



Joint Communication on Mainstreaming Gender in Integrated Water Resources Management¹

Why do we need more political attention to gender issues in the context of water resources?

The need to adopt effective water resources management practices in order to face crucial water security challenges has been on the top of the agenda of politicians and decision makers for many years.

Particular emphasis has been given to the need to base water development and management on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels. The decisive role of women in this context has been repeatedly highlighted in relevant Ministerial statements and declarations, such as the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development adopted in the framework of the International Conference on Water and the Environment (1992), the Ministerial Declaration of The Hague on Water Security in the 21st Century (Second World Water Forum, 2000) and the International Conference on Freshwater (Bonn, 2001). These high level meetings have recognised the need to empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation and to secure their equal voice in managing the sustainable use of water resources and sharing the benefits.

The reports presented during the recent Conference of the Water Directors of the Euro-Mediterranean and South-Eastern European Countries (Athens, 2006) clearly illustrate that a large number of efforts are being made in all countries of the region, South and North, by governments, national and international agencies and various stakeholders to respond to a diversity of water challenges among which also gender inequity figures. They also show that governance issues, including lack of adequate political support, fragmentation of water management, insufficient public awareness and relevant education are still among the most critical obstacles towards a sustainable management of the region's resources.

Considering the important role women play in water demand and use management by each sector (domestic, drinking water supply, agriculture, industry, environment etc.) it has become clear that an equal women's involvement is not only important for their status but it is also essential for the effective use of finite water resources for present

¹ This Communication is a joint effort of:

- the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med): www.gwpmed.org/
- the EC financed project GEWAMED (Mainstreaming Gender Dimensions into Water Resources Development and Management in the Mediterranean Region) www.gewamed.net/index.php and
- the MIO-ECSDE (Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Cultural and Sustainable Development), www.mio-ecsde.org

and future generations. Only by providing women the right incentives for investing time, labour and capital e.g. in irrigation and water management activities, etc. – incentives reflecting their responsibilities, access to and control over productive resources – a sustainable management of the resources can be achieved.

Therefore, if we are to respond to the current water challenges in a holistic and effective manner, increased efforts need to be made by all responsible agencies and ministries to enhance women's role in water resources management.

Interventions and policies towards this objective can also prove supportive of other efforts governments and the international community are undertaking towards the sustainable management of the region's resources and, finally, towards the satisfaction of basic people's needs clearly highlighted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (education, fight against poverty and hunger, gender equality, health, protection of natural resources etc.).

Urgent issues relating to the effective involvement of women in water resources management that still need an adequate political support are the following:

1. **Gender analysis:** There is urgent need for a more rigorous implementation of existing guidelines and/or new ones for the undertaking of gender analysis during the formulation and implementation of projects and the enactment of water policies. This will ensure that water development projects will benefit in an equal manner women and men
2. **Land and Water ownership inheritance legislation:** Gender sensitive legislation should be put in place and effectively implemented. In fact, even in cases where the law provides an equal opportunity for men and women regarding the inheritance of goods by the heirs there is often a considerable difference between law and reality. Social habits and other traditions inflict serious discrimination to women and few countries establish discriminating criteria when the heirs are women.
3. **Education and Awareness on Gender Issues:** Water education at all levels is of utmost importance for increasing the awareness of the public and the government bodies. Little is done in this important area compared to the actual needs.
4. **Participation of Women in Water Governance:** Very few women are active in Water Users Associations and Water Cooperatives. This is particularly a consequence of the restricted land ownership of women in many Mediterranean countries. The presence of women in most irrigation and water supply agencies is increasing but in most cases still far from the potential.
5. **Coordination and Institutional Capacity in gender issues:** There is the need for a better coordination at national level and even more at regional level among institutions and bodies (governmental and non-governmental) dealing with gender support programmes. Furthermore, the skills of many of these institutions related to participatory and gender approaches should be enhanced.
6. **Extension services, gender specialists and training materials:** There is an urgent need to improve the quality of extension services directed to women and to increase the number of female gender specialists / extension officers. Training materials should become more gender sensitive.

7. **Cultural Heritage and Social Norms:** Education and awareness are essential to support positive changes overcoming those social and cultural norms that are the cause of gender inequity and inequality.
8. **Training needs:** Specific training programmes need to be addressed to working-women, most of which are engaged in agriculture and represent the most disadvantaged group of their society. Often they do not have other source or income than their work, which is underpaid as they frequently remain unskilled workers.
9. **Access to Information:** A better knowledge among men and women about their own rights and an increased access for needed information and technology are urgently needed.
10. **Gender-disaggregated statistical information:** statistics disaggregated by sex with a gender perspective need to be improved in order to better evaluate the gravity of situations related to the roles that women and men play in the development and use of land and water resources and monitor the process of gender integration into water management

In line with these considerations we call on the Water Directors:

1. To promote the participation of women organizations concerned with land and water rights in the integrated water resources management.
2. To promote training and extension programmes specifically addressed to rural women at local level in order to provide them with the necessary qualifications to access better paid work.
3. To ensure that the principles of equal opportunities are rigorously applied in the recruitment of staff, including in large water ministries or related institutions, and, whenever the qualifications of candidates are equivalent, to adopt measures in order to promote equal representation of men and women,
4. To promote media programmes for the public awareness on existing gender issues in the domain of water resources management.
5. To promote the implementation of educational programs at schools to promote a better understanding of the importance of the sustainable use of the water resources and the complementary role that women and men can play in it.
6. To take appropriate actions to ensure that water users organizations do not include only the owner of land but the actual managers of it. This should create new and important opportunities for women to participate more actively in the affairs of the associations as many women are *de facto* the managers of many small and medium farms.
7. To guarantee that a gender analysis or other similar tools able to consider the productive and reproductive role of women be included in the formulation, execution and management of water resources development projects, including procedures aimed at collecting, processing and recording gender disaggregated information by sex. This information is essential for a proper planning of development projects as well as to monitor the social evolution of rural societies.