

How women can become agents of change.

To become an agent of change in the sphere of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene it is urgently required that we consider water as an entry point of change.

So that is what VAM does, as a member of Women for Water Partnership. But considering is not enough. If women want to become successful as an agent of change, than NGO's have to think about an integrated approach: capacity building, education and business opportunities

Who are we and what do we do

The Dutch VAM foundation supports and promotes emancipation, gender equity and economic independence for women in particular.

VAM (Foundation for Women and Labour Market) promotes a methodology and concepts for vocational training of women.

The expertise and methods used, are widely recognized as one of the most successful in terms of women acquiring job qualifications and entering the labour market.

VAM is specialized in made-to-measure vocational training for (especially) women also in developing countries.

VAM is assisting in projects or monitoring projects in e.g. Mali, in Bandiagara, region Dogon.

VAM enables local women's groups to address priority challenges in their communities related to water and sustainable development. Women groups are coached and supported to manage and supervise their own projects.

Water, sanitation and hygiene as an entry point in Bandiagara

Mali is a very poor country, many women don't have any education, the economic, political and social factors influence communities and households.

VAM was asked by women groups in Bandiagara to think about the ways to realize poverty reduction and to sustain by realizing vocational training and education in Wash.

Also in Bandiagara and the villages around Bandiagara there is no sufficient access to (safe)water, the knowledge of sanitation and hygiene is bad. And it will not soon become better; the impact of climate change is related to water and as we know access to sufficient safe water is a key for the empowerment of women.

So we took, in cooperation with our partner in Bandiagara, water and sanitation as an entry point.

We decided to organize an integrated approach with primary objective: introducing eco-toilets, their use and application; ameliorating hygiene and saving water

How do we organize an integrated approach

Integration in the program of the vocational school for women in which Water, Sanitation and Hygiene education plays a central role. So we can make women aware of the importance of that. But also in combination with a business model. And....It had to be theoretical but also practical.

We decided to organize:

- a vocational training with aim to enter the labour market or to start their business
- acquiring knowledge of water sanitation and hygiene.
- and training entrepreneurs about their business opportunities

What did we organize?

a. vocational training: (theoretical and practical):

a training to construct eco-composting toilets, accessible for wheelchairs.

a novelty in Mali. The faeces and urine will be re-used on the farm of the vocational school, which gets support of VAM. The women will be trained as professional masons and plumbers to start their own business

The women who were selected to follow the vocational training on constructing were also obliged to follow the training on water, sanitation and hygiene. They got a role/task to inform other women and families about that subject.

b. a measure-made training on water, sanitation and hygiene

VAM made a measure made training in the area of the Dogon concerning water, sanitation and hygiene. The most relevant effects: limiting open defecation, using less water in the toilets, using urine for the agriculture, limiting the decline of groundwater and ending pollution.

c. Training in business opportunities, with the focus on small enterprises for women and how to re-use the faeces..This project creates opportunities for paid work

After finishing the construction of these toilets,(they will also function as a demo) the women will start their enterprise and we hope other people/ villages become interested.

This project will:

1. organize professionally trained women on different subjects
2. disseminate experience and knowledge to other women's organizations, local government and other schools

This integrated approach is unique, because

- These types of toilets are unknown in the area, especially this design for women and disabled people.
- The women will be trained as professional plumbers at the school and learn to start their enterprise.
- The setting of a vocational demonstration in a vocational school is also quite new.
- It is integrated with a training on water, sanitation and hygiene; the women, who constructed, will also be responsible for the training on hygiene/water/sanitation of other women and organizations
- The fact that the toilets are built by women themselves, which means that local capacity is built for and by women, makes this project stand out from others.

- Lastly, also the business concept/approach: the project aims to provide eco-composting toilet blocks; the faeces and urine will be-used on the school's farm.

The need in Bandiagara of local business is great. The women get the opportunity of starting a small enterprise; not only for constructing these eco-toilets and training other women but also to develop and sell a fertilizer for the agriculture. This fertilizer can become a development driver.

The advice of VAM is: if you want that women are successful as an agent of change, you have to think about an integrated approach: capacity building, education and business opportunities.

But that is not always easy in the project in Bandiagara.

*Some of the women lost their motivation in constructing. The women with less motivation are also the women who received many complains of their husbands/family; they complained about women do less work at home and the women could not work on their land enough and earned less from that. It seems it is very difficult to think on longer term, since after a year there is a possibility to earn more.

* Other women don't want to inform other families/women about Wash.

The women who followed the course concerning water, sanitation and hygiene were very positive about the course, they talked about the content with each other. But inform/educate other families is difficult for them; they were afraid of jealousy of other women because they have more information.

To solve the problem about the motivation of the women the school is organizing interactive workshops with little groups of families to inform and talk about the chances for the women to earn money in the future and that watsan is very important for the health of families and adaptation to climate impacts.

So we as NGO's have to realize that such a project has also many social and cultural factors and you have to take probably more attention to that factors, at the start of the project. But VAM makes sure that we don't stop the integrated approach; also we learn every day. We have to take more attention about the social, cultural and economic factors in a country where people try to survive.