

E-Conference 3: Analysis and Recommendations

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This is the final summing up of the Third E-conference. Reactions on priorities for action kept coming in - the last ones are being forwarded to you separately. All in all, 77 participants (52 women and 25 men) sent in 84 emails. Many mails included comments and/or additional suggestions.

A division in regions or countries which also is reflected in the analysis as one of you suggested, is not possible firstly because the e-conferences themselves have been set up by regions (there are concurrent conferences in French, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking regions) and secondly because many participants draw from multi-country and -culture experience.

As mentioned in my first summing up, there was an initial lack of response because participants are very busy. Many mentioned also that they had joined to learn to learn about current thinking rather than contribute. Despite these constraints, the organizers received many compliments. As a whole, the e-conference was clearly useful and served the purposes of learning and exchange. However, there are also clear disadvantages in only relying on e-mail exchange over a long period of time when part of the audience has no time or feels it has no experiences to share.

The above calls for further reflection on the uses and limitations of e-conferences and for trying new combinations of e-conferencing with other forms of electronic information exchange. There are, for example, many websites that post useful documents on gender and the integration of gender approaches in development. One option would be to make an inventory of information needs in an e-conference and then provide participants with information about useful links and resources, and for those that cannot download documents see whether the most important documents can be provided as hard copies via the mail under an information service such as WELL.

The new reactions to priorities for future work have not led to a change in outcomes. Most important are to demonstrate benefits (30), enhance the institutional will and develop comprehensive strategies for gender mainstreaming (25 and 27 respectively) and using clearer and simpler words instead of vague terms such as mainstreaming that can be interpreted in many different ways (20).

Regional approaches, expanding/adjusting learning from the drinking water and sanitation sector to other sectors and balancing representation and influence on decision-making bodies ended ex aequo in fourth place with 15 votes each. All others received lower priorities.

On the basis of the first outcomes on priorities and comments I drafted and sent out a first e-mail with six suggestions (copied below) on how to act on these topics and so help move gender and social equity forward in the overall water sector. Perhaps not surprisingly after the many reactions on where we should focus, only one e-mail came in on actions for follow-up, stressing no's 1, 3 and 5. Most reactions elaborated or amended priorities. They have been incorporated in the recommendations below.

(1) Enhancing the institutional will and developing comprehensive strategies for gender mainstreaming

This is of course something that we can do in our own institutions in our own (sub) sectors, by uniting and forming 'critical masses for change' based on shared knowledge and philosophies of equity. But what might be done more collectively, keeping in mind the more regional approaches that many of you recommend? Several of you pointed out that we should be more self-assured and put more pressure on the top leaders in our fields. An overwhelming amount of evidence exists that proves the linkages and demonstrates the benefits of gender approaches, for women, for men and for the success of the programmes and longer term development.

To better operationalise, and get impact from, this know-how the Gender and Water Alliance is encouraged to seek to organize seminars with high-power decision makers ('key movers') in integrated water resources management in each of the world regions. Their purpose will be to discuss, agree on and adopt some key gender and social equity approaches related to a few priority developments in our sector, such as privatization, multiple uses of water and land, and integrated management of water resources.

Agreeing on targets and benchmarks, which several participants stressed would be part of this activity. One such benchmark is a balance in representation as a way for women and men in decision-making bodies and to national and international fora. A case in point is Tonga which sent 2 men and 2 women for their delegation to the regional meeting in preparation of the World Water Forum in Kyoto, and, tongue in cheek, told the other countries to follow their example.

(2) Demonstrate what differences a good gender approach can make

The E-conference showed that among those who practice gender and social equity approaches there is no lack of evidence. Knowledge is also spreading, but bringing out the differences between women and men and other social differences and how these influence results is by far not become included in each and every policy, programme and procedure.

What could be done to spread this information more widely to the groups for which it is relevant? Five important groups are women, especially those in disadvantaged groups, and the organizations in which they are united, journalists, researchers - technical as well as social, politicians and top managers. The kind of information that appeals to each group and the style is however quite different. The IIAV has already proposed to prepare a CD-ROM for rural women with information on how other groups of rural women were able to address their interests and change gender relations for the better.

Here, we'd now like to propose that the existing material (which is abounding) is reorganized into CD-ROMS targeted at also these other groups. The target date and occasion to launch these CD-ROMS would be just before (for the journalists) and at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto. Participants of the E-conference, and their colleagues, as well as members of the Gender and Water Alliance could send in factual evidence (their own as well as from others in the public domain) on the relevance and impact of gender and social equity approaches in the various sub-sectors. The IIAV could be contracted to form an editorial team that prepares the abstracts, and produce the CD-ROMs.

One point made here is the quality of the information. One participant remarked that a lot of lessons are too subjective and that the evidence produced needs rigour. Forming a knowledgeable team, setting clear selection criteria on the rigour of the data, and including peer review by institutions with a high reputation for quality work on gender and development can help ensure that the selected material is up to standard.

(3) Calling a spade a spade

No jargon, no vague terms such as mainstreaming that leave people free to pay lip service, provided simplification does not dilute the concept of the term and obscures the reality of inequality by gender.

Here, it has also been pointed out that it would help to set, and get global agreement on, a number of criteria that must be met as a minimum in the different water sub-sectors if scaling up of equity between women and men and social justice for the poor are to be achieved. There are of course the criteria on gender of the ECD/DAC, but these are not specific for the water sector and the developments that are currently happening in this sector. A small group of participants have already brought up the issue or made suggestions. Others may have a particular interest in this subject and be interested to form a sub-group that would work out such criteria. This might be done through e-mail in the first instance, although a meeting for discussion and agreement may be required. Since everyone is busy, it would be important to formulate a ToR, seek funding and agree on a facilitator. The activity would also obviously feed into the first one.

(4) Regional and local approaches

A number of participants have stressed that gender sensitive approaches must start in the community and the households and be part of general village life. One participant wrote: Gender issues in rural areas are interwoven with all aspects of life, not only water. Most of the traditional ways of living and division of tasks will not be changed by giving women a say in water related issues; it sometimes even isolates them, and makes them too independent in the eyes of men. Projects focusing on gender often also marginalize women. This makes gender a problem instead of trying in a more a more normal and rational way to make rights and responsibilities more equal. Six others also stressed the importance of paying attention to, and understanding, local social relations as a condition for enhancing more equality.

Since there is obviously quite a lot of cultural specific gender expertise in countries, getting together and forming advisory groups on which policy makers and programme managers can call for advice is one option to make this know-how more operational. Forming advisory teams (including criteria for joining) and spreading information about their existence, capabilities and services might be done by the GWA and its regional hubs, and service administration might be vested in the latter.

(5) Campaign against the use of gender-blind terms and statistics

This point is related to the previous one of greater clarity of terms. It seems high time that we start the battle against gender blindness and lip service, by beginning a campaign against the use of gender blind terms and statistics without defining "who" are meant. In conferences, papers, policies and laws terms such as 'communities', 'stakeholder', 'committees', and 'users' continue to be used without defining their meaning and scope. Here we can all be much more alert and systematically call attention to all these instances. A 'whoing' campaign for asking the "who question" may be started and be made a special activity for the Kyoto conference.

(6) More attention to the economic relevance of the projects/programs for poor women

Some participants made the point that a more equal say in water management for women in comparison with men, and especially poor women, depends on women's economic empowerment. Others have pointed out that their work is water management and that here, they must work with women and men to bring about better equity.

The two do not, however, need to be taken as contradictions: there is space for both approaches. We should, however, agree to pay more attention in water management to the economic aspects of poor women and men in a wide range of water related (sub) sectors and bring these systematically into all the above mentioned activities.

In the drinking water supply and sanitation sector, we should manage water as an affordable basic need for elementary domestic consumptive AND productive uses by women and men. Here, the water management principles that one participant shared with us and which I have annotated below for gender concerns will play a role. In the other sectors, such as irrigation and coastal zone and wetlands management, recognition of existing gendered uses of water by poor people is the starting point for a more balanced and socially just development.

The key principles in each sub sector are known - let's build them into education and into each policy, programme and project by using what we have and expanding what we know. This conference has been a good example of how we can unite and spread, and there's plenty more that can be done!

Christine van Wijk

Gender and poverty integrated into water management principles¹. Continue to manage water as a social good

1.1. Meet basic human needs for the basic domestic and productive uses of water of women and men within households. All residents in a service area should be guaranteed a basic water quantity for livelihood needs of men and women under any privatization agreement.

1.2 Meet basic ecosystem needs for water. Natural ecosystems should be guaranteed a basic water requirement for the preservation of natural resources and their uses by poor women and men under any privatization agreement.

1.3 The basic water requirement for domestic and small-scale productive use by women, men and children should be provided at subsidized rates when necessary for reasons of poverty.

2. Use sound economics in water management

2.1 Water and water services should be provided at fair rates and reasonable rates and with a payment system that is flexible to reflect that women and men in different socio-economic groups have different income patterns and mobility.

2.2 Whenever possible, link proposed rate increases with agreed-upon improvements in service based on consultations with women and men users in the different user categories.

2.3 Subsidies, if necessary, should be economically and socially sound and take into account the power relations within families (Note CvW: e.g. cash subsidies for latrines given to men were not used for installing latrines which were a female, not a male priority)

2.4 Private companies should be required to demonstrate that new water-supply projects are less expensive than projects to improve water conservation and water-use efficiency before they are permitted to invest and raise water rates to repay the investment.

3. Maintain strong government regulation and oversight

3.1 Government should retain or establish public ownership or control of water sources.

3.2 Public agencies and water-service providers should monitor water quantity, quality and reliability of delivery and convenience of service hours for women and account for their services to male and female heads of households. Governments should define and enforce water quality laws and set and enforce standards for service delivery. If the contractors do not deliver accordingly, an agreed lower tariff will be charged to the consumers for the period concerned.

3.3 Contracts that lay out the responsibilities of each partner are a prerequisite for the success of any privatization. The contracts should include clauses on service delivery and expansion to the urban poor.

3.4 Clear dispute-resolution procedures should be developed prior to privatization, and women and men users know their rights and with to act when these are not met.

3.5 Independent technical assistance and contract review should be standard and involve expertise on social aspects, with a gender and poverty focus.

3.6 Negotiations over privatization contracts should be open, transparent, and include representatives from all affected stakeholder groups including women and men users (separately, as their interests are not the same)