

Report of Relevant Activities and Messages for the Gender and Water Task Force from the Fourth World Water Forum

Mexico City, 16-22 March 2006

Report of the Task Manager, Marcia Brewster

The theme of the Fourth World Water Forum was “Local Actions for a Global Challenge.” Over 380 sessions were held for more than 11,000 participants from 140 countries. Many members of the Task Force participated actively at the Forum, in their individual capacities, as members of panels and presenters, as well as in their official capacities.

1. Thematic Sessions of the Forum

Through its overarching theme, "Local Actions for a Global Challenge", the focus of the Forum was on the means for implementation of the related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the spirit of MDGs, considerations for strengthening the role of women were very much present. Women – also from Mexican women’s organizations - turned out in great numbers for all the sessions related to gender and water.

Gender, water and sanitation

The Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water (GWTF) co-convened the session entitled ‘Safe, accessible, private and nearby: involving women in managing water and sanitation—the key to meeting the MDGs’ on 19 March. Co-conveners included the Beacon Team, headed by Roberto Lenton, UNICEF, UNDP and UN-Habitat, as well as the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) and Women for Water Partnership. The session was chaired by Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and moderated by Marcia Brewster as Task Manager of GWTF (Sustainable Development Division/UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). The local actions presented in the session included the following:

- Prabha Khosla, Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) on Gender Mainstreaming in the Water for African Cities II Programme;
- Maria Angelica Alegria, National Directorate for Water, Chile on Gender Perspectives in Rural Water Supply Systems in Bolivia, Peru and Chile;
- Ratnakar Gaikwad, on Sanitation to Slum Dwellers in Pune, India;
- Priscila (Age 12) and Charlotte (age 14) on WASH in Schools in Kibera Slum, Nairobi, Kenya;
- and Siegmien Staphorst and Luanda Landveld of the National Women’s Movement, Suriname.

Members of the Panel included: Ethne Davey, Chair, Gender and Water Alliance; Carlos Linares, Senior Water Policy Adviser, Energy and Environment Group, UNDP; Ms. Susmita Shekhar, Vice President, Sulabh International; Mariela Garcia Vargas, Universidad del Valle, Colombia; and Ingvar Andersson, Senior Adviser to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The presentation by the two young girls from Kibera slum in Nairobi was particularly well done, and caused a lot of commotion. The session was very well attended and was webcast over the Forum website. A report on the

session highlighting factors of success of the presented initiatives and the subsequent discussion has been sent to the involved Beacon team and the organizers.

Gender and Water for Growth and Development

The Gender and Water Alliance convened the session, ‘Gender Mainstreaming and Water for Growth and Development: Diversity as an Agent of Change’ which was chaired by Ethne Davey, chair of GWA. Local actions were presented by:

- K. Priego Martinez, Social anthropologist of RGEMA, Mexico on the Blue Agenda for women;
- J. I. Ezeji, RAWDP, Nigeria on gender mediation to supply water to the rural poor;
- N. Machado, Executive director of the Ipanema Institute in Brazil on Mainstreaming the gender perspective in IWRM Policies;
- B. van Koppen, researcher at IWMI on gender in multiple-use water services;
- Maria Lilly Marin de Jaramillo, Altos de Menga, Cali, Colombia on women working in construction and maintenance of a community-based sanitation system;
- B. Schreiner, Senior Executive Manager, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa on gender mainstreaming in the water sector in South Africa; and
- H. Barber, Hydraulic civil Engineer of National University of Tucuman, Argentina, on training women in the maintenance and use of rain water gauges.

This wide variety of local actions was commented upon by: Sacha Gabizon, Women in Europe for a Common Future; Meike van Ginneken, World Bank; Karin Krchnak, Nature Conservancy; Arlette Lopez, Metropolis; Victor Pochat, UNESCO/WWAP; Francine Senechal, City of Montreal; and Betty Soto, Consultant/medical doctor.

The session was well visited, especially by women, which immediately led to one of the main conclusions: Gender is an issue of women **and** men. Furthermore the session highlighted the particular importance of complementary gender mainstreaming at national and local government levels. This requires gender mainstreaming in national IWRM policies and plans; resources to back up policy commitments; staff capacity building; and gender-related targets and indicators.

Sessions convened by UNESCO

In the spirit of MDGs, considerations for strengthening the role of women were very much present. In the sessions convened or co-convened by UNESCO, there was a fairly balanced distribution of men and women among the panelists and presenters, with a number of women moderating sessions. In the context of integrated water resources management, which was central to many of the sessions, the importance of a participatory approach and the involvement of all stakeholders, women and men, was emphasized. In one of UNESCO’s sessions "Water and Cultural Diversity: Mediating for sustainable development", outstanding women from Europe (France), Africa (Kenya) and Asia(Japan) presented their local actions.

2. Launch of relevant reports

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) launched a new evidence report entitled: “For Her: It’s the Big Issue – putting women at the centre of

water, sanitation and hygiene efforts,” at a press conference on 18 March. Produced in collaboration with the Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC) and the Gender and Water Alliance, the evidence report was supported by the Government of Norway and UNICEF. It documents the multiple benefits of involving women in WASH interventions, projects and programmes, such as: reducing corruption, increasing transparency and better financial management; lowering disease; raising school attendance and literacy rates; improving health and nutritional status; and reducing gender equality and poverty. Speakers at the press conference were the Hon. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water, Uganda; Roberto Lenton, WSSCC Chair; Khomoatsana Tau, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Natural Resources, Lesotho; Vanessa Tobin, Chief of WES, UNICEF; Ethne Davey, Chair of GWA; and Eirah Gorre-Dale, WSSCC Spokesperson. Copies of the report were distributed at the Ministerial roundtables as well as at several WWF4 sessions on gender.

Following the gender, water and sanitation session on 19 March, the Resource Guide on Gender Mainstreaming in Water Management was launched in the same room by UNDP and GWA. Speakers were Carlos Linares, Senior Water Specialist at UNDP and Joke Muylwijk, Executive Director of GWA. All the participants received a CD of the Guide, which is now in four languages.

3. Activities of the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)

The Steering Committee of GWA (on which the Task Manager represents the UN) met on the day preceding the Forum. The discussion concerned the progress made in 2005 and early 2006, including the recent meeting in Johannesburg to complete the Resource Guide on Gender Mainstreaming in Water Management. The Guide was launched at WWF-4 and is on the website. The Steering Committee also discussed GWA’s strategy for the Forum and for a number of activities in the future.

On the evening of 20 March, GWA’s General Assembly was held and was attended by about 60 people. Members were encouraged to express their opinions and make suggestions about how the network could better meet their needs. Furthermore the strategic plan for the coming 5 years was presented and briefly discussed. The meeting finished with the members approving of the strategic plan.

A consultant was conducting an evaluation of GWA’s effectiveness on behalf of DGIS and Dfid. She interviewed all SC members, representatives of partners and donors, ordinary GWA members and others. Her impression of the work and direction of GWA was very favourable, and she gave the SC valuable insights on ways to improve the functioning of GWA.

During the forum GWA together with Cap-Net conducted a training entitled: ‘Why gender matters -- how to address gender in water management’. During this training the Tutorial on Gender in Water management for Water professionals was launched.

4. Ministerial roundtable

In parallel with the closing session of the 4th World Water Forum, the Ministerial Conference took place. The session on 22 March (World Water Day) opened with six thematic roundtables. Members of the Task Force, including the Task Manager, and other representatives on the Women's Coalition participated at each of the roundtables. As the lead agency for the World Water Day celebrations, UNESCO's focus was "Water and Culture", and the gender dimension is implicit in culture.

At the Conference, the Ministers discussed the Ministerial Declaration, which was adopted by consensus and recalls existing commitments and includes re-affirmation of the ministers' political will to implement the necessary mechanisms to reach the goals and targets. Unfortunately, however, the final Declaration hardly makes only one reference to women, and none to gender.

As a result of the Forum, the EU announced its intention to discuss the Right to Water after pressure from NGOs and from the governments of Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela. The Local Governments and Mayors group made a clear statement of the need to implement legislation to guarantee good quality and affordability of water and recognize water itself as a public good not to be privatized.

5. Key Ingredients

Some of the key ingredients for successful programmes that were identified in the gender and water sessions included:

- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships** among CBOs, NGOs, municipal authorities, private sector, and donors, with balanced representation of women and men, are critical to sustainability
- A **gender sensitive approach is critical** at both the **practical level** (access to water and sanitation facilities close to homes; access to irrigation) and the **decision-making level** (women's involvement in decision-making on planning, design, and monitoring; female trainers; women in technical jobs; women proportionately represented on water committees; sensitization of men)
- Promote **WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) in schools**: many activities involving children in promoting hygiene and sanitation in schools have a multiplier effect on families and communities
- **Participatory gender surveys** can at the same time generate information, raise awareness and build multi-stakeholder/multi-sector partnerships
- **Existing international agreements** e.g., CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, Agenda 21, JPOI, etc that have been agreed by all can provide support to hold governments accountable for commitments to gender equality and access to water.
- **Women leaders and managers can be engaged** to serve as role models in the effort to mainstream gender in water management at all levels.
- **Sanitation and hygiene education** can be promoted by channelling efforts through women's organizations, schools and health clinics; and including separate toilets for girls and boys

- **Resources need to be mobilized** to improve access to safe water and sanitation, and women involved in income generating activities, without overburdening their workload

From the session “Bottom up meets top down” – organized by Women for Water Partnership, GWA and others, the following key messages, illustrated by the various local actions presented, emerged:

- Only when **top-down meets bottom-up** is an enabling environment for sustainable development created
- In order to have gender responsive local actions, women’s voices have to be brought in **to influence policies** through networking and coalition building.
- From vulnerable groups to **partners**: women take responsibility for their own development and whatever tools are available to create an enabling environment for themselves and their communities
- **Local ownership and early involvement of participants** at the lowest appropriate level are crucial for sustainable solutions, but difficult to realise in practise
- **Social mechanisms** – capacity building and local empowerment are the **key** to successful sustainable technical solutions, however in practise often overlooked.

From the session convened by the Gender and Water Alliance the following key messages were drawn:

- Gender is about women *and* men - both have an important contribution to make to water-related management and development
- Gender issues are centrally important to *all* water sectors, urban as well as rural communities and to water as a human right: it is important for sectors to work together, learn from each other, and work on resolving conflicts in access to water and land
- Importance of advocacy and capacity building (lobbying, training, guidelines and tools, networking, exchanging experiences, meeting with local women) – for policy makers and planners– to enable them to understand why gender mainstreaming is critical, and how to put it into practice
- Importance of gender sensitive water management processes – affirmative action/quotas on women in water management and water engineering - and women’s participation at all levels of decision making and implementation
- Importance of gender equality in national policy and legal frameworks, backed up with clear implementation plans; gender-related, sex-disaggregated monitoring targets and indicators; and adequate finances and staffing
- Local women’s active involvement in needs analysis, decision making on location and design of water facilities, technician roles, management and maintenance is central to promoting appropriate, effective and sustainable water services. These processes are also empowering and confidence building for women and have wider personal and community benefits.

Some gender-specific observations were also made in other sessions, for example, in "Groundwater and Risk Management: coping with water scarcity, climate change and emergency situations", in which Ms Lesha Witmer (Women for Water), was a panelist. In the same session, the amount of time spent by women carrying water was highlighted by the Director-General of Water Affairs and Forestry of South-Africa, Mr Jabulani Sindani, in his intervention. The importance of gender equity was also emphasized by the Assistant Director General of UNESCO in the ministerial panel on finance on 21 March.

6. Other activities

The Forum provided an excellent opportunity for networking with water professionals, media and others concerned with sustainable development, water, sanitation, gender and related issues. Before the Forum started, a number of groups formed the 'Women's Coalition' to support issues of concern to women, coordinate sessions including the sessions on gender at WWF-4 and coordinate representation as a major group. As a result women were better represented in the panels and the ministerial roundtables.

On behalf of the Women's Coalition, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the Women for Water Partnership facilitated the Women's Caucus and published a declaration on behalf of the Caucus. See:

http://www.genderenduurzaamheid.nl/wfw/docs/Women_Caucus_Declaration_eng.pdf

The Women's Coalition as a group had a stand in the Water Fair, which was well visited and also served as a meeting point. In the stand information was given about the different organisations and many materials were distributed to interested people. Here also the 'Minimum agenda for gender in water management' was launched in cooperation with BothEnds and Comprehensive Assessment.

It was also possible to meet with many other partners, including GWP, UNDP, UN-Habitat, USAID, SIDA, CIDA and others in an informal setting.