

Power Walk Activity

A tool adapted for the water sector

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December 2023

1. Introduction

Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) refers to the promotion of equal opportunities and rights for all individuals and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes and access to resources, services, and opportunities. This approach analyzes unequal power relations and inequalities different individuals experience based on their social identity, and actions that can be taken to address these inequities. A GESI approach is a process which requires changing systems of oppression and discrimination and challenging harmful norms (FHI360 n.d.; UN Women 2020).

In the water sector, a GESI approach is crucial because it addresses inequities faced by various groups, such as women, children, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, who often bear the brunt of water-related challenges. By integrating GESI considerations in the planning and decision-making of water resources, the water sector can improve water resources management and governance, thereby improving water access for all.

2. Activity overview

The 'Power Walk' is a group role-play activity that encourages reflection about power, privilege, and inequities in society. It helps participants identify marginalized groups by clearly showing the power structure of a community or society. The activity is a simulation of a community/society in which everyone starts off on equal footing but ends up in different places or circumstances based on their social position. The debriefing after the power walk activity allows for a

deeper conversation on existing disparities in society and how we might address these in our professional and personal lives.

This activity has been used in various training manuals to promote deeper conversations around power (BC 2017, 134–136; CRS 2021, 22; IDMC 2015; Plan UK 2015, 50–73; OHCHR 2014).

In this tool, we adapted this activity to explore the intersectionality of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within the context of the water sector.

2.1. Objectives

The 'Power Walk' promotes critical thinking on how different dimensions of identity (such as gender, age, income, and social status) as well as larger structural inequalities impact access to and benefits from, and the costs of managing water resources and services. The activity aims to create awareness of and initiate discussion on disparities that exist within the water sector and the need for more inclusive practices.

The objectives of this activity are as follows:

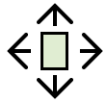
1. Explore the intersection between gender, social inclusion and access to water resources and services.
2. Foster a deeper understanding of how intersectionality influences individuals' experiences within the water sector.
3. Promote dialogue and reflection on the challenges faced by marginalized groups and the need for inclusive practices within the water sector.

This activity can be used during trainings, workshops, community awareness sessions or similar gatherings with relevant stakeholders from the water sector such as government officials, policymakers, academics, civil society, and community representatives. The activity can be tailored according to the audience and purpose of the gathering.

2.2. Materials/resources



Character cards (printed or handwritten): cut pieces of paper (can use index cards or sticky notes) with descriptions of each character are needed for the activity (see suggested characters list below). The character cards should be tailored to the country or region where the activity is taking place to make it as relevant as possible.



Open space: ensure there is an open space for participants to stand side-by-side in a line, and to walk forward and backward freely. The activity can take place indoors or outdoors.



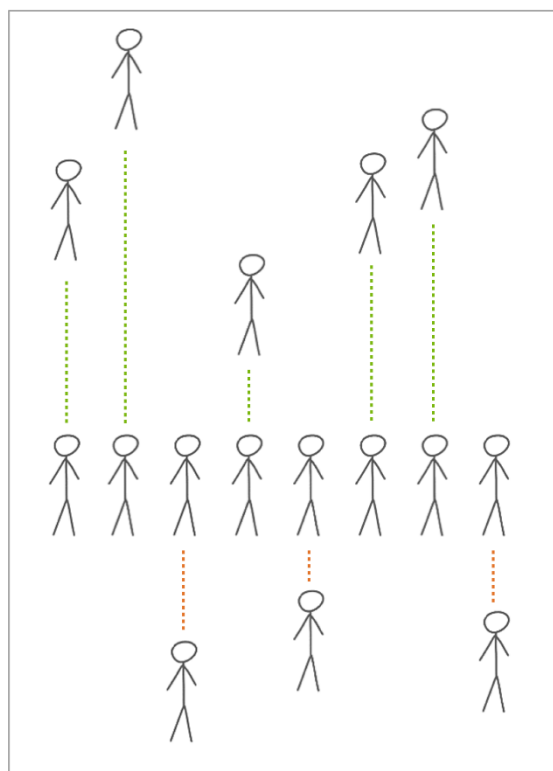
Time allocation: ideally, 1 hour should be allotted for this activity to ensure sufficient time for discussion and reflection.



Participants lined up and being briefed about the Power Walk activity during a training workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan. *Photo: IWMI Pakistan.*

2.3. Activity setup and instructions

1. Ask participants to stand side-by-side in a row. Distribute character cards randomly to each participant (see list of suggested characters below). Ask participants to keep their character identity a secret until the end of the activity.
2. Explain that a series of statements will be read out aloud (see list of statements below). Participants will be instructed to take one step forward if the statement applies to their character. If the statement does not apply to their character or they are unsure, they should remain in place. In some cases, participants will be instructed to take one step backward if the statement applies to them.
3. **Reminder:** participants should respond to the statements as the character assigned to them and not as themselves. Encourage participants to really put themselves in the shoes of their assigned character and interpret how that character may feel or behave.
4. Once all the statements are read out, assess where each participant is standing. Ask participants to share who their character is.
5. Conclude with a debrief and discussion.



Visual representation of 'Power Walk' activity. Participants line up at a starting line and will take steps forward or backward depending on their character.

Note: Characters and statements may be adjusted depending on the specific context. The list of characters provided below was originally developed for Pakistan and will need to be adapted according to the relevant context. The number of characters and statements can be adjusted depending on how large the group is. The activity works best with a group of at least 15-20 people. If there are more participants than the number of listed characters, characters can be duplicated or complete the activity in two rounds.



Participants shown conducting the Power Walk activity during a training workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan.
Photo: IWMI Pakistan.

3. Suggested characters

1. Woman (age 40): Lives in a rural area with three children and does not own a mobile phone. She is a stay-at-home wife/mother and her husband is the main breadwinner.
2. Man (age 35): Well-off farmer who owns his own farmland with easy access to clean groundwater. Uses a mobile phone with access to internet and can read and write in Urdu.
3. Man (age 55): Disabled (in a wheelchair), fully dependent on family for support.
4. Woman (age 45): Illiterate, does not have her own income and is dependent on husband for support. Lives in an area with poor water quality and low groundwater table. She is the primary water collector for her household and walks several kilometers daily to collect water.
5. Woman (age 35): Lives in a nice house with solar panels in an upscale urban neighborhood. She is married with 2 children, has household help and childcare. Is educated with a high-paying job, has laptop and mobile phone.
6. Young woman (age 16): She is educated and has access to technology (smartphone, laptop, etc.).

7. Young man (age 16): Lives in an area with easy water access. He is educated and rides a motorcycle.
8. Man (age 50): Lives in an area with easy water access and owns a car.
9. Woman (age 50): Is a farmer living in a poor rural area which has limited access to information. She is uneducated and does not own a mobile phone. Clean water is available year-round where she lives.
10. Man (age 18): Helps his father manage their agricultural land; will take over from father in the future. Also has an alternate source of income.
11. Woman (age 18): Lives in rural area and helps family in agricultural activities but does not own any land. Does not have a mobile phone or access to the internet and only studied until primary level (Grade 5).
12. Woman (age 45): She is a member of a local Water User Association. She is knowledgeable about water issues in the community but does not have any decision-making power or links with authorities.
13. Man (age 45): He is a member of a local Water User Association. He is knowledgeable about water issues in the community and has connections with relevant authorities.
14. Man (age 55): A member of National Assembly. Works in a government institute with strong networking at high levels. Owns a car and laptop. Has an understanding of water issues in his area and has power to address them.
15. Young man (age 15): Has a supportive family and attends school in a rural area. Can ride a motorcycle and easily get around.
16. Young woman (age 14): Attends school in a rural area with poor water quality. Often misses classes due to household responsibilities, such as collecting water etc. Parents work as farm laborers under a landlord. Often suffers from stomach and skin issues due to wastewater contamination.
17. Man (age 40): Lives in an urban area with poor water quality and water access issues. He is married with children. Has a low-paying job so struggles to afford monthly living expenses, including food and water.
18. Woman (age 25): Lives in an urban area, has no children and has a learning disability (Down Syndrome). Fully dependent on family for caretaking.

19. Man (age 60): Wealthy landlord who owns thousands of acres of land and controls the water supply in his area. Collects rent and taxes from laborers living on his land. Has strong ties with politicians and other parliamentarians in power and can influence decisions.
20. Woman (age 50): Divorced and lives in a low-income urban area and is part of a religious minority group. Water for her neighborhood is provided by public tankers but it is difficult to afford. She and her children often suffer from illnesses due to wastewater contamination. Often has to collect water from filtration plants in distant neighborhoods. Does not earn any income.

Note: Characters may be amended based on the relevant context. Facilitators may add characters who deviate from traditional social, cultural, and gender norms to spark interesting discussion.

- E.g., Woman (age 35): Lives in a rural area with land registered in her name. She has received training on water-saving techniques for her land. She is able to earn an income to support herself and her children and employs other rural women living nearby to work on her land. Owns a handpump and does not have to travel far to collect water.
- E.g., Man (age 40). Educated farmer who has switched to aquaculture due to growing salinization on his land. He now earns a better income. His wife supports him in fish cultivation. Groundwater in his area is not drinkable but he owns a motorcycle and can easily travel to collect water.
- E.g., Woman (age 21): University graduate from an urban town with poor water quality. She is tech-savvy with access to a laptop and smartphone and has learned about nature-based solutions to help save water in her home, such as installing rooftop rainwater storage systems and using chlorine tablets.

4. Statements

1. I live in a nice urban area where I have easy access to water and all amenities. I am educated. I live a comfortable life.
2. A flood is about to hit your area. The government sends out an early warning via Short Message Service (SMS) text. If you own a mobile phone and are literate, take one step forward.
3. I drive a car or motorcycle and can quickly and easily go to collect or purchase water for my household.

4. A recent flood in your community has caused many male family members to migrate to another city in search of work. In their absence, if you can still support yourself financially and make decisions in your household, take one step forward.
5. The government has launched a livelihood scheme to benefit farmers and boost their livelihoods. If you are a farmer and think you would benefit from this scheme, take one step forward.
6. If you are fully responsible for all household duties, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children, which leaves you less time for other activities, take one step backward.
7. I have a laptop or computer with internet access, giving me access to a variety of information.
8. I am a member of a Water User Association in my community, and I actively contribute to decision-making.
9. I have 100 acres of land for agriculture purposes. The land is registered in my name, or I will inherit it in the future from my family.
10. I am knowledgeable about water issues in my community and how to contact relevant authorities to share concerns or complaints.
11. There has been a drought, affecting all farming-based livelihoods. Take two steps backward if you and your family's livelihood is directly affected.
12. I am encouraged by my parents to attend school and I do not miss any days due to household chores or other responsibilities.
13. There has been a dramatic increase in inflation, leading to higher food and petrol prices across the country. If you have to cut back on expenses in order to meet daily household requirements, take two steps backward.
14. If a disaster hit my community, I could easily evacuate myself without any social or cultural barriers standing in my way.
15. I usually receive invitations to participate in high-level water-decision-making conferences, workshops, or policy forums such as United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP), United Nations Water Conference, or national-level forums.
16. I believe my gender group is adequately represented in irrigation, agriculture, as well as policy-making and decision-making bodies.

17. Globally, evidence shows that when disaster hits, women, girls, boys, elderly, and disabled people are most hard-hit. Take two steps backward if you are a woman, young boy or girl, over the age of 65, or have any kind of disability.
18. If disaster strikes, I could find alternative sources of income to financially support my family or children.
19. I am usually targeted for technological trainings to improve my agriculture productivity.
20. I live in an urban area and can easily afford a private tanker to meet my household water needs.
21. I am a recent graduate and I could easily find a job in my area or out of the city.
22. There was a nationwide power outage which lasted for 2 days. Everyone should take one step backward.
23. If you have power backup in your home, such as solar panels or generators, then take two steps forward.
24. If you have to travel far on foot to collect water for your household, take one step backward.
25. I live in an area where clean water is available year-round and is easily accessible.

5. Debrief and discussion

The following questions may be used to spark discussion and reflection from participants:

- Who are the characters that made it the furthest from the starting line? What is unique about them?
- Who are the characters that remained the closest to the starting line? What is unique about them?
- How does it feel to be standing where you are? How did you feel when you had to step forwards or backwards?
- Does this activity remind you of anything? Were you surprised by anything?

- What difference do you see between two similar characters whose only difference is gender – one being a woman and the other a man?
- Were there any cases where women were at more of an advantage than men? What was unique about these characters? How do other factors besides gender affect access to and control over water resources?
- How does individual social identity affect access to and management of water resources?
- How do larger structural inequalities or global events affect access to and management of water resources?
- What happens when our water policies and programs fail to account for GESI considerations?
- How can you apply what you've learned to the work that you do?

Note: These are suggested questions to guide discussion and facilitators can add or amend questions. The focus of discussion should not solely be about gender inequalities, but how gender intersects with other social identities to create unique positions of power or marginalization. Participants should be encouraged to think critically about each character's movement during the activity.

5.1. Key takeaways

- Water is not gender neutral – different gender groups have different levels of access to and control over water (and other) resources. It is important to understand these differences in order to design and implement sustainable and equitable policies and programs.
- In many cultural contexts, gender biases and social norms can exacerbate water-related inequalities, often limiting women's (and other underrepresented or marginalized groups') decision-making power in water-related matters. Inequalities in the water sector also impact other domains, such as food security, livelihoods, and public health.
- Gender intersects with other social factors such as geographic location, age, ethnicity, disability, education, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, it is vital to address gender and multiple dimensions of inequality when developing inclusive water sector interventions.
- Understanding water access and decision-making requires going beyond technical solutions and examining the social and power relations within society that shape water allocation and governance.

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Acknowledgments

This exercise was carried out under the CGIAR Initiative on NEXUS Gains and is part of training material on gender equality and social inclusion developed by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

CGIAR Initiative on NEXUS Gains

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Citation

Khalid, S.; Waqar, K. 2023. *Power Walk Activity: a tool adapted for the water sector*. Lahore, Pakistan: International Water Management Institute (IWMI). CGIAR Initiative on NEXUS Gains. 12p.

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This work has been prepared as an output of the CGIAR Initiative on NEXUS Gains and has not been independently peer reviewed. Responsibility for opinions expressed and any possible errors lies with the authors and not the institutions involved.

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