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AN INVESTIGATION OF GENDER DIMENSIONS IN WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION AND HYGIENE PROGRAMMES: A CASE OF MSTHAZO WARD 6, GWANDA

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Sustainable water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming requires the integration of gender dimension at all levels and for all water activities from policies to projects yet, too often, under-represented users particularly women. The main users and managers of water-excluded from decision making. One can simply argue that the exclusion of women has made WASH management systems less responsive to demand of water, sanitation and hygiene services. In development discourse it is agreed that use, access and control over natural resources such as land and water, and tasks, means and responsibilities are highly gender-specific. Patriarchal norms, community systems and values influence gender dimension in any development work. Various approaches have therefore been implemented by governments, donor agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations to promote people centered development through gender sensitive programming. It is against this background that an investigation of gender dimension in water supply, sanitation and hygiene programmes was undertaken in ward 6 of Gwanda district, located in the semi-arid, agro ecological region five of Zimbabwe. Specific objectives of the study were, to examine the gender dimensions witnessed in rural WASH, to assess the level at which women and men, boys and girls participate in WASH, to look at how gender perceptions influence the control over and access to local water supply systems, to explore the impact of unequal treatment of men, women, boys and girls towards WASH projects and to look at how gender mainstreaming has been tailored and incorporated in WASH. The study employed a case study design, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods made up of Statistical Package for Social Science(PSPP) was used for analyzing quantitative data, Microsoft Excel was then used to modify imported results from SPSS for improved graphical displays and qualitative data was analyzed using thematic approach. The study found out that WASH is predominantly seen as women’s domain as men prefer income earnings projects. Societal norms and values greatly shape the differing roles of men and women in WASH initiatives. The study concluded that despite the major role played by women as both laborers and managers of WASH systems, decision making platforms still remain at the realm of men.