The Evolving Role of Women in Sustainable Waste Management in Developing Countries - A Proactive Perspective?

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Abstract — The differences in gender roles vary between communities, class, race and do change over time. The evolving of societies in recent years has come with rapid changes especially that of women. As a result, this paper aims to investigate how evolving of gender roles have led to a more proactive approach to sustainable waste management. Findings of this study reveal that making women aware of their responsibilities instills greater mobilization, motivation and confident in their capacity to take their emancipation in their own hands. The full integration of women at all levels is vital for sustainable waste management.

Keywords — Bottom-up, gender, integration, paradigm shift, proactive perspective, sustainability.

I. INTRODUCTION

SOLID waste management in many developing countries is often considered to be a technical issue and because of this, women are sidelined in many management operations. The much focus on the technical aspects has led to unsustainable waste management in many societies (Arnold van de Klundert, 1999). A paradigm shift in the approach of service is evident as women are gaining grounds in waste management. One of the key areas that need to be addressed when reviewing the impact of social factors on waste service delivery is gender relations in households.

The differences in gender roles vary between communities, class, race and do change over time (Kabeer N., 1994). The concept of gender describes the socially constructed roles, responsibilities, attributes and activities ascribed to a male or a female in a given society (DFID 2000). In most developing societies, women are responsible for domestic work like shopping, cooking, cleaning, and childcare and wellbeing of their husbands (World bank, 1999). Their multiple roles as mothers, homemakers, educators, entrepreneurs and producers place a heavy demand on them particularly the non-elite ones (UNDFW, 1998). As a result of this, the need arises to investigate how their involvement has led to a more proactive perspective to waste management.

It is worth noting that information on the socio-economic status is of great importance to solid waste planning process. As a result, if household disposal practices are known, it will be easy to introduce measures to reduce the amount of waste generated by the affected community. Also, an understanding of the diversity of the local culture of home-owners can assist the planning of a domestic solid waste management system (Poswa, 2004). Addressing social, economic and environmental issues require an in-depth review of the existing situation and thorough planning in order to develop performance management plans. This can be achieved by involving affected communities especially women which is vital for the understanding of priority areas (DCD, 1999).

The evolving of societies in recent years has come with rapid changes in gender roles especially that of women. A proactive perspective captures the growing importance of women taking initiative to anticipate and create changes in how waste management is done in communities plague with uncertainties and management challenges.

A. Study Area – Buea, Cameroon

The area under study was Buea, the capital of South West Region located at the foot of Mount Cameroon in West Africa with an estimated population of 200,000 inhabitants (Buea Council, 2009). It is made up of a constellation of 85 villages and inhabited by the Bakweris located in urban and suburban areas. The climate in Buea tends to be humid because of its location at the foot of Mount Cameroon. It is worth mentioning that Buea is the home of academic excellence, making its locals to take education as a priority.

Sources: Page, 2003
Fig. 1 Map of Cameroon

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TABLE I
CLEAR MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation Factors</th>
<th>Indicative Set of Policy Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can do</td>
<td>have the resources and knowledge to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like to</td>
<td>have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabled to</td>
<td>are provided with the opportunity for participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked to</td>
<td>are mobilized through public agencies and civic channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded to</td>
<td>see evidence that their views have been considered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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II. KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
The findings of this study are fascinating. The paradigm shift is the outcome of a changing gender role. This serves as an eye opener and gives citizens the opportunity to rate their Council. The poor rating revealed that the unsanitary conditions were greatly felt by the people and needed urgent solutions.

Fig. 2 Rating of solid waste service provision

The Council attributed ineffectiveness to lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure for waste management. This ineffectiveness leads to the dumping of waste in drainage, gullies, streams, open lots and fields.

Fig. 3 Women rating of Buea Council’s ability to management waste

Actually, women in Buea are in charge of domestic waste because they are directly concerned with household chores.

Fig. 4 Gender Dimension: CLEAR Framework

The role of women in waste management and promotion of sustainable development is so pivotal. Despite the overwhelming response, integrating gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes has not been fully accepted. Nevertheless, the fact that women “can do” is evidence that women can rise up to management crisis. Women in Buea have much to contribute to effective waste management considering the fact that most of the waste is generated from homes.

Case Study A: KAWWS, Karachi, Pakistan
Situation Analysis: Dissatisfaction by housewives (1988) with the inadequate service delivered to their middle/upper income area.
Goal: They took the initiative to arrange for a private garbage collection service in their area. They approached their local politician for support, started a public awareness campaign on public health and garbage among the residents, and established the Karachi Administration Women Welfare Society (KAWWS) to deal with these and related issues (Ahmed, 1994)

Case Study B
Women-run Waste Management and Recycling Programme, Thiés - Senegal.
Situation Analysis: Only 35% of the 263 cubic metres of waste in the municipality was collected by the municipal services leading to archaic dumps and chronic poor health. Out of a targeted population of 44,860 people, the unemployment rate was 28.6% for men and 24.1% for women.
Goal: The goal of this initiative was the improvement of the living environment and along with providing income for community women and Creation of jobs

III. DISCUSSION
Regardless of the geographic location, women are proactive in solving waste management problems. For Buea, it is evident that women have the capacity and resources to tackle waste crisis and cannot be deterred by customary practices.

In Karachi, though the dominant Muslim religion enjoined its followers to avoid all contact with waste, the women forged forward and achieved their goal. In Senegal, though the absence of such an integrated initiative as a reference and the differences in origin and status among partners, the women saw it as an advantage and maximized the multiple aspects of it. The outcome was the eradication of anarchic dumps, and the improvement of sanitary and nutritional status of the beneficiaries.

IV. CONCLUSION

The idea that women are mere ‘home makers’ has changed over the years in many communities. In recent years, women are making important contributions in all walks of life. The boundaries between the traditional gender roles are slowly fading away. Despite the fact that the three case study areas are located in countries with highly centralized governments, the quest for women to earn a living, make a career and establish their own identity is a motivating factor to entrust waste management services into the hands of women. This supports the fact that women are good drivers of environmental ideas and that bottom-up approach is vital to sustainable waste management in third world countries.

REFERENCES