

# The clash between principles and practices

## How the Women for Water, Water for Women partnership fits into the CSD-12 Agenda

Women for Water, Water for Women (WfWfW), is a partnership of women's organizations and a commitment and action for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The founding members of the WfWfW and their partner organisations focus on bridging the gaps between the internationally agreed upon principles for sustainable development and the day-to-day practice in water and sanitation management.

The choice of the water and sanitation sector as the main focus for action is clear for us. All the development goals as defined in the UN Millennium Declaration have explicit links with water. Water plays a vital role in relation to human health, livelihood, economic growth as well as in sustaining ecosystems. Without equal access to water for all — including for ecosystems — international commitments to conflict prevention, poverty eradication and gender equality and equity cannot be made good.

This 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Sustainable Development aims to identify and prioritise the obstacles that block the implementation of international commitments to sustainable development and to find answers for overcoming these obstacles. In this paper, the WfWfW partnership has identified some of the constraints, and it proposes how it is part of the solution. WfWfW calls upon development partners, governments and the small private sector, to join this initiative and start forging long-term partnerships with women's organizations in a mutual effort towards bringing about equitable and sustainable development through improved water governance. In the WfWfW partnerships, responsibility for management and implementation takes place at the lowest appropriate level - with women and men in local communities.



## Principles of the WfWfW partnership

The WfWfW goals and objectives are based on Dublin Principles 2 and 3 and within the larger framework of women's rights and sustainable development as identified in relevant UN conventions. The Dublin Principles were established at the International Conference on Water and the Environment held in Dublin in 1992. They also form the basis for Agenda 21. The four principles are:

- 1. Freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment.**
- 2. Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy makers at all levels.**
- 3. Women play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.**
- 4. Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.**

Since 1992, many high level meetings on water have been organized and numerous documents produced with the bulk of them presenting a shared vision on sustainable water management. However, the powerful message of the Dublin Principles is still paramount. The principles constitute, without exception, the cornerstone of all international commitments to improved water management.

The WfWfW focus on Dublin Principles 2 and 3 is in line with Agenda 21, which considers *gender equality a prerequisite for sustainable development*. The WfWfW also endorses the holistic philosophy on which Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is based. IWRM underlines the interdependence between the natural systems and the human world and the need to integrate the two into a balanced whole. This new recognition has resulted in a new paradigm – that water management should be integrated cross-sectorally, be people-centered and environmentally sensitive.

WfWfW supports the international consensus that IWRM will contribute to pro-poor, gender equitable sus-

tainable development if different groups of water users are given a voice to express their views and define their needs. It is particularly critical here to recognise the importance of involving poor women and men and other marginalized communities in decision-making and as fully-fledged partners at all levels of the development process.

The WfWfW is the voice of many stakeholders as listed below. These include women belonging to women's organizations around the world, covering a number of different sectors, and active at all levels ranging from (inter) national lobbying and advocacy to the provision of services on the ground.

The WfWfW acknowledges the different uses of water - the human and natural systems of water use - and cooperates with stakeholders such as:

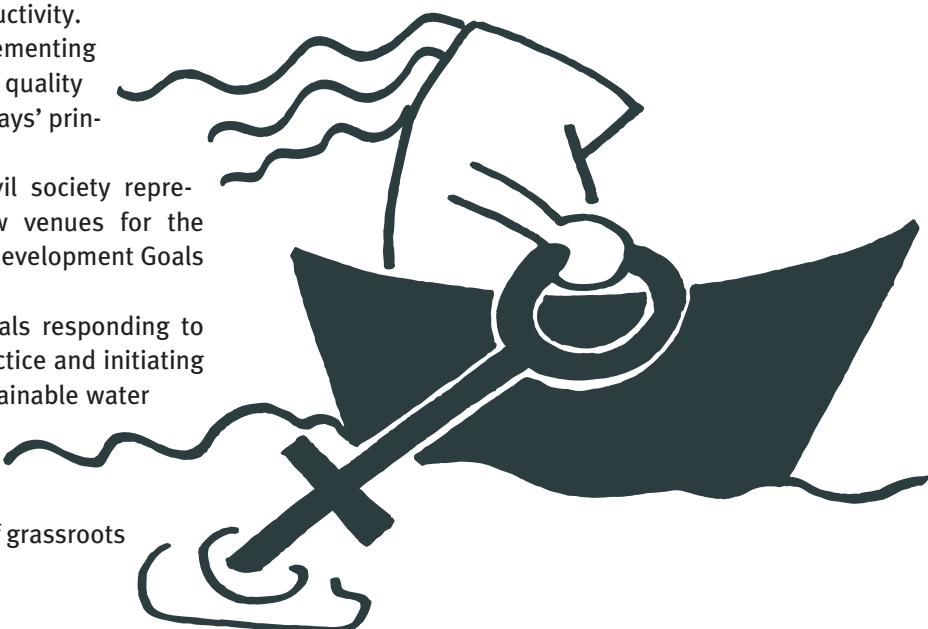
- Villagers living upstream seeing their water resources being diverted to the quickly growing urban centers downstream and the citizens negotiating affordable water & sanitation services.
- Subsistence farmers whose needs are often neglected by researchers and extension services, but also cash crop farmers – often men – being the focus group of researchers aiming at 'more crop per drop'.
- Cattle breeders and nomads watering their animals with fresh water, as well as fishing communities making their livelihood thanks to the coastal waters.
- Women having to face the dilemma to either keep their girls out of school because of the long hours it takes to fetch clean water or to make use of polluted water near the home, but at the risk of getting water borne diseases.
- Landowners who are granted access to water and the women and men sharecroppers having no legal rights.
- Rain-fed agriculture women and men farmers improving traditional techniques for rainwater harvesting and irrigation farmers relying on high tech innovations in order to increase their productivity.
- Policy makers responsible for implementing international agreements on water quality applying for instance the 'polluter pays' principle.
- Local government officials and civil society representatives together exploring new venues for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- Men and women water professionals responding to the challenge to put IWRM into practice and initiating cross-sectoral coordination for sustainable water resources management.
- Representatives of national and regional women's organizations contributing to the empowerment of grassroots women.

## The gap between policy principles and the day-to-day practice

The translation of the Dublin Principles into practice depends on the political will to commit and respond to the needs of all stakeholders. The consensus reached within the water world on *how to improve water management in a sustainable manner* is not reflected in national policy documents and implementation. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are the leading documents in which poor countries identify their development priorities. PRSP processes presented an excellent opportunity to put Dublin Principle 2 into practice and develop human and institutional capacities for sustainable development. But, they have failed to live up to these expectations. PRSPs are based on a consultative process with civil society and other stakeholders. However, regardless of the calls for devolving responsibility for implementation to the lowest appropriate levels and restricting the role of the central government to regulation, coordination and law enforcement, the PRSP process did not result in speeding up the process of decentralization and women's and community empowerment.

Moreover, water and sanitation is not an issue adequately covered in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers despite the fact that participatory poverty assessments have identified access to water and sanitation among the top three or four priority demands of the poor.

The reasons for this are many. They can be traced back to the absence of an *enabling environment*, and to the *institutional factors* defining the players and the rules of the game by which the negotiations are held. Furthermore, the use of proper *instruments* such as tools for poverty and gender impact assessments and gender



responsive budgeting to address the bottlenecks for equitable and pro-poor development, has been negligible.

Poverty is a main factor in the lack of access to safe drinking water in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Newly Independent States (NIS). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) documents that one in seven Europeans, some 120 million people, do not have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Of the entire rural population of Romania, only 16% has safe water and a mere 10% has access to adequate sanitation. In Armenia, Moldova and the Russian Federation only about half the wastewater is treated; in Azerbaijan that figure drops to a sixth. There are no water connections in the illegal settlements that have appeared on the outskirts of the capitals of some Eastern European countries like Albania, Armenia and Georgia. According to UNECE, water conservation measures that work in wealthier countries, such as metering and water charges, don't work in the CEE because the consumers are too poor to pay and/or the tools are not used consistently. Most CEE and NIS governments – following advice from Western countries – are trying to transfer the ownership of the water companies to the private sector. However, the largest number of citizens without access to safe drinking water and sanitation live in rural areas, whereas the private water companies are only interested in urban areas.

The strong preference of the donor community to support sectoral programmes through the national government is a source of concern in the present situation where community participation is not promoted and facilitated throughout the development process and where development processes are still implemented in a top-down manner. This holds equally true for First and Third world countries. Local governments, NGOs, community-based organizations and small scale private enterprises fail to benefit proportionally from funds and other resources generated within the country and from those provided by the donor community. The WfWfW aims to be the essential intermediary and bridge the gap between bottom-up and top-down development.

The WSSD call for Type-2 partnerships has the potential to further the implementation of people-centered and women and community-based water programmes. The WfWfW calls upon development organizations, governments and the small private sector to join together and support this initiative by developing it cooperatively into a Type-2 partnership that will show results at the local level in meeting the Millennium Development targets. Since the WSSD, governments have demonstrated a mesmerizing preference for partnerships with the private sector. This also holds true for the government of The Netherlands, the country where the secretariat of the WfWfW is based, as they have entered into Type 2 partnerships with a sizeable number of private sector partners. Equal commitment to the other Major Groups of Agenda 21 has yet to materialise.

The same preference for private sector participation has been demonstrated world wide in the public-private partnerships for improving drinking water and sanitation service delivery whose pro-poor performance has been less than adequate. This policy choice is inconsistent with the Dublin Principles and has meant neglecting the huge potential offered by community participation and partnerships with women's and community-based organizations and small-scale community-based private sector enterprises.

Women world-wide have demonstrated their commitment to taking long-term responsibility for sustainable development based on the participation of themselves and their communities. Governments have endorsed the outcomes of Summits confirming that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development and community participation a condition for pro-poor development. Statements of this kind have been made, supporting the equal participation of Major Groups in all phases of the development process - in conception, design and implementation. Nonetheless, women's organizations are still fighting the battle to become *de facto* equal partners in all stages of the development process. Because of this, tremendous amounts of time and resources go to waste; instead, this money could have been used for achieving concrete results on the ground. The WfWfW challenges governments to live up to their responsibilities and facilitate Type-2 partnerships with women's groups and civil society organizations.



Women for Water, Water for Women  
The Hague, The Netherlands April 2004  
see also: [www.womenforwater.org](http://www.womenforwater.org)

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