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Women and Rural Water Management: Token Representatives or Paving the Way to Power?

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses how informal structures intersect with women's participation in formally created decision-making spaces for managing domestic water at the village level in Tanzania. The results reveal the influence of the informal context on women's access to and performance in the formal decision-making spaces. Overall, there is low community involvement in local governance structures, and in most village assemblies that of women is even less. Only in the Social Welfare Committee women are fairly well represented, presumably because of its linkage with the traditional division of labour and women's practical gender needs. In the Village Water Committees, women's representation is regulated by a quota system but women rarely occupy leadership positions. Even when husbands are supportive, patriarchal culture, scepticism and negative stereotypical assumptions on female leadership frustrate the government's effort to enlarge women's representation in the local decision-making spaces. Three entry points for change were identified: successful women leaders as role models; women's passive participation in village meetings that could develop into active participation; and women's membership of social and economic groups which strengthens their skills and bargaining position.

KEYWORDS: Women participation, domestic water management, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming in rural water supply is among the major institutional reforms under decentralised rural water service. The approach emerged during the 1970s and 1980s and aimed at addressing the implications of the rural water interventions for men and women (van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). To promote it, involvement of both men and women through community participation was reinforced. In most developing countries, including Tanzania, the emphasis on community participation followed the failure of many water projects in terms of non-functionality and lack of sustainability, as a result of institutional and managerial problems (Therkildsen, 1988; van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). It was expected that water projects would fare better if communities had ownership and would be empowered. Furthermore, it was assumed that local specificities, including gender relations, could thus be more suitably addressed (Narayan, 1995; van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998; Harvey and Reed, 2004; Harris, 2009; Furlong, 2010).

Gender initiatives in the sector emanated from the notion that men and women have different needs and roles regarding water within and beyond the household, hence water (un)availability at the household level would affect men and women differently. The gendered division of labour in most of rural Tanzania is such that within the household women are responsible for food preparation, childcare, and domestic hygiene, whereas men's specific water needs relate to livelihood generation, such as livestock watering and other water-dependent productive activities which vary according to the specific local context. Thus, domestic water forms an integral part of women's practical gender needs (Kabeer, 1994) and it is, therefore, in the interest of women to have affordable, stable and sufficient access to domestic water to enable them to pursue their domestic roles and responsibilities. As the prime managers and users of domestic water at household level (Elmendorf and Isely, 1983; van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998; Mandara et al., 2013a), women should be able to influence community water management and decision making. However, it took some time before this was acknowledged and steps were taken (Narayan, 1995; Harvey and Reed, 2004; Singh, 2008; Seager, 2010). Factors obstructing women's effective engagement in the management of rural water services have been widely documented in academic and policy literature. Among others, women's demanding domestic workload and the social-cultural barriers they face stand out as major constraints (Hemson 2002; Singh 2008; Bhandari and Grant, 2009; Cleaver and Hamada, 2010; Todes et al., 2010; Udas, 2012; Mandara et al., 2013a). These constraints reflect norms and traditions that shape social structures, form masculine and feminine identities, govern the division of labour and reinforce social hierarchy (Agarwal, 1994; Rao and Kelleher, 2005; Singh, 2008; Cleaver and Hamada, 2010). To redress the situation, mechanisms such as a quota system, changes of rules, and training were devised (Kabeer, 2005; Rao and Kelleher, 2005; Harris, 2009; Hicks, 2011).

In the literature, the optimism prevails that women's participation in decision making and management makes water services more gender-responsive (Fisher, 2006; Water and Sanitation Program, 2010). Women's representation in village water management became mandatory in the 1980s, when the development community realised women's critical role in reaching the targets of water for all under the 1981-90 International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). In the global South, women's representation in the local management structures became a requirement of development agencies (Harvey and Reed, 2004; Harris, 2009; Furlong, 2010). Thus, women's entry into these local decision-making spaces was 'invited' and 'mandated' by policies, rather than being their own active choice. Still, little is known about how women's representation in village water management structures is achieved and translated into participation. Local social-cultural settings with their specific gender relations and roles were not much taken into account in implementing women's representation in local decision-making bodies (Kabeer, 1994; Rao and Kelleher, 2005; Singh, 2008; Udas, 2012). It was assumed that individuals would enact free choice and advance their interests once a level playing field was formally established. However, such a level playing field cannot be taken for granted, because "gender is historically contingent and constructed, simultaneously embedded in social institutions and cultural meanings" (Lamphere et al., 1997: 4).

The National Water Policy (henceforth NAWAPO) in Tanzania acknowledges the key roles and practical interest of women in rural water provision (URT, 2002: 32). A quota system was adopted to ensure women's representation in the formal water management structures at village level, particularly in the Village Council and Water Committees. The Village Water Committee (VWC) is responsible for managing village water projects on behalf of the village and reports to the Village Council. Although the general policy prescribes women's representation in these structures, it has to be implemented in areas with diverse customs, norms, traditions and beliefs relating to gender (Guijt and Shah, 1998; Hemson, 2002; Singh, 2008). In many countries, having women in local water management bodies challenges the pervasive socio-cultural notion that such bodies are a public, hence male domain, and use of domestic water is a private, female matter (Hemson, 2002; Singh, 2008; Bhandari and Grant, 2009; Udas, 2012). This can be explained by traditional stereotypical notions which have a bearing on gender roles that

govern the division of labour and on how men and women relate in the private and public arenas. Given that "women have often been associated with the private sphere and men with the public one" (Parpart et al., 2000: 208), incorporation of women in public decision-making spaces does not ensure that their influence will match that of men.

The above background exposes a missing link between the policy mechanism of the quota system and the factors that restrict women's participation in domestic water governance at village level. This begs the question whether women's representation in these structures will truly bring about positive change for women. The fact that women are represented does not mean they are accepted as decision makers and that they have voice, influence and decision-making power in the same way as men. Quota for women can also be 'exploited' politically and do not guarantee that women's needs are met. Just as it cannot be said that male representatives are necessarily blind to the concerns of women, it can also not be assumed that women's representation will lead to better outcomes for women in general. Furthermore, women may not always act in the interests of other women when they occupy official positions (cf. Meena, 2003; Kabeer, 2005; Todes et al., 2010).

Against the backdrop of this discussion, the paper addresses two key questions. First, how does the village-level interplay of formal and informal structures shape women's participation in the local decision-making spaces for water services management? Second, how do the obstacles facing these women affect the responsiveness to women's stakes in domestic water services?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework combines several concepts. Following the work of Moser, a distinction is made between women's practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs are those that arise from the concrete conditions women experience and are a response to immediate necessities that women identify within a specific context. Strategic gender needs originate from women's ideological subordination to men and they vary depending on the particular cultural and socio-political context within which they are formulated (Moser, 1989: 1803). Domestic water is a practical gender need for women because of their reproductive roles at household level. Women's representation and participation in the local decision-making spaces to affect water governance relate to women's strategic gender needs. In rural settings like our study area, there is a mismatch between women's domestic water needs and the governance of domestic water services, because of women's underrepresentation in the public domain where strategic decisions are made. This leads to women's practical gender needs like domestic water being insufficiently taken into account; the needs are regarded as women's business that belong to the private sphere, hence not of public interest. To analyse the formal and informal structures influencing women's involvement and performance in the local decision-making spaces and domestic water governance, we adopted the model (called 'what are we trying to change') by Rao and Kelleher (2005: 59-61). The model underscores the need for changing the rules of the game in the inequitable social systems and institutions, both at personal and social levels and in the formal and informal relations. Combining the concepts of practical and strategic gender needs with the analysis of the interfaces between the quota system and the informal institutions that determine women's performance in the local decision-making spaces, forms the basis of our conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

Water development policies intersect with other formal arrangements as well as with informal structures (cf. Nicol, 2000). Overlooking this fact, leads to complications and failures. The formal structures provide women with opportunities to participate in decision making, but it is the informal structures that govern women's actual access and performance (Kabeer, 2005). Since at village level the informal arrangements tend to prevail over the formal ones (Sokile et al., 2005); this study investigates how women exert influence in the formally created decision-making spaces in the village and how the informal context shapes their involvement in public management.

Figure 1. A conceptual framework for understanding women's involvement in management of village water service and its formal-informal intersections.

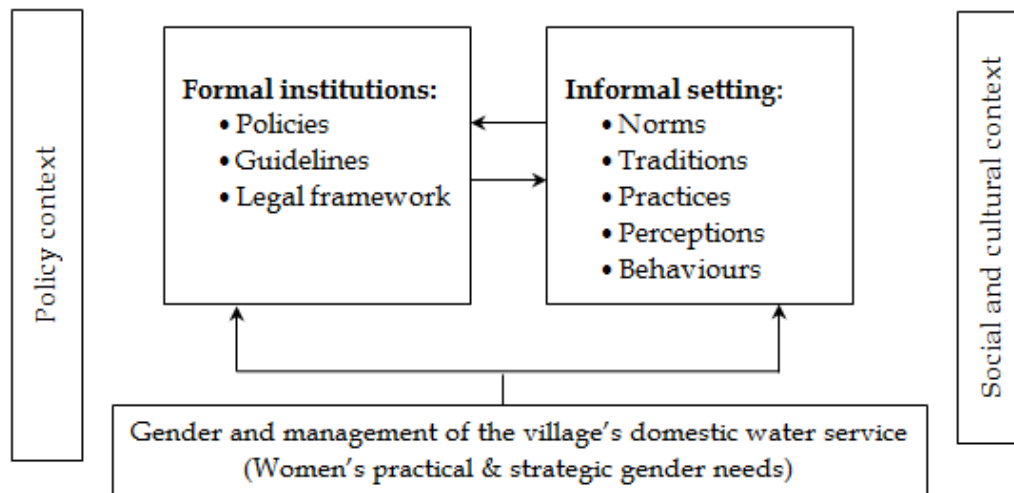


Figure 1 displays the formal and informal structures related to women's involvement in village-level domestic water management, which are connected through the linkages between the policy frameworks that create the 'invited' decision-making spaces and the social-cultural environment that dictates access and performance in those spaces. This interconnection implies that changes in the formal structures have a bearing on the informal structures and vice versa.

We looked at participation in village-level governmental bodies, including the Village Water Committees, and in specific activities relating to water projects, i.e. putting together the initial capital and maintenance of water facilities. We see women's participation in the latter type of activities as necessary involvement to safeguard their interests in accessible and safe domestic water. For the first, men's and women's participation in the village decision-making spaces and management, we draw on Agarwal's (2001, 2010) typology of participation. The typology distinguishes different levels of participation, from passive participation, i.e. being informed of decisions at meetings, to interactive participation, where one can have a voice on the decision made and/or hold a position in local decision making. Agarwal identifies the following forms of participation: nominal, passive, consultative, activity-specific, active and interactive (empowering) participation. In analysing women's participation, we position it in gender relations and arenas. Gender relations are the socially constructed practices that manifest themselves in the division of labour, roles, responsibilities and resources between men and women, based on attitudes, perceptions and behavioural patterns (cf. Agarwal, 1994, 1997; Parpart et al., 2000; Rao and Kelleher, 2005). The gender arenas in this study include the household, the domestic setting in which water is needed, used and managed, and the community, in which water schemes are governed through village institutions such as the VWC and Village Council.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical research was carried out in 2011-2012, in nine villages in the rural districts of Kondoa and Mpwapwa, Dodoma region, central Tanzania. The villages were selected on the basis of the presence of a public water project, type of water source, management arrangements and distance to the district headquarters. Each village had a functional water project, except Seluka that mainly depended on traditional hand-dug wells and riverbed-sand wells for all water uses because the borehole had broken

down (for details see Mandara et al., 2013b). In the other villages, villagers could access improved water sources for consumption while sometimes unimproved sources were used for cleaning and productive water uses. The three types of improved water sources were: boreholes (in six villages), gravity schemes (in two villages), and a shallow well with hand pump in one village.

Data collection combined quantitative and qualitative methods, to enhance data validity and reliability (cf. Small, 2011). The methods employed included a household survey, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews, observation and case studies. Survey interviews were done in 221 randomly selected households, with primarily (218) women respondents. Both men and women featured in the FGDs and the key informant interviews. Three cases of women were used to portray the *how* and *why* of women's involvement in local governance of rural water services in a real-life context. These women were selected for the following reasons. They had substantial leadership experience and commanded authority. They had experienced community-family interference and they had been confronted with negative community perceptions on women being leaders. We examined practices and processes pertaining to management of domestic water services in the village institutions and decision-making spaces and looked into women groups because of the opportunities these offer for women to strengthen their bargaining position.

RESULTS

Domestic water management approach

All nine villages had a VWC with male and female members. Four villages had a private operator (PO) who was sub-contracted by the village to operate the borehole and deliver water services under supervision of the VWC. In other villages the option was considered. In Potea, the village council was considering to have a PO to increase its water revenues as a solution to the problems with the collection of the user fees. Seluka village had put out a PO tender, but since the major part of the water infrastructure was not functional, no one applied. Mbori village was working to change the terms of the contract with the PO to derive more benefits from it.

The VWC is responsible for the overall management of water projects, selling water (in the villages without a PO) at the distribution points based on the water-selling roster prepared by the VWC, collecting user fees and submitting these to the VWC treasurer, and ensuring a smooth delivery of services and an adequate water flow to all distribution points and cattle troughs. In the villages with a PO, the VWC has to supervise the PO and confirm that the PO timely deposits the agreed monthly amount in the village water fund account. The VWCs are required to meet once a month (but not always do so) and convene extra meetings in case of an emergency, such as damaged infrastructures.

Women's representation in the village water committees

In all villages except Potea, the proportion of women in the VWC was 50 percent. Potea's VWC had five male and three female members because one woman who was elected as a member had to quit the post following her husband's disapproval. The Potea village leaders reported that the husband required his wife to be at home to fulfil her domestic responsibilities and insisted that as a practicing Muslim, it would not be acceptable for her as a married woman to be involved in public duties without her husband's permission. A recent study in the same village found a similar pattern of women withdrawing from village committees because of their husbands' objections (Masanyiwa et al., 2014). Such an experience can discourage other women to contest for and accept leadership positions.

The three positions in the VWC are chairperson, treasurer and member. Chairpersons and treasurers were mainly men; only one woman was a treasurer. Women were mostly just members. The reasons for this, as reported by men and women, include low level of education and lack of awareness among women, husbands' disapproval, and women's demanding domestic chores.

Gender, age and qualification criteria for village water committee members

In all villages the qualification criteria for VWC membership were being a resident in the village, aged 18 years and above, and ability to read and write. Trustworthiness and being literate are important because managing water project involves handling money, preparation and presentation of progress and financial reports. Other criteria such as willingness to volunteer, patience and being committed are vital as well, since the work is demanding and not compensated.

Women key informants brought up the subject of trust and were implying that some of the unmarried youth are not trustworthy. The following was reported during women's FGD in Seluka:

We prefer married youngsters to unmarried ones in the VWC because some unmarried youth can easily disappear with our money and since they do not have their own homestead we will have no one to hold accountable. But if he or she is married you can hold the spouse accountable and therefore one's spouse is our guarantee. If we elect unmarried youth and this person disappears with our money, the parent will tell us that we freely elected the youth as an independent adult and then they will not help us finding the person. For the married youth we can always ask the spouse to give us our money and when he/she refuses we can take an asset that will cover our lost money (Women FGD in Seluka village, Sept. 2012).

The aforementioned qualification criteria apply equally to men and women, but in the villages of Potea and Kelema Maziwani, marital status and age were specific criteria for women. In Potea, a married woman or a widow of advanced age was preferred as a VWC member. In Kelema Maziwani married women were preferred over single ones. The justification behind the preference for married women was their being settled in the village. Besides, in Kelema Maziwani, an elderly widow was favoured on the ground that it was unlikely for her to remarry, hence there would be no spouse interference. Normally, an elderly widow becomes head of the household and final decision maker. Although the age criterion allows any adult aged 18 and above, there were few young (aged 18-35) male and female adults in the VWCs. For young men the opportunity costs of community leadership, which is demanding and unpaid work, are too high. For young women, community perceptions on the socially appropriate behaviour of a 'good woman' discredit young women who are vocal, especially in public places and in the presence of elders.

All POs in the villages of Kidoka, Chase-Chinyika, Berege and Mbori were men, who hired married women, old men and sometimes single ladies to sell water at the distribution points. We found that POs applied the following criteria for hiring the water sellers: basic knowledge of arithmetic and experience of running a small business, parent's approval for young ladies and husband's approval for married women, as well as trustworthiness. Other water facilities' attendants, mainly security guards and pump or tank attendants were men. These attendants were hired by the village office and their allowances were paid by the village in the villages with VWC only and otherwise by the POs. The village office was the main employer for the security guard and pump or tank attendant.

Village assemblies

The village assembly is the village's major decision-making space. It comprises all adults in the village who are over 18 years and it elects the village chairperson, Village Council (VC), and committees such as the VWC (Shivji and Peter, 2003; Venugopal and Yilmaz, 2010). The VC consists of 15-25 members. It includes all subvillages' chairpersons, village chairperson and other elected members of whom at least one-fourth should be women (Venugopal and Yilmaz, 2010). The VC operates through three standing committees – for planning and finance, social welfare, and defence and security, respectively. These are responsible for handling the daily affairs of the village (Sokile et al., 2005).

Village assembly and domestic water services

Although water use for productive purposes exists in the study area, domestic water is a major item of discussion during the village assembly meetings as it touches the whole community. Points of discussion include the financial report on the revenue and expenditure from user fee collection, amount of the user fee, cleaning of and around the facilities (pump house, water tank, and gravity schemes), performance of the VWC, and the status of the water project and its infrastructures. The information on an up-coming meeting is disseminated at least two weeks prior to the meeting, mainly through the subvillages' chairpersons and by written announcements placed in public places such as on the school or the dispensary notice board, on poles and trees in the village centre close to the bus stop, shop walls, and in the village office. The information about the forthcoming meeting aims at notifying all adults on the meeting and its agenda. However, in 2011 about 60 percent of the respondents did not attend a village assembly meeting. Of the 40 percent who attended, 22 percent were male household heads, 8 percent wives, 7 percent other adult men or women in the household, and 3 percent were female household heads. This implies that most of the female-headed households do not participate in the village assembly. Upon our inquiry, the village leaders confirmed that in most villages assembly meetings attendance is poor. The following comments of six village leaders were noted (name of the village added):

Women attendance to village meetings is problematic; men attend and participate more in the village assembly compared to women (Potea)

Attendance in village assembly is poor (Kelema Maziwani)

Men attendance in the village meetings is more than that of women (Kidoka)

Villagers' attendance in the meetings, especially women is very poor (Sambwa)

Citizens have very low motivation and awareness towards development contributions; even their attendance in the village meetings is poor (Seluka)

There is insufficient attendance in the meetings in this village (Lupeta)

Other factors reported as causes of poor attendance were: (i) demanding domestic chores workload and patriarchy particularly for women; (ii) inadequate report on water revenue and expenditure; (iii) disappointment about the water project; and (iv) untimely information and irregular meeting schedule.

Speaking up in meetings

In Agarwal's (2001, 2010) typology of participation, speaking up in the meeting is a more active and higher level of participation than just attending meetings. Results from the survey revealed that only few women speak up in public meetings such as the village assembly, subvillage meetings and other village development meetings. The respondents reported that more men speak in public meetings than women. About one in ten women spoke in a last public meeting they attended in 2011. The village records showed that at most about 400 villagers attended the village assembly in 2011. Based on the average number of villagers who attend public meetings, the proportion of women estimated to speak up ranges from 0.4 to 4.4 percent. The explanation for these low percentages is that in these villages speaking up by women in a public place is seen as 'socially unacceptable' behaviour. An interviewed village leader told us that women who are overly vocal in meetings endanger the marital prospects of their unmarried female family members, because the family could be labelled as having 'noisy' and 'bad' women. Hemson (2002) and Hicks (2011) found the same phenomenon in South Africa.

Activity-specific participation

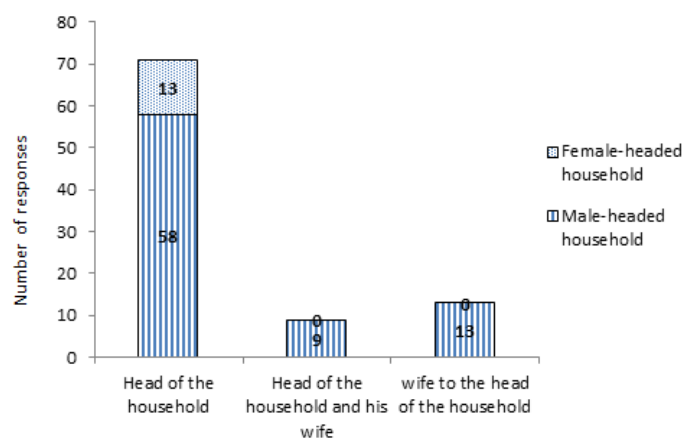
Contributing to the initial capital and involvement in maintenance activities are important aspects of rural water services in the national water policy’s requirement (URT, 2002) and represent activity-specific participation. According to the national water policy (URT, 2002), a community’s contribution to initial capital implies that it is in need of public water services and is willing to contribute to its establishment. Also men’s and women’s participation in maintenance activities are deemed desirable to express households’ and women’s (in particular) interests in accessible domestic water. Besides, activity-specific forms of participation have been part of rural development in Tanzania since the pre-colonial era, under names such as *self-help* and *popular participation*. According to Jennings (2003), mission societies had used activity-specific participation in the construction of schools and dispensaries and in famine relief; and the colonial administration had promoted popular participation as a low-cost means for local social development.

We have focused on the contribution to initial capital, repairing, cleaning around water infrastructures, and reporting breakdowns. This selection complies with the guidelines of the decentralisation of the rural water services, which requires the villagers (a) to contribute five percent to the capital investment by cash or physical labour as a qualification indicator (Harvey and Reed, 2004) and (b) to manage water schemes and cover all the costs of operation and maintenance (URT, 2002). Additionally, this selection highlights the actual roles and responsibilities of the villagers (cf. Mandara et al., 2013b) and community management as a component of community participation (Harvey and Reed, 2004).

Contributing to initial capital

About 42 percent of the households in the study had contributed to the initial capital in cash. The remaining households contributed physical labour, by digging trenches, collecting sand and stones, or fetching water for the building activities. A recent study on users’ participation in rural water services in Dodoma noted the same trend regarding cash contribution (Masanyiwa et al., 2014). District officials commented on the limited contribution to the initial capital. One of them said: "[t]here is low morale in the communities and reluctance to contribute to the initial capital, and it is more difficult in the villages with gravity schemes". A Sambwa village leader said: "[i]t was hard to convince villagers to contribute to the initial capital because some of the village council members resist any monetary contribution on the ground that a gravity scheme is naturally made and a free gift from God". Among the households who had paid cash, 80 were male-headed and 13 were female-headed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Numbers of respondents who paid a cash contribution to the initial capital according to household headship.



In the male-headed households the cash contribution in most cases was paid by the household head, in some cases shared between the household head and his wife or paid by the wife only. Female household heads shouldered the costs of the cash contribution to the initial capital on their own. We did not find a significant correlation between the household's level of income and cash contribution to the initial capital. Through the key informants and FGDs we were informed that the contributions used to be organised in phases and in most cases collected after harvesting, as in the villages of Chase Chinyika and Seluka (cf. Mandara et al., 2013b). A Kidoka village leader reported that "when we were raising money for the village's five percent to the initial contribution each household had to pay a fixed amount and the right timing was after harvesting, because that is feasible and avoids unnecessary quarrels with the fellow villagers".

Management and maintenance involvement

After the water project is installed, the community is responsible for management and maintenance. We examined community involvement in cleaning around the pump house or the gravity scheme source, repairing water infrastructures, and reporting breakdown. Community involvement in the latter activities was generally low. Household involvement ranged from 22.6 to 29.0 percent. Involvement in reporting was higher (29.0%) than in cleaning (22.6%) and repairing (26.2%), presumably because by reporting people hope to avoid compromising the availability of the water services.

The following reasons for the low community involvement in water infrastructures' management and maintenance were reported and confirmed by village leaders: cleaning is mostly perceived as the responsibility of the VWC members and is not carried out frequently; repairing requires specific technical skills that most villagers do not have; reporting is deemed voluntary. In addition, cleaning differs with the type of water source. To clean the storage tank for boreholes, the tank needs to have a stairway and an outlet pipe. For the gravity schemes, cleaning involves maintaining the catchment area and removing sand deposits and mud that clog the intake, particularly during the rainy season and when farming and grazing take place close by. The following statement by a key informant in Lupeta village summarises the issue: "It takes a lot of effort to clean the intake and it can inconvenience availability of clear water after cleaning the intake".

There was generally poor community participation in water infrastructure management. According to the district officials in Mpwapwa and Kondoa, low community participation in development activities is one of the main challenges in water supply projects. It is attributed to the following factors: low morale among many villagers, being used to free social services by the government, and political interference which causes confusion about participation. The studied districts profile and budget documents reported low community participation as one of the major factors responsible for poor project implementation (2010 and 2011 Mpwapwa District Profile and Budget Documents). Kondoa District Council also recorded poor community participation towards cash contribution and physical labour for three consecutive years as a major factor interfering with the implementation of development projects (cf. Kondoa District Council Medium Term Plans and Budget Documents 2008, 2009, and 2010).

Gender structures men's and women's involvement in infrastructures management. Cleaning the water tank and around the catchment area and intake for the gravity scheme, for example, are perceived as activities that require male physical strength. Reporting is another issue. For women, reporting on functional defects of a water facility is important because of their domestic water needs. From interviews it transpired that it is mostly the women members of the VWC who do cleaning at the water point surroundings. Cleaning is seen as 'feminine' work. Repairing, though also require technical skills is seen as 'masculine' work. Regarding repairing it is noteworthy that in Kondoa district there was not one female technician among 16 technical staff and in Mpwapwa there were only two female technicians among 11 technical staff.

Table 1. Proportion of household members involved in activities related to infrastructure management by gender.

Activity	Men	Women	Both
Cleaning	33 (14.9)	6 (2.7)	9 (4.1)
Repairing	46 (20.8)	12 (5.4)	1 (0.5)
Reporting	40 (18.1)	20 (9.0)	6 (2.7)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages.

When examining participation by gender, we found a significant difference ($p=0.007$; $\chi^2 =15.417$) with more men than women involved in all activities (see Table 1).

Village council and social welfare committee

In our study, all village councils have men and women. As can be inferred from Table 2, the proportions of men in the village councils ranged from 56 to 76 percent and that of women from 24 to 36 percent. On average, the proportions of women are close to and slightly above the 25 percent policy requirement (Shivji and Peter, 2003: 27; Venugopal and Yilmaz, 2010: 216). Qualification criteria for membership of the VC are the same as those described above.

Table2. Composition of the village council by village.

Village name	Men	Women
Potea	18 (72)	7 (28)
Kelema Maziwani	19 (76)	6 (24)
Kidoka	18 (72)	7 (28)
Sambwa	18 (72)	7 (28)
Chase-Chinyika	16 (64)	9 (36)
Berege	17 (68)	8 (32)
Seluka	18 (72)	7 (28)
Mbori	17 (68)	8 (32)
Lupeta*	14 (56)	6 (24)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages.

(*) In Lupeta village the membership of five members (three men and two women) had been terminated as they had not attended meetings since they were elected.

For the standing committees, we focused on the Social Welfare Committee, because monitoring domestic water services is their responsibility. It is one of the three standing committees through which the VC operates to handle the daily affairs of the village and govern the village's development (Sokile et al., 2005). The size of the Social Welfare Committees ranges from six to nine members, with two to four women.

Membership and participation in social and economic groups

Membership of and participation in social and economic activities can be linked to organisations that facilitate collective action and cooperation for mutual benefits (Cleaver, 2005; Nombo, 2007). Among these, women's social and economic groups (henceforth WSEGs) are common institutions in Tanzania (Nombo, 2007; Msonganzila, 2013). Their emergence dates from the 1970s to 1990s and is linked to the

Women in Development, Women and Development and Gender and Development approaches that aimed at integrating women into development (Parpart et al., 2000). In Tanzania, the government recognises these groups and supports them (cf. JMT, 2000, 2007; ILO, 2008).

We found that only 34 percent of the respondents were aware of the existence of such groups in the study area. There were two types of groups: gender-neutral and women-only groups. Men were members of the gender-neutral groups such as SACCOS¹, FINCA² and power tillers groups (only in Berege village). Women were members of gender-neutral groups and women's only groups, including burial and festival groups, church-based groups, and groups for income generating activities (IGAs) in poultry, goat and bee keeping. The groups combine formal and informal modes of operation. All groups have bylaws that stipulate their members' responsibilities, such as paying the required fees and attending meetings, and offer services that comprise four major categories: microfinance, moral support, skills training (in IGAs), and help with farm implements. There were significant ($p=0.000$) more members of groups in Mpwapwa than in Kondo. Burial and festival groups, SACCOS, FINCA and IGAs attracted most members.

Women, both members and non-members of Women Social and Economic Groups (WSEGs), have used these groups to convey their dissatisfaction about the water services and lobby for better ones, and to convince fellow women to contest for leadership positions in and outside their village and campaign for them. Statements from interviews and FGDs support the role played by WSEGs as a platform for advocacy of good leadership and water services that are responsive to women's needs. A women's group leader in Lupeta village said: "My fellow women in our poultry keeping group appointed me to communicate with the village leadership on the difficulties that women experience from non-functional distribution points. These women said I have the calibre to speak up and be listened to". The qualities of the WSEGs' leaders were linked to their ability to break cultural barriers and report women's concerns, including being approachable and knowledgeable, having exposure and experience, being reasonable and mature, having convincing power and confidence, and being respected by the community. In the women's FGD in Kidoka village it transpired that women indeed discuss their concerns about desired water services in the groups. In Seluka village there were neither gender-neutral groups nor WSEGs. There, a male village leader said: "[i]n our village it is very challenging to mobilise people to restore our water project, because we do not have any social and economic groups which could be an entry point as I have experienced in other villages I worked previously". Clearly, WSEGs have the potential to be a vehicle towards improved public water services (see also Nicol, 2000; Vijayanthi, 2002; UNEP, nd).

What supports and hinders women in their quest to become leaders

In this section we present examples of how women go about and perform in community leadership in practice. The following three cases reveal the multiple intersections between women's involvement in public leadership and gender relations in the arenas of household and community.

Case 1: Mama AB³ attained primary education, is married and has five grown-up children and several grandchildren. For over two decades she has been involved in leadership roles in different capacities and institutions, including secretary of the women's wing in the ruling political party and member of the village government. She is a facilitator on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS in and outside her village. She is a member of SACCOS and a leader in two different WSEGs. She links her capacity to fulfil leadership duties with learning from mistakes and the challenges she experienced as a person. She

¹ Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations

² Foundation for International Community Assistance

³ The letters AB, CD, and EF are pseudonyms to protect identity of these women.

manages to balance her domestic and public responsibilities because she is fully aware of what is expected from her and likes her positions in and outside the household. She warns that 'bad' practices such as staying in unknown places when travelling as a public figure can cause trouble, emphasising that married women have to be open about their whereabouts and the purpose of the trip to their husband and the unmarried women to their family, adding that in case of false accusations 'good' communication with the family helps. Mama AB said that questionable behaviour of women leaders triggers wrong perceptions in the society, such as associating those women with extra-marital affairs and domineering attitudes. She added that any woman in leadership needs to be straightforward, confident, always convincing, and not commanding those she leads. She said that when she started to hold leadership positions in her 30s, it was more challenging than now in her late 50s. She attributed her success to fulfilling her domestic responsibilities first and then work for community, insisting that hard work, confidence, and good moral values are her charms to public acceptance and respect.

Case 2: Mama CD is in her early 40s. She is married and has two children; a teenager and a toddler. She attended several training and study tours in her village and in other parts of Tanzania. Since the early 2000s, mama CD has been involved in several awareness creation campaigns on public health, child nutrition and vaccination, and she is leading the poultry and bee keeping groups in her village. She revealed that her engagement in community work has made her a public figure in her village. However, mama CD has been confronted with criticism and negative comments on her involvement in public work. Some fellow villagers even warned her husband not to tolerate her becoming too much of a public figure, because she could become a 'bad' wife who would cheat on him, and an irresponsible mother due to the demanding leadership roles. In spite of all this, her husband supports her. Sometimes her mother in-law looks after the children in her absence. Mama CD mentioned that her husband was aware of her public and leadership engagements before they got married and had accepted it. She ended the interview by insisting that good planning is a key for a woman leader to fulfil her primary responsibilities at her home and her community obligations.

Case 3: Mama EF is in her mid-50s. She is married and has four children and three grandchildren. She has primary education and moved into the village when she married. In the conversations with her she struck us as well informed and courageous. She has questioned village leadership on the poor performance of the water project. Mama EF wanted to become a member of the VWC but she was not elected despite her name being proposed, because some village leaders and 'influential' men secretly campaigned against her. She said that her husband and family have no problem with her contesting for leadership positions but it is the prevailing patriarchal system that causes community members to oppose bold women like her to become leaders.

Case 1 specifically highlights that individual character and experience, 'good' manners and relations with the family are important attributes for women to access and excel in public leadership. 'Bad' family relationships can be a factor in women's withdrawal from local management and politics (cf. Tripp, 1999). Also Case 2 demonstrates the importance of family support, especially the role of a supportive husband. Case 3 reveals that even with family support, it is hard for women to become leaders in a patriarchal context. This case underscores the point made by Rao and Kelleher (2005) that for gender mainstreaming interventions to succeed, efforts need to be directed at both formal and informal structures.

The cases depict positive and negative factors. They show that against all odds women venture into local governance and politics, capitalising on family support and personal attributes like knowledge and determination. These women also put in an extra effort by performing their leadership roles only after having taken care of their traditional domestic duties. At the same time, the cases reveal sceptical community perceptions on leadership by women of which the bottom line is that public leadership is not an ideal thing for 'good' and responsible women. The cases make clear that women who are engaged in local management and politics are exposed to unfair criticism and humiliating stereotypical assumptions. Even when these stereotypes do not reflect the reality, they are constantly reproduced

and frustrate the women's quest for voice in public decision-making spaces. Apparently, the situation has not changed much since the 1990s when studies on women's political participation established that prohibitive cultural attitudes and perceptions such as being thought of as 'loose women' or 'unfit mothers' (Tripp, 1999: 16-17) and being falsely accused of having extramarital affairs (Andersen, 1992), were suppressing the participation of women in public leadership.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our results imply that the creation of the formal opportunities to involve women in the local decision-making structures on domestic water does not guarantee women's participation and gender-responsive services. Whether women can make use of these opportunities largely depends on an individual woman's agency and the personal and social costs. It also depends on the power relations between the woman and her husband (head of her household) and on the husband's attitude (see Case 2) whether a woman will accept and perform leadership roles (cf. Kabeer, 2005). The woman in Potea village who withdrew from the VWC because her husband disapproved of her being involved in community leadership, made this choice to save her marriage and family. The norms and values underpinning intra-household relationships shape the negotiations between men and women that determine women's involvement in community roles (Moser, 1989; Kabeer, 1994; Agarwal, 1994, 1997).

This being the general picture, the results also uncover the layered and contextual nature of the interfaces between formal and informal structures. Firstly, more specific norms may provide some women with a better bargaining position than others. We could observe that for older women and widows the gender norms were less restrictive. A study in India also found that mainly elderly women were involved in community leadership (Singh, 2008). Such gender intersectionalities are embedded in traditional frameworks and influence leadership criteria and representation of women (Agarwal, 2001).

Secondly, the compliance of women's traditional gender roles with the type of public function makes a difference, because – as the literature shows – the reasons for women being accepted or not in certain public functions are ingrained in the local circumscriptions of women's gender roles (Kabeer, 1994; van Koppen, 2001; Cleaver and Hamada, 2010). Harvey and Reed (2004: 89) observed that "women are often concerned about the operation of their water supply and are motivated to do something about it because it directly affects them". While this may be the case, the types of water governance activities women engage show gender-specific patterns. A Nepalese study found that women did not have financial and managerial roles in local water governance structures but were highly involved in cleaning around tap-stands (Bhandari and Grant, 2009). Various studies, including ours, found that men assume responsibility for the maintenance of wells, tanks, ponds, or storage reservoirs (e.g. van Koppen, 2001; Harvey and Reed, 2004; Bhandari and Grant, 2009). Singh (2008: 937) concluded that "maintenance and management of water sources is still seen as the men's arena of work". Both men and women are VWC members, but women's membership was specifically explained by their willingness to volunteer and their being committed and patient, echoing the argument of Goetz (2007: 89, 95) that "women are nurturers, family managers (...) and more trustworthy and public-spirited than men". In our study, women's involvement in the social welfare committee reflects this continuity between women's gender roles from the private arena to the public sphere. It also shows that villagers and their leaders recognise complementarity among men and women. Thus, positions held by women and the types of committee of which they are a member signify a tendency of reproducing women's 'traditional' gender roles. The excuse or alibi of women's demanding domestic duties for women not to aspire or be admitted to a position in the public domain is example of the same mechanism.

If traditional gender roles are endlessly reproduced, nothing will change. However, according to Giddens' structuration principle (1984), individual agency and structures may interact in such a way that change in the one may lead to change in the other. Indeed, as the literature shows, opportunity costs,

hierarchy, status and perceptions on socially appropriate behaviour especially in public spaces shape the participation of men and women in community governance (Cleaver, 1998; Agarwal, 2001; Hemson, 2002; Kabeer, 2005; Cleaver and Hamada, 2010). Additionally, patriarchal culture system impedes women's agency in participating in and speaking up in meetings and other public domains (Hicks, 2011; Todes et al., 2010). For the women in our study, being talkative in public could damage their reputation. However, attending meetings such as the village assembly meetings is an important practice, even though women themselves may not always see it this way. It is important because, although women may at first only exercise their agency by attending, this 'passive' participation can pave the way to 'active' participation in the village's decision making (cf. Agarwal, 2010). Men and women who attend public meetings get exposed to the format of such meetings. For women, this exposure may help them to speak up and express their views in public and to devise tactics to get their views across in decision making on water services that meet their practical gender needs.

Another venue that facilitates structural change through women's agency is membership of women social and economic groups (WSEGs). These enable women members to gain experience. As Jones (2011) noted, local women's groups are hybrid in the sense that they combine 'invited' and 'created' space. They also enhance their members' capacity to handle money from contributions. Women's participation in VWCs can be regarded as policy-induced 'invited' space, while in WSEGs is more as 'created' space. The leaders and members of the WSEGs in our study know how bylaws work and have acquired the skills to manage monetary contributions, which experience they can share with the VWCs. In the literature on gender, development and social capital, WSEGs are considered in the following ways: (i) as alternative ways to address women's practical and strategic needs that are inappropriately addressed due to women's exclusion in development trajectories (Kabeer, 1994; Parpart et al., 2000; Msonganzila, 2013); (ii) as spaces in which women can collectively participate in political representation and local decision making (Cleaver, 2005); and (iii) as platforms to articulate their needs, mobilising and lobbying for improved public services (Vijayanthi, 2002; UNEP, nd). WSEGs have enlarged women's exposure to external sources of knowledge and information and have increased their awareness of opportunities in and outside their villages. Studies in India and Tanzania established that WSEGs have improved women's bargaining power and negotiation and leadership skills (Vijayanthi, 2002; Nombo, 2007; Msonganzila, 2013). Therefore, the argument is that gaining experience and public exposure through WSEGs may help women to participate more effectively and have a stronger voice in VWCs.

On the one hand our findings on women's participation in local water governance structures do not seem to deviate much from the picture found in the literature. Other studies in Africa have established that, for example, women were simply described as "committee members" (Harvey and Reed, 2004: 88) and occupied "secondary" and "supportive" positions in the committees (Hemson, 2002: 27). Descriptions like these substantiate Hicks' argument (2011) that women's involvement in local governance follows their traditional roles. As Cleaver (1998: 354) stated, "appointing women to committees may just be reinforcing their role as 'housekeepers' of the water sources rather than enhancing their decision-making capacities". We have also shown that women still face many obstacles when they want to exercise their agency in leadership and decision making in the public sphere and that these obstacles are embedded in resilient patriarchal norms and values about 'women's place'.

On the other hand, however, our research reveals a layered picture in which entry points for change can be identified. Since social-cultural institutions and practices in which gender is embedded vary across time and space, as the three women's cases show, paying attention to the local context in the provision and management of the water services is vital. Thus, policy makers and practitioners need to explicitly take into account the local context in which men and women operate and how the formal and informal function in a particular setting. They should investigate how policies do support or challenge the existing structures, instead of introducing a new approach that may be technically correct but is culturally inappropriate. The VWC quota system not only needs monitoring but could be extended to also include the leadership positions, so that women are not just 'committee members' (cf. Harvey and

Reed, 2004). That could make a difference for enabling these women to address local women's domestic water needs.

Thus, having women in the VWC, VC and committees might function as an engine that propels change but does not guarantee that women's strategic gender needs are met. Based on the Rao and Kelleher (2005) model, for gender integration in the public water service to become evident it requires changes at individual, household, community and state levels and in the formal and informal structures. In line with the structuration principle (Giddens, 1984), Kabeer (2005) noted that changes in one dimension can lead to changes in another. We identified three points from which change could emanate. Role models of accepted and successful women leaders (and their husbands if supportive) are the first one. It is high time to learn from women who have succeeded in bridging the gender gap between household and community decision making. The second point is that women's passive participation in decision-making spaces by attending meetings provides them with the exposure that they could use for more active participation. The third is the potential of local WSEGs. These groups embody women's expression of agency and contribute to their public participation skills which can be used in water services governance. Progressively, the three mechanisms can kindle changes on gender relations and roles within the household and in the community.

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