



United Nations

International Year of Freshwater 2003



WaterYear2003

NEW INTER-AGENCY GENDER & WATER TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED

United Nations, New York, 15 September 2003 - A new inter-agency Task Force on Gender and Water held its inaugural session last Wednesday with the participation of some 15 representatives of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations that are actively working in the areas of water and sanitation.

As part of the activities of the International Year of Freshwater 2003, the Task Force will facilitate gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes and assist in the implementation of gender-sensitive water and sanitation activities within and outside the UN system. The new task force was initiated by the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and was subsequently endorsed by the inter-agency group of agencies and programmes called "UN-Water" in June of this year.

In welcoming the Task Force, Ms. Angela King, Assistant-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, stated: "This Gender and Water Task Force offers a valuable opportunity for dialogue between gender specialists on the one hand, and water and sanitation experts on the other. Such a dialogue should lead to concrete suggestions on how to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the water and sanitation sector."

Mr. Manuel Dengo, Chief of Water, Natural Resources and Small Island Developing States Branch at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Secretary of "UN Water", expressed the hope that the Task Force would play a valuable role in the work of the 12th and 13th sessions of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), whose programmes of work will focus on water, sanitation and human settlements for the next two years.

The role of women in water resources management and sanitation, especially in developing countries, is increasingly recognized at all levels of development activity. As the primary providers of water inputs to domestic consumption, agriculture, health, sanitation and other productive activities, women's participation is critical to the success of these projects. Studies have shown that they are more efficient and sustainable when women are involved in planning and project design.

As global freshwater supplies are degraded and local water resources become scarcer, the international community has recognized that women's involvement and gender mainstreaming are crucial to achieving sustainable development and to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The new task force will advocate and promote gender mainstreaming in the implementation of MDGs related to water and sanitation and in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

In addition to facilitating a dialogue between gender and water focal points and integrating gender into the MDGs related to water and sanitation, the Task Force will undertake several other priority activities, including: promoting a gender perspective for the main themes of CSD-12 and -13; providing inputs to the World Water Assessment Programme so that the next edition of *World Water Development Report* (2006) incorporates gender into indicators and policy recommendations; and mainstreaming gender into field projects on water management.

The Water, Natural Resources, and Small Island Developing States Branch, Sustainable Development Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has been nominated as Task Manager of the Inter-agency Task Force. Ms. Marcia Brewster, Focal Point for the International Year of Freshwater, 2003 and Senior Economic Affairs Officer in that Division has been appointed Task Manager.

The Task Force brings together the gender and water focal points from thirteen UN agencies and programmes, including: DESA, Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and Sustainable Development Division; Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); the International Telecommunications Union (ITU); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); UN-Habitat; the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and the regional Economic and Social Commissions for Africa (ECA), Western Asia (ESCWA) and Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Four non-UN agencies are also participating: the Gender and Water Alliance, Women's Environment and Development Organization, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC); and the UN Foundation.

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