

# Women and water at the forefront of development in Asia

By [Lean Alfred Santos](#) on 13 February 2014

Recommend 0

Share



*Bindu Lohani, vice president for knowledge management and sustainable development at the Asian Development Bank speaks during a workshop that highlights the importance of women and water in development at the bank's headquarters in Manila, Philippines. Photo by: ADB*

For development in Asia to be truly sustainable and gain greater momentum, issues like water management need more women participation, especially in the region's most impoverished nations.

Participants in a workshop held on Thursday at the [Asian Development Bank](#) highlighted the importance of the role of women in development efforts with a special focus on water management — considered a vital element in any area, including sanitation, agriculture and irrigation, to name a few.

The bank's vice president for knowledge management and sustainable development, Bindu Lohani, said water is generally considered the business of women, but women themselves are rarely involved in the business of water.

"We have not put women in the center of decision-making [in development efforts] that much, not just in the water sector," he said. "We have to empower them, not just educate them" in a continent where women and children in poor communities normally spend part of the day collecting water for their families instead of going to school.

## Challenges

Some of the challenges that continue to drag the empowerment of women in development and water management include lack of ownership, outdated policies and the adverse effects of climate change.

Aditi Raina of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy cited the domestic migration of men in several developing countries as one of the reasons women end up having to take care of the water.

This example was echoed by Fraser Sugden, a lead researcher at the International Water Management Institute who mentioned the case of Nepal, where migration of men have led to the feminization of agriculture — although there are still instances of women being shy in actively participating in the process due to cultural pressure.

That's why "policy has not caught up with the [feminization of agriculture]," Sugden noted.

## Moving forward

Despite the glaring challenges, there are several opportunities as the development community — particularly in the Asia-Pacific — moves forward, according to Jeremy Bird, director general of IWMI.

Bird listed the three "I's" that could drive change and decentralize decision-making involving women in pursuing global development efforts.

1. Information — provides evidence and data that can be consolidated to inform and influence decision-making and policy implementation that could significantly affect women, water management and development as a whole.

2. Incentives (and disincentives) — it's important to engage women in the process while making it clear the kind of incentives that they will get (or not get) in actively engaging in the process because whatever the repercussion, they will also be affected.
3. Investment — invest financially and technically in both infrastructure and institutional reforms that would enable women to contribute more in global development.

*Read more [development aid news](#) online, and [subscribe to The Development Newswire](#) to receive top international development headlines from the world's leading donors, news sources and opinion leaders — emailed to you FREE every business day.*