

Commission on Sustainable Development, 12th Session
Panel on "Water: Empowering stakeholders to ensure participation,
in particular, women as agents of change"
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Statement by Ms. Kerstin Müller, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office,
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Ladies and gentlemen,

water and sanitation issues are among the most pressing problems on the international agenda: Access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation plays a crucial role in the daily life of every person.

Therefore, to a large extent, water management requires action at the community and the household level. Women, in particular, play a fundamental role in meeting the international water and sanitation targets. They are important agents of change - their experience and knowledge are crucial assets in the management of these precious resources.

I am convinced that all our activities can only be successful if we conduct them on a participatory basis. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development describes the implementation as "an inclusive process, involving all major groups and Governments". In other words: stakeholder participation is a key to success.

In many places active involvement of stakeholders requires a strategy of empowerment. They must be actively engaged in water management. Empowerment combines education and capacity building in the water sector with decentralization processes, giving everybody the right to participate in decision-making. It aims to give stakeholders greater control over water policy, by enabling them to make their voices heard and to choose between different options - between different technologies, for example. Empowerment therefore is a key to a sustainable water management. By the same token, it is one of our development cooperation priorities.

The active involvement of women and the adequate provision for their particular needs is of utmost importance. This is, as you know, one of the important cross-cutting concerns regarding implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action.

In most cultures, women play a central role in establishing hygienic practices within households, in managing domestic water use and in maintaining sanitation facilities. They are usually the custodians of family health. Women are the ones who suffer most from degradation of water and other natural resources. They are the best advocates of clean water and the first to notice water-threatening practices. Therefore, women have a key role in environmental protection, and in promoting water conservation activities. This makes their equal participation in decision making bodies, such as local water committees, a crucial one.

The German government, as host of the Bonn Fresh Water Conference in 2001, considers international water issues a high priority. That is why we have made sure all the water and sanitation sector projects funded under our development cooperation programme are designed to enhance the participation of women.

Let me give you two examples: Under a project in Zambia aimed at reforming the water sector so-called "water kiosks" – stalls where water is offered for sale – are being set up. The goal is that at least half the kiosks are run by women, who are thus able to earn an income of their own.

Another example is a programme in Bolivia to improve access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in small and medium-sized towns. The programme lays a special focus on the involvement of women in decision making at community-level.

At this year's CSD session we are taking stock by analysing existing gaps and the challenges ahead of us. Our deliberations will lay the basis for CSD-13 where we will decide about policy recommendations for an improved implementation of the international water and sanitation targets. The EU strives to see concrete steps, incorporating measurable and trackable short and midterm targets, with responsibilities clearly identified and reports on progress.

As far as the topic of our panel is concerned, the following aspects deserve further consideration at CSD-13:

Firstly: Integration of gender aspects into water and sanitation policy at all levels and at all stages – from policy planning to implementation and evaluation. This has to take into account the social realities for women and girls in communities, including their heavy workload in domestic water management;

Secondly: the involvement of women in all spheres and at all levels of water management, i.e. at the domestic and local level as well as within national policy making. They must become active participants in the management of water related public services and similar private sector activities, also in line with the established principles of gender-mainstreaming;

Thirdly: Education of stakeholders in the field of water and sanitation; this issue should also be a focus of the international decade "education for sustainable development";

And finally: Adequate public sanitation facilities, including in schools, especially for women and girls.

Thank you very much for your attention!