

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SESSIONS ON WATER AS A HUMAN RIGHT AT THE DEUTSCHE WELLE GLOBAL MEDIA FORUM

The 2011 edition of the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum gathered around 1500 participants to discuss the theme “**Human Rights in a Globalized World. Challenges for the Media**”. Media users and producers, scientists, representatives from organizations working in cultural, political, business, development and science sector, as well as human rights experts, policy makers and representatives from international, grassroots and non-governmental organizations to discuss how to harmonize individual and collective action in order to steer the world away from a foreboding future and instead toward genuine sustainability. The event incorporated podium discussions, workshops, interactive presentations, exhibitions.

UN-Water and the UN overall had a strong presence in this media event. The event provided an important opportunity to discuss and communicate the importance and relevance of the recent resolution of the UN General Assembly (A/RES/64/292 on July 28, 2010), recognising access to clean water and sanitation as a human right. An excellent opportunity to advocate on the importance of sanitation, the role of the Water Decade and the 5 year drive for sanitation, as a key initiative of UN-Water.

There were three key aspects discussed during the event:

- 1.- What are the stories related to basic water and sanitation as a human right?
- 2.- How to approach the stories to make them more compelling? How to clarify the link between Human Rights and Water and Sanitation?
- 3.- What is the role of the media?

1.- What are the stories related to basic water and sanitation as a human right?

a) The story on the resolution

The story of the resolution is about who supported it and what they are doing about it? What is and how legally binding is the resolution? Is it a leaking bucket? What are the possibilities that the resolution is interpreted in different ways in different countries? We also need to consider whether raising the relation between water and human rights is helpful for journalists who report on water and sanitation.

It is important to report on the gravity of the situation on water and sanitation in the world and the fact that there were clear needs for a greater effort on this at world level. Water and sanitation is fundamental for special groups such as for girls and for women. There are examples of what means for girls that drop out of school when

they have the menstruation if there are no facilities or the stories on crimes and rape to women that go to latrines late and night

In relation to water and sanitation as a human right the resolution bring about an opportunity to leap forward in achieving the MDGS and move on into considering the need to universal coverage and the quality of the coverage. The resolution points out to key issues in relation to accessibility, safe water, affordability and sufficiency that need to be promoted and monitored. It also helps to focus attention on the needs of the bottom billion, the unserved and to promote that governments prioritize water and sanitation in their agendas. The misunderstanding about what the resolution means need to be clarified in many instances

Some aspects that may be highlighted in stories are:

- The resolution is really a declaration of intent by Member States. What is legally binding is not this resolution but two other treaties where the right of water and sanitation is embedded in. It is binding then for most countries and for 2 others also because of non discrimination.
- What is important is to ask the questions of: what does the resolution change? How would it work for the people? The reality is that it will only work if there is political will in the countries and at local level. It will work when quietly the people at home will improve their living conditions. It needs to translate in access for people. We need to highlight the silent daily suffering of many.
- There may be a view of the western world that social rights are not the “true” human rights. However people in many countries are demonstrating in the streets because they do not have social rights: jobs, homes, food, etc.
- There are solutions and states need to take steps towards improving the situation of citizens. There will not be immediate coverage after the resolution is passed. But it is a way of being able to turn some red lights on countries who do not want to be monitored. Human Rights may also be an important entry point for journalists to report on the issue.

Insights on reporting on the issue include:

- In order to reach out to the media it is important to think about what interest people. Thinking outside the box is important. It is important to consider multiple audiences and different generations. However, stories can be factual and conservative but it is possible to invest on how they are presented.
- In some cases they may be denial of the problems and the people do not want to hear about it- Even the focus on technology may be about that because it does not require behavior change. There may also be some fatigue in relation to some issues (Climate Change).
- Over all, raising the issue of water as a human right may be initially confusing for media. The linkages are unclear. What comes to mind are the issues of water for free, and the link to the right to water and food security. But it is also confusing. This is why it is important to understand the message

and what it relates to. The issue of affordability and free water are different and we need to point out what we are referring to.

b) The story of sanitation

In relation to sanitation, the challenge of sanitation was pointed out and how it affects 40% of the world's population. Communicating and advocating for sanitation highlights the fact that solutions are available and include simple technological solutions, such as latrines, toilets, and changes to behaviour. It also needs to clarify that there are strong relationships with drinking water because of contaminated water when there is no good sanitation. Vice versa there is no good sanitation when there is no water (wash hands). It is important to look into the ladder of sanitation and how we move from open defecation; basic latrine (with a lid); to more privacy and to moving the waste away. An important concern is equity. The significant differences between different parts of the world were highlighted. In addition, within countries, even those where progress has been significant, there are still differences between the rich and the poor, between rural and urban, and between people in different ethnic groups. The case of why sanitation is important and public authorities and international donors need to focus on it is based on health benefits, the economic return of improved health; and the environment and job opportunities e.g. employment building or maintaining toilets, or from converting waste into fertilizer. There are powerful stories e.g. about how toilets in schools are a way to achieve educational goals, especially for girls.

Insights on how to communicate the issue of sanitation include:

- The struggle with the terminology we use. We talk about latrines, separate activities from human excreta. They are Taboo subjects. There are questions on how to approach the media to be able to talk about it.
- What seems important is to make it personal as soon as possible. To get testimonies from people on bring our stories that show how they are suffering because of this. It is also important to present the bright side of it: what are the positive solutions?
- Even from the solution side those that seem to attract most media attention are the wacky technologies. The reality is that the solutions of basic sanitation are relatively simple. Much of it is about changing people's behaviors and facilitating change. They are low technology.

c) The story of South Africa

There is a story about South Africa and the positive lessons of how legislation development, planning and financing are important but also how there is a need to improve effectiveness of financing and sustainability of services. This is mainly because of the way the legislation was drafted including a 25 liters per person per day free for all. This is a challenge for the services providers. There has to be a greater

focus for investments to concentrate on the needs of the unserved. The bottom 3 million may not be getting enough results. In addition, making water free may mean that we lose accountability and the system becomes heavily dependent on grants. Some lessons from SA are that funding is feasible and doable for a middle income country. The poorer countries may have more problems. There may be a tendency to favor capital versus operational expenditure. To ensure sustainability is very important to reinforce monitoring and increase the citizen's voice, transparency and regulator role. However, achieving the improvements may take time. Water as a Human Right has made a difference for water supply services but sanitation is behind. The story of water as a human right in South Africa shows that it has created a space for accountability. It has been a helpful step but what was important was how it was followed up by the governments with planning and financing.

It is a story of progress and of moving away from a situation that South Africa does not want to come back to. South Africa illustrates that beyond the resolutions and legislation is important to move on commit a budget. This is possible for middle income countries. There is no excuse. For low income countries may have it difficult and international solidarity can have an important role. There needs to be increased accountability on how financing, made available for water and sanitation, is used and if it reaches the bottom billion. The media may have a role in raising this issue. The example of South Africa shows how important is to have a plan for action and to provide the financing to move on beyond voting for the resolution.

The story on South Africa includes a positive message that the issue can be solvable and it is possible to do something about it. Also an opportunity for journalism to play a positive role in solving a problem and generating solidarity for resolving it. Many are tired of bad news. It is a good time for good news stories and a combination for optimist and pessimist arguments. In this sense, the important message in the South Africa story is that the provision of access to basic water and sanitation services is a solvable problem from the global perspective. It is possible and affordable – it's not a question of enough money, it is about how we allocate it. We need to lift our eyes up and look beyond country borders to take courage from what happens elsewhere. And there are lots of good, positive stories about what's happening, what's possible. It is possible to ask the questions that if your neighbors are doing it, why isn't it happening here? When it comes to water and human rights, this is a very simple story- it's clear, effective and doable. There are possibilities to link educational issues with the ability to do something about it.

d) The story on the link between water and food rights

There is no doubt that the world is facing a food crisis, which can only be exacerbated by climate change. There is a need to really link the issues of food security, and water and sanitation.

Addressing the link between the water and sanitation right and food could be done through the analysis of diets and how they are changing. There are water borne diseases causing children not to benefit from any of the food they take. Not spending on sanitation and water supply is costing countries money in many ways.

One misunderstanding is that there is not enough water. This is not true. Much water is used for luxury uses (including luxury foods) instead than for producing basic nutritious food. Even in LDC those that have money have the water and those that do not have to struggle.

2.- How to approach the stories to make them more compelling? How to clarify the link between Human Rights and Water and Sanitation.

In relation to insights from a Journalist perspective on what makes a good story about water there were some recommendations including the need to make them personal by, for example, getting testimonies about how people collect water.

In relation to how you can tell the story, the key is the testimonies of people suffering silently, the slum dwellers, the minorities, the lower casts, the homeless. Link it to global processes and problems on, for example, how the financial and economic crisis is affecting them and how the cuts in public spending are leaving them without basic services.

Reporting stories on human rights and sanitation may lack an element of persuasion. To convey the story it is important to understand the audience, they have to be more illustrative. If stories show that the situation is bad and getting worse, then media is making more compelling the need for governments to act.

There are opportunities about making stories that start with a quote, include the human element (a testimony) and broaden up to the bigger issues and the implications for the future of countries. It is important not to overload stories with facts.

There are issues about how to pitch a story. This is different for different contexts. Diarrhea may not be a problem in developed countries but it is very much a reality in LDCs. Discussions on what potential there is for media to report on sanitation relates to drawing out the personal stories about girls in schools, the dangers for women to use latrines at night. Social issues are important.

Journalists need to get the story right, inform themselves and avoid being bias. For example, the resolution does not say that water should be free, it says that it should be affordable and that nobody should be excluded from the service because they do not have money. Governments need to help those people. What is clear is when water is provided by a formal provider is much cheaper than when provided by an informal

provider. There is no unlimited right to water. What people needs depends on climate and health, if you are women, elderly, etc.

The analysis of the government budgets are a powerful tool to write stories. Both in LDC and in the developed world. For example, budget cuts in developed countries are affecting basic services and the poorest. This can be compared with military expenses or security budgets. Stories can compel governments to act

3.- What is the role of the media?

In some countries it may be important to consider the role of journalists as advocates beyond simply informing. Advocating human rights and good governance is part of the job.

Access to water and sanitation in countries like India is linked to overall health care of the communities. It affects the possibilities of economic development of the countries. Media needs to play a role in making governments realize that this is very important. Radio and TV can play an important role with the illiterate in rural areas. They can play a role in improving the acceptance of facilities, communicating how they can be benefited.

In a context of apathy what is the role of the journalists? It is important that they tell the story. Media can point out that there is a vicious circle by which if you do not have a plan of action you do not attract international donors to help you to invest, the kids do not go to school, they do not get an education and this affects the opportunities for development of the country. It perpetuates the downward spiral. The focus of journalists may be mainly on political and civil rights. In negative rights rather than in positive rights. You need all rights and not only political and civil rights. Social rights are also important. All of them are interrelated rights.

We look too much at governments that need to do something for their people, and at donors. Media has an important role in making the voices of people and civil society to be taken up to the level of governments.

There is a challenge that has to do with changing peoples' perceptions and attitudes in relation to sanitation, for example. Advocates develop messages for them as well – Journalists know their audience and can decide how to reach them, and how. From the perspective of advocates it is possible to provide facts and figures and some stories, or help journalists find the right people to give them answers. But it's up to journalists to publish it – it is important to have strong, independent journalism and objective reporting. There needs to be an informed debate, a give-and-take. Journalists are concerned that they are not used as a propaganda tool. In fact, the role of journalists is not to cozy up to politicians, but to question the stories.

The role of media may be to raise the noise levels - shock and inspire people, educate people and inform government. Make politicians and water planners more exposed to ordinary people, those who face the daily challenges.

Official DWGMF photos

Session: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/deutschewelle/sets/72157626880749933/>

Plenary session:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/deutschewelle/sets/72157626980316968/>

Interview with Amanda Marlin:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/GMF2011#p/u/35/ipkQ-h32wZY>

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