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Conference Report Summary

Sustainable Development and Water in International Gender Perspective

International Conference of Experts

Rotterdam, the Netherlands

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Conference Report Summary

On the initiative of the Netherlands State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment, Co-ordinating State Secretary for Emancipation Policy in co-operation with the State Secretary of Transport, Public Works and Water Management an international conference was held in Rotterdam, 2nd - 3rd of February 2000, on the subject of "Sustainable Development and Water in International Gender Perspective".

OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE

The objective of the conference was to attain more knowledge and understanding of the relation between sustainable development and gender-issues, to discuss progress and exchange experiences and good practices and subsequently to formulate recommendations for the future.

The Netherlands Government took this initiative as a step in a whole range of activities initiated during the last five years to implement strategies of the Beijing Platform for Action. An initiative to underline once more that human rights of women are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. A right which is seriously being threatened for many in the 21st century.

The Rotterdam conference is rooted in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). At this World Conference, to which 189 nations participated, a clear relation was established between the pursuit of sustainable development on the one hand and equal rights for men and women on the other hand. The provision of the primary necessity of life - water - is an intrinsic part of this pursuit. It was for this reason that the Beijing Platform for Action called upon governments to:

"... ensure that clean water is available and accessible to all by the year 2000 and that environmental protection and conservation plans are designed and implemented to restore polluted water systems and rebuild damaged watersheds".

Women play a crucial role in the development of sustainable and ecological sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management, as was recognised at the UN Conferences on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and on Women (Beijing, 1995) and reflected throughout Agenda 21. Other international organisations, such as the World Bank and the World Water Council, also increasingly acknowledge the desirability and the necessity to regard water projects in a perspective of human rights, including the human rights of women.

The results of the recent conference in Rotterdam were formulated in conclusions and recommendations which will be of use in the preparations of the Special Session

of General Assembly of the United Nations on the review and appraisal of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), to be held in June 2000 in New York.

The recommendations will also be introduced in the Second World Water Forum and in the Ministerial Conference on water to be held in March 2000 in The Hague. The objective of this Ministerial Conference will be to translate the awareness and commitment of the World Water Forum into concrete commitments by countries to implement the Visionpaper *From Vision to Action* and the *Framework for Action*.

In Rotterdam a total of 90 national and international experts from various relevant sectors -representatives from the water control boards, science, businesses and financing co-operations, social organisations, and relevant ministries like Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Development co-operation, and Emancipation policy took part in the discussions.

VISION ON GENDER: MAINSTREAM OR WATERSHED?

At the onset of the 21st century, we face an expansion of water scarcity around the world and major threats to the availability of water resources for an increasing part of the population. The increasing scarcity of water evoked many cries of distress in the past century, and it formed the subject matter for debate at world conferences. Yet, the results have been disappointing. The United Nations exclaimed the eighties of the 20th century to be the International Decade for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation. The aim was to provide every world citizen with access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the year 2000. Standing at the start of the year 2000, we have to admit that 1.2 billion people still don't have access to safe drinking water. In everyday reality, the contamination and pollution of water resources threatens the access to (safe) water resources, in particular the access of the most underprivileged of the world's population. The position of women is in this regard a special concern. The vision on water and gender: *Vision on Gender, Mainstream or Watershed*, which was especially written for the Rotterdam conference underlines this fact:

- Many women still carry the prime (or sole) responsibility for day-to-day care for their partner, children, family and community. Women and girls do not have any opportunity for self-development (i.e. attending school) as long as the first basic needs – such as water – are not guaranteed in large parts of the world. Subsequently, their human rights are violated. Carrying water is an arduous activity, absorbing much of women's time and energy. Without raising questions about this, the equal rights of men and women tend to become a hollow phrase.
- The traditional role of many women in developing countries – being consumer and small-scale producer at local level – is still insufficiently acknowledged in the process of strategic decision-making related to water. Unlike technical, economic

and – sometimes - ecological considerations, the social and gender aspects are much less incorporated in this process of decision-making. That is why, repeatedly, decisions taken at macro-level have a reversed impact on micro-level. The quality of decision-making will benefit from the incorporation of specific gender expertise and paying attention to gender-relations at local level. Therefore, in the process of research and decision-making, social and gender-aspects should be equally important as technical, economic and other considerations, in particular when decision-making evolves around investments and the use of water.

- Increasingly, international companies demonstrate their concern for social and ecological issues through social entrepreneurship. Especially in developing countries, it is important to encourage international firms that exert influence on the use and management of water, to apply a gender perspective and to incorporate women's expertise and knowledge as integral part of social entrepreneurship. Further research and experience is required to indicate whether or not the use of knowledge with regard to traditional and small-scale technologies applied by women, can contribute to more sustainable forms of water use and management.
- Women are hardly represented in the (inter)national decision-making organisations and companies in the water sector. The so-called glass ceiling, a well-known feature in many companies, the government and in science, is almost impermeable in the water sector. Figures indicate that strategic positions for decision-making are strongly dominated by men. Considering that access to water is a first requirement for every citizen, this is unacceptable from a democratic point of view.

THEMES

On the basis of the vision paper on water and gender, *Vision on Gender, Mainstream or Watershed*, the following themes were discussed more in detail:

- The participation of women in decision-making in the world of water;
- Women in consumption and small businesses, men in big businesses?
- Water and conflict: the role of women, the role of men.

In the afternoon of the conference three workshops were held. Each workshop elaborated on one of the above-mentioned themes. On the basis of the vision paper, the added input for discussion – on which further discussion and concrete recommendation could be made – and the presentation of the national and international good practices, the experts discussed their particular workshop theme. In order to 'streamline' the discussion, each workshop was asked to reach agreement upon a maximum of three recommendations. These were presented at the closing plenary session.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE WORLD OF WATER

Underrepresentation of women in influential decision-making bodies is a well-known phenomenon in many sectors and institutes. Women are hardly represented in the board of directors or in the management of (inter)national organisations and enterprises in the water world. The so-called 'glass ceiling', which is used to refer to the underrepresentation of women at the top, is in the water sector almost impermeable.

Statistics reveal that the positions where major decisions are taken within the water sector and related sectors, are - almost without exception - very strongly dominated by men. Women are much more present in informal networks and on local level. The modernisation of the water sector also asks for a transfer of the decision-making process from the informal domain to the formal domain with the establishment of formal decision-making structures mainly on local level. Thus women could get a better position in the whole of decision-making.

General outline of the workshop discussion

Three factors influencing participation of women in the world of water are:

- Awareness by decisionmakers of the meaning of gender (+ training) for the decision-making process;
- The way decision-making is organised in the world of water (top-down);
- The social, cultural and religious context.

Possible added value of women in decision-making on water:

- Stressing the need of co-operation;
- In many cases: bringing in non-technical knowledge such as social and ecological knowledge;
- Generating creative solutions by linking and exchanging various disciplines.

Instruments mentioned:

- Training/awareness-raising, aimed at both women and the officials in the world of water;
- Networking of women in the water-world;
- Legislative measures aiming at a certain quantity of women in decision-making;
- A certain percentage for appointing women (saved seats);
- Increasing the number of women in engineering, science and technical education and professions.

WOMEN IN CONSUMPTION AND SMALL BUSINESSES, MEN IN BIG BUSINESSES?

In many developing countries, carrying, storing and purifying water is still a traditional responsibility of women. Consequently, women depend - more than men - on the reliability and quality of water supply. The decision of women to use new water sources is influenced by factors such as the costs, its reliability,

accessibility, or even privacy (when bathing). The failure to understand these motives might end in a rejection of the services provided; a costly affair. It shows also that water supply firms, public utilities or public sector organisations have a direct interest in women's participation, for it provides them with valuable information regarding the use of their provisions.

The traditional role of women in consumption and production at local level can play an integral part in the aim for sustainable development and sustainable use of water, but requires active involvement of women in large-scale production and in the provision of water supply. This not only enables efficient use of women's expertise and the full employment of human capital, but their specific knowledge will also contribute to the cost-efficiency.

In contrast to the situation in many developing countries, in many industrialised countries, the responsibility for production of water and the treatment of (waste) water has been taken over completely by water supply companies, public utilities, or organisations for water supply and sanitation. Although traditionally under-represented in production, recently a change can be observed in which women become increasingly involved in research, development of products, hydraulical engineering, ground water management and in the construction of waterworks.

General outline of the workshop discussion

Men still occupy most of the management positions in the water sector. Several measures will be required to arrive at a more equal representation of women and men and of local people in management positions. Education and training of women (and men) at local level is one of the requirements to do so. Other methods to enhance women's participation in the water sector are:

- The involvement of a woman and a man from each household in all the meetings of a project;
- Measuring the direct and indirect effects of projects or Gender Impact Assessments;
- The establishment of incentives to recruit women for higher positions;
- Co-operation between (government) organisations and private enterprises in the water sector.

A gender label could play an important role in awareness raising. Yet, the realization of such a label is difficult to reach. First of all, the high costs of implementation would relatively confine the number of participating countries. Secondly, it creates high standards to which only few organisations are able to comply.

Therefore, it will be more feasible to emphasise the relation between sustainable development and gender-concerns. This relation touches upon sustainable use of natural resources, the maintenance of infrastructure, and refers to the social dimension of sustainable development.

Similarly, co-operation between governmental organisations and local, national and international organisations (e.g. water boards) is essential for water management.

Such co-operation facilitates the development of good governance policies, and stimulates social entrepreneurship and a broader transparent process which prevents the loss of valuable knowledge. It creates an institutional memory with regard to good practices, and successful projects. The involvement of women in these organisations is necessary to enhance the quality of the decision-making process.

WATER AND CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF WOMEN, THE ROLE OF MEN

There is a worldwide concern about the possible increase in sub-national and transboundary conflicts related to water. At present, many conflicts are related to multiple use of water and the increasing competition among water users and sectors. Agriculture is already competing for available water resources with urban and industrial uses, and this will only intensify with time. Transboundary conflicts have already become a reality and are likely to emerge more frequently on issues related to siltation, large dams, floodings, irrigation, international quotas, the level of salinity of water, diversion of rivers, industrial pollution, distribution and allocation of water, hydraulic water works.

Although transboundary conflicts are at the centre of attention, water-related conflicts frequently arise within the boundaries of a country. Conflicts are likely to emerge in situations where one can observe multiple and competing use of water, a change of the quantity and frequency of water withdrawal for particular purposes, and in situations where various groups of actors each have their distinct (and conflicting) interests. Especially in developing countries, and also at local level, conflict situations emerge when property rights and water rights are at stake.

An important characteristic of water is that it is used for different purposes among different groups of users, and that various sources might be available for the use of water, such as rivers, lakes, shallow aquifers, rainfall, surface water, ground water, and marine water resources. The main groups of water users represented in 'sectors' are: industries, power industry, agriculture, tourism, fisheries, and shipping. Other important 'groups' of water users are households, ecosystems, and non-consumptive water users. In these groups women are overrepresented. In the other groups of users such as industries, agriculture, shipping women are hardly represented. As a consequence gender issues play hardly a role in the conflicts by the various users of water.

General outline of the workshop discussion

Conflicts related to water are often part of a much broader conflict, and can thus not always be treated in isolation. A major source of conflict is the multiple use of water by different water users. Even though many water users have similar interests (drinking water, livelihood, safety, sanitation and sewage), clashes may emerge over different priorities. There is a trade-off between

1. Different interests in time and space;
2. Different water users and economic sectors;
3. Between economy, social structure and nature.

This trade-off is determined by factors such as gender, occupation or the dependence on the ecosystem for livelihood.

Co-operation between water users, and the involvement of all water users – in particular women – in water development and management is essential to prevent hostilities between users, and to prevent tensions nourished by emotion and lack of information. The involvement of women provides a valuable contribution in decision-making and in the prevention of conflicts, through:

- Their concern for the future; finding a balance between short-term and long-term objectives;
- Their insight in the role that water plays in the welfare and well-being of households;
- Their insight in the social fabric of a society or culture;
- Their understanding of the impact of water pricing and water taxes on households;
- The potential to link education and consumer behaviour.

One of the good practices to prevent confrontation between water users is based on teaching women and men integrated water management. This provides them with the ability

- To deal with the complexity of conflict situations;
- To define problems from a multiple stakeholder perspective;
- To communicate and negotiate;
- To design decision-making processes;
- To reflect on solutions and to evaluate.

In Africa, most good practices in conflict resolution are based on local value systems. In some African countries, women are found to play an important role in pressuring tribal leaders to end tribal wars (Sudan). Facilitation of such peace processes by international NGOs and donor organisations proves to be very important. In time of conflict – even when basic concerns are alike for men and women – there is an increased risk that women become the victim of rape, assaults, or even murder at the time of fetching water, especially when the access to these water resources is being disputed.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

The participation of women in decision-making in the world of water

1. Governments and donor organisations involved in the development of sustainable watermanagement and good governance in the watersector should formulate strategies, instruments and target figures to promote women's access to executive and managerial decision-making positions and to prevent them from hitting the glass ceiling.
2. Governments, public utilities, private enterprises and international organisations in the watersector should formulate short-term and long-term target figures to stimulate women's participation in decision-making bodies and commit

themselves to publish progress reports and figures in professional journals in the watersector.

3. Governments, donor organisations and international organisations in the watersector should publish information on their specific gender policies and on the way in which women take part in decision-making at all administrative levels.

Women in consumption and small businesses, men in big businesses?

1. Private enterprises, public utilities and international organisations in the watersector should reserve financial and human resources, to build greater awareness about the relationship between gender and water and to increase women's participation in decision-making.
2. Private enterprises, public utilities and international organisations in the watersector should provide opportunities to water users – women and men – to participate in the design, planning, gender impact assessment, strategic surveys, monitoring and evaluation of their economic and social development policy and in the launching of local, national and international waterprojects.
3. Private enterprises, public utilities and international organisations in the watersector should be encouraged to earmark a certain percentage of their operational costs to be spent on management training on gender mainstreaming.

Water and conflict: the role of women, the role of men

1. Governments, international organisations and the private sector should develop short-term and long-term macro-economic strategies and social development policies on the basis of the outcome of decision-making processes at micro-economic local level, reflecting the interests of local users, in particular women. They should be aware of the importance of involving grassroots organisations and the role and the position of women there in.
2. Governments, donor organisations and (inter)national NGO's should stimulate and facilitate women's participation in local peace processes and support the development of gender sensitive training and tools for conflict prevention and conflict resolution in case of multiple use of water.
3. Governments, public utilities, private enterprise and (inter)national organisations and NGO's should stimulate and facilitate women's education, -training, and -networking to increase women's participation in the watersector and to empower them to make their needs and interests within the watersector more visible.



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Conference Report Summary

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Contact
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***Conference Report Summary:
“Sustainable Development and Water in International Gender Perspective”***

Dear mister Noordholland de Jong,

The Netherlands State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment and Emancipation Policy and the State Secretary of Transport, Public Works and Water Management would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking part in our conference on “Sustainable development and water in international gender perspective”, which was held in Rotterdam on February 3rd, 2000.

Around 90 national and international experts from the various relevant sectors- representatives from the water control boards, science, businesses and financing co-operations, social organisations, and involved ministries like Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Development co-operation, and Emancipation policy took part in the discussions at the conference.

2000: a year of vision and action

The objective of the conference was to exchange good practices and discuss obstacles encountered in the field of sustainable development and water from a gender perspective. Furthermore a gender vision was discussed in which the following themes were elaborated on:

- The participation of women in decision-making in the world of water
- Women in consumption and small businesses, men in big businesses?
- Water and conflict: the role of women, the role of men

As a result of the discussion nine recommendations were formed, which are included in the Conference Report.

The recommendations were also successfully aimed at the Second World Water Forum and the Ministerial Conference, which was held on 21st and 22nd of March 2000 in the Hague. In the pledge of the Dutch Government, which will be attached to the Ministerial Declaration, it was stated that:

... In the years to come the Netherlands will use water as one of the leading principles in spatial planning and urban development, further sustain integrated coastal zone management, reassess the management of risks and put the principles of integrated water resource management into concrete action inter alia at a river basin level taking into account the need for a more equal representation of women and men. In this context, the Netherlands will take the initiative for establishing an informal Ministerial gathering on gender. ...

The results of the conference will furthermore be of use in the preparations of a Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action in June 2000 in New York.

Yours sincerely,



Ms. Ina Brouwer
Director for the Co-ordination of Emancipation Policy



**Ministry of Social Affairs
and Employment**



**Department for the Co-ordination
of Emancipation Policy**

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For the full documentation of the conference see: <http://www.iiav.nl>