

# **Gender in International Water Laws: A challenge**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Seventy percent of 1.3 billion people in developing countries living on less than one dollar a day, are women. Therefore it follows that energy poverty is a problem that has a disproportionate effect on women. Because, women are responsible for supplying their families with food, fuel and water, often without the benefit of basic modern infrastructure. Lack of energy for households' needs limits women's ability to take care themselves. Without access to convenient water and affordable fuels for cooking cleaning and heating, women have to spend large amounts of time to obtain traditional fuels, agricultural wastes and water. If they do not have running water or motorized pumps for their homes, women also have to spend time each day gathering water from taps or possibly polluted wells, rivers or spring.

Researches indicate striking examples to us. In rural Sub-Saharan Africa millions of people share their domestic water sources with animals or rely on unprotected wells that are breeding grounds for pathogens. And the average distance that women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water is 6 kilometers. Because the basic requirement for water is 7.5 litres a day, although it depends on the degree of development of the countries. For example, an average water use ranges from 200-300 litres a person a day in most countries in Europe to less than 10 litres in countries such as Mozambique. Water sanitation is also one of the major problems for the people who are living in underdeveloped and developing countries. Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are the world's second biggest killer of children. It has been calculated that 443 million school days are lost each year to water-related illness. A survey of 5000 schools in Senegal showed that over half of them had no water supply and almost half had no sanitation facilities. Children who are not drinking water at school, thereby becoming dehydrated and unable to concentrate.

Discussions on water pricing became disputed more at international level. People living in the slums of Jakarta, Manila and Nairobi pay 5 to 10 times more for water than those living in high-income areas in those same cities and more than consumers in London or New York. Although, by the Principle 4 of Dublin Declaration, water was an economic, productive and MERIT good and so, it has judged to be worth more than its value according to the market. However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggests that water costs should not exceed 3 per cent of household income, although, consumption of the merit goods does not depend primarily on the ability to pay for the good or service.

Shortly, although women always play an important role to manage water due to their traditional family roles, they are absent in decision-making mechanisms for water politics. Additionally, researches indicate that water policy actions including legislation and programs haven't been prepared by using gender lenses. However it wouldn't be possible to provide Sustainable Development if the framework for water governance will be determine without considering women's rights as water users and decision makers.

## **WATER GOVERNANCE**

Among the many water-related challenges worldwide, the crisis of scarcity, deteriorating water quality, the linkages between water and food security, and the need for improved governance are the most significant in the context of gender differences in access to and control over water resources.

Water policies based on broad, generalized perspectives are more likely to omit local knowledge, and social and gender dimensions and their implications. Recognizing the various purposes for which these local water resources are used by different groups of men and women in the community would help to successfully integrate gender considerations, not only in water resource management, but also in sectors such as urban water supply, agriculture, industry and energy that depend upon water resources, and which often conflict over water allocations and their demand for freshwater resources.

There is enough evidence to show that integrating a gender-sensitive approach to development policies can have a positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of water interventions and on the conservation of water resources. Scarcity and misuse of fresh water pose a serious and growing threat to sustainable development and protection of the environment. Involving both men and women in the design and implementation of interventions leads to effective new solutions to water problems; helps governments to avoid poor investments and expensive mistakes; makes projects more sustainable; ensures that infrastructure development yields the maximum social and economic returns; and furthers development goals, such as reducing hunger, child mortality and improving gender equality.

## **INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS FOR WATER GOVERNANCE**

The relationship between economic development and environmental degradation was first placed on the international agenda in 1972, at the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm. After the Conference, Governments set up the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which today continues to act as a global catalyst for action to protect the environment. Little, however, was done in the succeeding years to integrate environmental concerns into national economic planning and decision-making. Overall, the environment continued to deteriorate, and such problems as ozone depletion, global warming and water pollution grew more serious, while the destruction of natural resources accelerated at an alarming rate.

By 1983, when the UN set up the World Commission on Environment and Development, environmental degradation was accepted to be a matter of survival for developing nations. Led by Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, the Commission put forward the concept of sustainable development as an alternative approach to one simply based on economic growth which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

After considering the 1987 Brundtland Report, the UN General Assembly called for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The primary goals of the Summit were to come to an understanding of “development” that would support socio-economic development and prevent the continued deterioration of the environment, and to lay a

foundation for a global partnership between the developing and the more industrialized countries, based on mutual needs and common interests, that would ensure a healthy future for the planet.

In 1992, International Conference on Water and the Environment (ICWE) in Dublin, Ireland was held on. The experts saw the emerging global water resources picture as critical. At its closing session, the Conference adopted the Dublin Statement and the Conference Report. The Conference participants call for fundamental new approaches to the assessment, development and management of freshwater resources, which can only be brought about through political commitment and involvement from the highest levels of government to the smallest communities. Commitment will need to be backed by substantial and immediate investments, public awareness campaigns, legislative and institutional changes, technology development, and capacity building programs. Underlying all these must be a greater recognition of the interdependence of all peoples, and of their place in the natural world.

In commending the Dublin Statement to the world leaders assembled at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the Conference participants urge all governments to study carefully the specific activities in order to reverse the present trends of overconsumption, pollution, and rising threats from drought and floods. The Conference Report sets out recommendations for action at local, national and international levels, based on four guiding principles. **According to the Principle 1**, fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment. **By Principle 4**, water was accepted as economic good. **Principles 2 and 3** hold key for water governance. **By Principle 2**, water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels. And **by Principle 3**, women should be considered in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. **According to the Principle 3**, the pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programs, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration (Resolution A/res/55/2), which set out the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the Target 10; halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

By the Johannesburg Targets adopted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, States commit themselves to the additional target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

The Commission on the Status of Women has been responsible for organizing and following up the world conferences on women in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment that was announced at the end of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women which was held in Beijing, China in 1995. It aims to provide equal opportunities for women with men and remove all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.

The overall vision agreed at the Beijing Conference together with the MDG targets have guided the work of international organizations, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) over the past decade. IFAD works to create the conditions that enable poor rural people to integrate themselves into the mainstream of social and economic development, and to overcome poverty by improving their access to, and control over fundamental assets such as water, land, financial capital, knowledge and technology. Special effort is made to remove the material, institutional and policy obstacles that prevent women in particular from harnessing their potential. Gender issues are crucial elements of IFAD's poverty reduction strategy and women are major target group in almost all programs and projects. IFAD recognizes that lack of, or limited access to, essential services and infrastructure such as health care, water and education, places an additional burden on women and girls due to their care-giving and other domestic responsibilities. As a result of increasing awareness of resource depletion, the degradation of natural systems and the dangers of polluting substances has increased markedly in the past decade, it has been accepted that women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management.

Over the past decade, the Commission has systematically reviewed progress in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action at its annual sessions, and has adopted action-oriented recommendations, in the form of agreed conclusions, to facilitate increased implementation at all levels. In the 20th year of Beijing Process, we are all come together in order to get our equal rights and opportunities with men and provide harmonious partnership among us.

Throughout the Agenda 21, importance of struggle against worsening conditions that are destroying fragile ecosystems and displacing communities, keeping women out of the productive activities, threatening a safe and healthy environment and creating in negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life, has been underlined. **By Article 249**, Governments have invited to take measures in order to stop grievance of women and open the doors to women at all levels of policy formulation and decision-making in natural resource and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation. **By Article 250**, the leadership role of women has been mentioned in promoting an environmental ethic, reducing resource use, and reusing and recycling resources to minimize waste and excessive consumption. **By Article 251**, Governments have called for providing effective participation of women in the generation of knowledge and environmental education in decision-making and management at all levels.

Consequently, women's experiences and contributions should be accepted as an essential requirement for an ecologically sound environment and central pillar of the agenda for the twenty-first century. Because, sustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported.