



Gender and Water Alliance: Bringing women and men to the water table

Why focus on gender and water?

Research and practical experience demonstrate that effective, efficient and equitable management of water resources is only achieved when women and men are equally involved in consultation processes as well as in the management and implementation of water-related services (GWA Strategic Plan 2006-2010). A gender approach shows that women and men have distinctive tasks and responsibilities in water. Despite broad international decisions calling for women's full participation in water development activities and decision-making, many institutions have not fully understood or adopted a gender-sensitive, rights-based and inclusive approach to integrated water resource management (IWRM).

Efficiency.

When women and men share decisions in water management, the results are: a better use of time, money and resources, including human resources; a greater genuine involvement and commitment of water users; and increased creativity for conserving scarce supplies. Low-cost, sustainable solutions can be identified. When empowered, women and poor water users will make their voices heard, which is necessary for efficient water management.

Effectiveness.

Women are the main water users throughout the world, being responsible for providing adequate water and sanitation for their families. In many cultures, women and men contribute to water management, but they do so in different ways. Both groups have valuable and complementary knowledge and expertise, and thus both should be involved in planning and execution of water programmes. The specific responsibilities women have in water for different purposes give them expertise which is vital in the search for the most cost-effective decisions and management.

Equity.

Efforts to attain sustainable development will only succeed if the needs of all water users are addressed. These include female-headed households (currently one third of the world's households), women farmers and those running small businesses. Women and children spend countless hours in carrying water over long distances, and looking for places for sanitation. Convenient access to water and sanitation would improve women's health and would enable women and girls to take advantage of educational and training opportunities that can help them combat poverty.

Gender in the Different Water Sectors

Gender is a key variable in all water sectors. Involving men and women in influential roles at all levels will improve the sustainability in the management of scarce water resources. Managing water in an integrated and sustainable way can contribute significantly to better gender equity, by improving access of women and men to water and water-related services to meet their essential needs. GWA applies a broad gender concept including power relations based on socio-economic differences, age, ethnicity and caste. On the one hand women are often victimized, but on the other hand, they also have much knowledge and capacity to improve their situation and that of their people.

Water and Sanitation for People:

Women are the main beneficiaries of improved water and sanitation as many living in overcrowded urban slums or unserved rural areas have to go far and wait to relieve themselves after dark. They fear harassment and sexual assault while doing so. Walking long distances for drinking water blocks development and forms a poverty trap. As women are responsible for the health and hygiene of their families, they benefit more from clean drinking water, as family members get ill less often. The time gained by having a source of drinking water close by can be used for attending school or training or for generating an income.

Water for Food:

In agriculture women are often not recognized as farmers, resulting in limited control and access to land and water. Women and men often cultivate different crops, on different types of soils, using different techniques. More and more women are farmers on their own account, whilst men migrate to towns (feminization of agriculture), without handing over the needed land and water rights. Also in fisheries women and men use different technologies for catching fish, and specialise in different types of fish or seafood. Both in agriculture as well as in fisheries women do the lion's share of the processing of the products.

Water for Nature:

As poor people draw most heavily on common property resources such as forests, rangelands, water bodies and inshore fishing grounds, they suffer disproportionately when common resources are degraded. Industrial, urban and other pollution of water affects poor people and

especially women seriously, as they are usually the ones responsible for providing food and water for the household.

GWA: origin and evolution

The Gender and Water Alliance was created at the Second World Water Forum in the Hague (March, 2000) to mainstream gender in water management worldwide and to promote equitable access to safe and adequate water. It is a global network of organisations and individuals working in the water sector and in gender mainstreaming, working towards incorporation of gender considerations in water policies and practices at all levels.

The members of the GWA are its greatest asset as GWA strives to reach its goals through its membership. Members are asked to mainstream gender in water management in their own organisations and at national level in their countries, and are invited to execute the activities of the strategic plan of GWA. Therefore GWA strives for a worldwide representation in its membership of both men and women, individuals and organisations.

From its modest beginnings, the GWA has grown rapidly to a membership of 1100 members in 106 countries at the beginning of 2008. More than 80 per cent of its members come from countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. About 40 per cent of its members are men, and 60 per cent are women.

During its first phase, GWA was hosted by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) in Delft, the Netherlands. Since 2005 GWA has been registered as an independent Association under Dutch law, and has established a small Secretariat in the Netherlands.

Phase I (2000-2005) of GWA's work concentrated on the preparation of advocacy and training materials to promote mainstreaming of gender in IWRM (Integrated Water Resource Management). The Strategic Plan for Phase II, 2006-10, provides a framework for GWA to play a more active role in implementing its goals and objectives and to strengthen the gender-related understanding and practice of water-sector professionals and decision makers at national and local levels.

GWA's success in raising awareness about the importance of involving both men and women in all aspects of water management is partly a result of its commitment to work collectively with a wide variety of international partners that are prominent in the water sector, such as UN-

Habitat, IW-Learn, UNDP, IRC, GWP, Cap-Net, SIWI, UN Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water, UNEP and WSSCC. In the different regions the work is implemented with many regional partners.

During its first phase, GWA was funded primarily by DGIS (the Netherlands) and DFID (United Kingdom). Currently, although DGIS continues to be GWA's most important donor, the Alliance has established additional sources of funding for specific activities from a variety of bilateral and multilateral organizations and banks, NGOs and other partners.

Mandate of GWA

Vision of GWA:

To achieve equity and equality among women and men in sustainable water resources development and management at all levels. The ultimate aim is to improve the water situation of poor women and men.

An integrated water resources management approach that includes the provision of sustainable water and sanitation services requires a special emphasis and focus on gender, social justice and human rights. Water management that optimizes economic and social welfare and protects vital aquatic ecosystems must take into account the different requirements of women and men of all social strata. It also recognizes that women and the poor generally have fewer opportunities to benefit from development and management, being left out of decision making. Women and the poor empower themselves by awareness raising and capacity building activities. Empowerment leads to genuine participation by all stakeholders, and in its turn this leads to more equal practices, with more sharing of tasks, benefits and responsibilities between women and men.

Mission of GWA:

To promote women's and men's equitable access to and management of safe and adequate water, for domestic supply, sanitation, food security and environmental sustainability. GWA believes that equitable access to and control over water is a basic right for all, as well as a critical factor in the struggle against poverty and in promoting sustainability.

Mainstreaming gender implies that knowledge and skills are used in a more systematic manner so that, by involving users, water resource management will be more efficient and have a greater impact. Women and men should not only have access to safe and adequate water, sanitation and food, but should also be responsible for ensuring maintenance of the water source and the ecosystem. Governments need to involve interest groups at all levels of decision making, and encourage full participation by all stakeholders and users.

Core strategic activities

GWA's strategic plan for 2006-2010 provides structure to its activities around five outputs, mostly done in partnership with other organisations:

1. Strengthening of the network itself

By strengthening the network, more can be achieved in the field of gender mainstreaming in the water sector. More members can do more activities, and to do so they need to be facilitated by a professional secretariat. Activities under this output are: management of the GWA website (www.genderandwater.org) in five languages, organisation of General Assembly meetings every 3 years and supporting regional members' workshops.

2. Disseminating and sharing of knowledge and information on gender mainstreaming policies, practices and tools

This output gives tools to professionals who would like to mainstream gender in the water sector. It includes the production of manuals, a Resource Guide on Gender in Water Management, guidelines, publications on experiences in gender mainstreaming and a Travelling Exhibit on Gender and Water. By supporting innovative research and dissemination of case studies, knowledge-gaps are filled. All materials produced under this output are available on the website of GWA, as well as on CD or hard-copy, in various languages.

3. Increasing the capacity to mainstream gender in IWRM

GWA developed a Training of Trainers Manual and a Tutorial on gender and IWRM as a basis for training for water professionals and self-learning. Apart from this, GWA organises training workshops on different aspects of gender mainstreaming, such as "Gender ambassadors training", "Mainstreaming Gender in Integrated Water Resource Management" and "Training of

Trainers for Gender in IWRM". These training workshops are always tailor-made, depending on the target group, the region and the needs of the participants.

4. Incorporating gender concerns into national water-related policies.

In the partnership with UN-Habitat Rapid Gender Assessments are developed in many cities and towns. Under this output tailor-made support to gender mainstreaming has been developed on request for different countries. GWA is developing training materials and accompanying guidelines for members and gender advocates in the context of national water-related policies. To monitor the progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, a Gender Equity Gauge is being developed in South Asia..

5. Reinforcing the profile of gender equity issues at international water-related conferences.

This is achieved through the organisation of seminars, side events and sessions at most important international water conferences in collaboration with one or more partners. Presenting key-note speeches on gender issues, participating in discussion forums and handing out information in information booths are part of the activities. GWA members represent GWA as Gender Ambassadors in events in their regions, often resulting in the inclusion of the interest of women, or the importance of gender in the final declarations.

Future directions: increasing regionalization

One of GWA's priorities starting in 2007 is to decentralize its activities to the regional levels. This process is ongoing. Regional GWA Workshops were held for: Anglophone West Africa, the Arab region, Francophone West and Central Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean, the Lusophone countries, South Asia, and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Supported by the GWA Secretariat and/or Steering Committee, some key regional members have organized Strategic Planning Workshops in their region to draft Regional Strategic Plans with members, partner organizations and other interested and important stakeholders in the gender-and-water world. These plans outline the priority areas and activities for three years, including training. Regional activities form some of the building blocks of GWA's current five-year strategic plan. As the programme develops further, it is intended that additional funding (from regional development banks, bilateral and multilateral

donors) will be raised globally and in the region itself. In some of the regions Regional Focal Points have been appointed who function as the outreach of the Secretariat.

In the near future, regional workshops will be held for Southern Africa and for Eastern Africa. East Africa is a region where GWA has been very active as a result of its partnership with UN-Habitat in the Water for African Cities (WAC) Programme and the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Programme (LVWATSAN). Regions that are not mentioned are not being overlooked. Proposals on capacity building from members in not-yet-covered regions are also considered.

GWA recognizes that collaboration is essential with partners at the regional and national level, such as governments, multilateral and bilateral organizations, grassroots organizations, NGOs, river basin commissions, universities and research institutes in undertaking its regional activities.

How can you contribute to GWA?

GWA welcomes the participation of gender specialists, of water professionals, and of all those who want to take gender relations in their development work seriously. Those who want to teach and those who want to learn, all are welcome as members to be involved in any aspect of GWA's work: knowledge sharing, capacity building, advocacy, policy development and application of GWA principles in the field. GWA members represent a great diversity of people and organisations, enabling useful interaction and sharing of existing material, which in the end is beneficial for the water situation of poor women and men all over this world.



You can ask for more information and join GWA by registering via the Website in five languages:

<http://www.genderandwater.org>

or by contacting:

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