

Participation of the Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water at the 12th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

The Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water provided active and effective participation in many of the various events at the 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, 14-30 April 2004), which had as its main themes water, sanitation and human settlements. A background paper on 'Women, Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements: On Track or Distracted?' (E/CN.17/2004/10/Add.9) was prepared by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). WEDO and the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), both members of the TF, spoke on behalf of the Women's Major Group in the interactive and high-level segments at CSD-12. The Women's Major Group intervened 17 times in the sessions (out of a total 86 interventions by nine major groups). The women's MG called for the next Chair of CSD to be a woman and for gender balance among Vice Chairs. Many of the national delegations made strong points about the linkages among gender equality, women's empowerment and access to water and sanitation.

Moreover, members of the TF participated actively in the plenary sessions, learning centre and side events of the CSD. Vanessa Tobin of UNICEF, Gourisankar Ghosh of WSSCC, Jamie Bartram of WHO and Veele Vanderweerd of UNEP participated as expert panelists in the plenary sessions and side events, while Manuel Dengo and Marcia Brewster of DESA had key roles to play in the organization and reporting on the entire 12th session of CSD. Other TF members who were very active in the side events and Learning Centre include: June Zeitlin and Irene Dankelman of WEDO; Yassine Fall of UNIFEM; Maria Arce Moreira and Ethne Davey of the Gender and Water Alliance; Axumite Gebre-Egziabher, and Yamina Djacta of UN-Habitat; and Karin Krchnak of the Freshwater Caucus. Other members of the Task Force from the UN Water side who were prominent in the sessions and activities of CSD-12 included: András Szöllösi-Nagy of UNESCO; Ingvar Andersson of UNDP; Kalyan Ray and Andre Dzikus of UN-Habitat; and David Jezeph of ESCAP.

Gender as a cross-cutting issue was taken very seriously and was prominently included in the report. CSD Chair Børge Brende, Norwegian Minister of the Environment, noted in his concluding summary that, "The international community is not on track, and efforts must be scaled up. Achieving the targets is doable. The time-bound targets are specific, practical and realistic. They are technically feasible and financially affordable. For too many years we have had too little action. Let us all embark on a decade of implementation.... the role of women in making water policies is essential."

Among the substantive activities organized by member of the Task Force, those listed below were notable. Most had good attendance, and the cross-cutting issue of gender was prominent in all the discussions on water, sanitation and human settlements.

Activities organized during CSD-12 by Gender and Water TF members:

19 April: Partnership Fair on Water for African Cities, Water for Asian Cities – organized by UN-Habitat and Water for Africa and Asia Partnerships.

21 April:

- Side event on **Water, Education and Youth: A Dialogue** -- Organized by DESA, UNICEF, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), DPI and others -- active involvement of task manager, TF members from UNICEF and WSSCC on Panel, and other members of TF
- Related activity on **The Human Right to Water** -- organized by WEDO and others, with TF member from UNIFEM on Panel, active participation by many members of TF

22 April: Partnership fair on ‘**Women for Water Initiative**’ – organized by International Task Force on Women for Water, now working with our GWTF

26 April:

- Side Event on **Gender, Water and Poverty Connection** -- organized by WEDO, World Resources Institute, Heinrich Böll Foundation, active participation of TF members
- Side Event on **Achieving the Millennium Development Goals on Water and sanitation: Unheard Voices of Women** -- organized by UN-Habitat, member of the TF, and active participation by other members of TF.

27 April: Learning Centre on **Gender and Sanitation** -- organized by DESA and Gender and Water Alliance, active participation of TM and other TF members

28 April:

- Partnership Fair: **The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) Initiative** -- Organized by WSSCC, UNICEF, WHO, members of TF, participation by Mrs. Nane Annan and other supporters
- Side Event on the **Sanitation Challenge and the Rights based Approach** – organized by WHO and others; active participation by members of TF.

Other relevant activities organized by groups not on the Task Force:

20 April: Side Event on Sustainable Solutions to Rural Water and Sanitation in NIS, Experience from Women’s Organization – organized by Women in Europe for a Common Future

23 April: Side event **Global Forum on Women and Sustainable Development** – organized by the Philippine Women’s University and Philippine Women’s Network in Politics and Governance

29 April: Related activity on **Water, Sanitation and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals** – organized by UNDP and the Modern Media Initiatives for a Sustainable Future.

The whole CSD-12 session was considered a great success, and a welcome departure from the normal CSD negotiating sessions. It was much more interactive than usual and the presence of experts in the interactive sessions raised the level of debate on the issues. It was also very important to have sanitation as a separate issue rising to the top of the agenda. As was said, it was not easy to bring such an issue of personal hygiene into public debate, but it was essential to improving our water quality and quality of life. National representatives certainly seemed very engaged and interested. It was a good entry point for the Gender and Water Task Force to have an influence. Now we need to prepare for the upcoming ‘International Decade for Action – Water for Life’. This will be made easier by the new partnerships forged and developed during CSD-12.

*Marcia Brewster
10 May 2004*