



Gender gaps in the Water-Energy-Food and Ecosystems Nexus

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Water, energy, food and ecosystems are four elements of paramount importance in achieving global human well-being leading to poverty reduction and sustainable social and economic development.

New global challenges brought about by increasing resource scarcity, climate change and environmental degradation are leading to an ever-increasing tightening of living conditions for men and women.

These difficulties exacerbate conflicts, damaging economic development and leading to the death and forced displacement of millions of people each year. Women are the most affected by all these dramatic situations because they exacerbate gender inequalities and reinforce gender gaps.

At the same time, it is widely recognized that there is a strong relationship between gender and sustainability in consumption, food production and ecosystem management.

A Water-Energy-Food and Ecosystems Nexus approach which considers gender issues as important elements of the socio-economic environment, is proposed here for a sustainable management of resources. Men and women are affected differently by the lack of resources and have different roles in using and managing them, so it is crucial to have a gender perspective and to investigate gender issues while transitioning to WEFE-Nexus..

The approach is based on the analysis of 1) factors that contribute to a situation of gender inequality and 2) gender issues that impair a holistic transition towards WEFE-Nexus., i.e., a situation in which men and women do not have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities regarding the use and management of WEFE resources.

A thorough understanding of gender issues at various levels requires gender-disaggregated data. Only with this kind of data can policy makers be aware of the existing situation and can design gender-sensitive policies and strategies. In addition, gender-specific datasets linked to WEFE-Nexus are important to understand what differences arise from gender-specific productive roles, different perspectives of resources, access, and decision-making mechanisms with respect to resource management and use.

The preliminary analysis developed on 4 Mediterranean countries, namely Italy, Spain, Egypt, and

Tunisia, in addition to a different availability of gender disaggregated data, reveals a significant gender gap in decision-making in the water, energy, food, and ecosystem sectors. All are dominated by men, especially in the most relevant job positions. This means that women are hardly involved in shaping policies or innovative resource management systems whose lack affects them most. The root cause of these gaps has been identified as a lack of awareness of the topic. Gender issues are considered irrelevant to the achievement of sustainable resource management. This often causes an underestimation of the effects that gender dynamics have on the achievement of this outcome.

Having scientists who are aware of gender issues in their field and able to understand and analyze them in different contexts is the first step to having research that makes a real contribution to achieving gender equality by providing gender-disaggregated data and gathering the perspectives of all relevant actors and actresses.