gender in the sector. In most instances sanitation agencies also do not have departments dealing with gender related issues and all considerations are left to the departments of gender that are housed in a different ministry. In organisations with departments dealing with gender more often than not, these departments are under-resourced and the staff lack the necessary gender training to guide them in their work and there is no gender equity. For example, the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in South Africa, Mr Ronnie Kasrils, revealed at a function in March 2002, that only 23 percent of DWAF employs are women and of these only 8 percent are in managerial positions.

In cases where departments of gender are co-opted in water and sanitation committees their roles and powers are not clearly stated. For example, in Zimbabwe gender in the rural sanitation sector is not addressed at the national, provincial and district levels despite the fact that the ministry responsible for gender is included in water and sanitation committees at all levels. This is partly because the main duty of the ministry responsible for gender is community mobilisation and ensuring community participation at project level and not ensuring women representation in national, provincial and district decision-making committees.

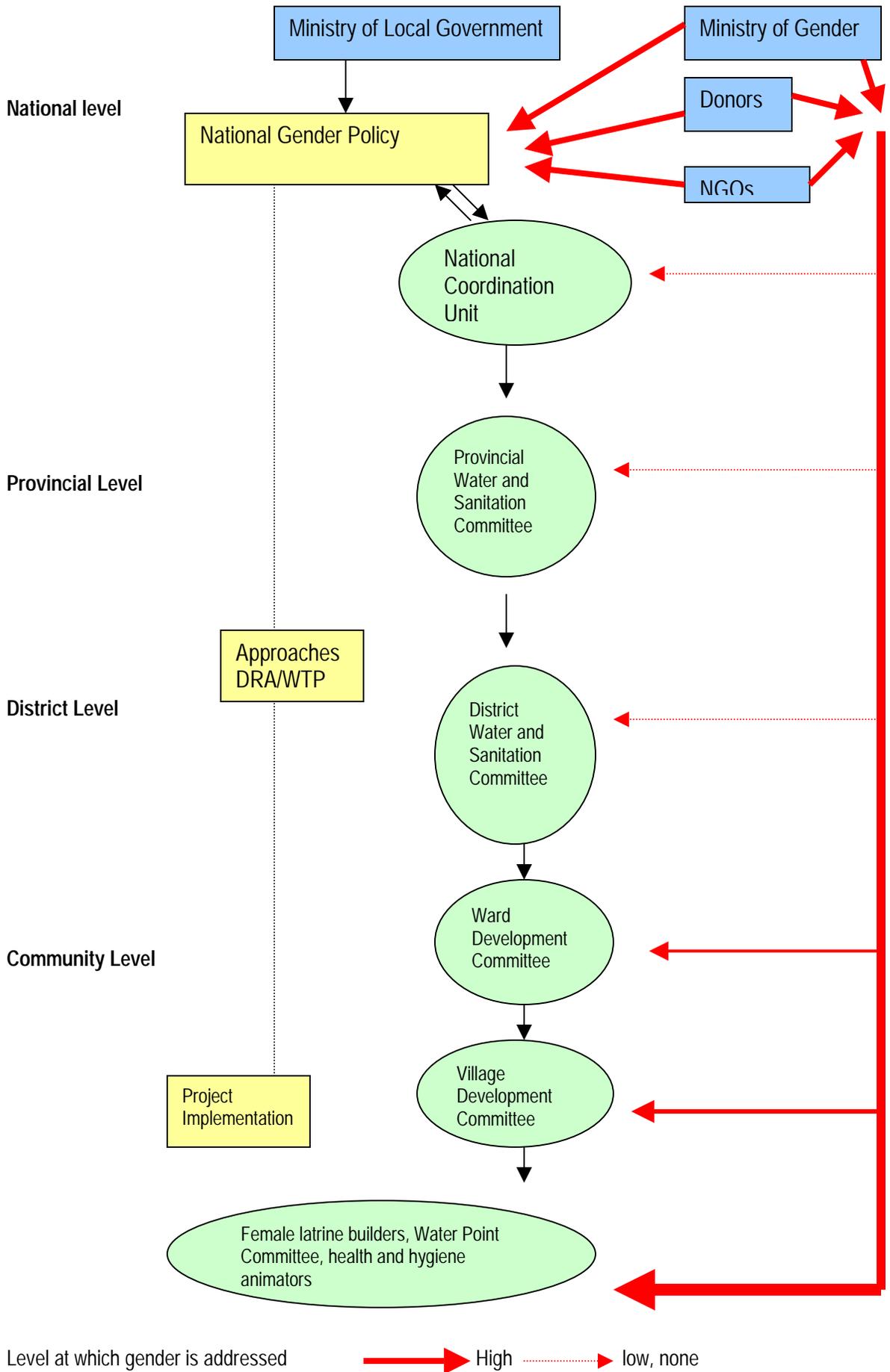
Therefore, although the three countries have ministries responsible for gender there are no clear institutional arrangements to ensure coordination and linkages between and within organisations which are responsible for the implementation of sanitation programmes. In addition, national sanitation policies do not have specific indicators for monitoring progress in achieving gender related goals. Consequently no institutional arrangements are put in place for monitoring and evaluating progress towards meeting gender goals. For example, whereas the South African White Paper on Household Basic Sanitation (2001) discusses the roles and responsibilities of all players, no organisation is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that gender is mainstreamed at all levels of sanitation programming.

Institutional arrangements for sanitation are also less developed compared to those for water. For example, institutions for the operation and maintenance of water points are put in place yet no similar arrangements are made for latrines especially in rural and urban informal settlements. Maintenance of sanitation facilities is treated as a household responsibility and yet no support services such as pit emptying facilities are provided. The poor women and men in urban informal or rural areas are forced to make private arrangements for pit emptying or they have no option but to construct new latrines when the ones they are using fill up.

Financial arrangements for sanitation services are also not clear, especially for on-site technologies. The common practice in the three countries, especially in rural areas is to ask households to dig pits and make bricks for latrine construction before they receive free cement. However, no clear financing arrangements are made to replace latrines when they fill up or collapse. Also the plight of female-headed households, the elderly and the physically handicapped who may not be able to dig pits or mould bricks for latrine construction is often ignored.

This generally shows that institutional arrangements for the provision of sanitation services are gender insensitive even in cases where there are national sanitation policies which emphasise gender mainstreaming at all levels. Institutions which are responsible for the provision of sanitation services do not have gender policies. In the end gender is addressed only at project level thus focusing on practical and not strategic gender needs.

The figure below shows the structure of the Rural Water and Sanitation Sector in Zimbabwe. The National Coordination Unit which is responsible for coordinating the activities of various players in the rural water and sanitation sector does not itself have a gender policy. Similarly the provincial and district structures do not have gender policies. Gender is fostered mainly by NGOs and donors at the project implementation levels resulting in gender focusing on meeting practical and not strategic needs.



## Legal Instruments

The purpose of the legal framework is to transform policy intentions into legally binding and enforceable clauses. South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have made significant progress in revising or repealing old laws in line with international gender conventions. However, no significant progress has been made in translating national gender policies which guide the provision of sanitation into law. Whereas the need for gender mainstreaming in all institutions is emphasised at the national level no legal provisions are put in place to ensure gender considerations in the recruitment and general practices of sanitation agencies. Similarly community participation in sanitation programmes and devolution of power to the lowest level is preached at the national level yet community based organisations such as women's clubs are not in most cases legally recognised. In Zimbabwe simple breakdowns in sanitation facilities in small urban areas which are scattered throughout the country have to be referred to the head office in Harare due to the centralised nature of the Central Rates Fund which administers these areas. The legal and institutional arrangements are also such that local authority workers are accountable to higher officers and not the poor women and men whom they serve.

The Urban Councils Act and the by-laws which set service standards do not mention gender at all. All urban councils are expected to provide urban dwellers with flush toilets, pit latrines of any description are not allowed for household use. The needs of poor women and men and their ability to pay for the recommended services are not considered when service standards are set. Service standards are generally based on developed countries and not on the needs of the urban poor women and men. In Zimbabwe all informal settlements are illegal and can be demolished at any time. The same applies to those informal settlements which are not recognised in South Africa and Zambia. In Mbare, Zimbabwe people were left homeless while property worth several million dollars was destroyed when municipal workers demolished cabins and tuck-shops last year (2001). The Harare City Council was reported to have plans to destroy over 145,000 backyard structures in 2001, making an estimated 500,000 people homeless (The Herald, 2001). Unfortunately demolition of informal structures in most cases is not motivated by interest in the conditions of the urban poor but rather by prestige. The demolition exercise in Mbare for example, was aimed at "cleaning up" the city. However, destroying informal settlements is like attempting to hide poverty. Housing is a highly visible dimension of poverty. Therefore by destroying shacks, municipalities are trying to hide poverty but in actual fact they end up increasing it. Demolition of slums without providing alternative houses only intensifies overcrowding and worsens the sanitation situation.

In some instances by-laws which ensure sanitary environments, such as disposal of hazardous waste are not enforced thereby exposing the poor women and men who scavenge on dumpsites. In other circumstances, the failure by the local authorities to enforce by-laws have led to situations where people build houses

without latrine facilities. Women who spend most of their time at home are the worst affected in such cases because they do not have any means of relieving themselves.

Furthermore, tender guidelines for the construction of sanitation facilities do not allow full participation of local communities. There is need therefore to critically analyse the gender impacts of legal provisions before they are enacted.

In South Africa, households in urban areas are entitled to a housing subsidy and sanitation subsidy which are restricted to people who are above 21 years of age. However, there are a number of men and women who start their families before they reach 21 and these people are unfortunately segregated against. This problem is even more notable to single mothers who have children at an early age. The sanitation subsidy in South Africa is also difficult for the rural households to access it.

At the moment approaches in the urban sanitation sector are promoting full cost recovery (the Strategic Sanitation Approach for example) and public private partnerships. There is need to analyse the impacts of such approaches on different gender groups. The impacts of cutting water supply for non-payment of services including sanitation services, which is a common practice in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, on poor women and men are not full considered when such laws are made.

Generally legal provisions are enacted without assessing their implications on gender. Gender analysis is not conducted during the formulation of legal instruments that govern the provision of sanitation services resulting in them being gender insensitive.

## **GAPS IN POLICIES**

### **National Gender and Water and Sanitation Policies**

1. National gender policies do not address sanitation
2. Sanitation is not linked with poverty alleviation
3. Sanitation is given low profile in national water and sanitation policies
4. Sanitation policies do not address gender at all. In instances where they do, the focus is on addressing practical gender needs (access to latrines) and not strategic needs (women professionals and women in decision making positions). Related to this is the observation that national policies treat sanitation and gender just as household or social issues but not as development problems.
5. Sanitation in urban informal settlements is not adequately addressed

## **Institutional Arrangements**

1. Gender is not mainstreamed at the institutional level. The situation is worse in urban compared to rural areas.
2. There is lack of coordination between gender departments and sanitation implementing agencies
3. There are no indicators for monitoring and evaluating progress towards meeting gender-related goals
4. No clear institutional arrangements are put in place for the operation and maintenance of sanitation facilities especially in rural and urban informal settlements.
5. Gender is not considered in financial arrangements

## **Legal Frameworks**

1. Legal instruments are generally gender insensitive. Therefore, national policies which foster the advancement and empowerment of marginalised groups are not translated into enforceable laws
2. No legal provisions are put in place to ensure that recruitment process or general practices of sanitation agencies are gender sensitive
3. No legal provision are put in place to ensure that community based organisations such as women's clubs are legally recognised
4. No legal instruments are put in place to ensure that service providers are accountable to the poor women and men they serve, especially those in rural and urban informal settlements.
5. Gender is not considered in the formulation of Acts and By-laws which set the service standards especially for urban areas
6. Urban informal settlements are not legally recognised
7. By-laws which ensure safe disposal of hazardous waste are not enforced resulting in dumping of hazardous chemicals near residential areas, especially urban informal settlements
8. Legal provision that govern material procurement or construction of sewers such as tender guidelines, do not allow participation of local informal organisations

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the gaps identified above we recommend the following:

1. Government departments that are responsible for gender should ensure that national sanitation policies are gender sensitive by participating fully in the policy formulation process. Gender sensitive sanitation policies ensure that the needs of poor men and women in rural and informal settlements are fully considered thus enhancing the chances of project acceptability, greater community participation and project sustainability. Gender provision should address both practical and strategic needs.
2. Government departments responsible for gender, NGOs and Donors should embark on awareness raising programmes targeted at sanitation policy makers which emphasise the fact that sanitation is not just a household or social issue but rather a development problem which should be linked with poverty alleviation. Sanitation in the three countries is still treated as a household or social and not a development problem. It should be realised that poor sanitation is both a symptom and cause of poverty and should be treated as such. The explicit and implicit costs of poor sanitation to development in terms of low productivity due to ill health and lost earnings from tourism and agricultural exports due to cholera outbreaks are substantial. Addressing gender in sanitation ensures that poor women and men benefit equally not only from the convenience of having a sanitary facility nearby, but from the wider health improvements and developmental benefits of improved access to sanitation. Therefore addressing gender in sanitation is an important tool in achieving equitable development.
3. Governments should design separate policies for sanitation. This will ensure that sanitation is given the attention it deserves. Separate sanitation strategies for rural and urban informal settlements should be prepared in order to ensure that various gender issues in the different situations are fully analysed
4. There is need for government gender departments, NGOs and donors to develop tools for gender mainstreaming at the institutional level. All institutions involved in the provision of sanitation services in both rural and urban areas should have internal gender policies. The policies should address gender in recruitment, training programmes and the general practice of the institutions. Indicators should also be developed to monitor progress towards achieving gender-related goals.
5. Legal instruments related to the provision of sanitation services should ensure that policy is translated into law. Government departments responsible for gender, NGOs and donors should ensure that gender is addressed in the formulation process and that Acts and by-laws (such as service standards, tender guidelines, building standards and land tenure) go through gender review before they are passed.

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