



Women Water Leaders Promoting gender equality within AWARE

GIZ Gender Competition Entry: AWARE project in Zambia. contact peter.kammerer@giz.de

Water scarcity hits women harder. They are the ones walking hours to fetch water. They are the ones struggling for each drop of water in their vegetable gardens yet are missing from the decision-making table. That is why we need women to increase the efficient use of water and obtain equitable water distribution. Therefore, we need more women leaders in the water sector in Zambia. To work towards this goal, we promote “Women Water Leaders” to spearhead activities within our own project – Accelerate Water and Agricultural Resources Efficiency (AWARE) – funded by the European Union (EU) and Germany Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

AWARE stretches its activities from policy advice on water resources management at national level to the implementation of Integrated Watershed Management and catchment protection along the tributaries of the Lower Kafue – one of Zambia’s major rivers. The project is annotated with a gender-sensitive approach and the outreach of women for all our trainings are set at a quota of at least 30%. But AWARE wants to go one step further and promote women to take up leadership positions in our project implementation activities and grassroots water resources management structures.

Our ambition rhymes well with Zambia’s National Gender Policy which prescribes 30% women representation in leadership positions. To achieve this, the country is fighting against traditional beliefs and norms shaped by a patriarchal society where women are expected to serve men. Yet, steady progress is being made. Zambia’s new government – in place since the peaceful elections in August 2021 – for the first time achieved its own 30% women target in the appointment of Permanent Secretaries, who coordinate key advisory functions within their Ministries. Despite this example set at national level, it is hard to find women in leaderships positions in the villages where traditional beliefs and norms on the role of women are still dominant.

We set ourselves two objectives to provide a positive example for change:

- Promote the participation of women in Water User Associations (WUAs) – these are grassroots water resource management organisations overseeing the allocation of water at macro-catchment level and mandated by the Water Resources Management Act number 21 of 2011.
- Promote meaningful participation of women in overseeing and constructing Catchment Protection Measures (CPMs) – which consist of check dams, soil bunds and trenches to stop run-off water from quickly moving out of the catchment area and the planting of trees to reduce deforestation.

Within its project area AWARE is supporting four WUAs and the implementation of CPMs at 16 sites through and Integrated Watershed Management approach.

Two out of the four Water User Associations (WUAs) supported by AWARE were founded in the previous phase of the project implementation. Unfortunately, with those WUAs, we did not achieve the 30% women membership target recording only 10% and 20% respectively. As a point of improvement, for the two additional WUAs, which were founded during the current project time, we managed to assure women participation. Candidate members were proposed for all different water use categories over a vast geographical and stakeholder landscape, something that makes gender balance particularly challenging. The project team alongside district government partners paid attention to include women for those water uses where women are naturally overrepresented, such as domestic use, horticultural use, and environmental use. Finally, for the

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two additional WUAs, even more than 30% women were elected as WUA members with 3 out of 10 and 5 out of 10 female members, respectively. The Water Resources Management Act prescribes a 10-member Water User Association.

So far two Catchment Protection Measures (CPM) sites have been established and four new CPM sites are under construction. Each CPM site is managed by the local village heads and two supervisors from the Water User Association (WUA). They are the ones who lead the selection of the team leaders overseeing a group of 100 community members to collect stones, dig trenches, plant trees, and conduct any other works done to keep more water in the landscape. The WUA members and team leaders undergo technical training in readiness for implementation of works.

At the first CPM site, which can be understood as our pilot site, the village heads and supervisors were asked to select at least three women for the ten team leader positions – sticking to the Zambian government's 30% target. We agreed that team leaders would be selected from those people in the community possessing leadership skills, most of them already being in role model positions such as lead farmer, forest champion or other community leadership positions.

We expected to face challenges in the selection of motivated women and the acceptance of women in their leadership roles, but none of this was the case. In fact, all selected women leaders performed excellent. They turned out to be confident, engaged, and accurate in their record keeping and interpretation of technical drawings for the check dams according to the observation by the lead consultant. This motivated us to increase our ambitions for the next batch of CPM sites, where we set a target of 50% women team leaders, which again was achieved without facing major difficulties.

Our next challenge was to attract women to participate as workers. Generally, women in rural Zambia are loaded with more tasks than men. Women provide most labour on the fields, while being responsible for all domestic work in the household. To promote the participation of women and avoid overloading them with additional workload, we decided to request women to work half-time for the same allowance compared to men. One of our consultants had good experiences with this approach in Ethiopia. In the beginning, men felt they were being treated unfairly but after some heated discussions the arrangement was accepted and more sensibility for the triple burden of women was created. Eventually we managed to have 40% women workers at the CPM sites.

In the short term we continue to benefit from the engagement of women in achieving our project indicators. The inclusion of women allows us to activate motivated leaders and tap into a large source of community labour to implement the CPMs. In the long term we expect the involvement of women to improve water resources management at grassroots level in the Lower Kafue in Southern Zambia, hopefully with a spillover effect to the rest of the country. We noticed that due to their daily tasks related to fetching water and irrigating gardens, women are particularly aware of water scarcity issues and highly motivated to protect water resources in their own environment. At the same time women take up community maintenance roles solving daily issues within the communities. As a result, women are highly knowledgeable about all sorts of day-to-day frictions between water users, making them well-equipped to resolve water use conflicts.

Gender equality as a joint task

The AWARE project relies strongly on cooperation with the line ministries at national, provincial and district level as well as the traditional leaders (chiefs and village heads). They have been key in the selection of women in leadership positions in the WUAs and the implementation of CPMs. The National Gender Policy and the Water Resources Management Act provided a strong reference to get our project partners along in reaching ambitious women participation targets. Nevertheless, our experiences show that the targets set by the government are not achieved automatically – which makes the positive examples set by AWARE critical to change the mind-set.

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Surprisingly, we even managed to reach higher targets than set by the national government. This was possible because our partners learned to think beyond blunt policy targets. They got to appreciate the importance of women representation and realised that:

- It is not hard to find women for leadership positions.
- Active participation of women has a positive influence on local community buy-in and subsequent ownership of CPM activities.
- The level of engagement and knowledge of women are crucial for leadership roles in water resource management.
- Involving women in paid labour contributes to the financial empowerment of rural women.

Raising gender competence amongst water users

Traditional beliefs and norms on women's roles in the household and in society are hard to change. Our approach does not only challenge gender role stereotypes head-on but does so without taking a long, often complex route of getting permission from the strong and powerful or accepting the potentially accustomed 'fears' of the underprivileged being comfortable or accepting of their disadvantaged positions as an excuse for not taking desired action. By simply implementing the agenda for rural women to take up leadership roles within the AWARE project, both men and women gain new experiences and often tend to think more deeply about their current gender perspectives. These experiences translate in strengthened competences to identify leadership capacities in women and allow women to grow in leadership roles. "I was initially worried that leading men would be a problem but knowing how to relate with people and being consistent about sharing the benefits of our activities to the community has really helped," said Angelina Hamalambo, a Team Leader under the AWARE activities in Mutama-Bweengwa area in the South of Zambia. "I encourage fellow women to avail themselves for leadership positions despite some challenges they might face."

Gender as quality feature of our work

It has not stayed unnoticed amongst our partners and colleagues that women play an essential role in the implementation of AWARE. Women are often praised for their skills and capacities, which go beyond the expectation of project partners and colleagues, be it the reading of technical drawings, their hard labour, or their commitment to protect local water resources. One of the supervisors and WUA members, Mr. Namushi Likolo, shared his opinion on the role of women in the project implementation: "At first, the women leaders were not comfortable especially that it involved physical work and leading a team of ten people, mostly men, but now they have become an asset to the community due to their newly acquired leadership and technical skills."

Gender and result-based monitoring

AWARE is annotated with a gender-sensitive approach. As such all participant lists for meetings, workshop and trainings include a gender column. Within reports we present the disaggregated data. At times colleagues may forget or delete the extra column to save space, but a kindly reminder always helps them to get back on track. Due to the double role of AWARE's M&E expert, who also is our project's gender expert, the gender topic receives ample attention in our monitoring activities. To illustrate this further, in the current Mid-Term Evaluation of our project, gender assessment is highlighted as an important assessment criterion of the evaluation in addition to the standard OECD criteria: sustainability, coherence, impact, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. This will ensure that gender equality is not lost in determining overall impact of AWARE.

Recently we have also produced a short documentary video on the CPM activities for public outreach. The video is yet to be launched. The star of the video is one of the woman team leaders. Although we are proud of our

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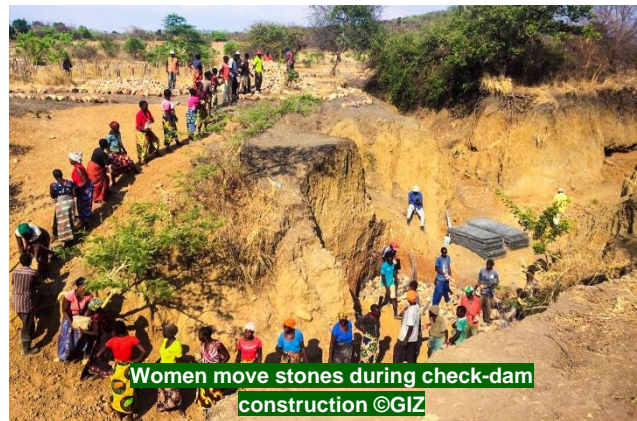
women team leaders, we did not actually centre the filming activities around her. Our communication expert simply declared: “She was the most enthusiastic and most eloquent interview partner conveying the message of AWARE, which brought her automatically to the forefront of the video.”

Through these and other experiences we realised that the time is ripe for women to step up the ladder in Zambia. We are proud to contribute to this development by promoting women leadership within AWARE.

Photo Gallery



Team Leaders Angelina (L) and Foster ©GIZ



Women move stones during check-dam construction ©GIZ



Check-dam construction in progress ©GIZ



A soil bund filled with rainwater ©GIZ



Team leader Foster supervising check dam construction ©GIZ



Aerial view of the CPM activities ©GIZ