WASH Indicators
Measuring progress in the realisation of the human right to water and sanitation
Thank you for granting me the opportunity to participate in this important workshop and for giving me the opportunity to zoom in on women’s rights to water and sanitation; and on how to best achieve the implementation thereof.

Working with women’s civil society for many years has made me a strong believer in the Human Rights Based Approach to development. HRBA is based on the understanding that people are not merely needy citizens and passive beneficiaries of state provisions, but that they are active contributors to development.

Participation, in particular of marginalised groups, is key for realising equitable access to basic resources.

I would like to stress at this point, that participation is not equivalent to being present. Participation is only meaningful if your voice is heard and taken into account. And if you are involved in the process, ensuring that your message is understood correctly by the party that has consulted you.
With respect to the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation: The Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) framework, which is based on the Dublin/Rio Principles, puts emphasis on the Human Rights Based Approach and puts participation central.

It furthermore zooms in on the pivotal role of women, emphasising the need to have women participating on an equal footing in the decision-making around water so that access is equitable and sustainable, tailor made to the needs of all parts/segments of the local population.
Ambassador Naela Gabr in her presentation, emphasized the importance of the CEDAW convention as a legally binding instrument for State Parties regarding women’s human rights.

While the CEDAW Convention provides the legal framework for non-discrimination we have to realize that there is a huge gap between having rights DE JURE, and being able to DE FACTO making use of those rights.

The Handbook of UN Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque on the implementation of the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation clearly states the importance of meaningful participation as a means to effectuate a Human Rights Based Approach to WATSAN.
Again, having the RIGHT to participate does not automatically mean that you are in a POSITION to participate. In particular in cases where there is social inequity and gender inequality – such as is often the case in rural areas of developing countries – women face restrictions to participate meaningfully because of traditional gender roles and cultural norms.

It is a long way from adopting a legal framework for non-discrimination to changing the mind set of people that are bound by customary law and long standing traditions. This process needs concerted action of different stakeholder, whereby women’s civil society itself is an important actor.

In the water sector, women’s civil society has joined forces globally in the Women for Water Partnership. WfWP unites women’s civil society organisations in approx. 100 countries of the world, predominantly developing countries, who claim their right to participate and actively exercise these rights at the various levels in their society, from local to (inter)national.

WfWP aims to strengthen women’s civil society, to empower local women, and through their action to create an enabling environment for women’s meaningful participation in decision making at all levels.
We strongly believe that the gender-water-development nexus is a means and largely untapped connection to accelerate the implementation of the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation. In other words, to go from Human Rights principles to implementation on the ground.

If we look at the current SDG proposal as presented by the UN Open Working Group last July, we are happy to see that there is both a stand alone goal for gender equality and women’s empowerment, and a stand alone goal for water, encompassing all four sectors and the need for an integrated water governance approach. Participation is anchored in both goals through target 5.5. and 6.b respectively.

We hope that these targets will translate into process indicators that measure in how far states and international organisations provide an enabling environment for true and meaningful participation of women (and other disadvantages groups for that matter).
In order to fuel the discussion on how to achieve the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in the foreseeable future, I would like to put some –slightly provocative – statements before you.

If we want to reach sustainable outcomes, we have to pay attention to the processes underlying poverty and social inequity. This is also the conclusion of the UN Women position paper on the SDGs, underpinning the importance of addressing gender inequality and women’s empowerment to advance sustainable and equitable development.

The key denominator is: meaningful participation of underprivileged groups in decision-making that concerns them. Nothing about them without them.

An important process indicator would be: to measure the investments of states and the international development community in realising preconditions for the meaningful participation of women and other marginalised groups. This includes adequate financing for women’s civil society to realise the meaningful participation of women.

To give an example: women receive an estimated < 1% of the total development budget. At the same time, an internal EU audit (EU Audit Commission, 2012) of the EU financed WATSAN project in Sub-Saharan Africa revealed that, while the projects were technically in order, >50 % had not reached the intended beneficiaries. I am sure that pre-investing in meaningful participation would have prevented considerable losses here.

Last but not least: in this ICT age, we should maybe not continue to rely on traditional indicators. But seriously look at existing methodologies to quantify qualitative data.
Thank you

Alice Bouman-Dentener
hfp@womenforwater.org

www.womenforwater.org