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Gender and Transboundary Water

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, were established by the United Nations in 2015 as a continuation upon the successful Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, of 2000. The UN and international development community sought to build on the successes from striving to meet the MDGs, and now go further taking a more holistic approach to global development for the next 15 years.

The MDGs primarily sought to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 and made great progress towards this end. The MDGs also included goals for education, child mortality rates, combating the HIV/AIDS epidemics, as well as to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. In 2015, the post-2015 development agenda was agreed to with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which placed the new 17 SDGs at its core.

The SDGs would build on the progress of the MDGs by seeking to fully eradicate poverty and to end global hunger, while improving other aspects of quality of life. As a result, the goals expanded from the original 8—with some more specific than others—to now include 17 goals that more comprehensively covered international development goals and quality of life. This again included education and poverty reduction, and also added energy, economic growth, as well as clean water.

The fifth SDG is now simply 'Gender Equality', moving beyond the weaker language of 'promotion' and a narrower view of women's empowerment, to cover gender and its intersection with development at all phases. As this briefing will further explore, applying gender analysis or a 'gender lens' across several case studies can provide powerful insights, data, and lessons for more effective policy development.

Within each of the SDGs are a set of targets to achieve, which should logically help to reach the overall goal. By setting specific targets of success, and indicators to track their progress, the global community can work together towards concrete progress across these developmental areas, with greater buy-in and accountability from nations and development institutions.

Shared Participation:
Four guest authors apply a gender lens to the challenges of water security and transboundary cooperation, and discuss methods for achieving the SDG of Gender Equality in the water sector

With SDG 6 – Clean Water, the targets include universal and equitable safe access to water, adequate sanitation, reduce pollution, increase usage efficiency, protect and restore water ecosystems, and implement IWRM at all levels while expanding transboundary cooperation.

For SDG 5 – Gender Equality, the targets range from eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and harmful practices, to improving family health, and ensuring women's full and effective participation in leadership roles, and all aspects of political and economic life.

As may already be apparent, achieving the Gender goals of SDG 5 are also inherently linked to the progress of achieving the water goals of SDG 6. Women and girls are often more affected by water scarcity, poor sanitation, pollution, etc., while being primarily responsible for family development and management due to gender norms, yet often without much decision power. Increased representation and participation by women in the water sector and in family decisions would help to give greater insights to policy for the most vulnerable and impacted groups, who have historically not usually had a say or influence in the water management process.

UN sustainable development goals. Source: digitalcommons.imsa.edu

Gender equality is also positively linked to economic development in the long-term and is understood to have significant effects on a countries GDP. As noted by UN women, "women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification and income equality, in addition to having other positive development outcomes". Therefore, in order to have effective and efficient programming across areas from water to poverty, or from climate change to infrastructure, gender has to be properly considered, and active measures taken in the appropriate cultural context to achieve gender equality.

The method towards this goal of gender equality is referred to as Gender Mainstreaming, an internationally recognized strategy aimed towards realizing gender equality by integrating a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation policies, projects, or programs. This is a process that must be undertaken by all stakeholders and implemented at all levels, from Donors and governments to NGOs and local implementors, ensuring best gender practices at all phases of their programs or projects. At the local level this can also include the developing of Gender Champions through training and engagement to help further foster changes in attitude and behavior.

This is also true for gender mainstreaming within development institutions and governments, where often internal institutional reforms still lag behind the standards promoted externally. This should not be too surprising, as experts recognize the difficulties in presenting a new level of analysis and recommendations that may clash with deeply held beliefs.

Often when we think about water and gender, we primarily imagine it from a WASH context, typically related to the time and effort need to gather and transport clean water. For example, across the world an estimated 266 million hours are spent by women and girls walking for water every day—97 billion hours per year. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, it is 40 billion. That is time then not spent towards education, development, or earning additional income. Every year away from school can mean a 25 percent loss in income potential.

> *"This is an opportune moment to reflect on the deep association between water and gender, because of large-scale shifts in global trends and patterns. Social and economic changes that would have been impossible to foresee even 20 years ago, globally and within most countries, seem to be unfolding right before our eyes."*
> ***Maitreyi Bordia Das with Gaia Hatzfeldt**, The Rising Tide World Bank report*

While this is clearly a large problem in many development contexts, it is only one aspect of Gender Analysis as it relates to water. The water sector overall is heavily dominated by men, as a recent World Bank report found, "the low number of women in water-related technical roles reflects their overall exclusion from such jobs". This exclusion also effects how changes and disruption to clean water effect women the most, with the least input in the process.

We can also think about the cross-sections of gender and water governance—the role of women in water resource management and decision making at all levels—or of gender and water diplomacy—the impact of equal gender representation in developing international agreements—or of gender in a transboundary context across various stakeholders, from local farmers to businesses, or to government officials. A recent example of such intersectional gender analysis can be seen here by Abaad MENA on the Beirut port explosion disaster and its gendered impacts.

In this Briefing, four guest experts will provide a case study on a topic related to Gender and Transboundary water. We hope these case studies provide a valuable insight and contribution to how practitioners in the water sector can best develop and implement water and development policies and programs.

Some of the terms used herein may be unfamiliar concepts for those who have not been exposed to this analytical perspective before. For instance, what is a 'Gender Impact Assessment', or what does 'Gender Mainstreaming' refer to, or the idea of applying a gender lens, or giving a gendered critique of a particular policy or overall political economy.

It is important to remember that many of the terms and tools we may have used to think about these issues before are socially determined and constructed, and which can evolve over time.

Gender – not to be confused with biological sex, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, boys, and girls in a society. This includes the expected norms, behaviors, or roles that are associated with each gender in that society (man or boy, woman or girl). While gender and sex are interrelated, they are not interchangeable terms. Gender identity varies from society to society and can evolve and change over time.

The EIGE defines Gender as, "social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and to the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as to the relations between women and those between men.

Gender Analysis – examines the relationship between men and women and the constraints of preventing gender equality in programs, policies, or projects. This analysis can qualitative or quantitative in nature, using a blend of methods and statistics.

Gender Impact Assessment – an ex-ante evaluation, analysis, or assessment of a law, policy, or program that makes it possible to identify and predict the likelihood of a given decision having negative consequences for the state of equality between women and men (EIGE). The basic question is: Does a law, policy or program reduce, maintain or increase the gender inequalities between women and men? By having more gender-sensitive program designs, greater impacts can be made to the relevant stakeholders, helping development efforts to be more efficient and sustainable.

Policy tool for the screening of a given policy proposal, in order to detect and assess its differential impact or effects on women and men, so that these imbalances can be redressed before the proposal is endorsed.

Gender Mainstreaming – Systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions. Often referred to in development and programming circles, success in this process would make such definition pages as this one unnecessary, to make gender concepts and analysis part and parcel of all development programming, to ensure the best and most equitable outcomes. It is effectively a pathway to implementing gender analysis and achieving the goal of gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is the integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy process – creation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with the aim of promoting equality

between women and men. It means assessing how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men–and taking responsibility to re-address them as necessary.

As nicely summarized by UN Women, "the 1997 agreed conclusions of ECOSOC defined gender mainstreaming as: "The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is 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 so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."

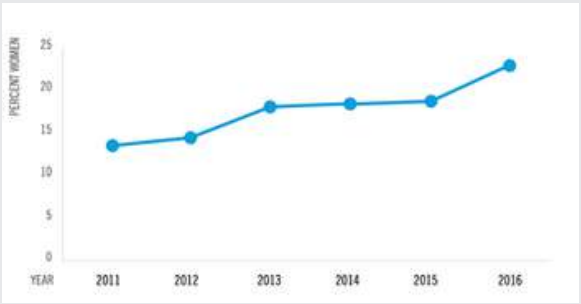
Gender-Neutral – (often applied alongside the phrase 'racially-blind'). Governments and NGOs have typically proposed legislation and development programs that were considered to be gender-neutral, since gender was thought to simply not factor into decision making. The assumption being that a law or program will benefit all groups equally, and that embedded inequalities will either not be further exacerbated or will be maintained, as the benefits are equal to all. In practice however, addressing suffering and inequality in equal ways actually causes the perpetuation of inequality. Embedded inequalities and historical contexts are repeated, and gender gaps are either maintained or widened.

Gender Blindness – fails to recognize that gender roles and responsibilities are ascribed or imposed by social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Projects, programs, or policies that are gender blind thereby maintain the status quo and do not improve unequal gender relations.

Gender Sensitivity – the process by which people are informed of how gender norms and constructs impact people's lives. Aiming to understand and account for the social and cultural elements of gender-based exclusion and discrimination, or gender-based violence.

Gender sensitivity trainings have garnered some media attention and may refer to the workplace training of employees to increase their gender awareness and thus change attitudes and behaviors. Some trainings may directly seek to spur dialogue between opposing genders to open up constructive communication and improve understanding. In a development context, this can refer to the systemic development of programs, projects, or policies to ensure that gender equality is being considered and actively worked towards alongside development outcomes. It is also about recognizing blind spots between program design or intent and its implementation and outcome.

Meanwhile, a Gender Equality Training (GET) seeks to provide the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively implement a gender-mainstreaming strategy in an organization or in a particular cultural context. Such trained Gender Champions can help ensure gender sensitivity in program implementation.



Trends in the share of female workers in water utilities Source: IBNET Women in Water Utilities: Breaking Barriers

266
million hours
Hours spent by women gathering water per day

18%
Women in water utilities

80%
Women responsible for family water collection

Author Bios

Katie Baczewski, *UNIDO*

Katie Baczewski is a gender specialist with ten years of experience managing development programs in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Katie holds a Master's degree in Development Economics and Gender Analysis from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and a Bachelor's degree in Politics/International Relations from Scripps College. She currently lives in Vienna, Austria and works as a Project Coordinator for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

Natasha Carmi, *Geneva Water Hub*

Natasha Carmi, an engineer by education, holds a Master's Degree in Hydrology for Environmental Management. She joined the Geneva Water Hub in March 2018 and contibutes to the establishment of the Global Water Observatory on Water and Peace, as well as the development of the women, water and peace agenda. Prior to that, she worked as water policy advisor to the Palestinian Negotiations Support Project, working closely with decision makers, and has experience in bilateral and regional water negotiations. She is used to working in highly sensitive and timely political environments. She worked with water resources and environmental challenges in the Middle East for the past 20 years. She serves frequently as a faculty member for conferences and workshops dealing with transboundary water resources in general, and hydropolitics in particular, at which water is a core political issue and international water law is a necessary framework for resolving conflicts and identifying opportunities and solutions.

Anamika Barua and Arundhati Deka, *Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT)*

Dr. Anamika Barua is a Professor in the Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG), India. Trained in Ecological Economics, her research interest lies in understanding how political, social and economic factors shapes environmental decisions and change, particularly related to water. For the last ten years she has been involved in academic and consultancy project related to water issues in South Asia.

Arundhati Deka is a Research Associate at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati. Currently she is working on the project – Science Communication for Water Diplomacy in the Brahmaputra. She has a master's degree in Environmental Studies and Resources Management. Her research interest lies in development studies and particularly on water science, policy and governance; socio-hydrology; and gender in water.

Natalija Ostojic, *UN Women*

Apart from having successfully obtained MA in International Studies (Module International Politics) at the University of Belgrade and having attended University of Oslo Master Course in International Development, Natalija has over eleven years of professional experience working for the government, civil society and international organizations on ensuring that gender is appropriately integrated into policy development, budget analysis, legislation and other methodologies and approaches in a manner that is appropriate for the Western Balkans context through building capacities of political parties, relevant government institutions, local self-governments, CSOs and women entrepreneurs, thus enabling women to take a more prominent role as economic, social and political change agents and innovators in the region.

Currently holds a position of Technical Project Analyst in charge of implementing Serbian component of the UN Women Reginal programme "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds". Passionate about design thinking, social innovation and mainstreaming gender into climate change policies and activities.

From the Source: A framework for understanding the intersection of gender and water

By: Katie Baczewski

It may be tempting to think that if anything could transcend gender, it would be water. Water is among the most fundamental of human needs. But gender, like water, is integral to our lives and shapes our daily routines, decisions, life paths, and well-being in ways both overt and unexamined. To mainstream gender into our work and understand the multiple ways in which gender impacts and is impacted by water access, use, quality, and management, we must first develop an intuitive understanding of what gender is, and what it means to apply a gender lens.

Everyone has gender

Most classic notions of gender define it as the socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and attributes of men and women, and the dynamics of the relationships between men and women. Gender is therefore often considered to be the social identity associated with sex - being male or female.

The difference between sex and gender is an important distinction. Sex refers to the reproductive biological characteristics someone has, such as genitalia and secondary sex characteristics. Though commonly understood to be binary - male or female - there is in fact a large intersex community[1], and many scientists argue that biological sex is more of a spectrum than a binary (Ainsworth, 2018).

UN Women defines gender as "the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities (UN Women, n.d).

> *"One of the most important things to say about the gender data gap is that it is not generally malicious, or even deliberate. Quite the opposite. It is simply the product of a way of thinking that has been around for millennia and is therefore a kind of not thinking. A double not thinking, even: men go without saying, and women don't get said at all. Because when we say human, on the whole, we mean man."*
> ***Caroline Criado Perez**, Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*

Generally, when organizations talk about gender and gender equality, they immediately talk about women and women's empowerment since women are marginalized in most of the world by prevailing gender norms. As a result of this marginalization, globally women work more hours than men (when unpaid work is accounted for) (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015), control less wealth (Zakrzewski, 2020), receive less formal education (UN Women, 2020), have less representation in government (Vogelstein, 2020), and are more likely to experience physical and/or sexual violence, especially from intimate partners (WHO, 2017).

Rigid gender norms negatively impact men, too. Men are more likely than women to die of suicide (Schumacher, 2019), are more likely to have alcohol use disorders (Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, 2017), are often not able to play as active a parenting role as they would like (MenCare, 2019), and also suffer high rates of sexual violence which is rarely reported or talked about (1in6, 2020). Gender may be socially constructed, but it still has very real, often life or death, consequences.

Most policies and strategies of international organizations and governments define gender as centered around the differential roles and responsibilities of men and women. However, definitions of gender are shifting, particularly among younger generations.

Increasingly, gender is not just seen as the socially ascribed roles and relationships between men and women, but as a fundamental aspect of our being - the complex interrelationship between body, identity,

and social dimensions (Reimagine Gender, n.d.). This understanding of gender emphasizes that man and woman are genders, but that there are many other genders, including trans[2], non-binary, and third genders. This approach fully separates sex and gender and acknowledges that while many people's genders will align with their sex assigned at birth, many people's genders will not.

This more expansive understanding of gender is both new and not new at all. In fact, many societies around the world have long-standing histories of recognizing and even revering non-binary genders (such as two spirit people of North American Indigenous tribes, muxes of the Zapotec, and hijras in South Asia) (Independent Lens, 2015). As younger generations have greater access to information which allows them to better understand concepts of gender, learn new terminology that can more accurately describe themselves, and find community with others, they are embracing more fluid gender identities and inclusive language (Parker, 2020). In a survey by Irregular Labs conducted in 2019 with youths between the age of 15-24 located in the USA, UK, Germany, India, China, Brazil, and South Africa, 33% of respondents said their gender identity is fluid. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) said that they expect their gender identity may change within their lifetime (Irregular Labs, 2019).

Regardless of our gender, the social norms associated with gender play out in complex ways in our lives, and intersect with other aspects of our identity, such as race or ethnicity, age, sexuality, and religion[3]. Gender groups are not monolithic; the experiences of a gay man and a straight man, or a young woman and an older woman, for example, may be drastically different. Still, our gender identity and the norms surrounding us from the moment we are born shape us. Our gender impacts how we present ourselves to the world, how we express (or don't express) our emotions and ideas, the relationships we form, academic and ultimately career decisions, decisions about the families we end up having, and our sense of safety and belonging. It also impacts our decision-making power, and who gets a say in what.

Gender norms can become institutionalized through laws, policies, and social or cultural norms. They become not just the way one (or a few people) think, but rather the way things are done.

It begins to seem natural and, as the quote from Caroline Criado Perez at the beginning of this article emphasizes, invisible. Gender is complicated, but foundational to the ways in which people experience their own bodies and their lives as social beings. We must understand this and understand the multiple ways gender plays out in our lives, communities, and societies to apply a gender lens.

Applying a gender lens

We often relegate gender to a sub-sector, even though nearly everyone in the world has gender[4], and marginalized genders such as women comprise approximately half the world's population. Often, even when we do think about gender we think particularly of the individual-level struggles of poor and disenfranchised women. In the water field, this means particular attention to women's uneven burden of gathering water, specific sanitation and hygiene needs, or the irrigation needs of smallholder women farmers. These are all crucial issues and do demand attention. But gender has implications beyond this, and a true gender lens will not only examine the ways in which gender shapes the experiences, opportunities, and choices of all people, but also relationships, communities, institutions, and societies at large.

Applying a gender lens means systematically thinking through the complexity of a situation and how gender applies at every step. This includes how it has shaped the motivations, opportunities, and challenges not just of beneficiaries but also of community leaders, policy makers, engineers, and government officials. Additionally, a gender lens reveals the ways in which gender norms are codified into systems and institutions and how power is distributed within micro, meso, or macro systems.

Because a gender lens gives us this depth of understanding, it not only enables us to understand the ways in which gender will impact the potential success of an intervention (such as a development activity, policy, law, or new technology), but it also helps us to understand whether and how the intervention itself could impact gender norms. Changing gender norms can lead to greater empowerment for marginalized genders (the intended effect), but these changes can also lead people with more power in the hierarchy (often men) to commit violence against those who are gaining new

power (John, 2017). The examples below show how a gender lens can be applied to different aspects relating to transboundary water.

Example 1: Masculinized and feminized sectors

We think about the world in gendered ways, which impacts the ways in which we value certain sectors over others.

Gender shapes how we fundamentally think - whether about objects, traits, tasks, concepts, professional fields, or academic disciplines. Carol Cohn writes that gender comprises "a set of ways of thinking, images, categories and beliefs which not only shape how we experience, understand and represent ourselves… but which also provide a familiar set of metaphors, dichotomies and values which structure ways of thinking about other aspects of the world." (Cohn & Ruddick, 2004).

The field of water, and all the sub-sectors that comprise it, is highly gendered. Suzanne Williams, in her analysis of gender in the interventions of Oxfam Great Britain, writes that the "actions and interventions that are bound by the urgent, which show fast, quantifiable results, and which are predominately technical in nature, are 'hard'… Those that are associated with more subtle and cautious forms of intervention, whose results are more difficult to measure and take longer to manifest, and which are predominately social and cultural in nature, are 'soft'… This dichotomy is closely associated with stereotypical categories of the masculine and the feminine and runs through not only the ways actions and achievements are perceived… but also how they are valued and rewarded." (Williams, 2002)

In their gendered critique of transboundary water management, Anton Earle and Susan Bazilli argue that the field is dominated by masculinized discourse and emphasis on "construction, command and control." They suggest that although there is notional recognition that women should be involved in water management, in reality "transboundary water management is largely blind to gender issues" in large part due to the male-dominated and masculine nature of the water management community ("with its military antecedents"), and the international relations, international water law and political science community (Earle and Bazilli, 2013).

We think in differing terms about the scope, seriousness, technical difficulty, and importance of issues according to how society has gendered them. Activities like building infrastructure or negotiating treaties are more masculinized (and therefore considered more difficult, technical, and important), while activities like community engagement or behavior change are traditionally more feminized (easier, less important, involves soft skills rather than technical skills). With this view, organizations and practitioners should look inward to interrogate the gendered assumptions and notions that impact how we plan, prioritize, and fund transboundary water initiatives.

Example 2: Treating the symptom, not the problem

Many of the problems we seek to solve are symptoms of gender inequality.

According to WaterAid's World Toilet Day Advocacy Report, "1 in 3 women risk shame, disease, harassment and even attack because they have nowhere safe to go to the toilet" (WaterAid, n.d.). The positive benefits of improving access to clean, accessible, and safe WASH facilities are manifold - including health benefits, improved educational attainment, and the fulfillment of human rights.

Though toilet access is important, women are not being harassed or attacked because they don't have somewhere to go to the toilet. They are being harassed or attacked because someone is doing the harassment or attacking. The underlying cause of the danger is gender-based violence, and a holistic response should include not only protection, but must also address the root causes of why people (in this case likely men) are committing these acts of violence. Often, related interventions are happening at the same time, but implementers may not be aware of each other's activities. Gender based violence prevention and building of WASH infrastructure may seem like disparate fields, but they are mutually reinforcing, and coordination is key.

According to UN Water, "women and girls are responsible for water collection in 8 out of 10 households with water off premises, so reducing the limited drinking water services will have a strong gender impact" (UN Water, 2020). As with access to toilets, there are multiple reasons why improving safe drinking water access is good and should be

prioritized. However, in parallel, there are likely opportunities to promote more gender equitable division of labor in households. Are we doing anything to question the fundamental assumption that collecting water is women's work?

Changing gender norms is difficult, slow, and, as discussed above, can cause backlash which can result in violence. Communities and local stakeholders--including representatives from both genders--must be involved in decision making about when and how to approach changing gender norms. Ultimately, many challenges have inequitable gender norms as the root problem, and while WASH interventions are critical, there is also room for a more holistic approach to promoting equity while solving immediate problems.

Example 3: Meaningful decision-making power

Having diverse stakeholders at the table is important, but it only matters if they have a true voice.

At the most fundamental level, even the concept of 'transboundary' is gendered. Who sets those boundaries? When, and for whose benefit? Very few modern borders had anyone other than powerful men at the table when they were drawn (and, of course, many borders were drawn by colonizers rather than people indigenous or native to the land).

Now, who is at the table when it comes to transboundary water management, and what true decision-making power do they have? Community engagement is important, but what decisions were made before the community had input? We must also question the assumption that communities are necessarily homogeneous. As Susan Bazili writes, "a community is not a collection of equal people living in a particular geographic region. It is made up of individuals and groups who command different levels of power, wealth, influence and ability to express their needs, concerns and rights" (Bazilli, 2011). We need to understand the complexity of gendered inter- and intra- community power dynamics in order to ensure that an intervention truly benefits everyone equitably.

Often organizations engage women's groups as stakeholders or set a quota for the number of women who need to be on an advisory board. This is positive, but at the same time it doesn't fundamentally address the fact that women are likely underrepresented in decision making positions. What other initiatives could be undertaken to address the talent pipeline (as it relates to what subjects' girls and women are encouraged in, university acceptance, gender equitable recruitment, and inclusive work environments) to ensure women have the opportunity to become project managers, engineers, scientists, and legislators?

Conclusion

To better conceptualize gender in a given context and apply a gender lens, practitioners can begin by asking themselves the following questions[5]:

- Do I understand the gender dynamics where I am working?
- Do I understand the power dynamics related to gender?
- Do I understand how other identities (race/ethnicity, age, class, religion, sexuality, etc.) intersect with gender in this context?
- What assumptions underpin my work, and what are these assumptions based on? How have I (or my team, organization, etc.) determined priorities?
- At what stage am I bringing in women (and other diverse stakeholders)? Do they have the power to fundamentally change the intervention?
- Have I thought about the gender norms that underpin or even cause the problems I'm seeking to solve? Can/should this intervention do something to address those underlying inequitable gender norms?

There are many excellent resources about how to mainstream gender into various water sub-sectors. Examples include: the FAO's 2012 Passport to Mainstreaming Gender in Water Programmes: Key questions for interventions in the agriculture sector; UNICEF's 2017 Gender-Responsive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Key elements for effective WASH programming; UNDP's 2006 Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management Resource Guide; and UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme's 2019 Water and Gender Toolkit.

Gender is a fundamental part of who we are and how we experience the world. The more we intuitively understand gender, and what it means to apply a gender lens, the more ably we will be able to approach and successfully address the world's most pressing water challenges.


RUSSIAN
UNITED KINGDOM
SOUTH AFRICA

The Water-Peace Discourse: An avenue for women leadership in transboundary water cooperation

By: Natasha Carmi

> *"If they do not give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair"*
> ***Shirley Chisholm,*** *the first African American woman elected to Congress*

Introduction

"Water is life" is indisputable. However, the relationship of humankind to water and its framing has developed from drinking use, to navigation, to "water wars", and finally in 2010 to a human right (UNGA, 2010). It is only within the past decade, that there has been an increased recognition that Water insecurity is increasingly a cause of social and political instability threatening peace and security. (Global High Level on Water and Peace, 2017)

To date, a large number of research and studies have been conducted on gender equality at the political and economic levels, yet the role of women in the water sector, in water diplomacy and cooperation has not been explicitly studied. In addition, although, there have been significant efforts to gender mainstreaming in different sectors, the engendering of the water sector and water cooperation has been focused on the grassroots, project, and local, private and, to a less degree, at the river basin level. (SADC/SARC 2019) An important area, in which women empowerment in this direction has not been properly institutionalized, is at the decision-making and public sector level.

This contribution is not a gender analysis, nor is it a research paper. It is a policy brief about the marginalized role of women leaders in water diplomacy and decision-making, and the potential opportunities for their empowerment through the increasingly recognized water and peace discourse.

This contribution is about the importance of having a feminist diplomacy incorporated into an existing form of preventive diplomacy- hydro diplomacy; in which research, success stories, role gender models are limited and under-investigated. The first explicit "feminist" foreign policy was adopted by Sweden in 2014, and a few countries followed suit over the years. (Thompson & Clement, 2019)

This is about equality, about good water governance, within and across the political borders of states, and within the boundaries of international water bodies.

This is about an inclusive and balanced bouncing back, and a sustainable recovery post crisis, post conflict, and now, post COVID-19 pandemic.

The objective of this policy brief is to initiate a discussion on policy options to enhance the opportunities for leadership and empowerment of women in hydro diplomatic settings. The basic assumption is that women should naturally be at the table of negotiations and decision-making on transboundary and national water cooperation, side by side with their male colleagues and counterparts, and for those negotiations to be successful, inclusive, sustainable, and forward-looking.

What is the water and peace discourse?

Sustainable water resources management is a critical and universal challenge of the 21st century that is increasingly linked to insecurity at all scales. Addressing such challenge is highly complex, and this intricacy is reinforced by exacerbating factors such as further growing population and climate changes. As a result, water related issues are a recurrent factor of local, national or regional fragility. If water is often one dimension of a more general situation of tension or conflict, it lies at the center of many security areas, each of which are intricately linked to water. In such a context, it is not a surprise that challenges related to water resources management reached the top of the political agenda in many contexts. In fact, world business and political leaders regularly consider **water crisis as a top global risk.** (WEF 2020)

If challenges and risks have to be underlined, it is key to stress that water can also become **an incredible potential for collaboration and as a key vehicle of peace.**

The complexity of water related challenges is extremely high. On the top of that, the challenges are exacerbated by further growing population and by

climate changes inducing additional difficulties and tensions with, for instance, diminishing socioeconomic conditions in some regions, generating migration and conflict potentials, and now with COVID-19 pandemic. Such changes and related uncertainties add pressure to the existing competition among water uses, including human consumption, food production and irrigation, mining and manufacturing, energy production or environmental services.

Evidence provided by research shows that water plays a critical role in the occurrence of tensions or even conflicts. Several cases show the causal link between water shortage and violence; water shortage has been an essential factor leading to armed conflicts in many cases. Many transboundary water basins are located in areas marked by interstate tensions and, in some places, armed conflicts, both among, and within states. Water shortages and tensions over water quality can spiral into armed conflict and war. Additionally, in contemporary armed conflicts, water resources and installations are being increasingly attacked and used as weapons of war. Durable and sustainable peace is not likely to last without addressing water challenges. Water-related issues are a recurrent factor of local, national or regional fragility, having an important socioeconomic impact at local level and deploying influence on global politics/policies. Water is often one dimension only of a more general situation of tension or conflict; however, it lies at the center of many security areas, each of which is intricately linked to water.

Water is considered a connector of the different international agreements: 2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework. In addition, the upsurge in youth climate activism over the past year has not only dramatically altered the terms of the global climate argument, but the water community is seizing the opportunity of the climate change wave to get the public attention to water issues. As a result, the nexus between water, peace and security is increasingly–but not unanimously–recognized among the development actors.

The water-peace discourse relates to global initiatives offering windows of opportunity for a promising future, using water as a vehicle of peace, particularly within the transboundary water context. The water-peace discourse has been developed through the interactive dynamics between and leadership of the following three main initiatives: The Blue Peace Initiative, the Geneva Water Hub, and the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace. The detailed information about the elements of this discourse are in a forthcoming publication (Salame et al. 2020).

- Blue Peace refers to water cooperation among borders, sectors and generations to foster peace, stability and sustainable development. This can be in the form of shared institutions and legal frameworks, which bring countries together in commitment to resolve differences peacefully – and to use their shared water as a foundation for wider economic and diplomatic collaboration. Blue Peace turns competition over limited freshwater resources into collaboration, resulting in more peaceful, cohesive and sustainable societies. This growing global movement promotes solutions from international organizations, governmental agencies, private sector, NGOs, research institutes, artists and young people. It is about the creation of a new development and political space for 'progressives' who believe in an open and mobile society. Its vision is to move towards a sustainable, integrated, cross-sectoral and transboundary management of water for people and planet, leading to prosperity and peace. The Blue Peace Movement brings a cooperative approach, which is more relevant than ever at a time when population growth, rapid urbanization and industrial expansion are putting increasingly more pressure on water supplies. It is using a variety of diplomatic, political, technical and financial tools, to advocate for creative and innovative thinking on how to use, manage and invest in water resources (source: www.thebluepeace.org).

- Water is a vehicle for peace—it is with this positive vision that the Geneva Water Hub was established in 2014 with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the University of Geneva and several global actors from civil society, academia, river basin organizations and the private sector. Its aim is to foster better understanding and preventing of water-related tensions between competing uses, between public and private actors, communities of practice, and between political entities and countries. It contributes to leverage resources available in the International Geneva in order to develop the hydro politics agenda. Making the best use of its

three functions (research & education, think tank and networking), the Geneva Water Hub's ambitious objective is to address the massive challenges related to the water-peace-security nexus providing innovative, substantial and incubation capacities, and to bridge the agendas of sustainable development, peace and humanitarian response through water.

Figure 1

- The considerations in relation to the potential role of water in peacebuilding have led a group of fifteen UN Member States to initiate the creation of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace. The Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace was requested to study the nexus between water and peace, in light of the experiences of our era, and to make recommendations for water as an instrument of peace. The work that the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace (GHLPW&P) - induced, facilitated and promoted by the GWH acting as its Secretariat - conducted between 2015 and 2017 - underlines several ways to leverage the potential of water as a vehicle for reinforced cooperation dynamics. It indeed argues that a fundamental rethinking of international water cooperation is essential. Figure 2 is a summary of the main areas of water related issues of the report "A Matter of Survival". (GHLPWP, 2017) These recommendations call for the development and use of tools, and include institutional, legal, financial, and political instruments.

The report "A Matter of Survival" has received global attention, and to date has been translated into four languages. The progress in the implementation of the Panel recommendations is detailed in the report "Determined Steps" in March 2019, and in the report "Intensified Action" published in June 2020. (Geneva Water Hub 2019 & 2020b)

What role for women in the water-peace discourse?

Modern preventive diplomacy has evolved and become multi-disciplinary-of which water diplomacy is one form. The latter itself has also evolved to include state and non-state actors, but ironically not ALL

Figure 2

actors. We speak of leaving no one behind and working towards meeting the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet at negotiation tables and decision-making levels, women are either at best underrepresented, or at worst absent. Women have a key role in enhancing water cooperation and participating in the political process.

The benefits of transboundary water cooperation in post-conflicts and as a bridge to peace are well researched and recognized. This was supported when water was recognized in the European Union as a foreign policy issue, in the 2013 Foreign Ministers Conclusions. On 19 November 2018, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted new Conclusions on EU Water Diplomacy making the case for linking water, security and peace, including the potential of water as an instrument for peace (EC 2013, 2018). A milestone event in 2017 was when the UN Security Council held a briefing on Preventive Diplomacy and Transboundary Waters, emphasising the role of water diplomacy and cooperation in conflict prevention. (UNSC, 2017)

At the same time, the linkages between sustainable sustainable peace and the inclusion of women are supported by emerging and modest research. The explicit gendered nature of water and peace processes was recognized with the adoption of the

first international policy mechanism, the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (adopted on 31 October 2000) Since 2017, the Geneva Water Hub, has been following up on the key recommendations of the Panel, and overseeing the implementation of most of them, through its various outcomes and platforms. (Figure 3)

Figure 3

Women as a societal node to the global observatory on water and peace

Two years onward, one of the new directions is to raise the gender aspect in the water-peace discourse and to have a role for women in advancing the new mechanisms of water diplomacy in addressing global water issues. For all the recommendations of the Panel, women can and should play an active role.

One of the main recommendations of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace (the Panel) in its 2017 Report "A Matter of Survival" is to set up the Global Observatory for Water and Peace (GOWP); an inclusive network that ensures linking partners working on water cooperation to fill in the critical gaps of the global water architecture.

By bridging and promoting existing skills, the Observatory will improve the limited capacity of international actors to act collectively and effectively at the political and diplomatic levels and the search for a global home of hydro-diplomacy. (Geneva Water Hub, 2020a)

The Observatory is the continuation of the analytic work initiated by the Panel. It has the same approach and global reflection that marked the Panel and the co-convening countries that established it.

The Global Observatory for Water and Peace is a global platform, based in Geneva International, an international hub for peace and diplomacy. It is an inclusive network, with its central node at the Geneva Water Hub that unites and aligns regional and local partners, credible and neutral institutions committed to the agenda of water, peace and security. The Observatory functions by strengthening the nexus, from global levels (federating the Geneva International) to local levels (through the Observatory network and regional partners). (The Water Diplomat, 2019)

The Observatory was launched during the Arab Water Week at the Dead Sea, Jordan in March 2019. Regional partnerships are currently underway. It is an open platform open to all agencies and entities concerned by the challenges of the water, peace and security nexus, and that bring into action the untapped potential of water in peacebuilding.

The Global Observatory for Water and Peace has the following capacities;

- To conduct data and research supported analysis, and provide an annual overview of global efforts in terms of water, peace and security;
- To create a "safe space" for pre-negotiation consultations at an early stage of project development, or to proactively address major water, peace and security issues;
- To encourage the production and use of innovative approaches and tools to better understand and meet water, peace and security challenges.

At present, the Global Observatory on Water and Peace is made up of REGIONAL partners (nodes) in West Africa, Geneva International and Latin Americas, in the Middle East, and expert groups in Central Asia, and Russia.

In addition, the Observatory also includes partners that enrich its reflection and its ability to advance concretely the water- peace nexus, and that support

the preparedness for the projected megatrends of the second half of the 21st century, by using water as a vehicle for peace for meeting the challenges of climate change, urbanization, demography, and present-day conflicts and migrations. These Societal nodes include the local populations' voices, the youth, women, and the Water Diplomat media network. During 2020, the women leading the initiative for the empowerment of women in water Diplomacy in the MENA region (detailed in the next section) contributed and participated in the partner roundtable as a societal node to the first analytic report of the GOWP.

Women leadership in the MENA region

This section will focus on the region of the Middle East and North Africa, referred to as MENA in most literature. The MENA region has a geographic strategic importance, and despite the geopolitical challenges, the region has a lot of untapped potential, a "young and increasingly educated population" (OECD, 2016). Although the region is mostly arid, however one the key findings of the inventory of shared water resources in Western Africa, is that there are more shared water resources then generally assumed. (UN-ESCWA, 2013) The potential and need for cooperation over shared water resources is key to the sustainability and development of the region. Therefore, it is imperative to engage in water diplomacy, and to include all actors.

The challenges of women in decision-making positions is global, with varying degrees. According to the Global Gender Gap report this year (WEF, 2019), in terms of political empowerment, and in spite of the progress, how in order to close the gap, it will take 94.5 years. "To date only 25% of these 35,127 global seats are occupied by women and only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women; and in some countries, women are not represented at all." The MENA, with the lowest score of 61.1%, will close the gender gap in around 150 years, if the rate of progress is maintained. The region's average score on the Political Empowerment Sub index is 10.2%, the worst performance among all regions and four times worse than the Western European average. There has been no female head of state in the last 50 years in 17 of the 19 MENA countries studied.

According to the IPU/UN Women's 2020 Women in Politics infographic, only 6.6 and 6.2% are women heads of state, and women heads of governments respectively. In terms of global average for women in parliaments, it stands at 24.9% and at 16.6% in the MENA region. (IPU, 2020)

In 2017, the role of women in water diplomacy in the MENA region was underestimated and understudied. This encouraged the conducting of a first mapping exercise in three countries of the Arab Levant- Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine- to unpack the main factors that hinder the attainment of women of water diplomacy related decision-making positions. The results of the mapping exercise, and related recommendations were published in the Special Issue of Hydrology. (Carmi et al, 2019)

In early 2020, the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med) and the Geneva Water Hub joined and initiated a collaboration on supporting the role of Women in Water Diplomacy with emphasis on the Middle East and North Africa region. The collaboration has primarily taken the form of technical/ mapping work on the current status and challenges facing women in water diplomacy/ transboundary water cooperation settings in the region, capitalizing on the methodology used for a similar mapping exercise undertaken in 2017 in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Further to the technical work, outreach opportunities have been explored and operational synergies sought.

The Comparative Study juxtaposes the challenges to the attainment of more women decision makers in water diplomacy and transboundary/national water cooperation settings, in five Arab countries in the MENA, including Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. The current effort has reviewed and updated the work in the three countries and expanded the mapping to the Maghreb sub-region by including the cases of Egypt and Morocco. Deepening the work in the five countries and expanding to more in the MENA region is in the pipeline, so interested countries are welcome to join. The focus of the comparative study is to identify the similarities and the differences in the challenges female water experts faced among the five countries, and to identify the capacity building needs in terms of the various skills of a 21st century water diplomat.

The current version of the Comparative Study forms the background of the informal network/community of practice of women in water diplomacy in the MENA

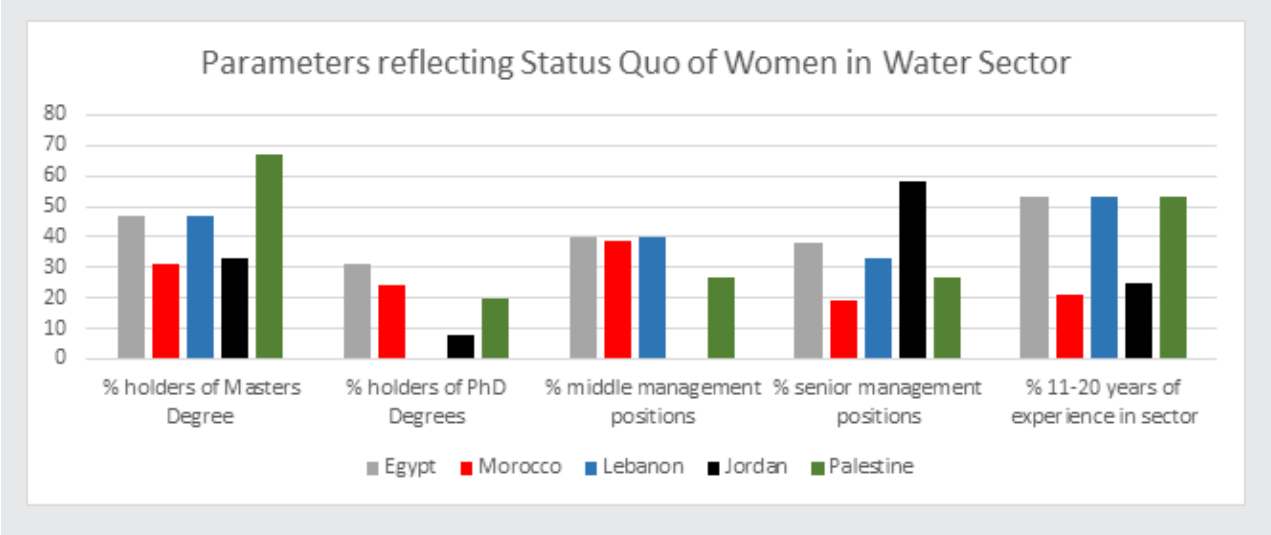


Figure 4

region that has been initiated and will be further supported by GWP-Med and the Geneva Water Hub and will serve as a platform for future interventions and exchanges.

The next few figures are part of the comparative study under finalization and should not be used without permission from the authors.

Figure 4 above confirms that women in the selected MENA countries are highly educated and specialized in the fields of water sector. It also gives an idea about the positions held, and the years of experience in the water sector. In a recent article, on women and leadership in the MENA region, the author emphasizes that women are ready to lead, yet the gap still remains in positions of authority, and having "a seat at the high table". (Khurma, 2020)

The obstacles that women face in terms of attaining decision making positions are mainly threefold: negative stereotypes, a considerable gender pay gap, and social expectations that negatively influence their career choices, including the need for balancing family and professional life, fitting into existing social structures, or simply struggling with lack of self-confidence. Figure 5, and 6 below summarizes the factors, identified by the respondents to the mapping exercise that contribute to a higher male-female ratio in the related water sector, and that affect the acceptance and attainment of decision-making positions.

The second mapping with the Comparative Study is currently under finalization, and the full Study with its roadmap of implementation will be published in January 2021. In the meantime, a virtual consultative

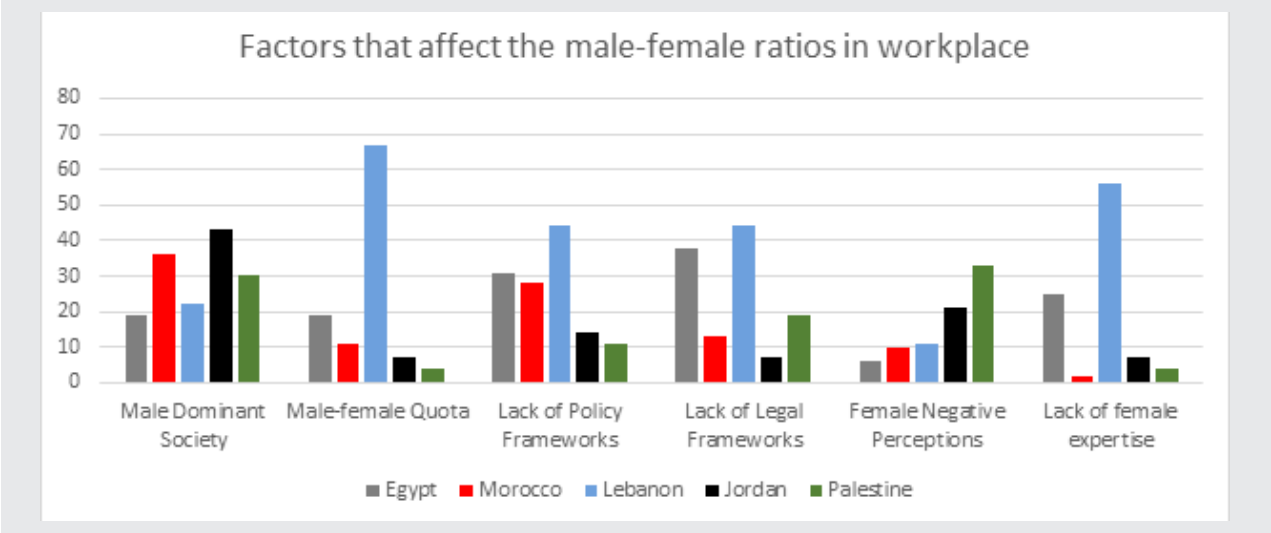


Figure 5

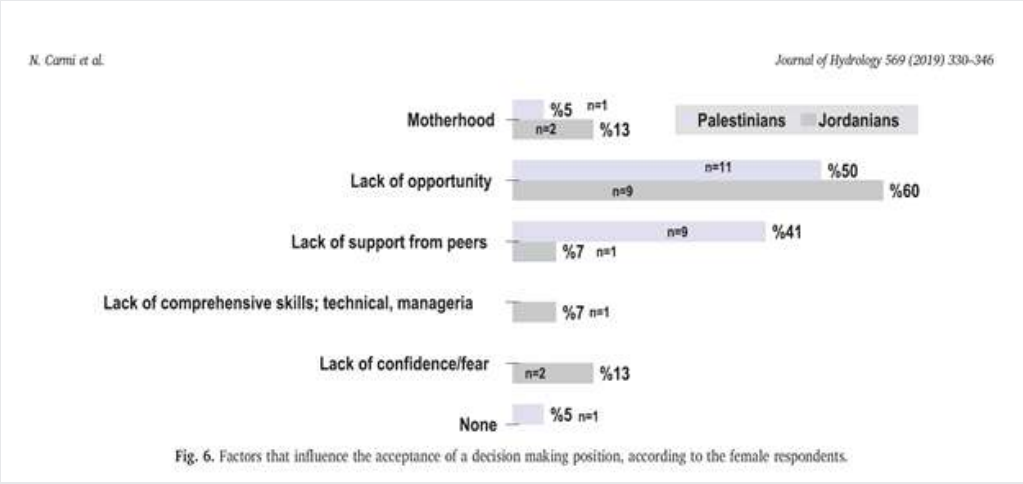


Figure 6

workshop was held with the participants to the mapping exercise in the five countries in summer 2020, during which some additional skills were identified as pertinent to water diplomacy and require capacity building, as in figure 7 below. (GWP-Med, 2020)

Figure 7

Furthermore, the key findings and the context of the Initiative have been thus far, presented at:

- (En) Gendering Transboundary Water Governance: (En) Gendering Transboundary Water Governance workshop organized by IHE Delft – September 29-30, 2020 (https://flows.hypotheses.org/5728)

- Cairo Water Week, dedicated session on October 21, 2020. (https://www.youtube.com/watchv=m1EmzRx1x_M&feature=youtu.be)

Some existing initiatives supporting women in water diplomacy

In addition, other initiatives have developed post 2018 to support the role of women in water diplomacy. Among them, the African Network for Women in Infrastructure (ANWIn) was launched in November 2019, in Cairo, and concerns a new initiative developed by the African Union Commission and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) with the support of the Government of Germany, through GIZ. The network aims at promoting African women's participation in infrastructure development at the national, regional, and global levels and to provide a high-level strategic engagement platform that will bring all stakeholders together for ensuring a gender responsive planning and implementation of infrastructure. Having transboundary water as one of the main sectors of PIDA, this network will be providing necessary support for African Women working in the domain of infrastructure development in transboundary water and consequently in water diplomacy. (PIDA, 2019)

At the Arab level, the Arab Water Council promoted the Network of Arab Women in Water (NAWW) during its fifth General Assembly in Cairo, Egypt on March 16-17, 2019. NAWW is a collaborative platform established for shaping a better future for Arab Women in the Water Sector by providing opportunities for development, fostering valuable connections and collaboration, facilitating access to knowledge, ensuring effective and equal participation in leadership and decision-making.

At the Nile Basin Level, SIWI's Shared Waters Partnership and its Transboundary Water Management department has launched a Women and Water Diplomacy Network, inspired by the Swedish Women Mediation Network. The Women and Water Diplomacy Network consists of women working with transboundary water issues in the Nile basin, either through ministries of foreign affairs, ministries of water/environment or civil society and academia. The main goal of the network is to connect women across borders and provide capacity training in areas in which participants have expressed an interest. (SIWI, 2019)

In terms of empowerment of women in water diplomacy, a close collaboration has grown between the various initiatives and discussions are already underway for joint collaboration and exchange of experiences and expertise.

2020 as an opportunity for empowerment of women

In some ways, 2020 has not met the expectations of many. This year has been a "challenging" one—it has challenged the way we work, deliver and what we view as essential, productive and doable.

The breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic has literally brought the world to a halt. However, in the midst of the sadness, the unfortunate loss of lives, and jobs, COVID-19 has unveiled the fragility and vulnerability that exists globally (United Nations, 2020; OECD, 2020; Tignino & Kebebew, 2020), as well as the interconnectedness of countries and continents. Many States and organisations have analysed the impacts of COVID-19 on different sectors, and societal groups. Some of the key conclusions for post COVID-19 recovery, in addition to the need for multilateralism (UNGA, 2020a), which offers further opportunities for empowerment of women, include the need to leave "no one behind", the need to adjust the way we work and communicate, the need to build resilience, and the role of women leaders in managing crisis effectively.

In June 2020, an OECD brief detailed the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and policy responses in the MENA region, and highlighted the opportunity for governments to "bounce forward on gender equality", by ensuring a gender-balanced leadership and decision making, to ensure inclusive sustainable policies for recovery.

The year 2020 marks several milestone anniversaries, all of which include global commitments to the empowerment of women generally:

1. July 2020 marked the 10th anniversary for the recognition of water and sanitation as a human right by the General Assembly (Res 64/292). The Statement to mark this occasion by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Léo Heller, was both positive in terms of the progress to date, and a reminder of the need to fully incorporate a human rights framework. (OHCHR, 2020) "The right of local populations to access drinking- and fresh-water resources is protected by various human rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health and the right to food in addition of the rights to water and sanitation. (UN, 2010) More generally, the rights to water and sanitation are indispensable for leading a life with dignity. One of the less explored aspects is the relation between these rights and political and civil rights.... The rights to information and participation in decision-making are therefore enshrined in the rights to water and sanitation." (FM, upcoming publication)
2. September 2020 marked the 25th anniversary for the adoption of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the 4th World Conference on Women Although the progress has been slow, and per a new research from UNDP, UN Women, and the University of Denver, COVID-19 threatens to increase the poverty rate of women, and exacerbate further gender inequality, however, there is an opportunity to do things differently, and ensure that the recovery economic models are more socially and gender equal. (UNGA, 2020b)
3. September also marked the 75th anniversary of the United Nations; during a high-level meeting to commemorate the anniversary, the declaration that was adopted included in article 11 a commitment to accelerate action to achieve gender equality, women's participation, and empowerment of women and girls in all domains.
4. October 2020 marked the 20th anniversary for the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. A recent to the point analysis by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, globally acclaimed as the initiator of the precursor decision leading to the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 as

President of the UN Security Council in March 2000, points out the poor record of implementation and the non-participation of women in real terms. However, he has identified four key areas for potential change. (IPS, 2020)

Way Forward

Although progress is slow in terms of empowerment of women generally, and in water diplomacy specifically, yet in the process of post-recovery (conflicts, reform, and more recently pandemic), there are opportunities for a positive change and real integration of women in the decision-making process.

In terms of the water and peace agenda, implemented by the GWH and partners, there are different areas and opportunities to empower women, including but not limited to:

- With our partner GWP-Med, we are working towards securing the financing of at least a 3-year capacity and mentorship program, as part of the Initiative for the empowerment of women in water diplomacy in the MENA region. An important additional objective is that, throughout the 3 years, the reflections and exchanges of the informal network will challenge the way of analysis and capacity building. This informal network will also have an analytic gender view of hydro diplomacy, as a community in which both mentors and mentored emerge stronger- the mentor's experience is challenged, and the mentored capacities are built. The outcomes of both will be used to ameliorate the research and the advocacy.
- Research into women leaders in transboundary water cooperation and negotiations.
- Tailor-made additional capacity building in hydro diplomacy.
- Strengthening of the voice of women as a societal node in the Global Observatory on Water and Peace, - a voice that analyses, observes, has the capacity to treat particular issues in the form of safe space, and to deliver capacity building and mentorship. By sharing the lessons learnt, the voice of women in water diplomacy is ensured to be loud.
- This initiative would also feed into the other initiatives and platforms of the water and peace discourse (figure 3). It will assist in engendering the arts for water and peace platform, the media (Water Diplomat) platform. In addition, it is time to add a sixth movement to the Symphony for Water and Peace, composed/and or performed by women musicians. (Geneva Water Hub website below)

As a final word, it is important to emphasize that water diplomacy is not limited to the negotiation table but occurs at all levels—water women diplomats are required to have a strong knowledge of all the levels and sensibilities, including being diplomats of local crisis, where women are at the forefront of meeting the related challenges.

We do not want to create "elite" water diplomats, who are disconnected, but rather those who *actually convey the grievances at the local level, those who will be the voice of those who are less heard.*

Why Gender Matters in Decision Making: Bringing the case from the Brahmaputra Basin

By: Anamika Barua and Arundhati Deka

Traditionally and even in recent times, women's role and influence has been missing within national and international diplomatic initiatives - in theory and practice. Feminist theory has also challenged the traditional perspective which assumes focus on areas that are considered to be higher politics – sovereignty, and border security that is inclusive of shared river water governance - and therefore 'masculine' (Williams 2017). Traditional perspectives that ignore gender not only overlook the contributions of women and the impact global politics has on them but also justify this exclusion by declaring international relations and gender as not non-exclusive. This exclusion has resulted in the absence of women participating in the decision-making process both in the private and public space (Smith 2017).

But not all gender considerations should rest on the analysis of women in isolation as gender relates to identities attached to both the sexes - men and women - and there are societal expectations that come with these identities. These socially and politically produced gender identities shape and influence interactions, and politics as practice produces such gendered identities in perpetuating assumptions about who should do what and why (Sultana 2010). Such gendered identities have led to exclusion of women in several fields including the field of water diplomacy[6] and governance. Water diplomacy was/is masculinist and engendering it remains a pertinent but challenging task (Zwarteveen 2008). However, in recent times, efforts have been made to recognise the linkages between gender role and diplomacy. For example, The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in the year 2000, acknowledging the essential role women play in peacebuilding, conflict management and sustaining security (Shepherd 2008). It was the first international policy mechanism explicitly recognizing the gendered nature of conflict and peace processes but the record for the implementation of the policy still remains quite disappointing.

Despite such recognition, women's participation particularly in the issue of high politics/public meetings (like village council meetings/public hearings) continues to be meagre. Water, when particularly transboundary in nature, sees exclusion of women participants as issues of sovereignty are considered to be confronted with masculine qualities of war or an armed conflict (Smith 2017, Zwarteveen 2008). Women have historically not found a space in the table of negotiation (Carmi et. al. 2019) and most often even in media reporting women academics don't find a space to communicate their research or experience on the matter. It is also not very easy for a woman to speak in a public meeting too as for a very long time the outdoors has been attributed as a male space (hunters, gatherers, rulers, etc.) and they lack confidence sometimes also due to lack of education and experience of holding leadership positions. Further, men monopolize the outcome of discussions by obstructing women's voice (Tschakert et. al. 2016, Enarson et. al. 2007). As such, women's concerns are usually overlooked, not just as participants but also as leaders of the community.

Lack of women's participation in water management across scales and particularly in transboundary waters (TBWs) is due to its identification with high politics. It is felt that women's experiences are not as important, making TBW management gender blind. Intersectional analysis acknowledges that an individual might be differently vulnerable as they might have many important aspects to their identity and are probably differently impacted by water events such as floods, depending on the systems of oppression or privilege that one comes from. Vulnerability, as a discourse has been prevalent across different disciplines, including in the field of disaster risk management. Women's participation with respect to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and floods is particularly important. Several transboundary rivers, particularly in South Asia, are prone to several natural disasters and understanding the differential vulnerability and coping mechanisms are significant to improve the existing risk management policies. Further, community's experiences with respect to water in South Asia are intersectional, and identify with gender, caste, class, religion and region. Women have also used their societal role of accessing water as a medium to renegotiate their agency both within the public and private spheres (sometimes at the cost of their own physical health and compromising on their precieved

future) (Singh 2019). Documenting such gendered patterns in division of water work, rights and responsibilities, can be a first step in acknowledging and establishing women's significance as water-stakeholders, and gaining legitimacy for their demands for more water rights and powers (Zwarteveen 2008).

Source: Arundhati Deka

The Brahmaputra river basin, a transboundary river, flowing through four South Asian countries - India, China, Bhutan and Bangladesh - has been particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. The annual floods are severe in the lower Brahmaputra basin, the flood plains of Assam in India (Barua, 2018). The impacts of a disaster within communities are also variable due to inequalities in access to resources, differential capacity and historical oppression. Even with the large-scale impact that the annual floods generate there has been no documentation of the differential vulnerability of men and women to river related disasters like flood, which is crucial towards policy making, and even when due effort is made to understand the ground realities it is the men speaking on behalf of both the genders. The paper is based on a study conducted during monsoon 2017 that sought to bring unheard voices from marginalized communities of the basin to the forefront with the intention of enabling a gendered understanding of the river. The Brahmaputra basin has attained international attention due to the complicated geopolitical situation along with immense potential to harness its resources. But women's contribution in decision making remains absent or minimal at local, state, national and international levels. In this paper we look into the question that Cynthia Enloe (1989) had raised "Where are the women?", valid also in the dialogue and decision-making process for basin management.

1. Context and methodology

1.1 The Brahmaputra River Basin

The Brahmaputra river basin (see figure 1) originates in South Tibet as Yarlung Tsangpo and flows through Arunachal Pradesh in India as the Siang and Brahmaputra in Assam, before flowing down to Bangladesh as Jamuna and emptying into Bay of Bengal. Four major tributaries have their origins in Bhutan - Amochu or Torsa, Wang Chu, Sonkosh, and Manas. Wangchu, Sonkosh and Manas join Brahmaputra in India and Amochu joins Bangladesh (Rahaman & Varis 2009). Topographically this area is an extension of the eastern Himalayas, with mountainous terrain covered by tropical rainforests. And comprises historically agrarian communities speaking Tibeto-Burman languages (De & Joshi 2007).

Assam is located in the northeastern part of India and has been a riverine civilization, society and economy. This river has influenced and continues to influence the social and economic life of Assam and its people in a matrix of layered inter-relationships. A simple economy basically has three important components i.e., livelihood (production, consumption, exchange and employment), infrastructure and institutions, and the temporal and spatial interactions of the components make for a continuous economy (Nayak & Panda 2016). The primary livelihood of the riverine communities in Assam includes agriculture and fishing. Agriculture in Assam is essentially subsistence and rice, being a primary crop, is cultivated in a wide range – Sali (winter rice), Ahu (autumn), Boro (summer) and Bao (deepwater rice) (Singha & Baruah 2011). While the agricultural pattern sure requires some amount of flood during the monsoon season, excessive floods cause destruction, and which has been the case in recent years. In India, out of the eight northeastern states, Assam faces the most severe brunt of flood and erosion. And has been severely affecting the economy as well as the political, social and cultural milieu of Assam.

1.2 Methodology

In this particular paper we focus on the indigenous communities of Assam in India, residing along the river for several decades now. While the communities are known to have association with nature and culture, and can be categorized under soft' patriarchy, but even then, women's voices don't find a space in the decision-making process. The paper focuses on the Deoris and Mishings from Sadiya in upper Assam

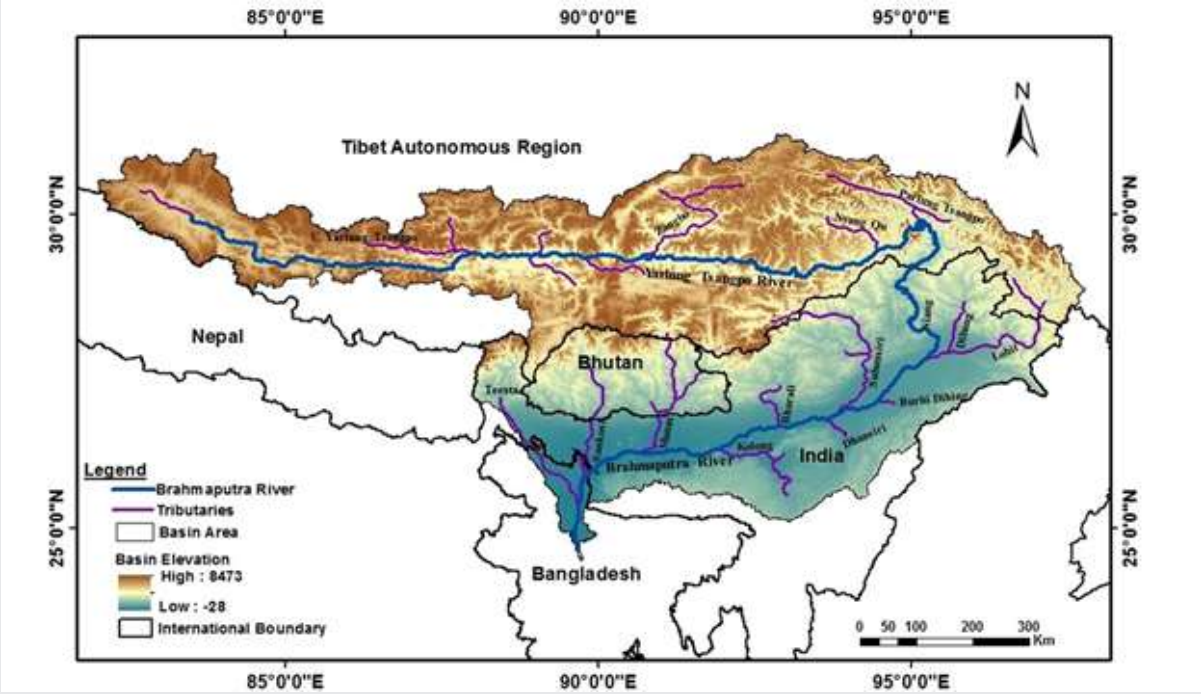


Figure 1: The Brahmaputra River Basin, Source: Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, India.

(upstream) and Majuli from middle Assam (downstream). The Deoris represented the class priest. Women from the community, according to prevalent social norms, take active part in every sphere of day-to-day life, ranging from household chores (cooking, sweeping, washing clothes, washing utensils, fetching water, childcare) to working in agriculture, fishing, weaving, poultry farming, etc. The Mishings, belonging to Tibeto-Burman ethnic group, constitute the second largest scheduled tribe (Plains) group in Assam, with a significant role in the culture and economy of Assam. Women from the community also play a major role in contributing to household and livelihood like the Deoris. These communities have been reliant on the river for over decades, yet when it comes to contributing to decisions regarding DRR policies their voices rarely find a space and rather the authorities/institutions make the decisions on their behalf.

The case study discussed here followed a narrative inquiry as a method for analysis. The data was collected through three subsequent steps - transect walk, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. The processes have been guided by snowball and purposive sampling. In snowball sampling, the sample is driven by the respondents. Purposive sampling seemed feasible as the qualities that the exercise demanded of a participant have been quite clear and selection with definite purpose in view was possible. The data collected in the form of field notes, audio recordings and memo (one's own and other's observations), was collated and transformed into written text format for the purpose of interpretative analysis.

To substantiate the analysis, several interviews were conducted with both men and women in the study sites. The duration of these interviews was between 30 and 120 minutes. On occasion, multiple interviews were conducted to triangulate the information shared by respondents. People interviewed included district disaster management authorities (DMA) to identify the most vulnerable locations/villages, community experts (e.g., local CSO[7] representatives (CSO), school headmasters (HM), at least one elderly woman (EW) and one elderly man (EM), young women (YW) and men and women teachers (T), etc.), and NGO's[8] implementing flood projects.

2. Analysis

2.1 Coping with the floods

"Chang ghar (in picture) has been a traditional way of coping with floods every year. Now even the other communities of our village have started building a granary and chang ghar" (EM, 2017). The annual floods have always been present in the floodplains of

Assam, but it is only in recent times that its intensity is becoming unpredictable. Deoris and Mishings have developed traditional methods to survive the annual floods in the monsoon, with experience

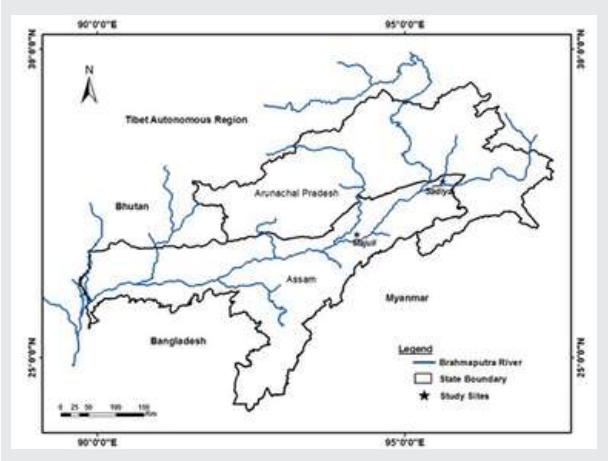


Figure 2: Study sites from the basin, Source: Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, India.

of living along along the river for centuries. This traditional knowledge is passed from one generation to another, and it's usually the women who hold the responsibility of oral history and passing the knowledge of the different methods of constructing the various structures for adaptation - Chang ghar (raised houses), bhoral (granary), raised kitchen, banana rafts, etc. Women are also responsible for preparing for the flood, like keeping an account of the amount of food stored and even after the flood they participate in reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. It is only during the floods somewhat the gendered division of labour diminishes as norms can be challenging to impose during a crisis. Although the burden of cooking and looking after the children still remains as the woman's responsibility even during the floods, often leaving them with anxiety and trauma during a loss.

Source: Arundhati Deka

2.2 Women in decision making

"Were you ever consulted regarding any issue of the village, considering that you are one of the elders of the village?". To which an EW from Majuli narrates "No, that never happened. Men don't even have the thought process that women could also participate in these meetings; women are also preoccupied with the household work, so they have never been able to organize women groups to deliberate on issues together. They would rather take the decisions".

Patriarchal norms have facilitated the social construction of gender roles. According to the traditional roles of men and women, agricultural work involving tools (ploughing), and construction of bridges and traditional stilt (or raised) houses, are presumed as responsibilities of men, while domestic activities and time-consuming agricultural activities, like sowing and harvesting (in picture), livestock rearing, and weaving are responsibilities of women. Women are not even encouraged to take up positions of leadership, like the village head, men inherit these positions. The women from the Deori community in Sadiya do participate in public meetings and are quite vocal about their opinions, but unfortunately the Panchayat head and the committee members have always been men and tend to disregard the opinions of women. In the private also the decisions regarding issues of significance in the household like evacuation during the floods to move to the shelter are taken by the head of the house, the husband, often leading to delays in absence. The women can only forward their suggestions.

2.3 Social norms and gendered vulnerability

"A young woman (YW) in her early twenties from the Deori community wanted to contribute to the income of the family by training as a nurse, which could be an alternative source of income for the family. But she had to discontinue after the birth of her child because of lack of time".

Such patriarchal norms also increase their vulnerability by reducing the available resources for recovery post flood as agriculture remains as the only source of income. Also, this outright refusal to let a woman be involved in the public sphere makes it evident that the community is still not very comfortable with women taking up positions of influence in the public sphere. The uneven dynamic of a man and a woman in a Deori household is also evident by the custom of women wearing head scarfs (gamusa) after marriage so that the hair is not visible

Source: Arundhati Deka

to a man who is older than her husband, thereby signifying that the woman is essentially the husband's and the husband then of course feels entitled to make the decisions for the women.

Traditionally, men inherit the land and property from their ancestors, among the Mishing and Deoris, leaving the women quite vulnerable when the male head/member fails to survive during the floods. A female headed household also has to seek support from the men of the community during a disaster specially for the provision of relief material and sometimes even to just safely reach the relief center. Even something as significant as education is considered to be secondary for women, like when the families often lose their possession to the floods, they cannot afford to send all of their children to school and it's always the girl child who is held back. Even when educated, higher education is not necessarily encouraged among women leaving them often with a lack of confidence to take up decision making positions that can actually allow them to voice their opinions which can impact DRR policies.

2.3 Gendered roles, responsibilities and spaces

"There is no opportunity to do any kind of work during heavy floods, let alone think about gendered division of roles." (EW, 2017). Her son is the village head. The men from the Mishing community however acknowledge how overburdened the women of their community are owing to responsibilities associated with domestic water along with fishing and agricultural water, but despite this acknowledgement there is no encouragement from the men to involve women in decision making or allocate family resources such as equal right to land. Post flood, to recover financial state people often have to go to another village to work as daily wage labourers to engage in activities such as dhan mora (breaking the rice manually with feet, using a dheki). While men can take upon these jobs easily, some women do not even get the opportunity to explore this option due to dearth of work opportunities as according to prevalent social norms women aren't considered to be as strong as the men. Men's lack of acknowledgement of women's role even percolates to not involving women during meetings among the community members when it is time for migration (involving panchayats). Only the men take part in these public discourses, leaving the vulnerabilities of the women due to differential social roles unacknowledged.

2.4 Changing social norms and values

"Times have changed, previously the role of a woman has been limited to household work and education would not be encouraged but this is gradually changing now" (EW, 2017) While changes are happening in terms of the next generation of women breaking down certain traditional customs by venturing into cultural activities by taking part in plays, reclaiming the night by staying out late, married women celebrating the harvest festival of Bihu which intricately is linked to the river, and encouraging self-dependency (in picture) through initiation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). But these changes have still not been able to open space for women in the public sphere with the same amount of societal acceptance as there is for men, women in the leadership positions are often judged as corrupt or with loose morals.

Source: Arundhati Deka

There are SHGs in most of the villages, not just specific to Sadiya and Majuli, but across Assam for women to collect funds, and take loan whenever necessary. It is like a revolving fund. The funds are spent on agriculture and during emergencies like floods. The interest to be paid to these groups is

much less than the interest that has to be paid on a bank loan. The training to the self-help groups is at times provided by the panchayat committee, which unfortunately just consist of men. But nevertheless, this provides the women with an opportunity to visit the town to go to the bank, providing them with a sense of freedom and confidence to be a part of the public. Women are often intimidated to speak in public due to lack of education, and these experiences help them in lowering their guard. Self-help groups provide an exclusive space, but again not every woman participates as the reliance is on men for savings. Whether it is some work associated with MGNREGA[9] or for the village, only the males from the village participate when it is group implementation.

The womenfolk of the Lakhimi Suburi village in Majuli on International Women's day in 2017, formed an Aanchalik Sajagota Mahila Samiti (Local Awareness Women's Committee). They intend to generate awareness for the benefit of the women in the region about issues associated with women, including those with the river. There is a growing acknowledgement among the women now about how historically they have been restricted.

3. Discussion and conclusion

Even though the gendered division of work is blurred during emergencies like floods and the indigenous communities are considered to be progressive with men and women both recognizing the divide, it's still a long way before gendered norms are challenged unequivocally and any sense of equality is achieved. Even when due effort is made to understand the realities, specifically pertaining to the impact generated during floods and erosion, it is usually the men's voices that are captured, while men and women have completely different roles to play before, during and after the floods. This often results in lack of recognition of women's physical and emotional cost incurred during the time of a disaster. As such the rehabilitation and recovery policies for post disaster remain inclined towards the need of a man and remain disconnected from reality. For e.g., relief centers are often not gender conscious with lack of adequate toilets and sanitary pads which leave the women in unhygienic conditions during menstruation.

While women from these communities find themselves in the public sphere while being involved in cultivation and fishing, it seems that this presence is only in the terms of the patriarch. In fact, women have engaged as farmers for a very long time but there is no formal acknowledgement yet. The government sees ownership of land as necessary for one to be considered a 'farmer', but patriarchal norms oppose inheritance to women, leaving them unable to access benefits and rights. They are labelled as cultivators, who operate agricultural land. As a result, most women in agriculture cannot avail government schemes meant for farmers. This particularly affects women post floods when they lose their cultivation but cannot avail of the compensation offered by the government for the loss.

Women's absence in diplomatic initiatives and institutions, within the nation and internationally, and women's marginalisation from decision-making insinuates the assumption that the reality of women's day-to-day lives is not impacted by or important to international diplomatic initiatives (Carmi et. al. 2019, Smith 2017). Like how traditional international relations is gender blind by often declaring this ground as gender neutral, the aforementioned communities are blind to the fact that traditional norms have also been shaped over time to suit the needs of the men. Therefore, the mere presence of women in public space is not an efficient indicator of their control over resources like land or water, or their role in public decision making. On the contrary, most women feel overburdened with work. Their lack of participation in public decision making, partially stem from lack of time and familiarity with these spheres which are exclusively controlled by men. Class, religion and caste positions can also be significant in the ways that gender relations come to play out in society and especially with respect to water (Sultana 2009). While there has been progress with women wanting to break barriers to contribute to the family's welfare through SHGs, there is still barely any acknowledgement towards equal land and property ownership rights. They do not think their choices about claiming land ownership would be socially acceptable, and sometimes the value of the land near the river itself is questionable and probably does not encourage the women enough to protest. But without the reclamation of these exclusive male spheres, women's voices would always remain restricted from the decision-making process.

Women are generally excluded in reconstruction efforts as they inherently also have limited access to economic resources post conflict and disaster. The restriction of women's direct access to resources such as basic food, housing and education makes them more vulnerable. Women's lack of participation also comes from the assumption that they are inherently peaceful (Skjelsbaek 2001) or that as the weaker sex they are incapable of speaking for themselves and only a man can share their narrative. Even conflict-like situations are characterized by masculine notions of security and war-like context, and the solution also involves only immediate cessation of violence. Issues like gender equality are considered 'soft' issues as opposed to the 'hard' or real issues of military security (Smith 2017).

This understanding of peace, then, is one in which women's security is not central. Critical discourse analysis of means through which women and particularly women leaders think and articulate the meaning of water diplomacy would be useful not only for understanding the voices of women but also the ecological, social and political context that they seem to be embedded in.

Acknowledgement:

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The Importance of Advocating and Negotiating for Gender Mainstreaming into Relevant Environmental Processes to Achieve Sustainable Development for All. Case study: Derivative small hydropower plants in Western Balkans.

By: Natalija Ostojic

The consequences of climate change, which include changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels and more extreme weather conditions, have a negative impact primarily on human lives, and then on national economies, communities and countries, and scientists, unfortunately, assume that this impact will be even more negative in the future. Also, those segments of the population that rely most on natural resources in their daily lives or those that have the least chance of responding to natural disasters, such as droughts, floods or landslides are very likely to feel the effects of climate change more strongly. Various studies by international and non-governmental organizations tell us that women face greater risks and pressures due to climate change, especially if they belong to the poorer sections of the population. Unequal participation of women in community politics, decision-making processes in both the public and private spheres, and in the labour market increases pre-existing inequalities and often prevents women from contributing in any way to planning, creating, and subsequently implementing various climate change decisions and activities.[10]

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are most often defined by various international actors both as goals in themselves and as significant means of promoting sustainable development in general. Accordingly, achieving full gender equality and empowering all women and girls is defined as the fifth of a total of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women and girls around the world continue to fight against gender stereotypes and suffer discrimination and violence, regardless of the social position they occupy, their level of education and age. Gender equality is not just one of the basic human rights, gender equality is one of the key preconditions for peaceful and sustainable development[11]. The creation of sustainable economies and their further growth, but also the progress of humanity is only possible if women and girls have equal access to health care, education, dignified work, and equal participation in the political life of a society [12].

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined gender equality as early as 1998 as "... equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances are equal."[13] The category "gender" implies a social construct – that is, all expectations from the role of women and men that a society "attributes" to them, usually based on biological "sex" that we get at the very moment of conception and distribution of sex chromosomes. In addition, the gender category also considers the relationships between women and men. Through the process of growing up and adopting social norms that are accepted as a standard in a community, gender becomes one of the key structural factors in defining and organizing any society. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the different roles that men and women have in so-called productive and reproductive work, where productive roles are defined as work that women and men perform for money or some other benefit, and reproductive roles all those responsibilities related to care, family, raising children and housework. Everything that women and men do in one day, whether paid or not, all interactions with the community in which they live, as well as opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, either at the family level or the wider community, are in fact a reflection of the different gender roles that these societies attribute to men and women and the different resources available to them. Feminism and gender theorists have developed many tools and methodologies[14] that help decision makers understand all these differences and take them into account when developing and adopting different policies that affect everyone regardless of their sex or gender[15].

When we talk about gender equality, the most common criticisms made by the public are related to the fact that gender equality is equated with women and women's human rights, i.e. that policies and activities in the field of achieving gender equality are

completely focused on women. However, this is not or at least should not be true. Any reflection and work on gender equality, as well as all other areas in which we create some policies and make decisions, should equally consider the different position, roles, needs and potential contributions of both women and men. Gender equality consists of two equally important parts, and any work that would exclude either of these two parts means not using the full potential of a society, be it men or women.

Climate change and the consequences of climate change affect all people on the planet regardless of their sex and/or gender. However, the expectations, roles, capacities and rights of both women and men are defined by different frameworks in which each society views men and women and exactly these different social roles attributed to men and women can cause different effects of climate change on men and women, with women often being the ones disproportionately negatively affected by climate change. If we consider issues such as access to different resources, access to justice, freedom of movement or opportunity, and the power to influence decision-making processes and politics in general, we will see that women are at a disadvantage compared to men. They participate less in decision-making processes at all levels, often have limited access to resources, and their freedom of movement is limited by social norms and expectations.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that women have valuable knowledge and experience in managing households, farms, and other natural resources and that they can contribute to finding different but significant solutions to the challenges of climate change. In this sense, the specific gender roles, and responsibilities that women have in a society can be seen as an opportunity for their equal engagement in the fight against climate change. This includes, for example, participation in informal, reproductive, and productive work, which often involves caring for the household and the community, storing old seeds, and cultivating land, transferring other traditional agricultural knowledge, and managing natural resources such as water. Although this is not obvious at first glance, women are often key decision makers in choosing, using, and disposing of various household products and devices, which significantly affects energy efficiency and the level of household consumption. Women make a major contribution to the processes of food production, community natural resources and biodiversity management, as well as children's education and family care. With all this in mind, if we really want to achieve the goals of sustainable development, it is necessary to recognize and support all women to be part of the fight against climate change in different ways.

Response to climate change can be divided into four categories: mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and financing. While mitigation and adaptation are closely linked to emerging forms of climate change, technology transfer and funding are concerned with the means to achieve sustainable development goals. Mitigation involves the process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, such as emissions from the burning of fossil fuels or deforestation. The main goal of mitigation measures is to reduce the concentration of these gases and achieve emission levels that are not harmful to human health and the environment. Adaptation or adaptation involves a range of activities to reduce vulnerability and build resilience of people and communities to climate change in areas such as water management, agriculture, and human settlements. As part of global efforts to address climate change, attention should also be paid to new and improved technologies and sources of funding, and to enable women and men to have equal access to both technological innovation and different funds and financial resources. [16]

The agreement reached at the 16th session of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP16) held in Cancun, Mexico in 2010 represents an important step in the process of institutionalizing the introduction of a gender mainstreaming in climate negotiations, especially in the areas of adaptation and capacity building. Decision 1/CP.16 on a “shared vision” for climate action confirms that gender equality and the effective participation of women are crucial for combating climate change. Four years later, the first Lima work programme on gender (LWPG) (Decision 18/CP.20) was presented, with the primary goal of increasing gender equality through policies and practices, encouraging gender equality primarily in decision-making processes, and responding to gender issues in the development, implementation and monitoring of climate policies and activities. At the twenty-third session of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23), held in Bonn, Germany in November 2017, Decision

3/CP.23 on the adoption of the first Gender Action Plan (GAP) was adopted. Finally, in December 2019 in Madrid at COP 25 Parties agreed a 5-year enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan (Decision 3/CP.25). The new GAP covering 2020-2024 has 5 priority areas with objectives, 20 activities defined and over 35 deliverables. The intermediate review of its implementation is scheduled for June 2022. The adopted Action Plan aims to enable women to influence decision-making processes in the field of climate change, as well as to be equally represented in all other UNFCCC processes. [17]

Although non-state actors often do not possess traditional forms of political power (such as legislative and executive), they claim it through alternative channels. The key skills and resources that non-state actors have are those arising from their knowledge and experience, broad membership, political and financial independence. That is, the sources of their power include knowledge and information, economic resources and position in the global economy, organizational capacities, as well as capacities for transnational networking and mobilization.

The literature on international relations on non-state actors agrees with the fact that they play an important role in global environmental governance. Although most of the older literature has explored whether non-state actors pose a challenge to state power, in recent years the focus has shifted to empirically documenting their activities and exploring their influence in international governance. Non-state actors are important players who have different roles in politics – from providing and disseminating information, through capacity building and implementation of various activities, to defining new rules. Non-state actors therefore have different roles across the political spectrum – from influencing decision-makers to implementing activities and projects independently of states.[18][19]

As already mentioned above, building effective responses to climate change requires a full understanding of the ways in which gender (inequality) affects access to and control of different resources, institutional structures, social, cultural, and formal networks, and decision-making processes. A large body of research conducted over the last twenty years suggests that policies and interventions that address these differences are more likely to have a positive and sustainable impact on communities. At the same time, previous experience with development programs shows that policies, programs, and interventions that do not take gender equality issues into account at all have unequal outcomes and can further increase inequalities in societies through misuse of resources and undermining development gains, especially for women and girls. Recognizing all this, non-governmental actors, i.e. non-governmental organizations[20], and especially women's non-governmental organizations, have significantly contributed to the UNFCCC process as the most important international process for combating climate change through double action: setting the conference agenda and influencing the signatory states. By organizing parallel events dedicated exclusively to the development of the UNFCCC process, but also by raising the capacity of state delegations (especially female delegates) on the importance of the gender perspective in general, women's NGOs and informal groups have contributed to strengthening women's voices in world negotiating arenas, with the ultimate goal to achieve gender equality.

WGC – Women and gender constituency

During the past few years of international negotiations on climate change, and especially in the period from 2014 to 2019, the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have identified and agreed that gender equality and the full realization of women's human rights and potentials are necessary for effective action in the areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation. UN efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will only succeed if law and justice are promoted, as well as if women's full participation in all UNFCCC processes and activities is enabled.

WGC – Women and gender constituency works to make women's human rights and gender equality a core element of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Representing women's and environmental civil society organizations at the annual conferences of the Parties to the Convention, as one of nine formal advocacy groups within the UNFCCC process, the WGC – Women and gender constituency strives to ensure that women's voices, their rights, and gender equality principles an integral part of the negotiation process and results in this international framework, which aims to create a

sustainable and just future for all. The views and opinions of the WGC are clear – full and equal participation of women is needed, as well as the promotion of general principles of law and justice to ensure that UN efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are successful. They also provide a platform for the exchange of information between its members and the UNFCCC Secretariat and ensure that the various meetings, workshops, and conferences within the process involve representatives of women's civil society and NGOs, who would not otherwise be able to attend these meetings. [21]

In other words, the process of advocating and negotiating the introduction of a gender mainstreaming into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was primarily led by non-governmental organizations, i.e. by the members of the WGC – Women and gender constituency. They have been working for years to make women's human rights and gender equality a core element of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Representing women's and environmental civil society organizations at the annual conferences of the Parties to the Convention, they have strived to ensure that women's voices, their rights, and gender equality principles are an integral part of the negotiation process and consequently decision made, with an overall goal to create a sustainable and just future for all. By building the capacities of government representatives and contracting parties on the importance of introducing a gender perspective in all areas of climate change – including mitigation and adaptation measures, and financing and technology transfer – they have contributed to creating favourable (pre)conditions for the adoption of inclusive and gender-equal decisions and action plans in the area of fighting climate change.

Case Study Western Balkans

There are estimates that about 2,800 projects for the construction of small hydropower plants (SHPPs) have been approved in the Western Balkans in the recent years, while in Serbia only the construction of a striking 850 of such power plants is planned. The SHPPs are predominantly of the derivation type, known as the ones most destructive to the ecosystems. These are small, derivative hydroelectric power plants, intended for construction on small mountain rivers.

Unlike large rivers on which powerful power plants are built, where the operation machinery is in the dam itself, these rivers do not have enough water mass for this method of electricity production. Therefore, a different approach is chosen. With derivative mini hydropower plants, the process begins with the construction of a small dam and the formation of a water intake. Then, ready-made, wide pipes are laid down in trenches along the riverbed. On average, they are between one and three kilometres long, sometimes even eight. Consequently, the drop in water required to start the turbine was obtained by placing the river in a derivation pipe and directing its flow through the pipes, all the way to the engine room, which is located downstream, and where electricity is produced.

SHPPs are built in hilly and mountainous areas because the natural slope of the terrain, and with it the natural fall of water, play a key role in the process. Their construction is cheap, because nature has already done half the work on its own, while at the same time shortcuts are often used to bring water to the engine room as quickly and efficiently as possible. In such cases, the pipelines are completely relocated away from the river, by clearing the surrounding forests and mountain flora to shorten the path to the engine room.

Although derivative mini hydropower plants do not pollute the environment in the way for example traditional thermal power plants do, their construction process and their very existence causes significant environmental devastations. The way they are constructed causes that from the water intake, all the way to the engine room, where in principle the river should continue its natural flow, there is no more water, and downstream from the engine rooms the rivers often dry up completely.

Moreover, although during the construction of derivative SHPPs, the contractor is obliged to leave the necessary biological minimum in the riverbed, also known as an ecologically sustainable stream, or in simple language enough water must remain outside the pipe to allow the survival of the living world that inhabits the rivers, unfortunately, in reality, the biological minimum is often ignored or determined arbitrarily without engaging experts in hydrobiology and hydrometry to define the hydrobiological characteristics of watercourses, based on detailed monitoring of the living world.

Therefore throughout 2018 and 2019, a citizen initiative to "Defend the Rivers of Mt. Stara Planina"[22], organized numerous environmental protests across Serbia demanding reviewing the cadastre of potential locations for SHPPs in Serbia, with the aim of reducing their number, banning the construction of hydropower plants in protected areas, removing all illegally built SHPPs, and using all available legal means to stop the issuance of new permits for the construction of SHPPs and immediately halting works under way on all SHPPs.

In a small and almost abandoned village of Topli Do, in Mt. Stara Planina, the last settlement in Serbia before the Bulgarian border, elderly villagers, mostly women over 80 years old, have been on twenty-four-hour guard for almost a month back in 2019 in an attempt to protect their rivers from derivative small hydropower plants. Eventually, they have managed to defend their rivers from the construction of six small hydro power plants, as many as were planned in this remote place.[23]

Similarly, in 2019, women from the Kruscica settlement near Vitez, in central Bosnia and Herzegovina won an award from the German EuroNatur Foundation for protests that prevented the construction of two mini hydropower plants. The women of Kruscica were on duty for more than 500 days, blocking the local bridge, preventing the passage of heavy machines and the construction of small hydro power plants.[24]

In a conclusion, many people in the Balkans live hard lives and environmental protection is still not a priority. However, the struggle against small hydropower plants has united many different interests. For more than three years, the public and citizens across the Balkans fighting for the right to water and against run-of-river small hydropower plants are not giving up on their struggle. The public pressure has led to some results in parts of the region.

Endnotes

[1] Intersex is a term which encapsulates a wide variety of differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy. An estimated 1.7% of people worldwide are born intersex (InterACT, 2020)

[2] Transgender is an umbrella term which describes many non-binary identities. It is used here to acknowledge that many people identify as trans but does not preclude that the genders of women' and 'men' are comprised of both cisgender and transgender people

[3] Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the notion of 'intersectionality' (Columbia Law School, 2017)

[4] The only people that do not have gender are agender (Gender Spectrum, 2020)

[5] These questions are not comprehensive, but are illustrative to spark reflection on key gender issues

[6] Water diplomacy is understood as the utilization of diplomatic instruments for existing or emerging disagreements and conflicts over shared water resources with the objective to solve or mitigate these disputes for the sake of regional stability and peace (ref).

[7] Civil Society Organization

[8] Non-governmental Organization

[9] The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

[10] UN Women, Često postavljena pitanja: Rodna ravnopravnost i klimatske promene, Beograd, 2018, Internet http://inovacije.klimatskepromene.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Rodna_ravnopravnosti_klimatske_promene.pdf, pg. 4-6.

[11] Ibid.

[12] The specific sub-objectives for Objective 5 are, inter alia: i) Undertaking reforms to provide women with equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control of land and other forms of property, rights to financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with with national laws; and ii) Increase the use of technology, especially information and communication technology, in promoting women's empowerment.

[13] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, DAC Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, Paris, 1999, p. 13.

[14] One of these tools is gender analysis, which primarily takes into account the difference between the different roles of women and men in society, including:
- Reproductive roles (obligations related to daily raising of children and household chores);
- Productive roles (work that women and men do for money or goods);
- Community management roles (voluntary and unpaid activities at the community level);
- Political roles (participation in decision-making at all political levels on behalf of interested constituencies).

[15] UN Women, Često postavljena pitanja: Rodna ravnopravnost i klimatske promene, Beograd, 2018, Internet http://inovacije.klimatskepromene.rs/wp content/uploads/2018/01/Rodna_ravnopravnosti_klimatske_promene.pdf, pg. 4.

[16] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, official webpage, Internet, https://unfccc.int/topics (Accessed November 15, 2020.)

[17] More information available at: https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/gender-and-unfccc-topics

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1. BINGO – Business and industry NGOs
2. ENGO – Environmental NGOs
3. Farmers – Farmers and agricultural NGOs
4. IPO – Indigenous people's organizations
5. LGMA – Local government and municipal authorities
6. RINGO – Research and independent NGOs
7. TUNGO – Trade union NGOs
8. WGC – Women and gender constituency
9. YOUNGO – Youth NGOs

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EIGE – Environment & Climate Change – https://eige.europa.eu/topics/environment-and-climate-change

Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) – Policy Support – http://www.fao.org/policy-support/policy-themes/gender/en/

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United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) – https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality

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