

Summary of the Portuguese language conference (in English)

Introduction

Participants enrolled from the Portuguese-speaking countries of Brazil, Portugal and Mozambique, although there were few enrollments from the last two countries. Thus the discussion had a bias when the participants spoke of their experiences that were normally based on Brazilian problems, although there was a vision of an international theme. Other participants came from countries such as England and France using the ease of belonging to other webs or as a support point for doctorate studies on like subjects.

Debates on concepts of water and sanitation. After nearly a month of discussion it was clear that most of the participants have little familiarity with the wealth of crossing that the theme of gender and water offers, many because they do not know this binomial or because the subject of gender has been little developed in their experiences. Many participants enrolled in the web to find out about and deal for the first time with subjects of this kind.

Some militants of social problems had already come across the theme of gender and water in their experiences. Others from technical areas such as project engineering know the terms but when they describe their activities it was found that they are far from presenting work that reflects understanding of the wealth that the theme offers. The theme gender is problematic for some because it sounds like discrimination and is considered an excluding term. But water appears as an inclusive and holistic term and one participant described water as the blood of the earth in the vital sense of the expression. For others the role of women is so relevant that it is not necessary to draw attention to this aspect as in present society a position sometimes reserved for men, or other times chauvinist, highlights the importance of the role of women so that it appears in a striking way for some and totally without possibility of action for others. The discussion seemed to be further permeated by whether attention is only being given to the role of women and not to the relationship of men, women, the elderly and young people as a whole when gender is discussed. For some gender is an important theme in transformation generation in society and some companies are aware and monitoring these changes.

CONSUMPTION PATTERNS, GENDER AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

An interesting view proposed by a participant relates these three elements in a pyramid highlighting the waste resulting from improper habits and where the role of women becomes relevant in the formation of a reality of rational behavior whether in domestic or professional environments.

SEWAGE, GENDER AND WATER

It was remembered that women could play a predominant role in solving improper habits that eliminate waste from the most varied origins by discharging it in rivers, river basins, seas and oceans.

GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP

The priority of a relationship among men, women, and the elderly and young people was remembered in the exercise of citizenship to construct an environment of healthy democracy among the parts of society.

TRANSLATION OF THE TERM GENDER

There is still difficulty in understanding this word of English origin to express the concept of global understanding that is expected among men, women, and the elderly and young people in this relationship. The term is still understood as a differentiation of sex and consequence of biological factors, rather than social roles.

THEMES RELATED TO WATER AND HEALTH

For many the importance of the theme water and health explains the need for constant work in the area of vector control, water pollution and better management of water resources.

WATER AND POVERTY

Different visions explained the presence of negative factors in water management such as pollution by human waste, sewage in general and illegal access that generates clandestine water links, seen by others as a direct consequence of a wild capitalism where big capital discriminates against enormous sectors of the population in the less developed countries. Poverty does not necessary mean dirtiness.

WATER AND INCOME GENERATION

There is evidence of job creation and income opportunities for women from correct water resources management in river basins, as long as they are thought out during the process of designing and implanting these resources.

WATER AND EQUITY

For many the need for gender equality for men and women is a target to be reached, responsible for providing elements of a sustainability that everyone wants in his desire for development.

WATER AND PARTY POLITICS

One participant remembered and appealed vehemently for water basin committees and water management committees as a whole not become a stage for the exercise of negative party politics that impede good working of this management.

HOLISTIC VISION OF WATER

In spite of the many partial definitions of water use offered by participants, there was unanimity in expressing the holistic character of the resource.

Many remembered the crucial role of environmental education to promote community and society integration in general, and highlighted work with young people - the springboard to a new mentality to structure the society of the future.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND WATER

The aggregating role of the indigenous societies is important in the defense of river headwater quality, by preserving river springs or in denouncing unsuitable farming that abuses agricultural chemical use.

WATER AND PRIVATELY OWNED CONSERVATION UNITS

The need to act in private reserves that have springs and river headwaters is obvious to allow correct management of these resources.

INFORMATION AND WOMEN

The important role that the work of organizing sites, newspapers, radio programmes and conferences plays was emphasized, where an important link has been formed between information and women at professional levels with middle and university education levels.

DEFINITION OF OTHER TERMS BY PARTICIPANTS

Complementary definitions were offered such as those linked to local development, social capital, various definitions of water linked to this function, concepts and fundamentals of the Brazilian water resource policy, water resource management plans and information systems for water.

PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

In first place is the need to link the water source legislation to insertion of the gender theme. Help was asked to obtain successful experiences in other countries on this topic.

Another pertinent point was about obtaining specialized bibliographies and didactic materials on the theme of gender and water that are easy to distribute. Further courses and training were requested to increase knowledge and mastery of techniques at community level that allow a greater equality of roles in the case of water management, whether at the level of increasing the degree of decision power for women that do not have it, or at the level of qualifying women managers technically to exercise this function together with water basin committees. The water resource legislation needs to be more understood to be able to work better with the communities where generally are most of the replies for the works. Access to water should be democratized in all its matrixes whether in terms of physical, financial or institutional access.

And finally, to complete the recommendations of the participants at this stage, the water table and sources of mineral waters must be better known and should be duly crossed with occurrences of water pollution.

GENERAL INFORMATION

One hundred and seventeen participants were enrolled in this first phase of the e-conference on gender and water in the Portuguese speaking countries.

A total of 104 messages were circulated from January 28 to February 24 2002. There is a copy file of the messages circulated as set out in the contract.

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