

# Report on the seminar “Conflict over Water and Water to Solve Conflicts”

## Conveners:

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)  
Saferworld UK

## Welcome and introduction

The seminar was opened by the Chair of the Gender and Water Alliance, dr. Sara Ahmed. After welcoming all participants, she started by stating that water is a marker of change. For many people water management is by definition conflict management. The water world is characterised by competing claims, uncertainty, degradation of water supply at different levels: micro level (village and household) as well as macro level (river basins, transboundary issues). Furthermore water intersects with other social relations of power, especially gender, reinforcing the power differences between different people.

At the same time conflicts can be windows of opportunity to address change, challenging inequities and differences. The seminar focussed on stories of hope, showing that facilitating access to water for all is at the heart of approaches to navigate conflict.

The co-chair of the seminar, Hesta Groenewald introduces Saferworld, a development organisation working in the water sector only from a conflict prevention angle.

## Presentations

Five presentations were given about different cases of conflict over water and how water was used to mitigate conflict.

### Mr. Capson Sausi, Saferworld and Didas Muhumuza, Centre for Conflict Resolution CECORE, Uganda

Mr. Sausi presented the work done by Saferworld in Uganda, which aims at promoting integration of conflict sensitivity in development policy and practice. Conflict and development impact each other, and conflicts in Uganda have undermined development thereby deepening poverty. A Conflict Sensitive Approach (CSA) was piloted in the water sector, in which different stakeholders were involved and targeted. The CSA was beneficial to the communities as it gave them an opportunity to discuss conflict issues in their midst, and how to collaborate to minimize negative impacts of these conflicts. This improved their sense of ownership of the project as well as the quality of their participation in design and decision making. CSA is also an opportunity to point out to private sector actors that tensions cause inefficiencies, and the impact their work has on host communities.

### Mr. Lamu Olweny Omalla, District Engineer, Kasese District, Uganda

Mr. Olweny Omalla described the use of a Conflict Sensitive Approach (CSA) in a community drinking water project. The conflict issues between 2 communities served under 1 project were on the sharing of water, the number of taps in each community, where these taps should be located and the private land necessary for the infrastructure. A *participatory conflict analysis* was conducted and it highlighted the need to consult widely, involve different stakeholders, mobilise the participation of all gender groups and the need to be ready to make changes in the design.

In answer to different questions Mr. Olweny explained that in Uganda land is privately owned (traditionally by men, but now also women start to buy land) and the owner needs to give permission if water pipes cross the land. This is often used as leverage: the pipe may only pass my land if I get a tap... He also highlighted the importance of involving women in the discussions and decision making. Traditionally women don't participate in meetings and decision making processes, but as women and men have different views it is important to consider their opinion. This may be done through separate meetings, or by returning to the village if it becomes clear that no consensus has been reached. A limiting factor in this process is that in Uganda facilities must be constructed within a year after the budget is made available, otherwise the money flows back into the national budget.

For every tap 27 USdollar has to be contributed by the community for construction, the maintenance fee is decided upon by the village, but is around 200 shilling per month (USD 0.12). The policy on ownership is that the land is privately owned and the project is government owned, but that the infrastructure should be maintained by its users.

### Ms. Nafisa Barot, Executive trustee, UTTHAN, India

Ms. Barot first described the different gender issues in water conflict in Gujarat state. As water is scarce, people fight violently at water sources. As the fights would become too violent, it was decided that only women were allowed to draw water as they did not fight so violently. If the water would finally come, the highest caste would take water first and after that only the lower and out-castes, deepening

the inequality. At the same time privatisation of water takes place, leading to women to have much longer distances to walk and get water. Furthermore dams are built that take the water away to other places whilst the inhabitants of the region do not have drinking water themselves. Utthan brought the women in this region together to discuss their problems and look for a solution. This was found in the construction of rain water harvesting systems as well as demanding government for decentralised water. Livelihoods security is not only access to resources but control over resources as well. After that she described the work Utthan had done after the serious communal conflict in Gujarat in 2002. Utthan worked with the people returning from the relief-camps, who had lost everything. The muslim women were afraid to go out to fetch water or to relieve themselves as they feared to be attacked or rape. This changed the power relations at the household level and in fact re-enforced the patriarchal inequality. Purdah was reinforced, with women leaving the house as little as possible or under male guidance. Because women suffered more, Utthan created a platform where women of different communities could come together to discuss their issues. The major priorities were to get water and sanitation. One solution was to create bathing hubs for women. These were first used by the different groups separately, but in the course of time they started to use the facilities mixed. A revolving fund for toilets was set up as this was considered the highest priority for the muslim women. After a few rounds, the muslim women pointed out that also the other women should be able to get access to sanitation to prevent to deepen the gaps.

Ms. Aisha Hamza, Hygiene Promotion Officer, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency, Nigeria

Ms. Hamza deals with water conflicts at the lowest level: within households and neighborhoods. First she explained the serious shortage of water in the village in the North and the problems stemming thereof. Daily women carry water for 5 to 7 hours and they tend to fight while queueing for water that is not even clean. Because it takes so long to fetch water, it generates problems within the household. Men complain that their food is not cooked in time, and women are tired all the time as they have to wake up at three o'clock in the morning. Including women in the committee that holds the key to the borehole, helped to solve the conflict.

Then she talked about a conflict between two groups of within the village about a toilet. One group would not allow the other to use the toilet. A drama play about the importance of the use of toilets for the health of all villagers and the unequal gender relations, helped to solve the conflict.

Ms. Ragaa Elzian, Sudan Academy of Sciences, Sudan

Ms. Elzian explained about the correlation between water scarcity and conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan. In the years with little rain, conflicts over water increase. As a result of these conflicts many women and children now live in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDP). These camps are located above water aquifers which are vulnerable to drought, as well as largely overpopulated, leading to long queues for drinking water. Because of the vulnerable situation women leaving the camps looking for water, firewood or for land cultivation, risk being raped while doing so.

Ms. Elzian continued her presentation with the sanitation situation in the IDP camps, indicating that most toilets are not constructed in a gender friendly way. The material is expensive and the toilets do not comply to the cultural needs of the people living in IDP camps. The toilets should be outside of the accommodation and not water based. Furthermore there should be 2 compartments, separating men and women. Aerial photographs show kilometers long queues of water containers pointing at the few waterpoints.

## **Discussion**

1. Questions about the Conflict Sensitivity Approach: what is the difference of this approach compared to participatory approaches? What is the difference to a Risk assessment?  
Hesta Groenewald: Traditionally activists and development practitioners did not recognise the impact of development work on conflict and aggravating it further. CSA aims at people being able to understand what is going on in a conflict environment. It starts with a conflict analysis; who are the actors involved, what are their motives, what are their strategies, what do they want to achieve. All these aspects are taken into account in the programme of the development organisation, whilst at the same time trying to bridge the gaps and differences.  
In risk analysis only external factors that are a risk to the programme (like conflict) are taken into account, whilst CSA paints a broader picture; it also looks how the programme affects the conflict. It is a more two-way approach.
2. Question: Is it possible to resolve a conflict without control over resources?  
Nafisa Barot: It is a possibility to raise awareness. It can empower a community to learn about their rights, and a group can be organised to challenge the situation. This group is not only responsible for the maintenance of a water or sanitation facility, but can also seek for ownership of the resource.

3. Observation by Ministry of Water, Sudan: The conflict of Darfur has spread to the Southern part of Sudan. Tribes have to share their water sources and fight over grazing lands. The solution of the government of Sudan, is to provide as many boreholes as possible and by doing so, it claims to have minimised the conflict.
4. Question: In the case of Nigeria it seems that the burden of the work within the household is not equally shared between men and women. Does the drama plays you use also comment on these gender structures, or does it only show the time constraints women face?  
Aisha Hamza: After the government provided the community with water, women and men also received gender training. Over and above women were trained as mechanics so they now maintain the pumps, and are given more control over water by keeping the keys of the boreholes. Men learned to be involved in carrying water.
5. Question: It is well known that rape is increasingly applied as a weapon in conflict. Because water and sanitation facilities are built in the wrong place, women get raped. Even though development organisations are aware of this one does not seem to get it right.  
Reaction: A strategy to involve the most vulnerable women in decision making about water and sanitation is necessary. They will know best what the safest places are. Nevertheless much more is needed to prevent rape and support the victims.
6. Question: Are the actors in government also targeted in the case of Gujarat? As the violence was government driven, they need to be targeted to prevent future violence.  
Nafisa Barot: Utthan looks at the larger environment which is violent. We create a basis where the vulnerable people will not be so easily victimised again. For example, awareness is raised about the strategies used to divide the people and to incite them against each other. Hindu and Muslim women learn to see how they both can resist the violence by which all suffer.
7. Observation: Most government staff in districts have not learnt to apply a participatory approach and to listen to water users. Policies may encourage participation but staff often simply does not have the capacity.
8. Observation by GWA Iraq: The situation in Iraq is that 90% of the water comes from outside the country. If there is a conflict with the neighbouring countries, it leads to problems with water. The present IDP camps in Iraq are located far away from towns where women have to go far away to fetch water. In some camps the military brings water in trucks, but camp inhabitants have to pay for that water. In case women do not have money to pay for the water, sexual favours are asked. An other problem in Iraq is the polluted fishing grounds in the south of the country. Fish is important in the diet of the Southern Iraqis in the marshes, and now people eating fish get ill.
9. Observation: IDP camps are set up in places where other people already lived. The original dwellers often suffer even more than the inhabitants of the camps.

### **Concluding remarks**

On behalf of the Gender and Water Alliance and Saferworld Dr.Sara Ahmed thanks all presenters for their presentations as well as the people in the audience for their contributions. She summarises the seminar as follows.

The cases showed us that conflicts are deeply embedded in the social structure of everyday life and in gender and power relations. But conflicts can also provide us with windows of opportunity to address change, to break down our walls and fears and reach out to each other.

To overcome conflicts we need to:

- Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues and safe spaces for different actors – sometimes these need to be separate spaces, (e.g. for women in patriarchal and violent contexts)
- Ensure that all voices, of both men and women from different social groups, are articulated and heard, both in formal and informal contexts (e.g. around common water sources)
- Build capacity of development organisations to deal with conflict situations by understanding power and gender relations.
- Be sensitive to all different aspects of conflict: governance, control over resources, land, access to credit and who decides on which resources.