

This policy brief was developed by the Inter-agency Task Force on Gender and Water (GWTF), a sub-programme of both UN-Water and the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) in support of the *International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life,' 2005–2015*.



WATER FOR LIFE  
2005-2015

UN WATER

# Gender, Water and Sanitation: A Policy Brief

In most societies, women have primary responsibility for management of household water supply, sanitation and health. Water is necessary not only for drinking, but also for food production and preparation, care of domestic animals, personal hygiene, care of the sick, cleaning, washing and waste disposal. Because of their dependence on water resources, women have accumulated considerable knowledge about water resources, including location, quality and storage methods. However, efforts geared towards improving the management of the world's finite water resources and extending access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, often overlook the central role of women in water management.

## Current status/trends

The importance of involving both women and men in the management of water and sanitation has been recognized at the global level, starting from the 1977 United Nations Water Conference at Mar del Plata, the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade (1981-90) and the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin (January 1992), which explicitly recognizes the central role of women in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Reference is also made to the involvement of women in water management in Agenda 21<sup>1</sup> (paragraph 18.70f), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation<sup>2</sup> (paragraph 25). Moreover, the resolution establishing the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life' (2005-2015), calls for women's participation and involvement in water-related development efforts. The Water for Life Decade coincides with the timeframe for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The close interlinkages between gender equality and women's empowerment (goal 3), and target 10 on access to water and sanitation are illustrated in the table below.

In many cases, showing that water projects work better when women are involved has a greater impact on mobilizing finance for gender-biased projects than showing that access to water has an impact on gender equality. A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) of community water

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992. (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8.).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002. (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1).

## Relationship between Gender and Water Millennium Development Goals

MDG relevant Targets	Ensure environmental Sustainability (Goal 7) Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (target 10)	
	Contribution of domestic water supply and sanitation	Contribution of sound water resources management and development
<b>Promote gender equality and empower women (goal 3)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced time, health, and care-giving burdens from improved water services give women more time for productive endeavours, adult education, empowerment activities, leisure</li> <li>• Convenient access to water and sanitation facilities increase privacy and reduce risk to women and girls of sexual harassment/assault while gathering water</li> <li>• Higher rates of child survival are a precursor to the demographic transition to lower fertility rates; having fewer children reduces women's household responsibilities and increases their opportunities for personal development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based organizations for water management can improve social capital of women by giving them leadership and networking opportunities and building solidarity among them.</li> </ul>

Source: Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation, *Health, Dignity and Development: What will it take?* Stockholm, Stockholm International Water Institute, 2005.

and sanitation projects in 88 communities in 15 countries<sup>3</sup> found that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those that do not. This supports an earlier World Bank study that found that women's participation was strongly associated with water and sanitation project effectiveness.

The recent increase in the number of women appointed as water and environment ministers is an exciting trend which may provide an impetus to gender and water programmes. In late-2005, there were 40 women ministers of water or environment, representing every region and level of development in the world. H.E. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water of Uganda, is currently the chair of the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) and of the African Ministers Initiative on WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), supported by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC). The Women Leaders for WASH are championing the role of women in decision-making, capacity building, educating children on sanitation and hygiene, and mobilizing political will around other priorities such as the linkages between water, sanitation, hygiene and HIV/AIDS (see [www.wsscc.org](http://www.wsscc.org)).

These leaders constitute the critical mass needed to get gender integrated into water and sanitation policies and programmes. Working closely with these dynamic women leaders is important for advancing a gender perspective at global and national levels during the 'Water for Life' Decade, and developing a network on gender and water.

Sustainable management of water resources and sanitation provides great benefits to a society and the economy as a whole. Thus, it is crucial, first, to involve both women and men in water resource management and sanitation

<sup>3</sup> Van Wijk-Sijbesma, Christine, 1998. Gender in Water Resources Management, Water Supply and Sanitation: Roles and Realities Revisited. International Research Centre for Water and Sanitation. Delft, the Netherlands.

Women Leaders for WASH during the Commission on Sustainable Development, 13th session, New York, 19 April 2005  
 [From left to right: H. E. Mamphono Khaketla, Minister of Natural Resources, Lesotho; Ms. Anna K. Tibajjuka, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, H.E. Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs & Forestry, South Africa; Ms. June Zeitlin, Executive Director, WEDO; Ms. Sunita Narain, Director, Centre for Science & Environment, India; H.E. Martha Karua, Minister of Water & Irrigation, Kenya; H. E. Penelope Beckles, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, Trinidad and Tobago; H.E. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water, Uganda; H.E. Carmen Arevalo-Correa, Vice-Minister of Environment, Colombia; H.E. Hilde Johnson, Minister for International Development, Norway]



policies and to ensure that the specific needs and concerns of women and men from all social groups are taken into account. Second, it is vitally important to determine what people (consumers of water and sanitation) want, what they can and will contribute and how they will participate in making decisions on the types and levels of service, location of facilities and operation and maintenance. For reaching this second goal, it is indispensable to analyse a given target group from a gender perspective. Only then can efforts be truly effective and sustainable.

## Issues of Particular Concern

The following are some of the major factors that need to be addressed to implement a gender approach to water resources and sanitation management. A focus on both women and men is crucial to the approach.

### > Equitable access to water supply

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human right and essential for achieving gender equality, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Yet, at the end of 2004 still some 1.1 billion people, or 18 per cent of the world's population, lacked access to safe drinking water, while 2.6 billion or 40 per cent of the world's population lacked access to improved sanitation services. Providing physically accessible clean water is essential for enabling women and girls to devote more time to the pursuit of education, income generation and even the construction and management of water and sanitation facilities.

In the Est-Mono region of **Togo**, where only 10 per cent of the population have access to potable water, a project aimed at improving access to water and sanitation facilities in schools did not adequately take a gender perspective into account. Thus, the facilities did not meet everyone's needs and fell into disuse. A new project design encouraged the participation of all villagers, boy and girl students, men and women teachers and administrators, and an action plan for hygiene promotion was approved by the schools and the villages. The project provided separate water and sanitation facilities for boys and girls, as well as educational resources, to each village school. Addressing gender imbalances among students and ensuring the participation of the entire community has led to impacts far beyond the immediate results. Girls have taken a leadership role and increased their self-esteem. Gender-balanced School Health Committees are responsible for the equipment and oversee hygiene.

Source: S. Alouka, 2006. Integrating Gender into the Promotion of Hygiene in Schools. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, *Gender, water and sanitation: case studies on best practices*. New York, United Nations (in press).



Women carrying water vessels, Guatemala.  
Photo by André Abbe, UNESCO

In Morocco the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project of the World Bank aimed to reduce the “burden of girls who were traditionally involved in fetching water” in order to improve their school attendance. In the six provinces where the project is based, it was found that girls' school attendance increased by 20 per cent in four years, attributed in part to the fact that girls spent less time fetching water. At the same time, convenient access to safe water reduced time spent collecting water by women and young girls by 50 to 90 per cent.

Source: World Bank, 2003. Report No. 25917. See: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/06/17/000090341\\_20030617084733/Rendered/PDF/259171MA1Ru](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/06/17/000090341_20030617084733/Rendered/PDF/259171MA1Ru)

### › Equitable access to land rights and water for productive use

Equitable access to water for productive use can empower women and address the root causes of poverty and gender inequality. However, lack of access (ownership) to land may be the underlying cause of women's limited access to water and a key reason for the greater poverty of female-headed households, as has been shown in World Bank research studies. In many countries (e.g., most of Latin America), land ownership is a precondition for access to water. Shockingly, women hold title to less than 2 per cent of the world's private land. Moreover, even where women do have a legal right to land, customs often prevent them from taking *de facto* control of land and natural resources, such as in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Zimbabwe.

In poor regions, food security is often dependent on women's subsistence production to feed the population. Evidence shows that women are responsible for half of the world's food production (as opposed to cash crops) and in most developing countries, rural women produce between 60–80 per cent of the food.<sup>4</sup> Women also have an important role in establishing sustainable use of resources in small-scale fishing communities, and their knowledge is valuable for managing and protecting watersheds and wetlands.

The real problem faced by many female farmers, however, is that they have very little or no access to irrigation water for agricultural purposes and are entirely dependent on rainfall. Therefore, it is crucial to accord to women recognition as land holders and contributors to the development process. Responding to the needs of poor farmers requires a detailed understanding of men's and women's local knowledge systems, resource utilization and income generating opportunities.

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 1995. Gender and Food security in Agriculture. See: <http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/agri-e.htm> and <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/W8376E/w8376e02.htm#2.1%20women%20as%20food%20producers> (both accessed on 4 January 2006).

In **Nigeria**, the construction of a tourist resort on the Obudu plateau led to deforestation and exacerbated pre-existing pressures on water resources and the environment, such as overgrazing and unsustainable agricultural practices. The local Becheve women complained about wasted time in collecting water, poor water quality and poor family health. Consequently, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) started a Watershed Management Project on the Obudu plateau in 1999, and encouraged women to get involved in the project's decision-making process. Women leaders were elected on the management committee, which gave them a source of pride, and became involved in the construction and maintenance of a water reservoir. The reduced time spent collecting water allowed women more time for generating income through farming and marketing. A conflict between the Becheve women and the Fulani tribesmen over access to water was resolved through negotiation, and the women were ensured timely access to water. Moreover the women's healthcare burden was reduced, with a 45 per cent reduction in cases of diarrhoea in 2004.

Source: A.A. Majekodunmi, A. A., 2006. Nigeria: Using Gender Mainstreaming Processes to Help Protect Drinking Water Sources of the Obudu Plateau Communities in Northern Cross River State. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, *Gender, water and sanitation: case studies on best practices*. New York, United Nations (in press).

### › Access to sanitation

Lack of sanitation facilities and poor hygiene cause water-borne diseases, such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid and several parasitic infections. Moreover, the incidence of these diseases and others linked to poor sanitation – e.g., round worm, whip worm, guinea worm, and *Schistosomiasis* – is highest among the poor, especially school-aged children.<sup>5</sup> Each year, more than 2.2 million people in developing countries die from preventable diseases associated with lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene. The social and environmental health costs of ignoring the need to address sanitation (including hygiene and wastewater collection and treatment) are far too great.

In **Mozambique**, a project supported the construction of latrines for boys, girls and teachers, and hand-washing facilities for hygiene practice. Not only have these initiatives provided safer, healthier learning environments, they have also encouraged girls to complete their basic schooling. In Bangladesh, a school sanitation project with separate facilities for boys and girls helped boost girls' school attendance 11 per cent per year, on average, from 1992 to 1999.

Source: United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), 2003. At a glance: Mozambique. See: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mozambique\\_2231.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mozambique_2231.html) and UNICEF, 2003. Sanitation for All. See: <http://www.unicef.org/wes/sanall.pdf>.

A focus on gender differences is of particular importance with regard to sanitation initiatives, and gender-balanced approaches should be encouraged in plans and structures for implementation. Simple measures, such as providing schools with water and latrines, and promoting hygiene education in the classroom, can enable girls to get an education, especially after they reach puberty, and reduce health-related risks for all. Moreover, the design and the location of latrines close to home may reduce violence against women, which may occur when women have to relieve themselves in the open after nightfall.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 1997. *Strengthening interventions to reduce helminth infections: an entry point for the development of health-promoting schools*. Geneva, WHO.



• • • • • • • • • •  
Women cultivating rice, Cambodia.  
Photo by Georges Malempré, UNESCO

In eight slums in the Tiruchirapalli district of Tamil Nadu State, **India**, latrines constructed by the municipal corporation had all become unserviceable due to poor maintenance. The women reported that the poor maintenance of the latrines caused faecal worms to generate and reproduce, and they could be found near the water taps, and even inside the walls of their houses. Poor sanitation and contaminated

water affected all families and increased their medical expenses. Male community leaders did not take any steps to provide improved facilities. Finally, the people joined forces with Gramalaya, an NGO working on water and sanitation projects. The project design called for the installation of drinking water facilities and individual toilets, as well as community mobilization, with a focus on gender mainstreaming. WaterAid covered the equipment and installation costs, while Gramalaya covered the capacity building and community mobilization components. The government provided the land sites, electricity, water supply, and loans to community members. The community benefits from improved water and sanitation facilities, better health and increased resources for community development, and the women have gained self-confidence.

*Source:* I. V. Berna, 2006. India: From Alienation to an Empowered Community - Applying a Gender Mainstreaming Approach to a Sanitation Project. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).

### ➤ Capacity development

Building capacity means bringing together more resources, more people (both women and men) and more skills. Yet, when looking closely at capacity building in water supply and sanitation in developing countries, it becomes clear that most of the training is aimed at water resources and water supply specialists. Very few programmes and projects are aimed at expertise in social development, sanitation, or hygiene education that emphasizes a gradual scaling down to those responsible for operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation, who are primarily women. Targeting women for training and capacity building is critical to the sustainability of water and sanitation initiatives, particularly in technical and managerial roles to ensure their presence in the decision-making process.

In the Ejura-Sekyedumasi District of **Ghana**, the Ghana Rural Water Project (GRWP) was initiated by World Vision Ghana (WVG) to address a serious infestation of guinea worm and poor access to potable drinking water. The project has shifted from a strictly technology-driven approach to a community-based, people-oriented, demand-driven focus, including gender mainstreaming, poverty alleviation and the well-being of children. Through the GRWP initiative, WVG supplied the village with two boreholes fitted with hand pumps, two public Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines and a urinal. The community has since identified this water and sanitation project as having had a high level of community participation and gender integration. It has improved the education of girls, who accounted for 53 per cent of primary school students in 2005, compared to 43 per cent in 1995.

*Source:* N. A. Poku Sam, 2006. Ghana: Gender Integration in a Rural Water Project in the Samari-Nkwanta Community. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation: case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).

### › Participation and equity in decision-making

Women are under-represented in the 'water world', with careers and training in water management dominated by men. If water management is to be democratic and transparent -- and represent the needs of the people -- both men and women must have an equal say. A start has been made through the increase in the number of women serving as ministers of water and environment, but the empowerment of women as water managers must also be felt at the grassroots level.

The Watersheds and Gender project in **El Salvador** is an example of how women learned new skills through participation and involvement. The project has promoted women as leaders, and trained them as community promoters and managers of small scale companies. As a result, women have acquired technical agricultural knowledge and are now performing tasks previously considered suitable only for men.

*Source: Agua Project Report, 2002. El Salvador. AGUA project Evaluation August-September 2002, See <http://www.ard-water.com/agua.htm> and [http://www.dec.org/country/more\\_display.cfm?region=lac&country=Elper\\_cent20Salvador&category=phn](http://www.dec.org/country/more_display.cfm?region=lac&country=Elper_cent20Salvador&category=phn)*

In South Africa, Lesotho and Uganda, the women ministers for water are implementing affirmative action programmes in the water sector to train women for water and sanitation related careers, including science and engineering. At the local level, women have found their voices and have now been trained to locate water sources in the village, to decide on the location of facilities and to repair pumps. Since these changes were made, the incidence of pump breakdown has decreased considerably. While it may be hard to imagine a change in orientation of water policy in many countries in the near future, affirmative action policies such as 'women in water' awards and a bursary for young women to take up careers in the water sector in South Africa have proved to be a successful means of empowering women.

In Hoto village, **Baluchistan** (Pakistan), where women follow a strict form of purdah, a participatory action research team went to help the village improve its water management in 1994. For a year the men would not give permission to the action team to meet the women of the village. Eventually, the women were able to participate in a joint meeting, and put up a proposal to build a new water tank on unused land, which would provide water to the non-functioning public standpipes. The women's solution, which was far more cost-effective, was adopted over the men's proposal. Moreover, after this initial success, women became active participants in decision-making, and significant changes have been made in their lives through hygiene education. Most significant has been the demand for education for their daughters. In 1998, a new girls' school was opened in Hoto. Traditional leaders have been impressed by the result of the project. The same approach is now taken in other villages

*Source: Christine Van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998. Gender in Water Resources Management, Water Supply and Sanitation: Roles and Realities Revisited. International Research Centre for Water and Sanitation, Delft, the Netherlands. Case Studies, Hoto Community, Pakistan. See: <http://www2.irc.nl/manage/manuals/cases/hoto.html>*

### › Protection of the resource base: indigenous perspective

Indigenous peoples possess traditional knowledge and skills concerning the sensing/locating of water and protection of the source. Water sources on indigenous lands are often considered a sacred element, and indigenous women may be the holders of 'water knowledge'. Their traditional land management skills often provide the most effective method of water resource management in their settlement areas. However, indigenous peoples are seriously affected by their uncompensated and unsustainable loss of water to farming and other industries introduced from outside their communities. In the worst cases, governments have closed water sources in an effort to forcibly relocate indigenous peoples from their traditional territories. In other instances, indigenous peoples are not provided with clean safe drinking water to the same level as other nationals in a given country. Measures must be taken so the indigenous people can develop their capacities to achieve sustainable and equitable self-development.

In the Witjira National Park in **Australia**, pastoralists have already caused serious deterioration of the 'mound springs' in the Great Artesian Basin. Some of them could be restored by using traditional methods and skills of indigenous peoples.

*Source:* Dean Ah Chee, 1995. Indigenous People's Connection with Kwatye (Water) in the Great Artesian Basin Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Witjira National Park Management Plan DENR.

### › Resource mobilization

The volume of external financial assistance is not likely to grow fast enough to meet water and sanitation needs around the world. Governments will have to continue to be primarily responsible for raising and using public funds (from general revenue, cross subsidization, user fees, and borrowing) for water resources and sanitation infrastructure needs. Formal and informal women's organizations and networks can play important and stimulating roles in mobilizing resources for sustainable and equitable water and land management projects. For example, The Swayam Shikshan Prayog in India has facilitated the formation of over 1,000 women's savings and credit groups that have mobilized their own savings to provide loans for one another. Women started organizing to address development issues such as water supply in their communities.

The Mabule Sanitation Project in **South Africa** is a joint initiative between the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and the community, with funding from Mvula Trust. The DWAF provides funding for sanitation projects in communities where there is gender-balanced decision-making. The initiative established a brick-making project for latrine construction that employs mainly women, generates cash, and provides the community with affordable bricks. Mabule village now has safe and attractive toilets and improved health and hygiene. There is increased acceptance of women's leadership roles by community members, as well as an increased collaboration between women and men.

*Source:* M. Jabu, 2006. South Africa: Women in Sanitation and Brick Making Project, Mabule Village. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation: case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).

While their potential contributions are considerable, women in developing countries often lack access to tools such as computers and Internet to disseminate their ideas and apply for funds. Instructing women in project management and fund raising may empower them to launch new projects and to contribute to poverty alleviation independently.



.....  
An indigenous woman with a baby on her back fills a clay pot with water, Myanmar. Photo by Franck Charton, UNICEF]



➤ **Private sector participation, pricing and the right to water**

An issue that has created controversy on many levels is the involvement of the private sector in the provision of water services. Those who are opposed to privatising water services argue that water is a fundamental human right and not a commodity that can be bought and sold for profit. This is in line with the November 2002 ruling (General Comment No. 15)<sup>6</sup> of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that states that access to adequate amounts of clean water for personal and domestic use is a fundamental human right. Opponents further point to recent empirical evidence which shows that privatisation in developing countries can have negative consequences in terms of water distribution for the poor, who are unable to pay for adequate supplies.<sup>7</sup>

A bottled water company opened a plant in the Klaten district of Java in **Indonesia** in 2002. The company extracts a huge quantity of spring water just 20 metres away from the area's primary water source. Since the opening of the plant, the community, consisting mostly of farmers, has found its access to irrigation water decreasing and its wells starting to run dry. Some farmers have been forced to stop farming and to seek work as construction workers or market labourers. In response community members came together in 2003 to establish KRAKED (Klaten People's Coalition for Justice) to advocate on their behalf. With a view to reduce its extraction rate, the community established a monitoring system and aims to eventually close down the plant. Women's participation in this process made it more effective and facilitated KRAKED reaching a wider audience.

*Source:* Nila Ardhanie, 2006. Indonesia: From The Impact of Women's Participation in the Aqua-Danone Advocacy Programme -- A Case Study in Klaten District, Central Java In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press). See also: [http://www.eng.walhi.or.id/kampanye/air/privatisasi/klaten\\_aqua/](http://www.eng.walhi.or.id/kampanye/air/privatisasi/klaten_aqua/)

Simultaneously, those in favour of private sector involvement point out that water tariffs are required to improve water allocation and efficiency and encourage the resource's conservation. When water is priced, people have a strong incentive to use it more efficiently. Nonetheless, whether or not water has a price is not directly related to private sector involvement in water services. Partnerships involving both public and private providers can be very effective in expanding services to a wider network of customers. As long as government retains oversight over water quality and ownership of the resource, private sector involvement can provide positive benefits.

<sup>6</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment 15: The right to water (articles 11 and 12). See: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/gc15.doc>.

<sup>7</sup> K. Bayliss, 2001. Water privatisation in Africa: lessons from three case studies, Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), London. See: <http://www.psiru.org/reports/2001-05-W-Africases.doc>.

The consequences of privatisation of water services in Cochabamba, Bolivia and Conakry, Guinea, were particularly difficult for the local populations. The increasing water prices have had a serious negative impact on the lives of displaced women, girls and boys. In Colombia and the Philippines communities started to use contaminated water again when water service was suspended due to non-payment. Such water put them at risk of serious illness.

*Source:* M.A. Rivera-Santander, 2004. Cited in A.E. Obando: Women and Water Privatization, Women's Human Rights Net. See: <http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-water.html>

### › Water conflicts, hazards and emergencies

Conflicts and emergencies that exacerbate water scarcity can lead to a double hardship for women. When water is scarce, women and girls may have to travel longer distances to obtain water, and conditions are more dangerous.

Women are also disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, as a result of gender inequalities regarding political and economic status, human rights, education and health. Women have high death rates in disasters, as they often do not receive warnings or other information about hazards and risks. Their mobility in disasters may be restricted or affected due to cultural and social constraints. Gender inequality can complicate and extend the time for women's recovery, for example, if women do not receive timely care for trauma experienced in disasters.

During floods in Mozambique in 2000, when clean water was in short supply, many women were forced to resort to using floodwater for cooking, thereby increasing the risk of disease outbreak.

In **Bangladesh**, rural women are usually affected in negative ways by floods. In early 2004, the Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), together with other national agencies, initiated a project on flood vulnerability, risk reduction and preparedness through a community-based information system in a flood-prone zone, which included gender mainstreaming in the flood-risk programme. The objective was to identify best practices regarding flood preparedness, risk reduction and information dissemination, especially to women at home. It was found that floods have less of an impact on men than on women, as men control resources and can leave their homes and communities to look for work. As a result of the study, new forms of communicating flood information to women at home were tested. Flood warnings were prepared using the local language and different media, including posters, flag systems, drums and broadcasts from mosques. These enabled illiterate women to access information needed for evacuating cattle, storing crops and food supplies and organizing boats for evacuation. The warning systems provided considerably improved preparedness during floods in 2004.

*Source:* S.H.M. Fakhruddin, 2006. Bangladesh: Gender Mainstreaming Processes in Community-based Flood Risk Management. In: Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).

## Recommended areas for action

To ensure that the gender perspective is successfully incorporated into the global water and sanitation agenda, it is essential to advocate for the direct involvement of both women and men at all levels: national governments; regional/local governments; communities and civil society organizations; donors; and international organizations. Some actions for each are suggested below:

### A. National Governments

Governments need to have a clear commitment to both incorporate water and sanitation programmes explicitly into their national development strategies, and to ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into this agenda. Some suggested actions are outlined below:

#### *Mobilize resources to improve access to safe water and sanitation*

- ✘ Facilitate access to grants or credit on concessionary terms for women's groups for installation and maintenance of adequate drinking water supply and sanitation facilities;
- ✘ Allocate resources to civil society organizations and small-scale providers of water and sanitation services, particularly those that include women as full partners;
- ✘ Provide micro-credit and creative alternative financing mechanisms to gender-sensitive organizations for improving or building community-based water and sanitation services.

#### *Strengthen legislation and facilitate access to land and water for productive uses*

- ✘ Recognize women's important role in agriculture, livestock and fisheries, assist them in gaining access to water for productive uses and accord women equal rights to land tenure;
- ✘ Support and promote equitable land and tenure arrangements that enable female producers to become decision-makers and owners;
- ✘ Improve women's productivity in using water for agriculture and small business through training, market linkages and access to information.

#### *Promote access to sanitation*

- ✘ Ensure that the overall national sanitation framework is gender-sensitive;
- ✘ Earmark funds for hygiene education in school curricula and separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls;
- ✘ Commission research to identify, through gender analysis, where social and economic groups are chronically excluded from access to sanitation.

#### *Develop capacity and encourage participation*

- ✘ Introduce affirmative action programmes for training women in technical and managerial careers in the water and sanitation sector;
- ✘ Ensure that a minimum percentage of women participate in decision making from the ministerial down to village levels;
- ✘ Provide assistance to facilitate research into gender considerations in water resource management;
- ✘ Allocate funds to the capacity development of women and girls;

- ✘ Encourage both women and men to participate in businesses involved in water resource management and sanitation schemes.

#### **B. Regional/Local Governments**

- ✘ Encourage gender mainstreaming in local government and community levels;
- ✘ Promote hygiene education messages through women's groups, schools and health clinics;
- ✘ Design and implement capacity building to consider the needs of women and men in the design of water, sanitation and hygiene education programmes;
- ✘ Remove internal gender biases and discrimination in public sector organizations;
- ✘ Encourage gender sensitive budgets so that local governments can assess the economic value of policy commitments on gender equality.

#### **C. Communities and Civil Society**

- ✘ Lobby for better services targeted towards women and children;
- ✘ Assist in collecting information on men and women's roles, access, needs, priorities and perspective on water and sanitation related issues;
- ✘ Support equality for women in the decision-making process at a local level;
- ✘ Enable women and girls to acquire access to information, training and resources related to water and sanitation initiatives.

#### **D. Donors and International Organizations**

- ✘ Engage women leaders, especially environment and water scientists and ministers, to serve as role models in the effort to mainstream gender into water management at all levels;
- ✘ Promote gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation through linking with MDG 3: 'Promote gender and empower women'.
- ✘ Compile and disseminate examples of good practices and develop norms and guidelines for gender mainstreaming;
- ✘ Invest in the capacity building of the water sector, with emphasis on empowering disadvantaged women and men;
- ✘ Encourage the media, in both developed and developing countries, to provide more coverage on gender and water issues;
- ✘ Promote equal opportunities for men and women within the donor sector;
- ✘ Provide capacity building support of gender focal staff;
- ✘ Cooperate with partner organizations to develop a framework of conventional wisdom between water and gender employees from each organization;
- ✘ Support the development and implementation of a gender sensitive water policy framework both on national and international level during the decade 2005-2015.

Traditional transport of water in an isolated Andean village, Ecuador.

Photo by J. Cassagne, UNESCO



## The Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water

### Background information

The Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water (GWTF) was established in February 2003 as an initiative of the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE). It was subsequently endorsed by the inter-agency group of agencies and programmes called “UN-Water” as the focal point for both gender and water issues. At the Task Force’s inaugural session, Ms. Angela King, Assistant-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, stated: “...the 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 recommendations on how to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the water and sanitation sector.”

The Task Force brings together the gender and water focal points from 18 United Nations agencies, five partners outside the United Nations, and two observers. The Water, Natural Resources and Small Island Developing States Branch in the Sustainable Development Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and specifically Marcia Brewster, Senior Officer in that Division, was nominated as the Task Manager. In efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals in water and sanitation, the Task Force coordinates joint efforts of the United Nations agencies to meet the most basic human needs in water and sanitation, as well as water for productive use, with a commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment. The definition of access to safe drinking water, according to the World Health Organization, is an average of 20 litres per person per day within one kilometre walking distance of the household, and basic sanitation refers simply to a sanitary means of excreta disposal.

Members of the Task Force recognize that the internationally-agreed goals and targets for water and sanitation can only be achieved if both women and men are involved in water resources and sanitation management and that gender concerns are a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of the goals.

### Further information

#### UN-Water

c/o Chief, Water, Natural Resources and Small Islands  
Developing States Branch  
Sustainable Development Division  
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
(UN/DESA)  
Room DC2-2020, New York, NY 10017, USA  
[Unwater@un.org](mailto:Unwater@un.org)

#### Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water

Task Manager,  
Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water  
Water, Natural Resources and Small Islands Developing  
States Branch  
Sustainable Development Division  
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
(UN/DESA)  
Room DC2-2024, New York, NY 10017, USA

**Related links:** <http://unwater.org> • <http://un.org/waterforlifedecade>

**Link to Gender and Water Task Force:** [http://un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/Interagency\\_activities.htm](http://un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/Interagency_activities.htm)

## Task Force members

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA): Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); Division for Sustainable Development (DSD); Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI); and Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW)

World Bank (WB)

World Health Organization (WHO)

### Non- UN Members

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)

UN Foundation

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Women for Water Partnership (WfWfW)

### Observers

Freshwater Caucus to the Commission on Sustainable Development

Plan International

## Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank	IANWGE	Intera gency Network on Women and Gender Equality
AMCOW	African Ministers' Council for Water	IRC	International Water and Sanitation Centre, the Netherlands
AWARENET	Agro Food Wastes Minimization and Reduction Network.	IW-Learn	International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network
Cap-Net	Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resources Management	WEDC	Water Engineering Development Centre, U.K.
GEF	Global Environment Facility	WWAP	United Nations World Water Assessment Programme
GWTF	Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water		

## Selected joint activities of the Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water, 2005 - 2006

ACTIVITY	DELIVERABLES	PARTNERS
<i>Meetings organized by members</i>		
Oxford Roundtable on Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Education for Schools (Jan., 2005)	– 'Basic quality package' of water and sanitation to be delivered to all primary schools by 2015	UNICEF IRC, WSSCC, GWA
Seminar on "Gender and Water Resources Management in Africa", Pretoria (9 March 2005)	Action plan for AMCOW for mainstreaming gender in water resources, sanitation and hygiene management drafted and later adopted by AMCOW	UN-Water (Africa), UNEP, GWA, ECA, AMCOW, WSSCC, GWTF
Participation at the Forth World Water Forum, Mexico, March 2006: "Local Actions for a Global Challenge"	Sessions on Gender at WWF-4: Safe, accessible, private and nearby: Involving women in managing water and sanitation – <i>Key to meeting the MDGs</i> (19/03/06) Gender Mainstreaming and Water for Growth and Development: Diversity as an Agent of Change Water and Cultural Diversity: Mediating for sustainable development	GWTF, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, GWA, WfW GWA, WfW UNESCO
<i>Meetings on gender/water organized by members</i>		
Expert Group Meetings (EGM) on Gender Mainstreaming in Water for African Cities (WAC) Programme	EGMs are part of the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Initiative of the WAC-II Programme. They provide a forum for presenting Rapid Gender Assessments and developing Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans for selected WAC-II cities. The first session was held in mid-2005 and the second will be held in mid-2006.	UN-HABITAT GWA AfDB
<i>Publications/papers/training materials</i>		
GWTF background paper, 'A Gender perspective in water resources and sanitation' for CSD-13	Background paper prepared for CSD-13 (April 2005) outlining the central issues of concern and recommendations for action. Available as link on: <a href="http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd13/documents/bgound_2.pdf">http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd13/documents/bgound_2.pdf</a>	UN DESA, GWTF
UNDP Resource Guide on Gender mainstreaming in Water Management	Revised edition released March 2006 [Eng, Fr, Sp, Arabic], available at <a href="http://www.genderandwater.org">www.genderandwater.org</a>	UNDP, GWA, GWTF, IRC
Gender and IWRM tutorial	Available at: <a href="http://www.cap-net.org/iwrm_tutorial/mainmenu.htm">http://www.cap-net.org/iwrm_tutorial/mainmenu.htm</a>	UNDP Cap-Net, GWA
Evidence Report: For Her It's the Big Issue: Putting Women at the Centre of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene	Launched in March 2006. Available at <a href="http://www.wsscc.org/pdf/publication/FOR_HER_ITs_THE_BIG_ISSUE_Evidence_Report-en.pdf">http://www.wsscc.org/pdf/publication/FOR_HER_ITs_THE_BIG_ISSUE_Evidence_Report-en.pdf</a>	UNICEF, WSSCC, GWA, Norway, WEDC
Gender, Water and Sanitation: Case studies on Best practices	Full version to be printed in mid-2006. Summary version available at: <a href="http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/casestudies_bestpractices.pdf">http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/casestudies_bestpractices.pdf</a>	Case studies produced by OSAGI, edited with GWTF Task Manager

ACTIVITY	DELIVERABLES	PARTNERS
<i>Publications/papers (continued)</i>		
Gender and Irrigation Pocketguide	Guidelines for mainstreaming a gender perspective in planning, design and implementation of water management programmes (especially in agriculture). Mid-2006.	FAO
Water, gender and rural livelihoods: case studies	Case studies highlighting some of the gender-linked constraints and opportunities in access to water resources, possibly also addressing the land-water interface. Mid-2006.	FAO
Papers and Reports developed as part of the UN HABITAT Water for African Cities (WAC) II Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– City Level Rapid Gender Assessment Reports from 17 WAC II cities</li> <li>– Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (overall concept paper and strategy for WAC II)</li> </ul>	UN-HABITAT GWA
<b>Public Awareness/Education Campaigns</b>		
Implementation of the "Women leaders for WASH" (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All) initiative.	Development of Advocacy materials in collaboration with partners. Interventions by women leaders (ex. speeches, articles, Press Releases etc.) focusing on WASH messages.	WSSCC, UNICEF, UNDP, GWTF
Travelling exhibit: Advocacy and awareness raising on gender and water	Exhibit in Brazil at the GEF Congress (June 2005), travelling to Argentina, March 2006. Travel to Africa in 2006-07.	GWA IW – Learn GEF, others
Development of educational materials for the 'Water-for-Life' Decade	Policy, advocacy and training materials for the Decade including: (i) Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) content for Girls Education Curricula; (ii) WASH advocacy materials	UNICEF, WHO IRC WSSCC
Other media events/materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– BBC Earth Report worldwide broadcasts</li> <li>– 2005-06 WASH Media Awards for best investigative reporting on WASH issues (including a Gender Prize)</li> </ul>	WSSCC, TVE/BBC
<b>Other activities</b>		
Provision of Research Assistance into Gender and water issues.	Directed at regional and national organizations to facilitate the understanding of existing gender considerations in water resources management.	GWA Cap-Net AWARENET
Provision of inputs to the World Water Development Report and the Human Development Report	Inputs on gender-relevant indicators and policy recommendations for the 2006 World Water Development Report (WWDR 2006), and the 2006 Human Development Report.	DESA, GWTF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WWAP
Training	Assistance to regional and national organizations in incorporating gender perspectives into their water and sanitation related interventions.	GWA Cap-Net