

Professional Women and Water Management: Case Study from Morocco

A Water Forum Contribution

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Abstract: *Globally, the issue of water management and women has thus far been almost exclusively focused on women responsible for the provision and management of water at the household and community levels. Their presence and contributions at the managerial and decision-making levels have received little attention in the past. The present paper focuses on the role women play, and can play, in the planning, management, and operation of water resources systems in Morocco. Based on this analysis, it appears to be a matter of education, training, personal choice, and time before more women will work professionally in the water-related institutions in Morocco, and also obtain more positions at the higher levels.*

Keywords: *Water management, women, Morocco, education, training.*

Introduction

Morocco has a surface area of 447,000 km², a population of 28 million in 1999, and an average population growth rate of 1.8 percent annually over the period 1990 to 1999. In 1999, Morocco had a gross national product (GNP) of US\$33.8 billion. In 1980, 41 percent of the total population of the country was urban, which increased to 55 percent by 1999. In 1998, the adult literacy rate (measured as percentage of people 15 years of age and above) was estimated at 60 percent for men and 34 percent for women. The female labor force, in percentage terms, has increased very little during the last decade: from 34 percent in 1980 to 35 percent in 1999. The access to clean water increased from 32 percent of the total population between 1982 and 1985, to 52 percent by 1990 to 1996. However, access to sanitation decreased from 50 percent between 1982 and 1985 to 40 percent between 1990 and 1996 for the country as a whole (World Bank, 2000).

In 1995, the Moroccan Government emphasized in its National Environmental Strategy that the priorities in terms of environmental management would be on water, air, solid waste, and soil-related issues. In terms of water management, the lack of industrial and domestic wastewater treatment facilities represent a serious threat to the qualities of the water sources in the country, and thus the health of the population and ecosystems. Approximately, only 5 percent of all the urban wastewater produced is properly treated. The current municipal wastewater market is estimated at

US\$5 billion. In 1995, the World Bank carried out an evaluation of selected areas of the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries in terms of environmental deterioration. The case of Sebou River Basin in Morocco was noted as an example of an area facing severe water quality degradation problems. Another example given was Casablanca, which was considered to be an “urban hot spot” due to the wastewater discharges from industrial sources. It was estimated that in the area south of this city, industries discharge up to 80,000 tons of oxidable material into the rivers (World Bank, 1995).

Morocco faces a serious challenge in terms of water resources management over the near-and medium-terms, both in terms of quantity and quality. Considering the importance of water to the economy and social and environmental conditions of the country, it is absolutely critical that its water resources be managed efficiently and equitably for both the current and the future generations. In terms of qualified professional human resources, women can, and should, play an important role in this management process in the future.

In order to learn what role women professionals working in the water sector play, and can play, in the planning and management of water resources in Morocco, a study was carried out in November 2001. Interviews were conducted with senior level staff members of the major water-related institutions in Morocco (public and private sector, universities and NGOs) in the cities of Rabat, Marrakech, and Casablanca. The institutions include the

National Office for Drinking Water (ONEP), Laboratoire Public d'Essais et d'Etudes, General Directorate of Hydraulics of Ministry of Equipment, Rural Engineering Administration of Ministry of Agriculture, Epidemiology and Diseases Control Directorate of Ministry of Public Health, Water and Sanitation Directorate of Ministry of Interior, Hassania School of Public Works, Faculty Semlalia of Sciences, Zakoura Educational Foundation, Lyonnaise des Eaux of Casablanca (LYDEC), and Regie Autonome Intercommunale de Distribution d'Eau et d'Electricite (Radeema).

The interviews were conducted on an individual and a group basis and included all the Heads of Department of all the institutions mentioned above, as well as approximately 70 to 90 percent of all women staff at the technical level working in each institution.

It should be noted that the focus of this paper is not intended to be on gender issues. As important as that topic may be, the discussions presented herewith include statistical data on women and men working at the different levels in the various water-related institutions, perceptions of the importance of professional women working in the water sector, and how their participation could be improved not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms.

Participation of Women at Professional Level: Facts

The following is a brief description of the present situation in terms of participation of women at decision-making levels in different water institutions in Morocco.

National Office for Drinking Water (ONEP)

The main activities of the National Office for Drinking Water (ONEP, *Office National de l'Eau Potable*) are planning and production of water resources. ONEP also ensures distribution of water in urban areas and in some rural municipalities. It also plans, builds, and operates the facilities for treatment and transport of water from the primary sources, like reservoirs, and it has recently been given the responsibility for wastewater management.

In terms of personnel, ONEP has a total staff of 6,505: 1,643 work in the central directorates, while the balance of 4,862 work in the regional directorates. Out of this total staff of 6,505, 12 percent are women (769) and 88 percent are men (5736). Generally speaking, the percentage of women at the working level is less than the number of women working at senior and middle level positions. The reason for this anomaly is that at the working level, most activities focus on personnel like guards, attendants for pumping stations, drivers, maintenance and night shifts workers, etc. Hence, the majority of the staff at the working level is male (see Figure 1).

Overall, the ONEP professionals interviewed pointed out that even though more women are becoming educated in Morocco, their number is generally still significantly less

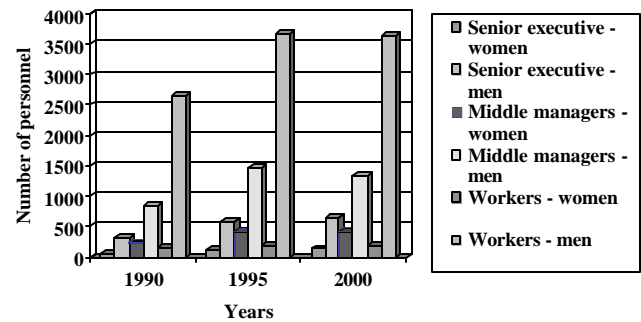


Figure 1. Personnel Working at ONEP

than men at the professional level, and they are thus a minority at the senior levels of different institutions. For example, when the study was undertaken, there was only one woman Deputy Director General, out of seven similar positions in ONEP. There were expectations that once ONEP was restructured, more women may be appointed to decision-making positions. However, it was recognized that the highest positions should be given to those professionals who have considerable experience, knowledge, and management skills. Not surprisingly this goes hand-in-hand with the number of years people have worked at the institutions concerned. The general feeling was that if more and more women join ONEP as professional staff, more of them would be selected for senior positions later.

Ministry of Equipment, General Directorate of Hydraulics (GDH)

The GDH is part of the Ministry of Public Works. It is responsible for water supply at the basin level and for the use, exploitation, and research of water resources. Some 2,981 people were working at GDH, 87 percent whom were men and 13 percent were women (Figure 2).

In 2001, there were three women, all of them engineers, working as Heads of Services in the areas of planning, water quality management, and safety of dams. The area of water quality happened to be the one where there was a majority of women working at the technical level, accounting for approximately 90 percent of the staff.

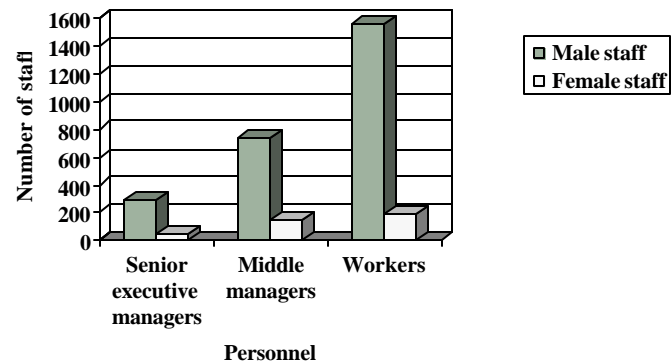


Figure 2. Personnel Working at GDH

Table 1. Senior Executives, Rural Engineering Administration, 2001

Area	AGR (CDRHD)	AGR (DAA)	AGR (Finance)	AGR (Computers)	AGR (Follow-up)	DAF	DAHA	DDGI	Total
Men	1	9	1	1	2	40	41	33	129
Women	1	3	0	1	1	5	7	20	38
Total	2	12	1	2	3	45	48	53	167

Note:

AGR – Administration du Genie Rural (Rural Engineering Administration); CDRHD – Cellule du Développement des Ressources Humaines et de la Documentation; DAA – Division des Affaires Administratives; DAF – Direction des Amenagements Fonciers; DAHA – Direction des Amenagements Hydro-Agricoles; DDGI – Direction du Développement et de la Gestion de l'Irrigation

Rural Engineering Administration, Ministry of Agriculture

The Rural Engineering Administration is responsible for the management of irrigation schemes. In 2001, the staff of the Rural Engineering Administration included 159 women and 269 men, making a total of 428 workers. The senior management staff included 38 women and 129 men, for a total of 167 (Table 1, Figure 3).

It was interesting to note that as of December 2001, no woman had applied for consideration to higher positions in this Administration, even though the positions are publicly announced to all the workers. Even though there was no apparent reason for this, it would be interesting to investigate this issue further.

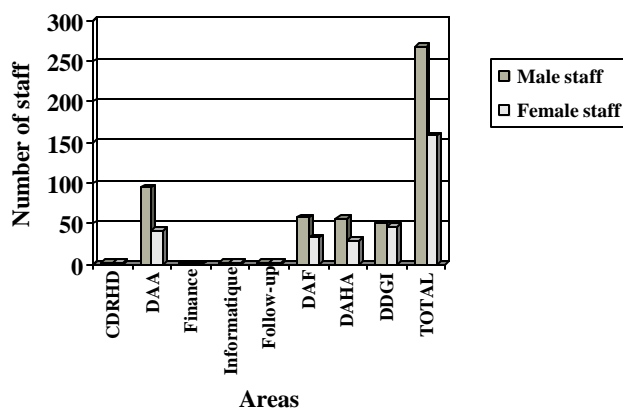


Figure 3. Personnel Working at Rural Engineering Administration

Epidemiology and Diseases Control Directorate, Ministry of Public Health

The Ministry of Public Health, along with ONEP, is responsible for quality control of drinking water in the urban and rural areas.

In 2001, the Directorate of Diseases Control had a professional staff of 130 persons, 40 percent of whom were women. The National Institute of Hygiene had a total staff of 240, of whom 120 were professionals. Approximately half of them were women, including the Director. The main concern in this Directorate was not related to gender, but to inefficient management. For ex-

ample, in many cases, professionals who are hired do not match the profiles needed to carry out the specific jobs successfully. For example, a medical doctor may be hired to carry out jobs for which a biological background is necessary. Consequently, the institution is not functioning smoothly. The overall feelings of the staff members interviewed were that it was not necessary that more women be recruited to work in the Ministry, but rather the best qualified staff for the specific jobs be hired, irrespective of their gender.

Water and Sanitation Directorate, Ministry of the Interior

The Ministry of the Interior coordinates and supervises the municipalities at the regional levels in terms of water distribution and wastewater collection and disposal. The tasks of this Directorate include issues related to health, drinking water, surveillance, sanitation, and training of personnel working in the municipalities. In 2001, the Directorate had 55 workers, 22 of which were women. The women were mainly responsible for supervision and training-related activities, which require both office and field work.

Lyonnaise des Eaux (LYDEC), Casablanca

The management of water supply, sanitation and electricity of the city of Casablanca has been delegated by the Moroccan Government to a private sector consortium, LYDEC, from 1997. During the last five years, LYDEC has invested more than 220 million euros, with nearly half of this amount earmarked for sanitation. Overall results indicate an improved better customer service, an increase of more than 20 percent in terms of the number of population served in water and electricity, and a saving of 24 million m³ of water per year.

In 2001, LYDEC had a total staff of 3,657, 13 percent of whom were women and 87 percent were men. There were 72 women and 312 men at senior levels. These are shown in Figure 4.

At LYDEC, women staff members interviewed felt that whereas there is no discrimination between men and women at the recruitment stage, men appear to be promoted faster than women. Regarding salaries, there is a fixed salary for each position. However, at higher levels,

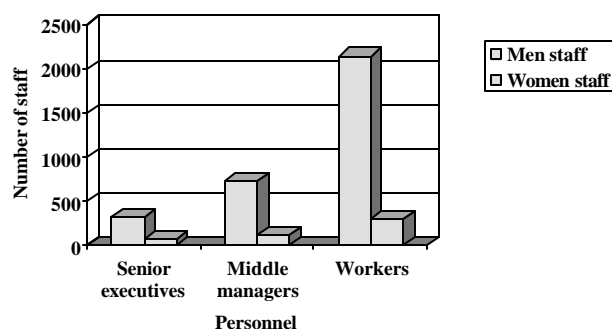


Figure 4. Personnel Working at Lyonnaise des Eaux

men receive additional economic compensation. The rationale is that men normally support the families economically, and thus this additional support is not meant for the men themselves, but for their families. The justification appears to be somewhat strange since senior women staff members also have families.

Régie Autonome de Distribution de L'eau et d'Electricité Locale (RADEEMA), Marrakech

RADEEMA is an autonomous organization based in Marrakech responsible for the provision of water, electricity, and sanitation services. It covers 15 regions containing approximately 850,000 people.

In terms of staff, while in 1979 there were no women executives in this institution, in 2001, there were 23 women section chiefs out of 121 positions.

It was mentioned that since more women are being educated and trained in the fields of interest of RADEEMA, it is expected that the number of women professionals would increase with time and that more women would reach decision-making positions.

During the interviews, it was clear that the young interviewees had very different opinions compared to the oldest generations. For example, while the oldest generations emphasized the importance of more women working at decision-making levels, the younger generations of professionals felt: "the challenges RADEEMA has to face in order to provide the several services to the population require qualified staff, and that recruiting women primarily because they are women would not bring any advantages to the organization. RADEEMA needs trained and committed personnel, with acceptable performances, and the best men and women should be given the best opportunities. Additionally, if there is to be a strong water sector in Morocco, equal attention should be paid to all workers, which should not be based on the consideration of gender. The success of the organizations will depend on the overall team, and not on specific individuals, or their genders."

Zakoura Educational Foundation, Casablanca

This Foundation operates in 30 regions in the country, and focuses primarily on micro-credits, non-formal education, adult literacy, and diverse support services to villages.

Regarding water management at the local level in rural and urban areas, the Zakoura Foundation has training courses on the use and the protection of water sources. Additionally, the awareness campaigns generally include in-house use and conservation of water. The programs include training of both men and women in terms of maintenance of water infrastructure; but only women when in-house consumption and hygiene issues are considered.

For the program on non-formal education, the Zakoura Foundation has a staff of 108 people in the field, and 13 supervisors. This program covers 13 regions, and 5,907 children in 108 schools have benefited from it. The adult literacy program covers six regions and 8,723 persons have benefited from it. Some 87 workers from Zakoura work in the field, as well as seven supervisors. The gender distribution of the Foundation is shown in Table 2.

All the supervisors are men. In general, for the programs for the rural areas, there are more men than women, while the situation is reverse for the urban programs. The micro-credits program has a majority of women staff. These programs are primarily in and around cities.

Table 2. Gender distribution of staff at Zakoura Foundation, 2001

Areas	Women	Men	Total
Micro credits	157	64	221
Education	31	95	126
Literacy of adults	81	16	97
Total	269	175	444

Hassania School of Public Works, Casablanca

This school was founded in 1971, and it is recognized as one of the two best schools in the country for engineering education. Nearly 3,200 students have graduated since its inception, and 70 percent of them are engineers. In terms of teaching staff, in 2001, there were 70 permanent professors (28 percent women and 72 percent men), and approximately 100 visiting professors. Nine out of 20 positions in the Administration at the senior level were occupied by women. These are in the areas of continuing education in management and in the technical areas of: computing, cooperation, promotion and development of the school, coordination of studies, administrative projects, human resources, and documentation.

The Director of Hassania School mentioned that there are not enough women studying engineering. This is a "pipe-line" problem. If the students, both men and women, do not study mathematics at the high school level, they cannot join the engineering schools. Hence, unless the high school students are encouraged to study mathematics, they cannot join the engineering schools, and the country will continue to face a general scarcity of engineers, both men and women. He noted that, in Morocco, there are only eight engineers for each 10,000 people, which means that there is a shortage of all types of engineers in the country,

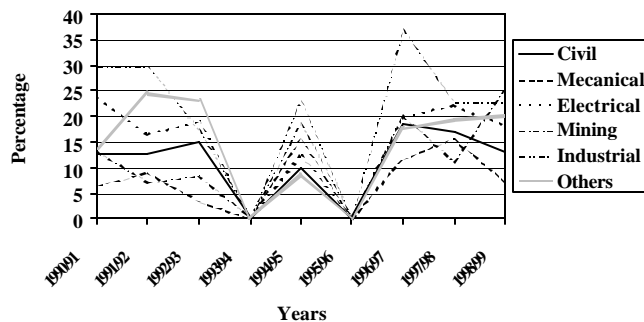


Figure 5. Female Students of Engineering at Hassania School 1990-1999

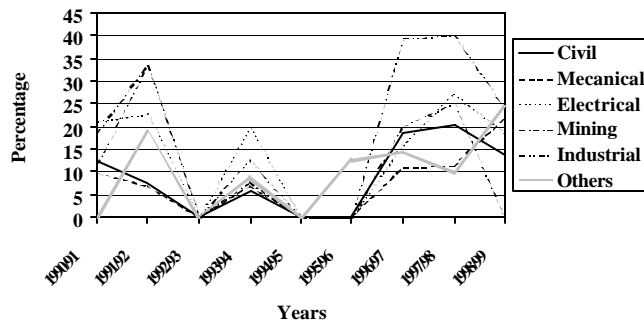


Figure 6. Graduated Female Students of Engineering at Hassania School 1990-1999

including water-related engineers. He stressed that Morocco requires skilled and trained professionals in all areas, including engineering for its future development.

As far as women are concerned, he felt that unless they are directly motivated to study mathematics at the high school level in larger numbers, their number will continue to be small in engineering schools. Furthermore, the overall percentages of men and women in engineering schools reflect more or less their composition at senior levels within the next two decades or so.

Figures 5 and 6 show the number of female students who have joined the Hassania School from 1971, and those who have graduated.

Faculty of Sciences, Cadi Ayyad University, Semlalila, Marrakesh

This Faculty was established in 1978. In 2001, there were 464 professors, 81.5 percent of whom were men and 18.5 percent were women. The total number of administrative and technical staff was 264, of which 53 percent were men, and 47 percent women.

The numbers of female students in this school have increased steadily in recent years, and hence, that it is likely that more women will join the universities in the future. In certain departments (for example biology), the numbers of male and female students are now nearly the same. In this department, all students (both men and women) have to attend field work as part of the curricula. As far as this faculty is concerned, the girls, as well as their parents, have had no objection to the field trips, or even to study abroad for prolonged periods.

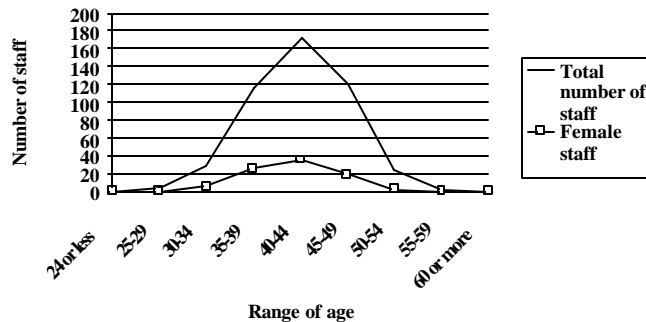


Figure 7. Faculty of Science, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakesh

In terms of academic staff, the number of women professors varies in the different departments, which the female professors themselves considered to be the natural result of what they chose to study earlier, and not due to faculty policies or discrimination practices. Figure 7 shows the percentage of female staff working in the Faculty of Sciences.

Based on the comments from the above two universities, if the number of women professionals in Morocco is to be increased in the water-related organizations, it is essential that girls are motivated and encouraged to study mathematics or science first, and then study water-related disciplines in the universities, especially civil engineering, which is still the predominant discipline for entering the water sector.

Participation of Women at Professional Level: Perceptions

Issues like lack of representation, quotas and field-work created much debate among the interviewees. It was concluded that these issues are often equally applicable to women as well as men. As will be explained in the next section, what often traditionally is considered to be "a gender problem" may have different roots.

Lack of representation in the water sector

In general, all the professionals (men and women) who were interviewed strongly opposed the hypothesis that fewer women than men can now be found at the professional and decision-making levels because of bias or discrimination against women. All women interviewed considered it totally unacceptable that women professionals should be hired because they are women, since this is unlikely to improve the quality of work of the organization or enhance its performance and credibility. When the idea of possible quotas for women was raised, there was very strong opposition from both men and women. The overwhelming view was that the institutions do not need a certain minimum number of men or women: what they need are qualified and experienced staff who can perform their tasks efficiently.

In fact, the vast majority of women felt offended with the idea of a quota at the professional level because a

career should only be based on knowledge and performance and should be independent from the gender component. They felt that they had been hired because they were competent, and the fact that they were women was not an important or relevant consideration. While quotas were rejected as a systematic way to enroll professional women in technical areas, they felt quotas could be considered as an alternative to introduce women students in education and training.

Women felt that networking is important, but that they do not have the same alternatives as men, at least socially speaking. Fortunately, new alternatives are now available for networking in terms of internet, and technology is now available which was not available to earlier generations. This means that women do not have to limit their networking to social activities which may not be feasible for them. Technology provides a new alternative.

The perspective of men and women were different when they were asked why there were so few women at senior levels. The answer of the men invariably was that earlier there was not even a single woman in any senior position, but now there are some, that this is the general trend, and that their number will increase steadily with time. In contrast, women felt that while their numbers at the senior levels have increased with time, and they expect that it will increase further. However, it is not axiomatic that this trend will continue in the future.

The main reason that was generally given as to why there are not more women at the decision-making levels was mainly "because there are not enough women candidates. Since on a percentage basis, there are fewer women than men, it is to be expected that less women will climb to the top. Exactly as not all men can reach the top, similarly not all women will go to the top. However, since the number of women joining the ministries is increasing, it is logical to expect that more women will reach higher positions in the future."

Finally, it was universally agreed that if the numbers of women professionals are to be increased in the several water-related organizations, it is essential that women be motivated to study mathematics or science first and then subsequently study the water-related disciplines in the universities. In the final analysis, it is a matter of choice for the women as to what they wish to study and what careers they wish to pursue. The same way that, in general, there are a high percentage of medical doctors who are women, and there are few men who become nurses, there seems to be few women who decide to be engineers. The choice of the careers does not seem to have any relation with the intellectual capacity of the women, but rather on their personal preferences and choices in terms of their future.

Office versus fieldwork

The issue of whether women professionals prefer to work in the offices, in contrast to the field, was raised

time and again during the interviews. It was often stated (both by males and females) that women prefer to carry out their responsibilities in the offices and not to go out to the field mainly due to "family responsibilities and family constraints," which do not allow them to be away from their homes for any prolonged period. It seems, however, that this societal perception is not always accurate, and thus is not applicable to many women professionals.

It is a fact that women who are married and have children have more responsibilities than those women and men who do not have such direct or indirect responsibilities. This second job (as the family responsibilities are often considered) limits the activities of women, mainly in terms of spending extra hours working at the offices. However, it does not necessarily prevent them from going ahead in their professional development and career, handle more responsibilities (even if strictly within the working hours) by becoming increasingly more efficient, and get promoted to senior levels.

Women professionals working at the organizations visited mentioned that the family responsibilities are not a constraint as long as they receive support from other members of their family. Nearly all the women interviewed stated that they do their best to organize their times and activities so that they can carry out their jobs efficiently, irrespective of whether these are in the offices or in the field.

A good example is the staff of the Rural Engineering Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture. A fundamental requirement of their jobs is fieldwork. This Administration confirmed that they have never encountered any problem whatsoever in terms of women refusing to work in the field. All staff members (men and women) fulfill their tasks according to their positions and the needs and requirements of the Administration.

In contrast, the Water Supply Generalisation Directorate, Rural Affairs Division, ONEP, noted that both women and men often refuse to work in the field. This could be due to the fact that the work is very hard in the rural areas, the climatic conditions are often very severe, living conditions leave much to be desired (basically in terms of housing and sanitary facilities in the field), daily subsistence allowance is not enough, and there are no additional economic benefits to compensate the hardships, since the travel allowances are similar for the staff when they travel to urban or rural areas. This lack of hardship allowance may explain why many men and women prefer to stay in the urban areas. The staff needs to be motivated, but the organization cannot provide the necessary incentives due to administrative requirements and constraints.

In this Directorate, many activities (like those related to sociological studies in rural areas) have been handed over to the private sector, where most of the workers are women, and who have no problem whatsoever to spend long time working in the field, even under very severe conditions.

Thus, working in the office or in the field is a matter

of personal choice, incentives available, and job requirements, and not a gender-related issue. Women do not necessarily refuse to carry out fieldwork because of family reasons. There are staff members who prefer working in the field, while others prefer to stay in the office, irrespective of their gender. This preference could be linked to work load, working conditions, economic incentives and other related factors, and not whether the worker is a man or a woman. The fact remains that many staff members prefer to work in the offices because fieldwork could be hard, conditions may not be the most convenient or because economic incentives available may not encourage such work.

It was unanimously accepted that the country would benefit immensely if more women entered the formal economy, since a higher percentage of educated population would change the social and economic fabric of the country. In addition, women who work outside of their homes are likely to bring back to their families new and more innovative ideas and practices in terms of knowledge, management, education, health, etc. While such developments are considered essential and desirable, there was an agreement from all men and women interviewed that the water institutions should hire the best professionals available and not women primarily because they are women. Only educated, trained and competent women and men should be hired, otherwise the institutions would deteriorate.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that for each one of the organizations in the country, women and men are the fundamental element in the use, management, and protection of water resources. Currently, the water sector is being increasingly exposed to the non-engineering professions, not only in Morocco but also in many other parts of the world. While engineers still constitute the main core of the water departments and ministries, the new demands of the water sector require professionals from different disciplines. The current and future challenges of water resources management require interdisciplinary groups of engineers, administrators, economists, ecologists, geographers, biologists, sociologists, environmental scientists, lawyers, etc. It is now accepted that solutions to the current and future water problems can only be achieved through a multidisciplinary team. The increasing need for diverse professions is highly likely to contribute to a more balanced gender distribution in the water institutions.

On the basis of the present study, it appears to be a matter of education, training and time before more women work in the water-related institutions, and get more positions at the higher levels. If at present, it is easy or not for male staff to have a good working relationship with a female boss, as time passes and more women reach higher positions, this situation will not only be accepted, but also

there will not be any distinction between a female or a male boss in terms of their acceptance by the staffs.

Women can constitute a significant percentage of water professionals in Morocco, provided they make the choice in terms of career selection. Also, if more women join the institutions as professional staff, then more women are likely to be selected for senior levels.

Irrespective of the very positive attitude of all the women professionals who were interviewed, it is very interesting to note that, while in the universities nearly 50 percent of the students are women, strikingly, nearly 80 percent of them *disappear* from the labor market later on for one reason or another. While this may be the result of cultural baggage from the past, it is also a fact that many times it depends on the choice of the women themselves, who decide not to join the labor force of the country for whatever reason.

Society is changing everywhere, and Morocco is not an exception. More women are joining sectors where there were only men before, and their contributions are being increasingly appreciated. Even though family constraints were mentioned, mainly by some men as a reason for women not to develop professionally, women repeatedly pointed out that they, and any women, can work hard and become professionally successful. If necessary, they can also study and get training abroad for prolonged periods, especially when they have support from members of their family. Thus, it appears that the development of women at the professional level, at least in Morocco, may often depend on the family and societal support they receive. In turn, the same society can benefit significantly by having more women educated and becoming productive members who can contribute very significantly to the socio-economic development of the country.

Finally, it is important to remember that if the main objective is to improve water resources management, experienced and trained professionals are needed. However, if increasing the number of women professionals is the objective, then there may be two alternatives. In the short-term, the most feasible alternative is to create interdisciplinary groups, which will not only improve water management practices, but also enable more women professionals to participate. In the long-term, the alternative is to encourage women to choose professions which are related to water management, and provide them with equal opportunities in terms of education, training, work, and professional fulfillment.

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