

CSD NGO Women's Caucus Position Paper for CSD-8, 2000

Women & Freshwater

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Roles, responsibilities and burdens of women regarding freshwater

In developing countries, women are responsible for supplying freshwater for the household and agricultural activities of their families and communities, as a result of traditional gender roles. The impact of increasing freshwater scarcity has obliged women water carriers to travel longer distances and spend many hours waiting to fill their pail. In many cases, girls have to assist their mothers to fulfil their tasks. Since reproductive tasks go hand in hand with family health care, women also take the necessary environmental control measures to deal with water-borne diseases (e.g. boiling or chlorinating water). Women deal with utilising and conserving water resources on a daily basis and have considerable expertise and experience regarding water management. Despite this, in many cases, women are not in control nor participate in decision-making structures relating to water systems.

Environmental policies and programmes in areas such as freshwater resources management have differential gender impacts. In addition, contaminated water has resulted in reproductive health problems including birth defects and lack of food for women and their families, particularly affecting poor women living in under-serviced urban areas.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) 1998 Report contends that "gender-in equitable governance and decision-making structures do not produce the most effective and sustainable solutions to the water crisis" (CSD 1998). Indeed, the 1992 Earth Summit Agenda 21 calls for the involvement of women in water resources management. However, as the CSD Report pointed out, little has been done to achieve the aim of "mainstreaming a gender perspective into policy-making". The CSD 1998 Report successfully integrates a gender perspective into many of its recommendations to governments, the international community and stakeholders such as industry.

The Secretary-General's report to CSD-8 in section C. entitled "The importance of the gender dimension" notes the increasing recognition of the need to empower women in the process of solving the water supply and sanitation tragedy", and cites positive health results of UNICEF water-related programmes involving women. The report adds that neglect of the sanitation needs of young female students leads to girls dropping out from school, while exclusion of women from education opportunities and from managerial and administrative functions has often resulted in the installation of facilities that do not suit their requirements or take advantage of their potential as managers and operators.

The Ministerial Declaration of the Hague on Water Security in 21st Century (March 2000) emphasised the need to empower women, use their skills and respond to their needs in water resources management.

Women's activities

Although often overlooked by policymakers, women have been involved in planning and decision-making for management of freshwater resources, frequently at the forefront of implementing programmes designed to get authorities to solve problems with water services. Women in the

Ukraine, Bangladesh, Russia for example have banded together and in some cases mobilized communities and resources to highlight urgent problems at industrial hot-spots as well as help conserve and protect their supplies of clean, accessible water (eg UNDESA & WEDO 1998; MAMA-86 & UNED-UK 1998). In Mexico, other Latin American countries and Africa, women have fought for equitable water and sanitation provision in urban and rural areas. At a recent workshop on gender responsive environmental planning and management, urban planners and gender experts from around the world discussed these and numerous other examples and agreed that freshwater is one of the top issues in terms of requiring women's active participation in planning and decision-making (SCP 1999). These experiences and findings clearly indicate the necessity and the benefits of women's full participation in water management.

At the Second World Water Forum,, The Hague, March 2000 the Gender and Water Workshop, attended by 500 people, agreed to establish a Gender and Water Alliance, (1) and hold a follow-up workshop at the Vision Unit., on gender, water and people. The workshop also called for resources " to enable regional knowledge centres to expand training and backstopping in methods and tools for gender and poverty sensitive service assessments."

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Recommendations

- The U.N. CSD-8 should support the Ministerial Declaration of the Hague, and facilitate related follow-up actions by the entire U.N. system, as well as by all Major Groups, with full integration of gender aspects.
- Gender issues must be fully integrated at all stages of work on the U.N. Water Development Report and activities related to the U.N. Water Assessment, with the full participation of women's groups at all levels. Close working relationships should also be developed with the Gender and Water Alliance.
- In accordance with the above ministerial Declaration, water:should be managed in a way that reflects its economic, social, environmental and cultural values for all its uses, and countries should move towards pricing water services to reflect the cost of their provision. This approach should take account of the need for equity and the basic needs of the poor and the vulnerable. Special attention should be paid to the poor, to the role, skills and needs of women and to vulnerable areas such as small island states, landlocked countries and desertified areas.
- Sustainable integrated water resources management must be based on gender balanced, transparent and accountable decision-making structures at all levels representing all stakeholders, and take full account of the special roles, responsibilities and burdens of women, in particular in ensuring household food security.
- "Listening centres" should be established to engage the public in discussions about water: access, price, quantity and quality, and transmit their views of participatory decision-making structures.
- Gender disaggregated data collection and gender analysis must be incorporated into all research, problem diagnosis, information and monitoring networks and formulation of solutions and actions at all levels.
- Social consequences of change: The approach to problem-solving has to be participatory and community based, so that new technology and management systems to alleviate the workload of women supplying water, do not lead to further diminishing the status of women in the family and the community

- Education, training and information services: Knowledgeable local women should fully participate in developing and implementing education programmes and information services on water management. Equal access for women and girls to education and training programs must be ensured. A gender and age-sensitive approach should be used to train local health officials about specific substances to which the local population has been or is likely to be exposed through their freshwater supplies.
 - Support should be given to the 70+ remaining governments that do not have statistical information on the percentage of their population without access to safe water in particular within work connected with the forthcoming U.N. World Water Development Report and follow-up actions to the Hague Declaration..
 - Investments should be made in improved data collection on public health, including more long-term epidemiological studies and more dissemination of clear and useful information about the environmental links to health problems.
 - Systems of corporate accountability must be introduced at national and international levels to reduce and finally eliminate release of dangerous pollutants which contaminate freshwater supplies by production units in all economically active sectors As stated in the Hague Declaration, "the effectiveness of pollution control strategies (must be increased) based on polluter pays principles and ...appropriate rules and procedures (considered) in the fields of liability and compensation for damage resulting from activities dangerous to water resources."
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FOR REFERENCE

Ministerial Declaration of The Hague On Water Security in the 21st Century

1. Water is vital for the life and health of people and ecosystems and a basic requirement for the development of countries, but around the world women, men and children lack access to adequate and safe water to meet their most basic needs. Water resources, and the related ecosystems that provide and sustain them, are under threat from pollution, unsustainable use, land-use changes, climate change and many other forces. The link between these threats and poverty is clear, for it is the poor who are hit first and hardest. This leads to one simple conclusion: business as usual is not an option. There is, of course, a huge diversity of needs and situations around the globe, but together we have one common goal: to provide water security in the 21st Century. This means ensuring that freshwater, coastal and related ecosystems are protected and improved; that sustainable development and political stability are promoted, that every person has access to enough safe water at an affordable cost to lead a healthy and productive life and that the vulnerable are protected from the risks of water-related hazards.

2. These threats are not new. Nor are attempts to address them. Discussions and actions started in Mar del Plata in 1977, continued through Dublin and were consolidated into Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 in Rio in 1992. They were reaffirmed in Paris 1998, CSD-6 and in the Second World Water Forum and Ministerial Conference. The process will continue in the meeting in Bonn in 2002 ("Dublin+10"), through the 10-year review of implementation of Agenda 21, and beyond. These and other international meetings have produced a number of agreements and principles that are the basis upon which this and future statements should be built. The goal of providing water security in the 21st Century is reflected in the unprecedented process of broad participation

and discussion by experts, stakeholders and government officials in many regions of the world. This process has profited from the important contributions of the World Water Council, who launched the World Water Vision process at the First World Water Forum in Marrakech, from the formation of the World Commission on Water in the 21st Century and from the development of the Framework for Action by the Global Water Partnership.

The Main Challenges

3. To achieve water security, we face the following main challenges:

Meeting basic needs: to recognise that access to safe and sufficient water and sanitation are basic human needs and are essential to health and well-being, and to empower people, especially women, through a participatory process of water management.

Securing the food supply: to enhance food security, particularly of the poor and vulnerable, through the more efficient mobilisation and use, and the more equitable allocation of water for food production.

Protecting ecosystems: to ensure the integrity of ecosystems through sustainable water resources management.

Sharing water resources: to promote peaceful co-operation and develop synergies between different uses of water at all levels, whenever possible, within and, in the case of boundary and trans-boundary water resources, between states concerned, through sustainable river basin management or other appropriate approaches.

Managing risks: to provide security from floods, droughts, pollution and other water-related hazards.

Valuing water: to manage water in a way that reflects its economic, social, environmental and cultural values for all its uses, and to move towards pricing water services to reflect the cost of their provision. This approach should take account of the need for equity and the basic needs of the poor and the vulnerable.

Governing water wisely: to ensure good governance, so that the involvement of the public and the interests of all stakeholders are included in the management of water resources.

Meeting the Challenges

4. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation, recognise that our gathering and this Declaration are part of a wider process, and are linked to a wide range of initiatives at all levels. We acknowledge the pivotal role that governments play in realising actions to meet the challenges. We recognise the need for institutional, technological and financial innovations in order to move beyond "business as usual" and we resolve to rise to meet these challenges.

5. The actions advocated here are based on integrated water resources management, that includes the planning and management of water resources, both conventional and non-conventional, and land. This takes account of social, economic and environmental factors and integrates surface water, groundwater and the ecosystems through which they flow. It recognises the importance of water quality issues. In this, special attention should be paid to the poor, to the role, skills and needs of women and to vulnerable areas such as small island states, landlocked countries and desertified areas.

6. Integrated water resources management depends on collaboration and partnerships at all levels, from individual citizens to international organisations, based on a political commitment to, and wider societal awareness of, the need for water security and the sustainable management of water resources. To achieve integrated water resources management, there is a need for

coherent national and, where appropriate, regional and international policies to overcome fragmentation, and for transparent and accountable institutions at all levels.

7. We will further advance the process of collaboration in order to turn agreed principles into action, based on partnerships and synergies among the government, citizens and other stakeholders. To this end:

A. We will establish targets and strategies, as appropriate, to meet the challenges of achieving water security. As part of this effort, we support the development of indicators of progress at the national and sub-national level. In carrying this forward, we will take account of the valuable work done for the Second World Water Forum.

B. We will continue to support the UN system to re-assess periodically the state of freshwater resources and related ecosystems, to assist countries, where appropriate, to develop systems to measure progress towards the realisation of targets and to report in the biennial World Water Development Report as part of the overall monitoring of Agenda 21.

C. We will work together with other stakeholders to develop a stronger water culture through greater awareness and commitment. We will identify best practices, based on enhanced research and knowledge generation capacities, knowledge dissemination through education and other channels and knowledge sharing between individuals, institutions and societies at all appropriate levels. This will include co-ordination at regional and other levels, as appropriate, to promote arrangements for coping with water-related disasters and for sharing experiences in water sector reform. It will also include international co-operation in technology transfers to, and capacity building in, developing countries.

D. We will work together with stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of pollution control strategies based on polluter pays principles and to consider appropriate rules and procedures in the fields of liability and compensation for damage resulting from activities dangerous to water resources.

E. Against the background of the preparatory work for and discussions in The Hague, we will work within multilateral institutions, particularly the UN system, International Financial Institutions and bodies established by Inter-Governmental Treaties, to strengthen water-related policies and programmes that enhance water security, and to assist countries, as appropriate, to address the major challenges identified in this Declaration.

F. We call upon the Secretary General of the United Nations to further strengthen the co-ordination and coherence of activities on water issues within the UN system. We will adopt consistent positions in the respective governing bodies to enhance coherence in these activities.

G. We call upon the Council of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to expand activities that are within the mandate of the GEF in relation to freshwater resources by catalysing investments in national water management issues that have a beneficial impact on international waters.

H. We welcome the contribution of the World Water Council in relation to the Vision and of the Global Water Partnership with respect to the development of the Framework for Action. We welcome follow-up actions by all relevant actors in an open, participatory and transparent manner that draws upon all major groups in society.

I. We note the statements (attached to this declaration) made by the representatives of the major groups and welcome them as a clear reflection of their readiness to work with us towards a secure water future for all.

8. Recognising that the actions referred to in paragraph 7, including progress on targets and strategies, are important and ambitious, we will review our progress periodically at appropriate

fora, including the meeting in Bonn in 2002 and the 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21.

9. The Ministerial Conference acknowledges with appreciation that a range of issues were discussed during the Second World Water Forum, and that the Chair of the Forum presented these issues to the Ministerial Conference. The importance of these issues is unquestionable; we will raise them for further consideration in relevant fora in the future and will consider their implications for our individual national situations.

10. The challenges are formidable, but so are the opportunities. There are many experiences around the world that can be built on. What is needed is for us all to work together, to develop collaboration and partnerships, to build a secure and sustainable water future. We will, individually and acting together, strive to achieve this and stimulate and facilitate the contributions of society as a whole. To this end, we note with appreciation that pledges were made at The Hague (attached to our declaration). This Declaration reflects the determination of our governments and represents a critical step in the process of providing water security for all.

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