

Interactive discussion with Major groups

CSD-13, 21 April 2005

Statement by the Women's Major Group

Thank you chair,

UN to provide moral leadership

The women's major group would like to recall that this is the decade of water for life. There is – no dignity without safe water and adequate sanitation. This is a matter of principles. Principles are not negotiated. As the UN represent the people of the world, the UN has the moral responsibility for making sure that these principles are fully respected.

Basic right to water

We the women major group, recall that water is a basic human right. It is not negotiable.

The General comment 15 of the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights, which states: “the human right to water, entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic uses”.

The “right to food” adopted by you, governments, confirms the rights-based approach.

If the outcome document of CSD-13 does not strongly reflect the right based approach, we are concerned that conflicting messages are coming from the UN.

We are worried about the reluctance of certain governments to implement the rights based approach. Yet, it is recognized that governments have the primary role in ensuring access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation, sustainable and secure tenure, and adequate shelter.

There are many good examples that show how the rights based approach has been successfully implemented in national policies.

Through learning by doing, South Africa has developed a model that responds to their own economic, political and social development, that recognizes the right of “water for all”.

The South Africa government recognized that not all South Africans can afford to pay even the minimum amount of water. Therefore the water department developed a model where a limited basic amount of water is provided for free, and is cross-subsidised by the large users of water.

Sanitation

We are very far from reaching the MDG target on sanitation. The women's organisations recognize that successful sanitation is a combination of infrastructure, behavioural change, and social empowerment.

Women are the key actors for change. But as regards sanitation education, they should not carry all the responsibility alone. Men must not pass the bucket on – but take on responsibility as well. Men are part of the problem, and should be part of the solution

We recognize that education and capacity building is a long term process and is not easily measurable, and governments are often reluctant to invest in it. Since women are recognized as key actor in this area, governments must provide adequate support to women's organisations, in the form of resources, time, as well as in the recognition of women's contribution that is often hidden or taken for granted.

Governments must provide adequate support to women's organizations, with resources, affordable technologies as well as recognition for their achievements.

For example, technologies such as ecological sanitation, are successfully being adopted by women in Uganda, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.

On Gender mainstreaming

In the last few days we heard gender mainstreaming and the importance of women in several interventions.

Yet, we are concerned that “Gender equality, Women's Empowerment and Women's Rights – which are central to poverty eradication and sustainable development – are not properly addressed in the chair's text.

After 13 years of CSDs– and the recent Beijing+10 review - there is hardly any evidence that action has been taken. Women on the ground haven't seen any substantial improvements! Women are still a target group, and not fully recognized as key actors and equal partners, in implementing the CSDs outcomes.

We would be less concerned that you continue to talk – as long as you provide women's organizations around the world with the adequate decisions, resources and support to act in order to achieve a peaceful and healthy planet for all.