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MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO WATER RESOURCES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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INTRODUCTION

We have entered the new millennium with one of the most fundamental conditions of human development unmet: universal access to water. Of the world's 6 billion people, at least 1.1 billion lack access of safe drinking water. The lives of these people who are among the poorest on our planet are often devastated by this deprivation, which impede the enjoyment of health and other human rights.

"Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity". (Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General).

To go forward to make such a dream a reality implies major efforts and effective strategies in the way we are using and managing the water resources. On the global level, water is badly used and managed. This holds true for the countries either rich in their water resources or in the ones of limited water resources and facing severe water scarcity. This can be clearly demonstrated if we consider the agricultural sector where more than 70% of the available water resources are allocated and the water on-farm use efficiency is not exceeding 45% with water losses exceeding 50%. Ensuring that the access to sufficient safe water is a human right constitutes an important step towards making it a reality for every one.

It means that:

- freshwater is a legal entitlement, rather than a commodity or service provided on a charitable basis;
- achieving basic and improved levels of access should be accelerated;
- the least served are better targeted and, therefore, inequalities decreased; and
- communities and vulnerable groups will be empowered to take part in decision-making processes.

Passing from the meanings of water as human right towards the realization is a very difficult and complex process. However, our success and/or failure are mainly a matter of the way we are using and managing the water resources within the constraints of their availability.

In this regard, the cornerstone is the management of available water resources. We have to stop with the fragmented management approach and move to the integrated one. Integrated water resource management is the call of time, but, it requires attention to the human aspects of the use, development and management of the limited fresh water resources, being the users, the actual operators in all the management process starting with the set up of plan, passing by the needed actions to be taken and ending with practical implementation on the ground. However, this cannot smoothly and appropriately be done without major attention and priority consideration given to gender, but, unfortunately, gender approach is not sufficiently considered.

WATER AND GENDER: PRESENT SITUATION

The demands and skills of water users differ, depending on their gender, age, culture, religion, abilities, education and income.

Sustainable water use and management requires that these differences be taken into account at all levels and for all water activities, from policies to projects. Yet, too often under-represented users, particularly women, the main users and managers of water are excluded from decision-making and

planning. The exclusion of women has made water management systems less responsive to demands for water services hence, the skills and energies of nearly half of the communities' population are nearly neglected in spite of the vital role they could play in improving natural resources management.

These shortcomings offer important lessons and challenges for the international, regional and local water communities. Women's involvement is crucial to successful water sector use, management and reforms. This started clearly appearing politically and technically.

At present, we can notify that globally, there is a better understanding and more awareness of the gender issues involved in water management and a range of initiatives have been introduced to improve the situation. Many countries recognized the benefits of involving women in all aspects of water use and thus most government guidelines, project designs, and programmes policies now address gender concerns. However, too many projects and programmes focus on the practical rather than the strategic needs of women. Focusing should be given to the water rights; those would provide women with permanent means of production, the basis to greater wealth creation, long-term prosperity and financial security. But such a change challenges longstanding traditions and practices.

Indeed, although men and women both have water related responsibilities, gender based divisions of labour determine who controls the many uses of water. Moreover, water management structures, from the local level to the basin level, tend to be dominated by large water users and by administrative, political and economic elites. As a result, poor families' water needs are often ignored, undermining the welfare and livelihoods. The point to be raised is that in some societies men have deeply ingrained insecurities about the notion of women owning property, including land and water right for farming.

It has to be stressed here that the issue is not just empowering women, but, it also involves addressing and altering men's deeply ingrained incentives about women owning property. Such changes are possible only with fundamental shifts in gender relations.

GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE WATER USE AND MANAGEMENT

Water scarcity and its fragility pose different challenges for rural men and women because of their different roles, relations and responsibilities, opportunities and constraints and uneven access and control of resources.

Furthermore, agricultural, environmental and related water policies and programmes often fail to recognize women's particular needs and crucial contribution in the use and management of water resources.

In this regard, in the arid and semi-arid countries, and particularly those of the Mediterranean, still more work needs to be done to incorporate a gender perspective in policy, projects and programmes concerning the water sector. This can be promoted through a better understanding of men's and women's roles, and their perspective concerns and needs.

As food producers, women and men have a stake in the preservation of the environment and in environmentally sustainable development. Land and water resources form the basis of all farming systems and their preservation is crucial to sustained and improved food production. A lack of understanding and appreciation of women's and men's knowledge of natural resources management and preservation techniques, as well as a disregard for their properties as resource users, has caused many development interventions to fail or to be rejected by local communities. In view of this, sustainable, relevant and equitable development should be based on women's and men's full and equal participation, on their respective local knowledge and on ecological and socio-cultural factors.

Governments, development agencies and civil society organizations are increasingly incorporating a gender perspective in their policies, programmes and projects aimed at sustainable use and management of natural resources. However, the road to achieve this goal is still a long and arduous one, and the commitments made at international conferences and conventions need to be translated

into practice, with the full and equal participation of women and men of the local, national and international levels.

Indeed, several international conventions and agreements have been adopted by the international community, all including commitments reflecting a broad-based consensus on the need to remove the obstacles to women's and men's equal and active participation in and benefit from development initiatives (Agenda 21 UNCED Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Beijing Platform for Action 1995; the International Conference on Freshwater, Bonn, 2001; The World Summit of Sustainable Development - WSSD - Johannesburg, 2002; The Second World Water Forum, The Hague, 2000; The Third World Water Forum, Kyoto, Japan 2003). Yet, despite these efforts, gender discrimination in access to and control of resources and services persists, as does the neglect of women's rights, because of political and cultural impediments that are difficult to eradicate and that require resources and strong political will. These impediments have also hindered the signatory parties' and development agent's efforts to mainstream gender in sustainable land and water resources development and management. Generally, the implementation of conventions still depends on addressing certain issues such as collection and use of sex-disaggregation data, the understanding of gender, the capacities and tools to insure integration of the gender dimension, as well as the knowledge of existing resources and expertise on gender issues.

A CONCERN FOR EQUALITY

Without specific attention to gender issues and initiatives, projects can reinforce inequalities between women and men and even increase imbalances. Ideally the capacity to work with a gender analysis or perspective should be included as one of the core capacities to be developed in the consideration of all issues concerning water resources management. This capacity to identify gender issues should be one of the basic capacities for both individuals and institutions.

The fact that gender issues are a crosscutting theme in water resources management, yet, all too often in international and national programmes they are of little consideration.

The concerning programmes and the implemented programmes are usually characterized with the lacking of certain issues that could be expressed in the following questions:

- Is planning for the project based on an integrated analysis of productive and domestic uses of water?
- Does this analysis recognize the different needs and priorities of women and men?
- In assessing the trade-offs between competing demands for water have the different capacities of women and men to express their needs been taken into account?
- Do project activities include measures to ensure that women's voices will be heard?
- Have sex-disaggregated data base been developed, and can they be used to monitor impacts on women and men respectively?

In order to fulfil the previously mentioned gaps further initiatives are required with major focusing on:

- To raise the profile of gender issues;
- To look for ways to increase demand for inclusion of gender perspectives in the broad areas of technical support, research and networking;
- To devote specific attention to specialist and expertise; and
- To promote the development and advancement of women professionals.

COMMON GENDER PROBLEMS IN THE WATER SECTOR

- Traditional cultural norms:
 - The centrality of traditional cultural norms as a rationale for gender inequity in the water sector is a common theme in most countries.
 - Cultural norms and customs of the community are often not congruent with the principles of gender equity as articulated in the water policy and thereby undermine good policy on the part of implementing agencies.

- **Self esteem and public participation skills:**
Low self-esteem displayed by women where public functions were concerned is one of the factors that severely impeded equitable water-management. In this regard, major efforts should be taken to improve not only the women's capacities and skills, but their appreciation for their capacities.
- **Gender inequity in employment.**
Such problem can be generalized not only at the community level, but it is also widely found in a range of institutions dealing with water sector.
- **Gender differentiation in irrigation management**
Systematic disadvantages are a general pattern characterizing the irrigation sector. Women's participation in the irrigation sector is always in increase without a corresponding increase in decision making power.
- **Capacity building needed at various levels**
- **At project management level, many managers do not understand gender issues and do not really know how to mainstream them in their work.**
- **At community level, various kinds of skills need to be developed among women and men to enable them to effectively participate in public affairs.**

Beside these common problems, the present situation indicates clearly that the effectiveness of efforts to integrate gender equality into development cooperation in general and water sector in particular as well as on how gender mainstreaming strategies might be pursued in the future, both did not succeed in providing more significant and visible results. The reasons behind could be attributed to the followings.

Understanding of Gender and Gender Mainstreaming

In most countries, due to lack of understanding and the will to change gender is often thought as side-streamed rather than mainstreamed. The term gender should not be used to refer predominately to women. It is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act, as women and men, because of the way society is organized, not because of our biological differences. Equally, gender mainstreaming should be understood as a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres.

Gender Approach

The gender approach aims at the fullest possible participation of both women and men. This cannot be achieved unless attitudes, roles, and responsibilities of men and women are carefully taken into account. This cannot be easily done, hence, both sexes do not necessarily have the same access to, or control over, resources and that work, benefits and impacts may be different for both groups. To meet such situation successfully, the gender approach requires an open mind capable to lead and organize both men and women to work together in complete harmony.

Resources and Institutional Support

One of the most significant constraints on progress of gender equality, mainstreaming, is that the resources and institutional support are not yet commensurate with the policy commitments on gender equality, or the requirements of a gender mainstreaming strategy. Drastic changes are needed in the working environment and in how dialogue is conducted. What is evident is the presence of a male dominated and masculine culture that has inevitable consequences for the values and priorities that are expressed, formally in policy and budget priorities and informally in the discourse and atmosphere of workplace. Moreover, dialogue even between those involved in gender equality policies and active women's organizations – is not enabling women's voices and voices on gender equality, to come

through. Dialogue should be not only about discussing issues with partners but should also be about listening to their views including their interpretations of gender equality.

Managing Gender Mainstreaming Strategies

This is not any easy process, but a rather complex one. The failure and/or success are highly a matter of in-house capacity to manage gender mainstreaming strategies at both centralized and decentralized levels. The over use of external experts to manage and implement gender mainstreaming is not the appropriate approach to be followed. This could create significant difficulties in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of followed strategies and taken measures. It is needed to allocate sufficient resources in terms of skilled and knowledgeable staff as well as balancing the capacity at central levels with sufficient capacity at the decentralized ones.

Reassessing Strategy

So far, strategies for gender mainstreaming placed considerable emphasis on the development of tools and instruments (for analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation) and on capacity building. What we have now is a multitude of tools and instruments, but in return, their impact is not widely overseen with only few examples of good practice on the ground.

Visibility and Clarity of Gender Equality

There is a continuing need in country strategies, country programmes and intervention for clarity, explicitness and visibility in the statement of gender equality as a goal and priority. Without the clarity called for, there is an evident lack of follow-through. On the other hand, there is a requirement for linkages and ensuring synergies with other goals and issues.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: GAPS AND WEAKNESS

For most countries of the Mediterranean, gender mainstreaming are not well defined. There is an apparent need for a set of core requirements that represent the reasonable minimum for gender mainstreaming. An effective gender mainstreaming requires:

- clear objectives and targets on gender equality;
- gender analysis;
- monitoring and reporting;
- resources and capacity, tools and dialogue of gender equality (qualified personal, institutions and government, civil society, internal team work, donor community) and its implementation.

These requirements are needed to ensure, on one hand, that progress is made beyond a pro-forma or simplistic application of the mainstreaming gender strategy, and on the other hand, that the energy and commitment of staff and partners working on gender issues are used to the full.

Insuring that gender equality is fully addressed not easy. Rethinking about gender mainstreaming is needed to decide what can be done about the gaps and weakness. A new way forward is needed that links gender equality with other development goals and objectives, brings gender knowledge and expertise into the mainstream and makes much better use of local knowledge and resources.

INTEGRATION OF GENDER DIMENSION IN WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: EXISTING PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

In the Mediterranean, gender is now a priority on the agendas of water resources policy-makers, irrigation leaders and researchers; however, the considerable existing gap between positive policy intentions and their conversion into concredited action is mainly attributed to several problems, among them:

- **Legislation**, which often doesn't sufficiently consider the access of women to land and water; women are absent in the decision-making process, government agencies are not taking enough initiatives in educating women in water management issues.
- **Communication and awareness of gender issues**: education at primary and secondary school, vocational schools and universities in gender issues 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.
- **Inadequacy of analysis**; in fact there is a poor analysis of gender issues in water policies.
- **Lack of women's participation of in water governance**: women are mainly absent in the management and policy making processes; very few women are active in Water Users Associations and Water Cooperatives.
- **Centralization of water management and governance**.
- **Institutional capacity**: there is a lack of coordination mechanisms among relevant institutions and bodies within countries and more at regional level, and limited skills related to participatory and gender approaches.
- **Extension**: the extension services directed towards women are unsatisfactory; there are few female extension officers\gender specialists; training material is rarely gender sensitive.
- **Impact of globalization**: globalization is affecting social roles in rural communities and agricultural management, including irrigation; consequently, many women are changing their attitude towards agricultural work.
- **Cultural heritage and social norms**: in most countries inequity and inequality are dominant because of social and cultural reasons.
- **Poverty**: Most working women are engaged in agriculture and are the most disadvantaged group of their society. Due to lack of training and other reasons they remain unskilled workers.
- **Lack of access to information**: there is insufficient knowledge among men and women about their own rights, and there is lack of access to needed information and technology.
- **Lack of gender-sensitive indicators**: There is an absence of institutional set up that is responsible for monitoring the process of gender integration into water management.
- **Gender-disaggregated statistical information**: Still limited availability of statistics disaggregated by sex with a gender perspective and therefore it becomes difficult to quantify the gravity of situations related to the access of women and men to land and water resources.

In addition to the outlined problems, several basic gender-sensitive questions are still seeking reasonable answers, such as:

- Who performs which tasks?
- Who has access to and control of land and water resources?
- Who has access to and who has the control of income and benefits?
- Who decides what?
- What are the expectations and needs of the land and water users?

In order to integrate gender dimension in water resources management, it is of paramount importance to identify clearly the following:

- What is needed? What could be the strategy? What is the most appropriate approach? What are the enabling conditions needed for putting the strategy in action? What needs to be done?

Equally, if women are to play a more prominent role in water management in the Mediterranean, a number of basic concepts must be more widely accepted, among them the following:

- Increasing efforts to improve the general status of women. They must be tackled by taking into account the status of both women and men, recognizing that their life courses differ and that equal treatments will not necessarily produce equal outcomes.
- On the national level, water policies, institutions and management structures must reflect the needs, priorities and representation rights of both women and men for all possible water uses.

- Community institutions for integrated water management must be linked to new basin-level management framework. This will require a continuous flow of information to allow the women to be acquainted with water management proposals from the local level to the basin level, besides setting the devising strategies that guarantee the women participation while recognizing cultural and social tradition.
- Many steps need to be taken to achieve gender equity in water management, including affirmative actions at various levels, gender budgeting and action at the micro-level. Meeting this goals requires gender mainstreaming taking into account gender equity concerns in all policies, programmes administrative and organizational procedures.
- Governments have to be motivated and encouraged to use affirmative action to attract more women to water management careers, strengthen the skills of women dealing with water issues, formulate a national strategy for integrating gender mainstreaming with integrated water resource management, build the capacity of water professionals to work on gender issues and improve information dissemination and sharing among women.
- Promote participatory methodologies that use agreed indicators to measure the effectiveness of women participation. In the meantime, and to ensure meaningful participation of women, it is needed to provide additional capacity in training, materials and financing.
- Develop gender analysis at the earliest stages of projects and programmes as well as monitor gender equity for the running programmes and projects including gender budgeting.

USE OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: MAJOR REASONS

Conflicts over water-too much- too little or too polluted, harm people, food production and the environment.

Research and practical experience demonstrate that effective, efficient and equitable management of water resources is only achieved when both women and men are involved in consultation process and in management and implementation of water related services. Striking a gender balance ensures that:

- the roles and responsibilities of women and men are mobilized to best effect;
- the creativity energy and knowledge of both sexes contribute to making water schemes and eco-systems work better;
- the benefits and costs of water use accrue equitably to all groups.

A gender perspective in water resources management is necessary for a variety of reasons:

Increase Project Effectiveness and Meeting Project Results

There is a vast body of anecdotal research projects and running programmes around the world and, particularly, in the developing countries that evidently demonstrate that ensuring both women's and men's participation improves project performance. Involving both women and men enhance project results and improves the likelihood of sustainability (Naryan, 1995; Fong *et al.*, 1996; Quisuimbing, 1994). There are several positive impacts of paying attention to gender issues in water resources management and irrigation project, among them the following:

- recruiting community organizers;
- promotion and ensuring membership of both women and men in water user; associations and thereby facilitating the payment of water fees;
- actively encouraging women to assure leadership roles.

Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Although there is no guarantee that the inclusion of women as well as men as beneficiaries and active participants in irrigation initiatives well produce better environmental results, experience shows that the potential of sustainability grows with increased involvement of the affected parties. There is a widespread interest in the commitment to a "new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations. The Beijing platform

for action (1995) highlighted environmental issues as one of critical area of concern (“gender inequalities in the management and safeguarding of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment”).

Improving Social and Economical Analysis

With a gender analysis, planners gain a more accurate picture of communities, natural resources uses, households and water users. Understanding the differences among and between women and men is a part of good analysis and contribute to more effective initiatives. Using gender analysis involves:

- understanding the gender – differentiated systems for access to resource, labour water uses, water rights and the distribution of benefits and products;
- focusing on gender relation (differences, inequalities, power imbalances, differential access to resources) between and among women and men and not just women;
- understanding the gender dimensions of institutions at all levels in the society (within the household, community based organizations, water users associations, local governments, national civil services, etc.);
- confirming or rejecting assumption in each specific context, the specificity of each situation must be investigated – ideally the use of participatory methodologies;
- getting the initiative or project right, studying its differential impacts on women and men to ensure that all implications are clearly understood and there are no unintended negative repercussions;
- understanding gender roles, relations and inequalities that influence the choices people make and their different options and how people respond both individually or collectively.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCES

Policy Evaporation is a Key Problem

All too often gender policies evaporate before implementation, and remain paper commitments only. The reasons for that could be mainly attributed to the fact that in most gender policies strategies or action plans are included with no clearly defined activities and targets, as well as the allocation of staffing and financial resources. Furthermore, such gender policies are not based on a realistic analysis of the organization/ministries –including their decision-making structure and planning routines and its history with respect to gender-related initiatives. The value of a gender mainstreaming policy lies in its formulation as well as its existence. The policy should fit with the organizational culture, structures and procedures and substantially increases the chance that policy will be implemented. Equally, gender policies, in order to be effective, should reflect their organizational and cultural context and be realistic and achievable within this.

Policy Components

Three distinct components are important for an effective gender policy:

- *situation analysis* – examining gender issues concerning beneficiary groups and concerning the organization itself. The latter includes an examination of staff knowledge, skill, commitment and practice in relation to gender issues;
- *the policy itself* – this should be fundamentally devised on the basis of the situation analysis;
- *action plan* – this sets out in detail how the policy will be implemented over a special time period, including activities, budgets, responsibility and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Gender equity in water resources use and management needs a wide acceptance of a number of basic concepts among them the followings:

- Further efforts to improve the general status of women taking into account the status of both women and men, recognizing that their life courses will not necessarily produce equal outcomes.

- A better understanding that women and men have different needs, priorities and decision making capabilities and that institutional structures determine their roles, rights and responsibilities for access to and control over resource.
- The gender sensitivity of services provided by national water management institutions must integrate gender equality in their hiring procedures, capacity building efforts and institutional cultures.
- Women often have vital knowledge of local water management that should be enhanced.
- Ensuring the participation of women in designing, planning, and the implementation of irrigation and water resources development projects, crucial to the success of such efforts will be informing women about new water management proposals from the local level as well as including them in design of new institutions and devising strategies that assure their participation while recognizing cultural and social traditions.

THE PROCESS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING: HOW TO BEGIN?

The process can begin by doing the following:

Information

Disaggregate all relevant data and information by men and women, firstly to identify the different needs of men and women and, secondly, to study the differential impact of integrated water resources management interventions on men and women. Gender analysis (an examination of women's and men's roles, resources, needs and priorities in relation to water) should be part of all situation analysis; planning and evaluation processes; and gender analytical studies should be commissioned to examine particular issues and address information gaps.

Consultation, Advocacy and Decision-Making

Involve men and women in planning and implementing integrated water resources management interventions on the basis of their various skills and the contribution they can make rather than on the basis on what is considered as "appropriate" by gender. This means promoting the involvement of women as well as men in consultation and decision-making from the community level to the highest level of organizational management. This will require further efforts to be made to create space for women in planning and implementation processes and to facilitate their participation through capacity building.

These aforementioned steps are to be followed by other two steps:

Action to Promote Gender Sensitivity-Beneficiary Groups

This step should be based on context specific sex disaggregated data and gender analytical information and a clear understanding of women's and men's priorities. Actions need to be explicitly included in policy and project and frameworks, backed up with staff and budgets, monitored and reviewed through appropriate indicator of change.

Action to Promote Gender Sensitivity-Organizations

This step is directed to develop the skills, knowledge and commitment of the staff involved in management and implementation as well as addressing and understanding issues of gender differences and inequality within developing organizations themselves. Appropriate capacity building activities have to be explicitly included in policy, project documents and programmes framework. In the abovementioned four key-steps of gender mainstreaming it is important for policy makers to recognize, understand and take into account the following:

- that without specific consideration of the differences and inequalities between women and men, it is possible that several of the new policy trends could end up making women situation worse;
- that all data should be disaggregated by sex;

- that matching ability to pay and willing to pay may require redistribution of income of women;
- that not only water but also women's time is an economic good and that markets are likely to undervalue women's times, and
- that gender barriers of effective and equitable management of water resources are more likely to be overcome if women are organized into movements for change.

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY IN WATER SECTOR: STEPS TO BE TAKEN

Such steps include affirmative action at various levels, budgeting and actions at the micro-level. However, meeting these goals requires gender mainstreaming that takes into account gender equity concerns in all policies, programmes, administrative and financial activities and organizational procedures (UNDP, 1997).

Affirmative Action

Such actions should be taken to assess strongly the followings:

- the adequate representation of women in all water management committees and decision-making bodies;
- the participation of sufficient number of females in international decision-making organizations, international consultations as well as regional and international networking activities;
- on the national level, water policies, institutions and management structures must reflect the needs priorities and representation rights of both women and men for all possible water uses.

Gender Budgeting

Through this action, proposed policies and projects are examined to ensure that the resources allocated deliver substantial benefits for women and thereby enhance their empowerment.

Micro-Level Actions

Such actions are addressing the following issues:

- Gender aspects of roles, rights and responsibilities in the water sector management and its use.
- Facilitating the women's participation in the water use associations and in community decision making.
- Developing a demand-responsive approach to user fees for water and sanitation services fundamentally based on the ability of male and female users.

Such actions are essentially needed to be in function, however, they are not sufficient; much remains to be done to meet the outstanding problems to achieve gender equity in water management.

The widening socio-economic disparities between men and women, the absence of women views in planning and implementation of water aspects, the non-systematic incorporation of women into water resources management, the limited involvement of women in water decision making and maintenance, the deficiencies in gender among water organization in particular and society in general, all are problems seeking appropriate actions and reasonable solutions. That's why to achieve gender equity, much remain to be done.

WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE?

To respond to all the concerns identified above and to answer to the previously raised questions in this paper, efforts should be made and action should be taken to:

- Integrate gender concerns into state policy. A gender analysis should be included in the process of designing implementing public policies on water. Lack of integration has been identified as one of the main causes of ineffective and unequal water supply.

- Enhance institutional will and develop comprehensive strategies for gender mainstreaming in national and regional institutions.
- Train local communities to know and master techniques that enable a change in role and focus for both women and men in water resources management and in the decision making process.
- Information should be widely disseminated through the water sector and used as basis for training and advocacy at all levels.
- Integrate efforts in gender and water with other themes such as poverty, pollution and health.
- Deep analysis of local cultural realities through the involvement of culture specific gender expertise in the country to assist and provide the advice to policy makers and programmes managers.
- Work towards establishing a mechanism for networking and sharing information and experiences, by involving all those with a stake in water resources such as trade union, private sector, NGO's and vulnerable groups.
- Promote participatory methodologies that use agreed indicators to measure the effectiveness of women participation.
- Strengthen targeted advocacy at the national and regional levels and provide additional resources (time, authority, incentives) for people responsible for gender mainstreaming.

Finally, the most important point is not to decide on the actions needed but to implement these actions on the ground. Time is running, water scarcity and related water problems are increasing in most developing countries, particularly those of the Mediterranean. We can no longer promise words in policy documents, or existing guidelines or speeches. We need to strive towards real impact on the ground.

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS: CHALLENGES

Experience shows that participatory processes in water resources management initiatives do not automatically recognize inequalities and differences between women and men. Attention to gender differences and inequalities is required if participatory development initiatives are to involve women as well as men. However, in most of the developing countries, the involvement of women is always hindered due to several specific issues included:

- power imbalances in communities;
- intra-household and intra-family relations;
- different constraints to participate;
- different abilities to participate; and
- perceived benefits to participate.

Participatory processes challenge organizations in many ways:

- *skills*: facilitating gender-sensitive participatory processes requires experience, skills and the ability to deal with the arising conflicts;
- *flexibility and adaptability*: the selection of methods should be based on the specific circumstances responding adequately and flexibility to specific contexts;
- *support*: exploring new issues requires support for participants both men and women. Furthermore, participatory process can take a long time and this will require support over a period of years;
- *follow-up*: this is a crucial issue for the organizations involved in the promotion of gender issues.

These tasks should not stop on implementing issues, but to follow up the results and feed back emerging from the participatory methods in action.