

Session Report

Session Title: Gender and Water in Asia in the 21st Century - a stakeholder dialogue

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Ms Kusum Athukorala, Chairperson welcomed all participants who had turned up in spite of the late hour said that this was a landmark event as this is the first time a gender session was held within the main technical session. Segregation of gender sessions should be stopped and gender issues integrated within all main technical sessions.

Mr S. Wickramaratchi, Ministry Secretary on behalf of the Minister of Irrigation and Water Management who had been called away on urgent business said that the Government of Sri Lanka believes in partnerships, All stakeholders Government. NGOs private sector and community each has its own role.

The largest development project in the country was the Mahaveli scheme was started in the 70's; in view of inadequate environmental safeguards there is significant pollution in the waters now. This crisis situation has been building up for many years. The activity carried out by NetWwater fell in line with the government thinking as well. Although the NGOs, the Govt., and the Minister were thinking on the same lines, there were great problems with policy not being implemented, miscommunications etc.

But with developing partnerships, government, local authorities and NGOs within one year a complete change was brought about not prosecution of polluters but through awareness.

Key Message - Although a remarkable progress has been achieved there is a long way to go. We believe that very importantly the govt. NGOs and the Private sector should work together in this endeavor.

Ms Hasna Moudud – Global Environment 500 Laureate from ICARDMA , Bangladesh spoke on the positive impact of women on Ganges water sharing a contentious transboundary issue. 94% of Bangladesh's rivers arise outside its own territory. Therefore they have no control of over the

floodwaters and more important the tapping of water in the dry season. She spoke on the experiences of how women from both India and Bangladesh got together and had a positive impact on the arrangements to share water through the Ganges treaty of 1996.

Dr Ava Shreshta, Asian Development Bank spoke on harmonising gender concerns in the ADB assisted schemes. The ADBs water and poverty initiative is based on the policy known as Water for All. It promotes and participatory approach. The ADB gender and development strategy adopts mainstreaming gender as a key strategy in promoting gender equity. The ADB gender policy and water policy are mutually supportive. Gender is seen as the key to successful proper approach by the ADB. Two case studies were presented in support of this; the Panchakanya project in Nepal and Second Red River Basin in Vietnam.

Ms Miyako Iseki of Women's International Organisation for Peace and Freedom presented the experiences of Japanese women who had to combat air and water pollution from the 60's onwards. She demonstrated how very simple tools were used by Japanese housewives to test pollution in water or acid rain monitoring. A simple test kit was devised by the universities to help them. Bamboo charcoal was then used in baskets tonbe placed in rivers to filter it. After 10years of monitoring in 1998 thanks to the Kyoto Protocol and stringent rules on vehicular pollution the air is now clean. The river Kamo round the conference hall is clean as well as she showed in her simple test.

Key quotes

Let the rivers run free; let water unite not divide us – Ms Hasna Moudud, ICARDMA , Bangladesh.

Let this be the last water forum where gender issues are segregated from the main technical sessions, into separate sessions in separate halls. Ms Kusum Athukorala, NetWwater, Sri Lanka