

# Understanding the constraints that lessened the involvement of women regarding integrated water management in the Mouhoun region of Burkina Faso

## Comprendre les contraintes qui ont affaibli l'implication des femmes dans la gestion intégrée de l'eau dans la région du Mouhoun au Burkina Faso

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**ABSTRACT.** In Burkina Faso, women represent 51.7% of the population and provide more than 60% of national agricultural production. Although women make an essential contribution, there is still a large gap between men and women when it comes to access to natural resources, such as land and water. The ability of a woman to participate in water management depends on the authority that she has over this resource in the society. This paper explores the constraints that weakened the involvement of women in watershed management in Burkina Faso, with regards to participation, representativeness, role and ability in relation to means of production. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with users (men and women); representatives from local water committees. The results show that women cannot make any decision regarding water resource management that affects them (men and women) differently. Although women are the primary stakeholders/end users of water resources, and are therefore key actors in terms of use, they are lagging behind in terms of their ability to make decisions regarding water management. This impacts the sustainability of water and the ecosystems as a whole.

**KEYWORDS.** Integrated water, participation, genre, sustainable.

### Introduction

In Burkina Faso, women represent 51.7% of the population and provide more than 60% of national agricultural production. This agricultural production uses more than 70% of the water for irrigation. Although women make an essential contribution to agricultural and rural operations as farmers, workers or entrepreneurs, there is still a large gap between men and women when it comes to access to natural resources, such as land, water, and their management. As the traditional bodies are opposed to any form of access by women to land, they are also opposed to the management of water resources by women, especially at the basin level. Despite the recognition of their role and the strategies of national authorities such as the national gender policy, the gender quota, the water agencies at the regional level and the local water committees at the municipal level, we observe a dysfunction between different structures responsible for water resources management. This is the case with the local water committees (CLE) under the management space of the Mouhoun Water Agency which is responsible for the inclusive and participatory management of water resources at the watershed level. They find it difficult to operate due to the lack of stakeholder engagement and the low involvement of the local population in decision-making, especially women.

It is important to note that women play the essential role in the supply, conservation and management of water such as providing, managing, and safeguarding water resources within the family and on the farms. However, so far, such role has not yet been fully played and most time, and the constraints related to such role has not been defined and documented the related constraints that have impact on their full involvement of the natural resource management.

This study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap and to contribute to the body of literature by investigating women's constraints toward watershed management in Burkina Faso and to examine the practice in the Mouhoun region. Hence this study would contribute to the discourse and add credence to reinforce the integration of gender in the initiatives of the state authorities. As such, the study addresses. The main objective here is to investigate the gender related constraints that weakened the involvement of women in watershed management in Burkina Faso through the lengths of the gender approach on participation, representativeness, role and capability in relation to means of production. Our work aims to answer the following main question: what are the constraints linked to the participation of women in the management of water resources in the Mouhoun watershed? What are the consequences of these constraints for a sustainable integrated water management? This study first of all look at the key concepts (gender, participation, means of production, social role). This is followed by the methods and the results based on tree key theme: women assigned roles, their level of enrolment and their perceptions.

## Literature review

The representativeness of women in water sector is still very low and the way in which water resources are managed affects women and men differently. As custodians of family health and hygiene and as key figures in the household, water and food supply, women are the primary stakeholders in household. In terms of water and sanitation they are the fore front actors in the communities. However, decisions and leadership over water supply and sanitation technologies, water point locations, operation and maintenance of water systems are mostly made by men (Zie Foundation, 2010). It is well known that a crucial element of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is that water users, rich and poor, men and women, can influence decisions that affect their daily lives. The international community as well as organizations for the advancement of women urge governments to act urgently for a systematic integration of gender. The organization of rural women has been around the issues of women's economic empowerment. The relationship between gender and development is an integral part of the public debate and an agenda in international and national discourses. A gender perspective aims to take into account the differential roles of men and women. It also seeks to ensure that all people have the same opportunities and access to the resources and services that they need to reduce their vulnerability, mitigate the effect. Gender inequality in access to factors of production including land, credit, agricultural inputs does not contribute to the empowerment of rural women. Verbunt (1996) will say that the man represents the whole family in the organization of the society. The Gender inequality is a phenomenon that penetrates the heart of our existence and our daily experience. It goes beyond a simple approach in terms of a development model. There is an authority also that depends on relationships, on the functions and roles in society and the way it assumes them, on the more or less institutionalized power shared and on the land heritage (Javeau, 1997). It is these elements that enable the individual to be influential and to participate in the management of natural resources and in decision-making. Woman's decision-making power is weakened in their absence and especially the absence of property rights. Javeau (1997) described it in terms of social force and importance of the groups to which she belongs. According to Quisumbing and Malauccio (2003), the assets to which women have access are of paramount importance in terms of empowerment and could therefore increase their bargaining power. As the FAO (2014) has suggested, in many African societies there is a strong correlation between the decision-making powers a person enjoys and the quantity and quality of land rights held by that person to manage the resources on it. On the other hand, in the south-west of Burkina Faso, access to land is open to all except women (Hagberg 2004), although they largely participate in their exploitation as part of the family (Houdeingar, 2009). In rural areas, land is a precious commodity and sometimes even the only commodity.

The watershed management space is an asset and a social field in which several players from different socio-professional categories come together, including fishermen, market gardeners, gold miners, breeders, processors and traders in search of well-being, MAHRH (2005). As such, women in all these professions which is related to water resources either directly or indirectly. It is important in

this literature review to cover some key concepts that will enable us to unpack categories of constraints in watershed management in the Mouhoun region.

## 1. The Integrated Water Resource Management approach

During the 1980s to 2000s, water became a subject of priority and political interest, both nationally and internationally. If in the 1980s, the debate focused on water and sanitation in the context of public health and its access in developing countries, from the 1990s, the debate spread to management and policy in a perspective of environmental protection, sustainable development and solidarity with future generations (IWCE 1992). In this context, demonstrations are being held around the world, reflecting the awareness of the international community of the need for a new approach to the environment and water resources. The participants at this conference called for the assessment, development and management of water resources to be approached from a new perspective. It was necessary to fully recognize the interdependence of all peoples and their place in the natural world, hence the concept of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), was considered as the solution to water problems. It offers a flexible framework with several entry points, like a puzzle where each action added is a further step towards the achievement of sustainable integrated management (Wenger & al, 2003) agreed that water resources should be managed holistically, coordinating and integrating all aspects and functions of water withdrawal, water monitoring and the provision of water-related services, so that those who depend on the resources benefit sustainably and equitably. The approach takes into consideration all the relevant factors and involving all the actors concerned with a view to equitable sharing and a balanced, ecologically rational and sustainable use of water resources,

The Integrated Water Resource Management aims to achieve the involvement of the various stakeholders, specifically women, in the decision-making process for the sustainable management of the resource. We are going to consider three main concepts: concept of participation, concept of means of production and concept of social roles that are used to understand the gender related constraints.

Variables	Dimensions	Indicators	Variables
<b>Participation</b>	Participation presence of women in executive offices Involvement in CLE activities Membership in office positions	Roles assigned to them in water management Tasks performed	Participation
<b>Representativity</b>	Presence of women Intellectual skills of women	Leadership/number of women in the water local committee Ability to draft documents, make decisions, be able to read or make a speech Ability to mobilize the population and to lead a meeting	Representativity

**Table 1.** indicators of women's participation in water management

## 1.1. The gender approach

Gender was first used in the 1970s by Anne Oakley to describe the characteristics of men and women determined by social factors, as opposed to those determined by sociological factors. According to Thiombiano (2014), gender is a development concept that refers not to women and men per se but to the relationships that exist between them. For Rouamba (2011, 126), the concept attempts to establish equity in terms of access to opportunities, participation in development and in the benefit of the advantages linked by all social categories of a given society. The gender approach makes it possible to understand the relationship of roles, rights and responsibilities and to determine the appropriate objectives, activities and methods according to the different social groups concerned.

*It is a strategy that aims to make the concerns and experiences of women as well as those of men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all spheres, so that men and women can benefit equally* (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1995, cited in GWA 2003, 21).

As a result, the gender approach does not focus on women as such but rather examining the relationships between women and men in all areas of life in order to help remove obstacles to development. In Burkina Faso, the concept is used in the National Gender Policy (PNG) and states that “gender should be analyzed from the perspective of inequalities and disparities between men and women, by examining the different social categories, in the goal of greater social justice and equitable development” (2009, 22). According to this definition, the representation, the conception of the female and the male as well as the values which are attached to them are social, historical, cultural and symbolic constructions. The roles of women and men can vary from culture and can change over time is looked at in the Mouhoun watershed management.

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## 1.2. The concept of participation

A strong participation of the populations in the definition of local problems, in the identification of solutions and their implementation helps to give more efficiency and sustainability to the resulting programs. According to Gueye (1999), participation should be conceived as “an active process in

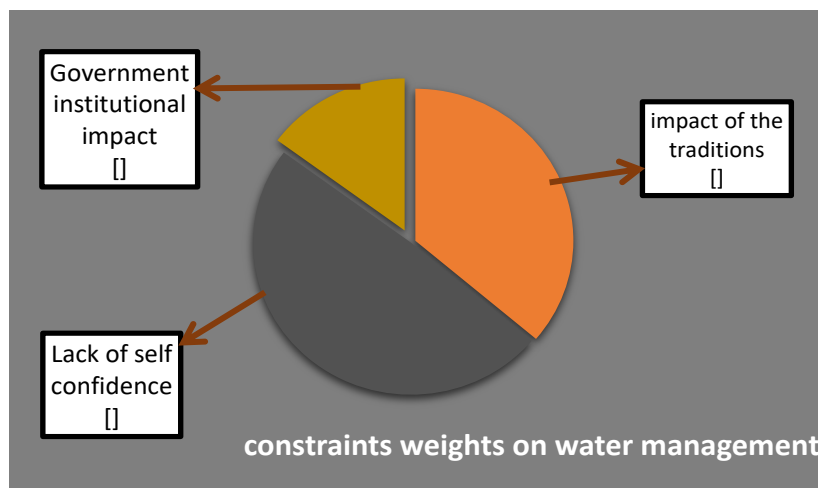
which the initiative is taken by the people, guided by their own thinking. Through participation, communities appropriate the forms and even the meanings of the integral process in which they are engaged. Consequently, participation implies: (a) taking part in decision-making on what needs to be done, (b) taking part in the implementation of programs and decisions by contributing with different resources or by managing certain activities or specific organizations, (c) share the benefits of the program, (d) take part in efforts to evaluate such programs. Such a process assumes that individuals, as well as local groups and communities, identify the type of society in which they live and the resources needed for them and the generation to come. This means that people are able to organize and influence change on the basis of their access to knowledge, political processes, and financial, social and natural resources. This is built upon the sustainable development concept where the social, the economy and the environment are brought together in an integrated way. Regarding our study in the water sector, gender is the way in which the burdens, benefits and responsibilities relating to the use, projects and services of water are shared between the men and women of different classes, age groups and socio-economic situations. Note that in the water sector, the determining element of gender is the active and appropriate involvement of women and men in the decision-making process.

### **1.3. The concept of means of production**

According to Alpe and Beitone (2007) in an economic conception, the means of production constitute a set of elements allowing to work. Among these elements, we have land, inputs and sometimes social strength (Alpe and Beitone, 2007). In Burkina Faso, as everywhere in the world, land is an asset. If, in cities, land provides housing plots, in rural areas it is the only means of production for households, to the point that legal measures have been taken to secure this precious asset. However, in undeveloped rural areas there is legal pluralism (customary law and modern law), with a preponderance of customs that are unfavorable to certain groups, in particular women. In developed rural areas, the specifications do not, for the most part, provide for the representation of women in the local land management. As a result, few women are the beneficiaries of plots. According to Yoda, *"besides women, other groups such as young people, pastoralists, migrants find it difficult to access and properly use land"* (2009, 3). In the rural world, access to land remain then an essential condition for agriculture; its mastery or control is synonymous with well-being, status and power (FAO, 2011). Access to land and decision-making around water issues are closely linked. Land management is the responsibility of the land chief in relation to the customary chief. For Thiombiano (2014), land is also a social asset. Its control can determine and increase the capacity of women to make decisions about community and family matters. These decisions include the choice of crops as well as expenses related to food, education and children's health.

As land is a capital element for the promotion of economic activities, particularly in rural areas, its equitable access is an essential condition for curbing the food crisis and boosting sustainable development (Yoda 2009, 6). In Burkina Faso, despite the adoption of policies and laws aimed at securing citizens' land rights, it must be recognized that certain groups of people, in particular women, young people, pastoralists and migrants, are disadvantaged in the process of access to land. The land issue is still managed according to traditions, in a precarious and negotiated social relationship that is very unfavorable to women and to other groups. Such realities would have some direct impact on women.





**Figure No. 3.** Constraint weights in relation to water management

#### 1.4. The concept of social roles

The words man and woman sometimes refers to "social roles and considerations relating to the identity of male and female. The roles of men and women are shaped by ideological, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural factors and they represent a determining element in the distribution of responsibilities and resources" (Quisumbing 1996, cited by FAO 2011, 3). This distribution, determined by social factors, can be modified by deliberate social actions, including public policies. Each society defines the roles of men and women, but these can vary widely across cultures and can change over time. Therefore, the role played by an individual is sometimes linked to his define status in society. The notions of role and status therefore remain closely linked. According to Ferréol (1996), the notion of status refers to all the attributes that allow the actor to play a social role on the one hand, and the position he/she has in the division of labor on the other. The role refers to a configuration of driving models associated with a position or function in a system. For Alpe and Beitone (2007), the notion of role also refers to a fairly common reality: every day, we are called upon to play a certain number of roles or stereotypical model of conduct which entails obligations. The function of roles is to normalize and stabilize relationships between people and to define a frame of reference that allows individuals to find their way around a situation. Mendras (2002) distinguishes two kinds of roles: assigned roles and acquired roles. According to him, a position (role) is assigned to the extent that you cannot escape it, where the position is imposed either by nature or by society while one can choose, acquire or even conquer position. Being a man or a woman is an assigned position or role that cannot be changed because it is not your choice to be a man or a woman. On the other hand, the professional role is acquired. Mendras (2002) mentions freedom as an essential element in the choice of profession. For him, the choice does not mean that there is total freedom and that one can choose between any profession. However, in some cases the role is imposed on you, in other cases it is acquired either freely or taking into account the situation in which one finds oneself to avoid role conflicts (ibid.). Following the same logic, Verbunt (1996) concludes that, in traditional societies, destiny, nature or the community designate each person's role and status in order to ensure great stability. And it is "the family order which fixes for each member his place within the family, the community and therefore fixes his relationship with others" (Verbunt 1996, 95). By social role, we mean the set of behaviors and norms that a person, as a social actor, acquires and understands as a result of his social status. This is therefore expected behavior depending on the social and cultural level.

Here we use the concept of role to describe the social position occupied by a woman within society. The word gender role, on the other hand, is used to refer to the attitudes, values and behavior that society assigns to men and women. Thus, the social role is the putting into practice a status accepted and fulfilled by the subject. This reality is what we are going to look into in the watershed management in the Mouhoun region.

## 2. Methodology

Knowledge of a behavior, a motivation or a representation is very key in this research which calls for qualitative research. Quivy and Campenhout (1995, 194) agrees “*unlike the questionnaire survey, the interview methods are characterized by direct contact between the researcher and his interlocutors and by a weak directivity of his part and [...] the interview is semi-structured in the sense that it is neither entirely open nor channeled by a large number of precise questions*” Given the information to be collected, we use interview guide for the interviews and focus groups discussions in addition to observation template. The target population is made up of: members of the executive board local committee, different water users, local elected representatives of the municipalities for watershed management, responsible for development projects intervening in the region/watershed area, civil society organizations, customary and religious authorities. Four (4) workshops was conducted with the above key actors for a total of 30 representatives. Twelve (12) focus groups discussions were also conducted with the local communities living around the watershed areas. and 25 individual interviews were conducted with key actors at village and district level.

As Blanchet and Gotman (2007, 96) underline, “*the thematic analysis shows the singularity of the discourse and cuts transversely one interview to another, [...]*”. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data because it is coherent with the implementation of explanatory models of gender related practices or representations. This allowed us to identify the converging and divergent elements in the different interviews. This technique allows us to get an idea of the trends in the results while highlighting their specificities.

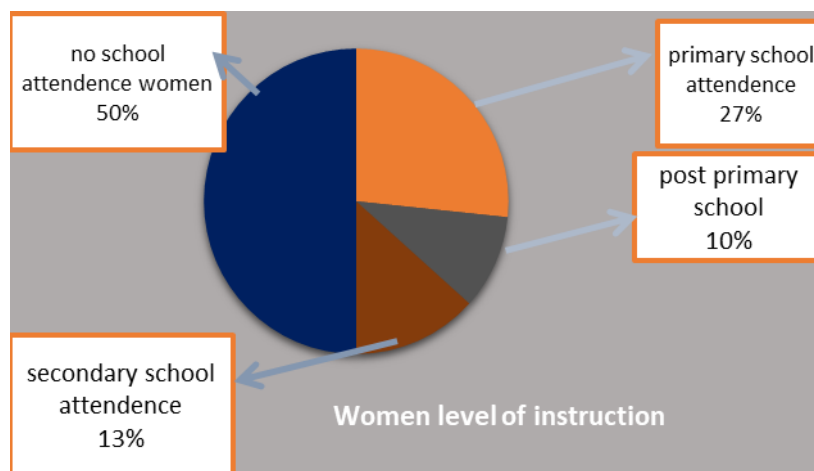
## 3. Results

### 3.1. Low involvement of women in water management in the family

The involvement of women in water management is a reflection of the structures put in place from the local level to the national level. Their role and assigned status keep them away from male activities characterized as productive. Through Figure 4, we can understand the degree of involvement of women in water management. Men and women have different roles and responsibilities within the household and in the community, which implies different practices and strategies. At household level the sexual division of labor is one of the general concepts to which ethnologists often refer. In fact, in Mouhoun region, men and women have their own activities. The role of each may vary and even reverse from one to another, but the division of labor remains. Collecting wood, water cooking etc. are some of the daily assigned work to women in many areas in Burkina Faso. In the Mouhoun watershed, space, women and men contribute in different and often unequal ways to the management of water and sanitation both in the household and in the community. The customary chief of one village in the Mouhoun region on the 10/02/20 states that: “*women take care of fetching the water necessary for the household and, to the extent that they ensure that the supply is sufficient*”. This is confirmed in the following words by one woman 7/02/20

*As a housewife, I used to wake up very early. That is, around 4:30 am, when I wake up, the first thing is to reassure myself that there is water for the toilet. If there's water, I wash myself first and start sweeping the yard. But, if there is no water, I must first get the water before coming back to clean the yard ... this has become our daily life.*

These statements shed light on women role in the community. This repetitive work has become a habit for all women. As a saying goes, behavior always produces actions. The repetition of this action establishes a habit which subsequently becomes second nature. Collecting water has become a job considered to be an integral part of a woman's life in Mouhoun communities.



**Figure No. 4.** Women's level of instruction

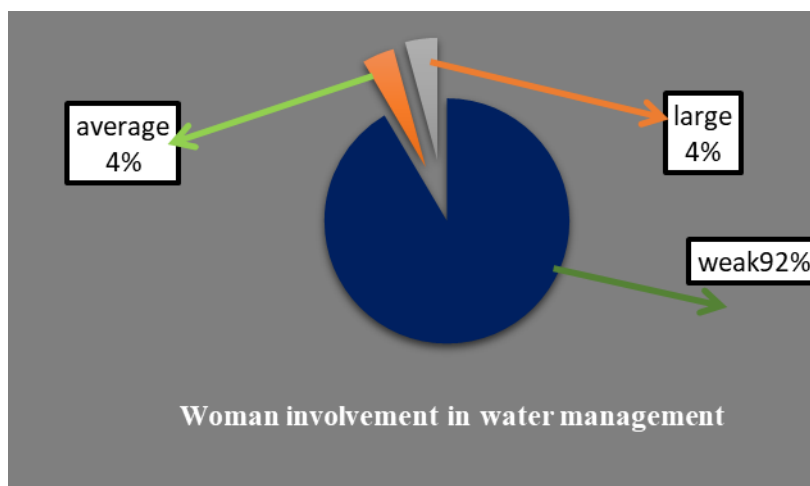
### 3.2. Women water management at community level

In relation to our model of analysis, the system in place always influences the role of women at the community level. According to the Nasso farmer, a village in the Mouhoun zone, women maintain community infrastructure. *"The hygiene of the various pumps is the responsibility of the women. There were management committees around these pumps, the post of hygienist fell to the woman. And when there is a community activity, we, women have an obligation to take over these tasks."* This role is an active cleaning role making sure the surrounding of the pump is very clean. This does not require leadership as it stands, but a cleaning work the same way women do in their respective families. Either at family level or community level women are lagging behind due to the predefined social roles that they are entitled to occupy.

### 3.3. Roles assigned to women in agricultural water

The roles assigned to women depend on the different activities carried out for water management. In the local water committee, the leaders do not allow women to access positions of responsibility in water management. According to official, river management is marked by significant conflicts between the various users. The representatives of the various actors around the river are all men and conflict management is sometimes very complicated for a woman. As a result they are considered as not being entitled to such position. In addition, the fact that the social construction defines their role and their identity, they usually integrate it into their daily life. This is the case in the Mouhoun region where women are in the second position. Our research shows the lack of self-confidence from women, the weight of tradition materialized by the exclusion of women in water management by the male counterpart and finally the weight of state institutions are key factors that influence the individual choices of women. Figure 2 illustrates the degree of influence of these factors. More than half of our participants think that the first obstacle in this lack of confidence is related to men/husbands who remind them about their given role within the community and traditions. This hinder woman involvement in watershed management. As quoted by the customary chief of the village of Nasso: *"memory is the basis of individual personality, just as tradition is the basis of collective personality"*. Through this it is understood that tradition is a unifying direction of society which refers firstly to an idea of position and to a movement in time. Even though legal texts promote equitable access to rural land regardless of ethnicity, sex, religion, nationality and political affiliation, this problem is still very real. The full participation of women in the management of agricultural water requires their access to land, but traditions, some customary leaders, families and husbands still deny them this right.





**Figure No 2.** Women's involvement in water management

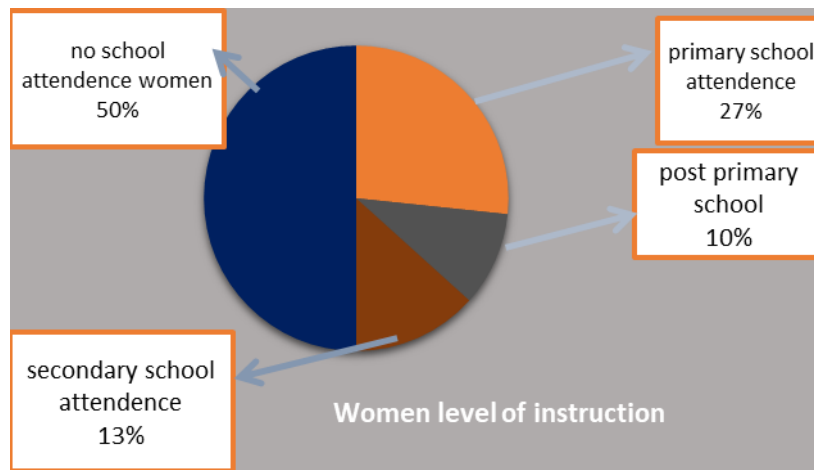
### 3.4. Women's lack of self-confidence

It must be recognized from Figure 3 that women have the ability to self-promote and be confident in themselves, but they don't. The majority of participants, including women, consider the inferiority complex as an obstacle to their involvement in water management and particularly in decision-making. This inferiority complex has its roots in the educational level of women. This is what Saussey explained through the figures of the empowerment of women. Their low level of education prevents them from participating in local water committee. Women usually refuse to take responsibility. So it seems that when women have the opportunity to take a leading role in water management, they lack self-confidence to take over the role. Some women recognize that they refuse to speak in public for fear of not being up to the task. These comments confirm their lack of self-confidence: "I am afraid of speaking in public". Figure 4 highlights the educational level of women which impact on this lack of confidence. The majority have received literacy training in the local language and therefore do not speak French. Also, those who have the courage to speak in public are sometimes discouraged by the attitudes of other women and some men. The following statement from one participant 5/3/2020 make this clear

*Some women say discouraging words to me. They qualify very few women leaders as rebels. Because, for them, the woman in the presence of the men should not speak, they should agree. Also, there are men who do not give importance to the word of the woman. Others say, I have one like you at home. Because of all these, women are reluctant when it comes to speaking in public or leading a local level water committee discussion.*

In the same perspective, another women's 20/03/20 explain the origin of women's lack of self-confidence.

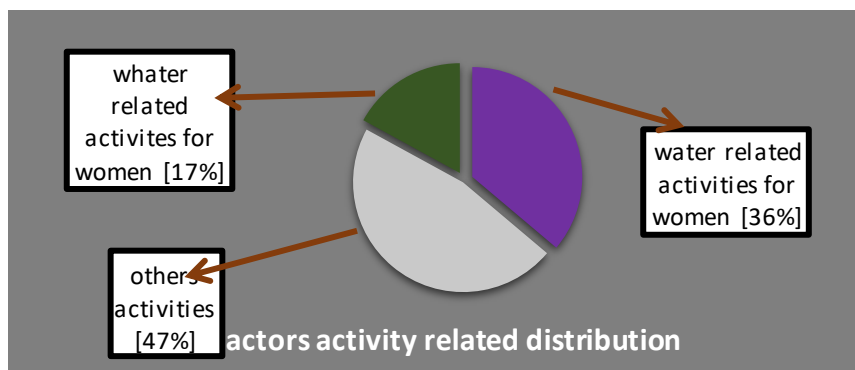
*Men see us as rebellious women. When we want to defend our ideas in public, especially in their presence, this sometimes creates conflicts. They think that in our homes, we have the same attitude with our husbands. These are discouraging behaviors. This is why young girls at the local level are not interested in public action. They are afraid of not having a husband because women who appear in public are frowned upon.*



**Figure No. 4.** Women's level of instruction

### 3.5. Willingness to change perception

It was very important to see the willingness for both men and women to change their way of looking at their predefine role in the community in terms of water management. 30% of women think that if they are being encouraged they are ready to take action and get involved into the water management. As such one of them confirm during a workshop 30/3/2020, *"We really want sometime to contribute and to talk if we are encouraged to. We want to be part and share our views in this water shed issues but men need to allow us and change the way they see us. The change need to be here (laugh) not from somewhere else"*. As such it is important to note that there is a strong willingness from some of our participants the remaining 70% feels that it is part of the nature and that they just have to accept it. In the Mouhoun region, men consider that tasks for watershed management are gendered already and that it belongs to women to position themselves if they want and can.



**Figure No. 1.** Gender-related activities to water

## 4. Discussion

Water allocation decisions can have a significant impact on the well-being of different users, food security and overall development of a community. Therefore, the effective participation of women in decision-making is one of the main strategies for improving their status in society. Not only would it make it possible to achieve equal opportunities for men and women in the exercise of power, but it would also contribute to changing collective perceptions of the role of women in society. It would also be a pledge of ownership and sustainability of decisions and collective projects, hence the importance of promoting, by all means, the equitable participation of men and women in decision-making and management of public affairs.

Water resources are common good. This collective heritage must be managed with the firm desire to preserve its integrity for future generations. The place that water occupies in the lives of populations is

in itself a motivating factor for real control of its management. Integrated management of water resources requires the establishment of a management body articulated between public actors, private actors and local communities, organized in watersheds and not according to administrative boundaries. Such an approach was recommended by the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin in January 1992. As a result, the Burkina Faso territory has been divided into hydrographic basins and sub-basins with a view to the management of its water resources. This research focused on two specific local management bodies. Integrated Water Resource Management requires a gender awareness. To develop the full and effective participation of women at all levels of decision-making, it is necessary to take into account the way in which different societies affect the specific social, economic and cultural roles of men and women.

## Conclusion

Our study aimed to contribute to the sustainable and balanced management of water resources in Burkina Faso through the analysis of the involvement of women in water management in Mouhoun region. To do this, it was a matter of analyzing the theoretical tools and mechanisms put in place for the involvement of women in water management and then examining the operating mode of the local water committee in order to understand the logic of intervention of women in sustainable management of water resources, particularly in the decision-making process. Finally, it was a question of showing the degree of involvement of women in water management in Mouhoun region.

A gender analytical approach has been a useful tool to understand the constraints that women face in the water management process. Women role is essential as the primary actors in taking care of the water. However, their limited access to natural resources (land, water), as well as to some decision-making regarding the use of these resources are key challenges. Understanding the socially determined roles of men and women implications is important for better management of these resources. In the light of these analyses, the main results show that women and men are generally responsible at household level for various tasks related to water, they have separate and generally inequitable access to water resources as well as to water authorities and decision-making. Given their low involvement in activities directly related to water and the role that society has assigned to them. In addition, women also occupy a less influential role in water management and specifically within the executive office of the local committee. The study also shed light on these obstacles that hinder the full involvement of women in water management and particularly in decision-making. It emerges that three major obstacles hinder the full involvement of women in the management of water, lack of self-esteem, the low level of education of women in the management area resulted in a lack of self-confidence and the existing assigned social position and role. These results are coherent with LE BOSSE, (1996) provided take into account, not only what is happening internally within a specific social group, but also consider social processes (attitudes and beliefs), objectives, and changes. The empowerment approach is therefore a process and an outcome validation through collective experience, knowledge and skills through social action (Gutierrez, 1994). In addition, and the work of Sandercock, L. et Forsyth, A., (1992) on gender in relation to planning practice

The results of our research challenge public decision-makers on the need to establish flexible mechanisms to facilitate the integration of women in the water sector. It is therefore necessary for the State and its technical partners to create a community dialogue with the customary authorities so that they reflect on the possibilities and the existing constraints by bringing everyone on board in a more participatory way. The involvement of women in water management and particularly in decision-making must go through their involvement in activities directly related to water. Beyond this involvement, they must be willing to improve their leadership and confidence in order to access positions of responsibility. It becomes important to better understand the capacity development from gender length.

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