

Summary of the Spanish language conference (in English)

INTRODUCTION

The conference, that took place over a four-week period, brought 260 participants together, primarily from Latin America. They came from Central America, the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean and from South America. A few Latin Americans residing in the United States, Spanish and European Spanish-speaking individuals also participated. This conference was developed in three stages. An enthusiastic spirit of debate characterized its first two phases. At the end, the conference concentrated on recommendations aimed at indicating paths of action. The Conference received 146 messages from 47 participants.

This conference was very diverse in terms of the professions and work practices of the participants, their knowledge on the subject, their level of analysis, their awareness of the problem and the work done to incorporate a gender perspective in the various sectors related to water resource management. Many testimonials were presented, from those who questioned if gender is at all related to water resources, to those who are completely convinced that working from a gender perspective is fundamental for the management of water. Some participants had little knowledge about the concept of gender; however, others showed extensive knowledge in terms of literature and reflections on the subject.

CONCEPTS

The following outlines the main aspects addressed in the discussion regarding concepts:

- An analysis of the differences and relationships between terms, such as gender and woman, gender and feminism and other terms, such as male chauvinism and female chauvinism ("hembrismo"). The terms sex, gender, gender styles and sexual orientation were also defined.
- Pointing out that a gender perspective, in addition to promoting the analysis of the differences between men and women, is propositional, since it seeks to generate strategies for changing the unequal relations with respect to access to resources, decision-making, exercise of rights, etc. This type of analysis should be carried out at all levels: family, community, institutional, legislative, policy making. It also implies the adoption of a position regarding the material and symbolic conditions of the relationships that exist among women, between men and women and among men.
- To explain that a gender perspective does not deny the biological differences, but concentrates on the examination of how various cultures experience these differences. Likewise, the need to recognize that the work on gender takes a very strong emotional toll on people was emphasized because it profoundly affects daily life and is not merely discourse. This is the reason why this kind of work generates resistance. In this sense, a warning was made about the instrumental use of this approach. Many participants emphasized that it has become common practice, with respect to project implementation, to be concerned over the number of men and women that participate, without analyzing the quality of their participation or the expectation of the different social groups and cohorts.
- The establishment of an important conceptual difference between practical and strategic gender needs. The first can be ascribed to the different material conditions of men and women (with respect to employment, education, salary level, land tenure, etc.), while the second refers to differences in social position. It was recognized that achieving strategic change requires broader action, such as changing cultural aspects of an entire society that affect gender relations and that are related to the empowerment of women.
- To draw attention to the importance of considering men as active agents in changing gender relations. Some men criticized the position taken by many of their fellow participants that consider gender to be a women's issue and, have a passive attitude towards the subject. One of them described how the work related to masculinity, developed by teams working in conjunction with those teams working on the empowerment of women has produced

significant results. This approach makes possible, starting with a personal revision of our own gender relations, achieving a greater understanding and structuring of a better strategy to work with communities. One participant pointed out the need to restructure masculine subjectivity, which would imply openness on the part of men to share with women their privileged conditions in many areas, while the process of constructing new feminine identities is taking place. There was also interest in understanding the social forms masculinity takes, in order to achieve attitudinal change in men and reinforce the self-esteem of both sexes, with the goal of reaching mutual collaboration and more harmonious relations.

- An interesting controversy emerged over family. One position conceives of the ideal family as a symmetric social structure, based on what is "natural" in human beings and where feminine and masculine roles are complementary. The other position recognizes the presence of power relations in the family and admits the diversity of family types, as well as the relation of this diversity to the differences in social strata and ethnicity. Some showed concern over the conflicts that can be generated in transforming the power relations in families, while others were of the opinion that gender tensions and conflicts have always existed, and although they lie under the surface, when they do surface, they can be seen as opportunities that give us the potential to enrich our social life. One participant indicated that many development projects conduct their work in communities under the assumption that all are nuclear families. This prejudice prevents them from recognizing the needs of many extended or single-parent families, such as homes where a female is the head of the household. In Argentina, more than 30% of homes are supported by women and in Central America, between 20 and 35%.
- One of the largest limitations of working from a gender perspective that was identified is the lack of qualified personnel at an institutional level and, the lack of institutional policies that reflect a clear position on gender at the project or internal level. Moreover, the personnel should develop an open mind and creativity in order to understand the situations that arise in the communities. Project communication strategies should also reflect gender differences.

RELATING GENDER-WATER AND OTHER CONCEPTS

- The Conference also addressed the relationship of gender and water to key factors, such as poverty, ethnicity, rural-urban situation, employment, etc. Some of the main contributions to this discussion include:
- Poverty is a situation in which sufficient water supply is more difficult to obtain. The management of water resources should be an important strategy against poverty. However, evaluations of water systems in the region have shown that poor people have the greatest problems in terms of continuity of service. One study, undertaken by the United Nations Program for Development in Latin America, found that homes in which women are heads of the household have the highest probability of being poor.
- It is becoming more frequent that women act as the head of the household and as community activists. Nevertheless, they continue to take care of domestic duties, which puts an excessive workload on them. Female leadership is often more represented in areas related to the tasks they usually undertake, rather than at the decision-making levels.
- There was no unanimous agreement on whether social changes in gender relations have been sufficient or not. For many men and women, women have achieved some rights that were previously denied to them, but there is still much work to be done to reach equality of opportunity and equity. For some participants, the achievements of women, such as access to the labour market, have threatened the stability of families, contributed to their poverty and hurt the pride of men. One participant expressed concern over the possible disappearance of the social differences between men and women and the end of the nuclear family, which he considers fundamental to facing poverty.
- In the form of a hypothesis, an inverse relation between wealth and female participation was outlined, observing that in critical situations women participate in the labour market and in public activities that are usually forbidden to them. However, when the situation has normalized, often women are again excluded. In Argentina, it was reported that female professionals earn 26% less than male professionals do.

- The work carried out in projects should be undertaken with full awareness of the danger of ethnocentrism, that is, the imposition of the customs and ideas of the technical or fieldworker's own ethnicity. It should be kept in mind that, in the area of a water basin or sub-basin, there is cultural and ethnic diversity, which demands understanding the gender relations of those communities and, not simply promoting processes of acculturation.
- The gender-water and ethnicity relation, presented cases where, for example, female participation is non-existent in the indigenous communities of Chiapas; the presence of matrilineal societies, such as the Wayu community in Guajira, Colombia, where the role of women is very important in the political, social and cultural decision-making process, but it is secondary regarding women's connection to fishery, the community's fundamental activity of production; or the case of Patagonia, where in the Mapuche community, the Machi, the tribal medicine person, is the paramount leader.
- There is evidence of how the migratory process of men from the rural sector is pressuring women to take responsibility for handling water for human consumption, irrigation and the management of natural resources.

INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Integrated water resources management was not a topic of intense debate at the Conference. Although, some participants recognized the analytical strength of this approach, they also acknowledged that in practice, the work continues to be done sector by sector and, therefore, work guidelines for gender activities must be produced for each sector. A few participants criticized that sanitary conditions were not included in the base document. Other issues included in the debate were:

- The analysis of the legal and political-administrative levels of decision-making involved in water resource management is considered a key issue, to diminish social and gender inequities.
- It was acknowledged, through examples from different countries in Latin America, in general, presented by women (some men expressed the opposite point of view), that they are excluded from the many levels of decision-making in the management of water resources. Those examples range from the Water Community Committees, in Chiapas, Mexico, in which only 1% of the positions are held by women, to the existence, in the Andes, of courses in community management that are offered only to illiterate men; or the situation of water projects in which the opinions of women working in the technical areas are considered less important than those of their male fellow workers, or they are relegated to the role of "second class project members."
- In relation to the work performed from the perspective of an integrated vision, a concern arose because this approach implies taking into consideration the different uses of water with respect to the social role of men and women. It was pointed out that use, access and control of water resources often appear to be linked to the traditional roles: productive and public roles of men and reproductive and domestic roles of women. There was a tendency to privilege the references made to the use of water in relation to the reproductive role of women, ignoring, as it was mentioned by some participants, the productive use of water that women make in the domestic realm, which allows to increase family income or to provide an income when women are the head of the household. Nevertheless, the need to evaluate how these roles are experienced in each specific community was emphasized, to generate actions according to the reality of each community and to avoid pre-conceived actions based on schemes or stereotypes. In addition, there are communities in which women are subjugated and this situation is passively accepted, meanwhile, in other communities conditions of great equality exist.
- From El Salvador, the low participation rate of women in the irrigation associations and the difficulties they have accessing irrigation water because they are not landowners was noted. We were informed, from Argentina, that in poor and dry areas water is highly valued, while in the cities water is wasted. At the same time, a participant from Peru stated that, in that country, the issue of the economic value of water is problematic and needs to be discussed, as well as supply and demand of water resources

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants made suggestions during all stages of the Conference. These suggestions are presented below, along with the recommendations made in the final session:

- An in depth analysis of the current different tendencies in relation to gender, is necessary. In addition, the importance of achieving change in regards to gender attitudes was acknowledged; if educators and trainers are not educated about gender mainstreaming, the educational system will tend to reproduce male chauvinist tendencies. Conversely, if change with respect to educators' gender attitudes is accomplished, there will be a more equitable treatment of boys and girls.
- There is concern about how the concept of extended family could be used in a more efficient manner and about age as a determining factor of relations amongst equals. Both issues must be taken into account in planning water projects.
- An interdisciplinary study of gender relations was recommended. It was also recommended that gender courses of the professional training programs in the social sciences as well as technical careers include a gender perspective across all of them. This means to include a gender perspective across all project stages, programs and policies, avoiding the introduction in a mechanical way, of the knowledge on planning that includes a gender perspective. Some participants believe that only by undertaking long-term projects will it be possible to do a better job with respect to gender equality.
- To increment women training in technical areas, organization and leadership that includes a gender perspective and, to promote the participation of women in the decision-making process of public policies.
- To influence financial institutions and governmental decision-making bodies and review the gender approach of the organizational culture of both sectors, since it is observed that exists incoherency between discourse and practice.
- One of the participants pointed out that at the national, regional and international level, a theoretical framework that sustains the importance of gender mainstreaming in the management of water resources, without resorting to humanist arguments does not exist.

The following possible topics of research were suggested:

- The level and quality of women's participation in the integrated water resources management, by evaluating the impact of its management at the domestic, institutional and policy formulation levels
- The relationship between the gender perspective and the science/technology associated with water resources
- Systematization of existing experiences
- Production of descriptive statistics of the different situations related to water resource management with a gender perspective
- Analysis of the water cycle, including the human impact on it, to propose preservation measures

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the conference permitted to demonstrate that the introduction of the gender perspective is closely related to the development of a more social and less technocratic approach to water resource management.

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