

Editorial

Experiences in water resources management have demonstrated that the future solutions of current and emerging water problems need to span across regions, sectors, disciplines and stakeholders and need to be viewed within the context of the overall dynamics of the changes that are currently taking place globally, regionally and locally, as well as the changes that are likely to occur in the coming decades.

Participation of women in water planning and management is an important issue. However, globally the issue of women and water use and management has thus far been almost exclusively dominated by gender specialists. Senior women managers and decision makers have very seldom participated in such discussions. In order to fill this gap, the International Water Resources Association (IWRA), in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Global Water Partnership (GWP), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and International Water Management Institute (IWMI), has embarked on the task of analysing the roles women play and could play in the management and planning of water resources from the viewpoints of senior women water managers and decision makers, as well as identifying concrete proposals on how the participation of women in the field of water could be increased.

As part of this overall process, it was decided to organize a forum for senior decision makers and professionals from various Latin American countries where they could share their experiences and where operational and practical lessons were drawn. A meeting was organized in Mexico City in May 1998 on the 'Contributions of women to the planning and management of water resources in Latin America'. It was noted that in Latin America more women are working as decision makers, managers and researchers in water-related issues. In addition, the number of female students who are in general studying civil and hydraulic engineering in the universities has also increased by a factor of almost 50% in some countries such as Brazil and Panama. The situation in these Latin American countries is likely to change significantly during the next 10 years, when women currently entering the job market progressively move up the management ladder.

The Mexico City Forum was followed by the organization of a workshop during the Stockholm Water Symposium in August 1998 on the 'Contributions of women in the field of water management', where cases from Latin America, the United States, Asia and Africa were analysed. During the workshop, it was stressed that the roles women play and could play in water-related issues depend to a large extent on the conditions within which they live, as well as their cultures and traditions.

During the Stockholm Workshop, Dr Torkil Jønch-Clausen, chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Global Water Partnership, pointed out that water resources and gender issues are two of the priorities on the agendas of

many international organizations, including theirs. Unfortunately, however, gender issues for the most part are receiving only lip-service: concrete operational activities are mostly missing. GWP, a co-sponsor of both the Stockholm and Mexico Workshops, is interested not in dogmas, but in supporting the development and implementation of concrete proposals on how to improve and increase the role of women in the water sector. It is interesting to note that in spite of the specific request made by the sponsors of both the Mexico City and Stockholm Workshops, no concrete proposals emerged on how to increase or improve the participation of women in the water sector.

The Stockholm Workshop identified that one of the main contributions of women who are working formally or non-formally in the water sector has been on health and sanitation-related issues, as well as conservation of natural resources and environmental education. In the specific case of women living in rural areas, it was noted that women need water to carry out activities which result in direct economic benefits for their families and communities, and not just for their responsibilities at the household level.

The papers presented in both the workshops provided a good diagnosis of many problems. What is now urgently needed is the identification of specific actions that can be implemented, rather than continued general rhetoric for more training and participation of women in the water sector. The time for rhetoric is long over, what is needed are actions to improve the current unsatisfactory situation quickly and cost effectively.

A book based on specially commissioned papers delivered to the Mexico City Workshop and its results will be published shortly by the United Nations University Press in Tokyo. Selected papers from the Stockholm Workshop are being published in this Special Issue.

I am most grateful to Dr Johan Holmberg of the Swedish International Development Agency, and Dr Torkil Jonch-Clausen of GWP for supporting the two workshops, to Prof. Malin Falkenmark for inviting me to be the Rapporteur of the Stockholm Workshop, and Prof. Asit K. Biswas, the Editor of this Journal, for giving over this entire issue so that we may publish all the major papers presented at Stockholm.

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