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MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY IN GENDER WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

We have entered the new millennium with one of the most fundamental conditions of human development unmet: universal access to water. Of the world's 6 billion people, at least 1.1 billion lack access of safe drinking water. The lives of these people who are among the poorest on our planet are often devastated by this deprivation, which impeded the enjoyment of health and other human rights.

“Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity”. (Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General).

To go forward to make such a dream a reality implies major efforts and effective strategies in the way we are using and managing the water resources. On the global level water is badly used and managed. This holds true for the countries either rich in their water resources or in the ones of limited water resources and facing severe water scarcity. This can be clearly demonstrated if we consider the agricultural sector where nearly 70% of the available water resources are allocated and the water on farm use efficiency is not exceeding 45% with water losses exceeding 50%. Ensuring that the access to sufficient safe water is a human right constitutes an important step towards making it a reality for every one.

It means that:

- freshwater is a legal entitlement, rather than a commodity or service provided on a charitable basis;
- achieving basic and improved levels of access should be accelerated;
- the “least served are better targeted and, therefore, inequalities decreased and
- communities and vulnerable groups will be empowered to take part in decision-making processes.

Passing from the meanings of water as human right towards the realization is a very difficult and complex process. However, our success and/or failure is mainly a matter of the way we are using and managing the water resources within the constraints of their availability.

In this regard, the cornerstone is the management of available water resources. We have to stop with the fragmented management approach and move to the integrated one. Integrated water resource management is the call of time, but, it requires attention to the human aspects of the use, development and management of the limited fresh water resources, being, the users, the actual operators in all the management process starting with the set up of plan, passing by the needed actions to be taken and ending with practical implementation on the ground. However, this cannot smoothly and appropriately be done without major attention and priority consideration given to gender, but, unfortunately, gender approach is not sufficiently considered.

WATER AND GENDER: PRESENT SITUATION

The demands and skills of water users differ, depending on their gender, age, culture, religion, abilities, education and income.

Sustainable water use and management requires that these differences be taken into account at all levels and for all water activities, from policies to projects. Yet, too often under-represented users - particularly women the main users and managers of water are excluded from decision-making and planning. The exclusion of women has made water management systems less responsive to demands for water services hence, the skills and energies of nearly half of the communities' population are nearly neglected in spite of the vital role they could play in improving natural resources management.

These shortcomings offer important lessons and challenges for the international, regional and local water communities. Women's involvement is crucial to successful water sector use, management and reforms. This started clearly appearing politically and technically.

At present, we can notify that globally, there is a better understanding and more awareness of the gender issues involved in water management and a range of initiatives have been introduced to improve the situation. Many countries recognized the benefits of involving women in all aspects of water use and thus most government guidelines, project designs, and programmes policies now address gender concerns. However, too many projects and programmes focus on the practical rather than the strategic needs of women. Focusing should be given to the water rights; those would provide women with permanent means of production – the basis to greater wealth creation, longterm prosperity and financial security. But such a change challenges longstanding traditions and practices.

Indeed, although men and women both have water related responsibilities, gender based divisions of labor determine who controls the many uses of water. Moreover, water management structures – from the local level to the basin level- tend to be dominated by large water users and by administrative political and economic elites. As a result, poor families' water needs are often ignored, undermining the welfare and livelihoods. Then point to be raised is that in some societies men have deeply ingrained insecurities about the notion of women owing property, including land and water right for farming.

It has to be stressed here that the issue is not just empowering women, but, it also involves addressing and altering men's deeply ingrained incentives about women owing property. Such changes are possible only with fundamental shifts in gender relations.

GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE WATER USE AND MANAGEMENT

Water scarcity and its fragility pose different challenges for rural men and women because of their different roles, relations and responsibilities, opportunities and constraints and uneven access and control of resources.

Furthermore, agricultural, environmental and related water policies and programmes often fail to recognize women's particular needs and crucial contribution in the use and the management of water resources.

In this regard, in the arid and semi-arid countries and, particularly those of the Mediterranean, still more work needed to be done to incorporate a gender perspective in policy, projects and programmes concerning the water sector. This can be promoted through a better understanding of men's and women's roles, and their perspective concerns and needs.

As food producers, women and men have a stake in the preservation of the environment and in environmentally sustainable development. Land and water resources form the basis of all farming systems and their preservation is crucial to sustained and improved food production. A lack of understanding and appreciation of women's and men's knowledge of natural resources management and preservation techniques, as well as a disregard for their properties as resource users, has caused many development interventions to fail or to be rejected by local communities. In view of this sustainable, relevant and equitable development should be based on women's and men's full and equal participation, on their respective local knowledge and on ecological and socio-cultural factors.

Governments, development agencies and civil society organizations are increasingly incorporating a gender perspective in their policies, programmes and projects aimed at sustainable use and management of natural resources. However, the road to achieve this goal is still a long and arduous

one, and the commitments made at international conferences and conventions need to be translated into practice, with the full and equal participation of women and men of the local, national and international levels.

Indeed, several international conventions and agreements have been adopted by the international community, all including commitments reflecting a broad-based consensus on the need to remove the obstacles to women's and men's equal and active participation in and benefit from development initiatives (Agenda 21 UNCED Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Beijing Platform for Action 1995; the International Conference on Freshwater, Bonn, 2001; The World Summit of Sustainable Development –SSD- Johannesburg, 2002; The Second World Water Forum, The Hague, 2000; The Third World Water Forum, Kyoto, Japan 2003). Yet, despite these efforts, gender discrimination in access to, and control of resources and services persists- as does the neglect of women's rights- because of political and cultural impediments that are difficult to eradicate and that require resources and strong political will. These impediments have also hindered the signatory parties' and development agent's efforts to mainstream gender in sustainable land and water resources development and management. Generally, the implementation of conventions still depends on addressing certain issues such as collection and use of sex- disaggregation data, the understanding of gender, the capacities and tools to insure integration of the gender dimension, as well as the knowledge of existing resources and expertise on gender issues.

INTEGRATION OF GENDER DIMENSION IN WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: EXISTING PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

In the Mediterranean, gender is now a priority on the agendas of water resources policy-makers, irrigation leaders and researchers, however, the considerable existing gap between positive policy intentions and their conversion into concredited action is quite and clearly demonstrated. Aware of this, Bari Institute took the initiatives for a better understanding of the actual situation, particularly in the developing countries, the reason for this existing gap and what are the imposing negative factors that impact and slow down the gender implementation policy. This required to establish a realistic dialogue between the eminent international experts, professionals and practitioners representing most countries of the region as well as representatives of NGOs and other women organizations effectively involved in the development of gender issues.

This was realized through a successful workshop organized and held in Bari Institute from 3 – 5 June, 2004 gathering around 40 international and national experts where the above-mentioned questions were addressed, seeking reasonable answers from the presented case studies covering the majority of developing countries and the experiences of the developed ones.

The added value of the workshop is in accurately identifying the problems and the constraints impending and slowing down the implementation of integrating gender issues in water resources development and management as outlined in the following:

1. **Legislation:** Legislation often does not sufficiently consider the access of women to land and water in most Mediterranean countries. Women are absent in the decision-making process, government agencies are not taking enough initiatives in educating women in water management issues. Legislation must be modified to be more gender-sensitive.
2. **Communication and Awareness of Gender Issues:** Education at primary and secondary school, vocational schools and universities in gender issues is of utmost importance for increasing the awareness of the public and the government bodies. Little is done in this important area compared to the actual needs.
3. **Inadequacy of Analysis:** There is a poor analysis of gender issues in water policies. New tools and guidelines are needed.
4. **Lack of Participation of Women in Water Governance:** Women are mainly absent in the management and policy making processes. Very few women are active in Water Users Associations and Water Cooperatives. The same applies to most irrigation and water supply agencies.
5. **Centralization of Water Management and Governance:** There is an excessive centralization of decisions and insufficient knowledge of local problems resulting in very poor technical assistance at local level.
6. **Institutional Capacity:** There is a lack of coordination mechanisms among relevant institutions and bodies within countries and more at regional level, and limited skills related to participatory and gender approaches.

7. **Extension:** The extension services directed towards women are unsatisfactory. There are few female extension officers/gender specialists. Training material is rarely gender sensitive.

8. **Impact of Globalization:** Globalization is affecting social roles in rural communities and agricultural management, including irrigation. Many women are changing their attitude towards agricultural work.

9. **Cultural Heritage and Social Norms:** In most countries inequity and inequality are dominant because of social and cultural reasons.

10. **Poverty:** Most working women are engaged in agriculture and are the most disadvantaged group of their society. Due to lack of training and other reasons they remain unskilled workers.

11. **Lack of Access to Information:** There is insufficient knowledge among men and women about their own rights, and there is lack of access to needed information and technology.

12. **Lack of Gender-Sensitive Indicators:** There is an absence of institutional set up that is responsible for monitoring the process of gender integration into water management.

13. **Gender-disaggregated statistical information:** Still limited availability of statistics disaggregated by sex with a gender perspective and therefore it becomes difficult to quantify the gravity of situations related to the access of women and men to land and water resources.

The discussions in the case of the workshop was not limited to fulfill its objectives, but also covered the following basic gender-sensitive questions:

- *Who performs which tasks?*
- *Who has access to and control of land and water resources?*
- *Who has access to and who has the control of income and benefits?*
- *Who decides what?*
- *What are the expectations and needs of the land and water users?*

In addition, in view of the workshop findings, a part of the discussion concentrated on the following:

- *What is needed? What could be the strategy? What is the most appropriate approach? What are the enabling conditions needed for putting the strategy in action? What needs to be done?*

If women are to play a more prominent role in water management in the Mediterranean, a number of basic concepts must be more widely accepted, among them the following:

- *Increasing efforts to improve the general status of women.*

They must be tackled by taking into account the status of both women and men, recognizing that their life courses differ and that equal treatments will not necessarily produce equal outcomes.

- On the national level, water policies, institutions and management structures must reflect the needs, priorities and representation rights of both women and men for all possible water uses.

- Community institutions for integrated water management must be linked to new basin-level management framework. This will require a continuous flow of information to allow the women to be acquainted with water management proposals from the local level to the basin level, beside setting the devising strategies that guarantee the women participation while recognizing cultural and social tradition.

- Many steps need to be taken to achieve gender equity in water management, including affirmative actions at various levels, gender budgeting and action at the micro-level. Meeting this goals requires gender mainstreaming taking into account gender equity concerns in all policies, programmes administrative and organizational procedures.

- Governments have to be motivated and encouraged to use affirmative action to attract more women to water management careers, strengthen the skills of women dealing with water issues, formulate a national strategy for integrating gender mainstreaming with integrated water resource management, build the capacity of water professionals to work on gender issues and improve information dissemination and sharing among women.

- Promote participatory methodologies that use agreed indicators to measure the effectiveness of women participation. In the meantime, and to ensure meaningful participation of women, it is needed to provide additional capacity in training, materials and financing.

- Develop gender analysis at the earliest stages of projects and programmes as well as monitor gender equity for the running programmes and projects including gender budgeting.

RESPONDING TO THE CONSTRAINTS AND MEETING THE NEEDS:

The GEWAMED proposed programme: "Mainstreaming Gender Dimensions into Water Resources Development and Management".

In view of the recommendations of the workshop held in Bari Institute in June 2004, in the frame of the EC-INCO funded "SAA" INGEDI, Bari Institute prepared a new ample programme "GEWAMED". The proposed project aims at solving those problems clearly identified in Bari workshop and, particularly, the ones closely related to the access to information and to improved coordination, but also it can contribute considerably to reduce the extent on most of the problems many countries of the region are now facing.

The new in this programme is that it expresses the ideas and opinions of the experts of the region fully involved in mainstreaming gender issues in water resources development and management to overcome the existing constrains through several strategies and actions to be taken and that could be easily implemented on the ground under the prevailing conditions of the Mediterranean countries and, particularly, the developing ones. Furthermore, it is mainly concentrating on building national networks in a major number of the developing countries as main sources for supplying information and know-how to the regional network and, thereby, the national coordinator will have a key position as he will be involved in far-reaching activities included in the project.

The programme was already submitted to the EC (FP6-2003-INCO-MPC-2), and it is in the process of evaluation, hopefully to be accepted.

The strategic objectives addressed in the proposed programme are the following:

1. Building a national and regional shared knowledge base on gender issues, policies, actions and measures to support gender mainstreaming in all processes related to sustainable water resources development and management.
2. Enhance the cooperation and dialogue among Mediterranean countries but also within each country promoting the exchange of information and its dissemination among national governmental agencies, NGO's research institutions, international organizations, private sector and communication media involved in gender-related issues and the water sector.
3. Promote the adoption of national policies and other related instruments (strategies, approaches, guidelines, incentives and legislation) by involving decision-makers and politicians in the processes of mainstreaming gender dimensions in the planning, development and management of water resources.
4. Improve the institutional capacity building and the understanding of gender issues of all stakeholders involved in the processes of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM).

PROPOSED PROGRAMME ABSTRACT

The project plans to build an extensive knowledge base for mainstreaming gender dimensions into IWRM. To achieve this objective the project will build a network at regional and national level using Internet technology and undertake 10 national seminars, three regional workshops and an inter-regional conference. The regional network will be essentially a mean for exchanging experiences, disseminate results and allow for enhanced coordination among national projects' activities and participants. The national networks will be a powerful tool to store and disseminate relevant information and co-ordinate existing relevant activities.

The project will disseminate the gender-water information particularly in the rural areas where the problems of women participation in decision-making processes are more neglected. For this purpose GEWAMED will establish national coordination committees that will be, on one hand, important sources of information and, on the other, the main channel for dissemination. The most distinctive features of this project are precisely the actions at national level.

The integration of women in all aspects of the society and in particular in water resources management is extremely variable within the countries of the Mediterranean basin, going from situations of nearly total neglect to others of ample participation. Therefore, the exchange of these experiences offers promising possibilities. To promote coordination and exchange of experiences the project will organize two regional workshops and an Inter Regional Conference that will also be a channel for disseminating project results and achievements.

At the end of this paper, it is worthy adding that Mainstreaming Gender Dimension into Water Resources Development and Management offer cause for cautious optimism. Nationally and

internationally, the main challenges are recognized and case studies and examples of needed measures are numerous.

Promoting equity and gender balance is not just a matter of political concerns, it is about mobilizing all available skills and so conserving our natural resources, stopping their rapid degradation and empowering societies to accelerate poverty alleviation, advance socio-economic development and the welfare of the Mediterranean population.

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