

Water in Rio+20

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Interview with
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President Women for
Water Partnership

By UNW-DPAC

UNW-DPAC: Why do you consider that it is important for water to be part of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development?

A-BD: Water = Life. We all know that. We should stop questioning and debating the obvious. Given the fact that so many millions on our globe still lack access to this life bringing resource, we should use our time and energy to solve that problem by putting the vast number of already agreed principles into practice. Let us please move from vision to action.

How do you imagine a (perfect) water future? What future would you like to see for water (How to improve international coordination for sustainable development)?

The water future will look very different for different people in different circumstances. So we need context specific responses. I would therefore rather concentrate on the last part of your question: how to improve the international coordination. Why should we want to concentrate on improving the international coordination? Will that solve the problem? Allow me to reiterate the Dublin/Rio Principles for Integrated Water

Resources Management. The strength of that concept and of the agreed principles is that they allow for addressing water issues at the most relevant (appropriate) level. Yes, there is an international dimension to sustainable development, especially of water resources; since so many of them are transboundary. But the implementation level – providing access for communities – is not addressed at international level. This is a national and more often a very local issue.

Furthermore, we know that sustainable water provision and use is not a technical issue. A technical solution can be found for every problem, but it does not necessarily result in access for all or adequate use taking into consideration the needs of the environment or future generations.

How we manage our water is primarily a social issue. We have long moved from top-down water MANAGEMENT to water GOVERNANCE acknowledging the role of different stakeholders and the need to take a participatory approach.

In this respect I am very impressed by the approach of the Sri Lankan government which is supporting community management of rural water systems. One sixth of the population in Sri Lanka obtain water through community based organizations (CBOs) in the rural sector. They are led by volunteers, mostly women. Empowering these women through access to knowledge and decisionmaking ensures efficiency and good governance.

What are your expectations for water in Rio? What would you like to see, what do you expect to take out of Rio?

As Women for Water Partnership, we like to see real commitment for implementation.

We expect that the international community reconfirms the Major Group approach of Agenda 21, underpins the participatory approach which is the fundamental of the IWRM concept. And in that context, we expect that governments commit to provide an enabling environment for the different Major Groups to do their work. In particular, we

expect that the outcome of the 6th World Water Forum in Marseille is taken into account, where the specific role of civil society was articulated.



Very concrete: we expect that women leadership in water is acknowledged and supported; and that women's civil society organizations - currently deplorably underfunded - finally get a fair share of the development funds

What are the commitments you are bringing to Rio?

The Women for Water Partnership will continue to empower women's civil society groups all over the world through giving them a voice and facilitation their leadership in water & sanitation provision in their communities. By up-scaling our successful approach in the 90 countries where our membership resides and works, we will lay a solid foundation for the development and implementation of socially adept, gender sensitive and climate smart solutions aimed at sustainable livelihoods. We commit to our role as women civil society Major Group to accelerate the internationally agreed development goals. We can only do this however, if governments live up to their commitment and give the Women Major Group a fair share of the development funds. Less than 1% simply is not enough.

Do you expect that there will be a decision in Rio+20 by heads of state tackling the most important issues related to water such as improved access to water, sanitation, elimination of malnutrition and hunger, the role of climate change and the importance of capacity building?

We sincerely hope that in this time and age, women's intrinsic capacity is finally acknowledged. We have sufficiently shown what we are capable off. And what the return on investment of our projects is. We easily make the stipulated 8:1 return on investment.

What is not being said about the issue of sanitation?

As indicated before, I am not so much interested in what has not been said. But more in what is not being done. Actions must match the talk. We would very much welcome if half the money that currently is spent on talking would be put in a women's action fund. We would be delighted to work with that money and get things done.

What would you think would be the consequence of not having an outcome on water and sanitation in Rio?

That depends on the type of outcome. Another outcome document and declaration would not be of much consequence. We have plenty of those. But a commitment to implement the earlier agreements and to acknowledge and support the civil society Major Groups (women, youth and indigenous people) as indispensable actors ... that would really make a difference towards accelerating the implementation of the internationally agreed (water related) development goals.

UNW-DPAC: Mrs. Bouman-Dentener, thank you for this interview.

Women for Water Partnership is one out of 30 members of UN-Water. Formally established in 2003, UN-Water as UN-System wide mechanism coordinates and provides a coherent response to challenges related to all aspects of freshwater and sanitation. It has evolved out of a history of close collaboration among UN entities and was created to add value to UN initiatives by fostering greater co-operation and information-sharing among existing UN agencies and outside partners. It supports Member States worldwide, in their efforts to achieve water and sanitation goals and targets.

Since 2008, UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC) is implemented by the United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015.

UN-Water organizes at Rio+20 the UN-Water Day on 19 June 2012. Further information at [Water at Rio+20](#)