



Civil Society Session: Civil Society and the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

Session report, 16 January 2015

Civil society's contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals related to water

The session was coordinated by Alice Bouman/Dentener, Women and Water Partnership, and Bart Devos, World Youth Parliament for Water, and aimed to shed light on how civil society can contribute most effectively and efficiently to bringing the post-2015 development agenda on water into action. It outlined – from a civil society perspective - the main challenges concerning the four selected tools for implementation: technology, capacity building, governance and financing. Lastly, it proposed solutions for effectively overcoming the obstacles for accelerated implementation with due consideration of the roles of civil society actors.

The civil society pillar concentrated on the first four categories of Major Groups following the classification of UNCED Agenda 21: Women, Youth, Indigenous Peoples and NGOs, covering predominantly the category of volunteer groups in society. Civil Society does not manifest itself as a single, homogenous set of actors, but as varied diverse and plural.

Session structure

The session addressed four thematic focuses reflecting main water-related challenges, which civil society consider especially relevant to collaborate with local communities, countries and the international community:

1. Water and Sanitation Services - Human Right to Water and Sanitation
2. Water Resources Management - Dealing with Water Scarcity and Allocation
3. Water Quality – Including Wastewater Treatment and Reuse
4. Extreme Events – Management of Risks and Climate Change

For each thematic session, a lead case from different world regions was presented by the different civil society actors: Women, Youth, Indigenous People and NGOs, to reflect on these cases with respect to technology, capacity development, governance issues and financing and debate their views with the audience. In the closing panel, session conveners and international experts synthesized the outcomes of the thematic sessions and proposed priorities and recommendations for the implementation toolkit.

1. Civil Society and the Human Right to safe drinking water and sanitation

The session was convened by Shauna Curry, CEO, Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST), Canada. An overview presentation by Shauna Curry introduced the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, stressing how the pressing global need is a compelling case for Civil Society, one of the reasons being that water is a very local issue. The introduction was followed by a main case study presented by Eliza Mngale, Tegemeo Women Group, Mweteni Village, Tanzania, as an example of women's empowerment and the role of women's civil society in turning around the mindset of the entire community (Tegemeo Women Group). The process of building and strengthening the group, overcoming traditional gender stereotypes, building the confidence and the space to have a voice in decision making was showcased.

Lead Case: Water and sanitation project, Mweteni-village, Tanzania, Tegemeo Women Group

Not being among the 10 villages included in the Tanzania Water Sector Development Programme (WSDP), Tegemeo Women Group of Mweteni took the initiative to address the challenge of accessing adequate, reliable drinking water for their community themselves. With the support of the Women for Water Partnership, the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme and Aqua for All, TWG engaged the village leadership and district authorities to jointly develop a comprehensive WASH scheme covering the four sub-villages and approximately 12,000 inhabitants. These women have built trust and restored confidence among the Mweteni people, effectively prevented corruption and achieved a financing scheme on the basis of ability to pay to cover costs of maintenance and reparation. The project includes five gravity schemes piping water from perennial springs, rainwater harvesting systems for the hospital and four schools, sanitation demonstration facilities, hygiene training programmes including train-the-trainers, the establishment of a water user association (COMWE) and local water user committees, and a purpose community centre. Financing has been obtained in phases and from a variety of donors including WfWP, Aqua for All, GETF/RAIN, Marie-Stella-Maris, Retourschip Foundation, Soroptimists of Wassenaar and Delft and various private donations. The Tegemeo Women Group, Mweteni community and Same District contributed in kind.

[Link to case study](#)

A discussion panel followed to address Financing, Technology, Capacity development and Governance issues for the implementation of the Human Right to water and sanitation, led by:

- **Mary Rusimbi**, Co-founder and Executive Director, Women Fund, Tanzania (Financing)
- **Emma Anakhasyan**, Head of the Environmental Health Department, AWHHE, Armenia (Capacity Development)
- **Antonia Lorenzo**, BioAzul, Spain (Technology)
- **Jerry Van Den Berge**, Policy Officer for Energy, Water, and Waste Industries and for European Works Councils, EPSU – European federation of Public Service Unions, Belgium (Governance)

In a participatory 'Graffiti Wall' participants rotated in 4 groups to give their inputs in relation to the challenges and tools to implement the human right to water and sanitation according to these 4 different thematic areas. Each panellist reported back key points. Main highlights from these discussions are:

Challenges to implement the human right to water

Financing

Discussions pointed to the need of sufficient financing to meet targets and allocated to address inequities and sustainability of services; specifically, to address basic systems, capacity development and small local projects. Financing is lacking integrative and long term approaches. Governmental budget allocations are not moving with the demands, and gaps in connecting to communities lead to inefficiency. Water supply-projects often turn out to be vulnerable due to concerns in terms of the sustainability of the infrastructure, as well as a lack of sense of ownership by the community.

Decentralized financing, where financial support is awarded to local communities, turns out to be an effective solution for increasing community ownership, and raising the ability of the community to respond to eventual difficulties or even technical failures which might raise. The success of decentralized financing however is not an automatism, but instead depends on certain conditions. Successful practical examples of decentralized financing will allow to identify such conditions. The financing of Civil Society institutions by governments may cripple their role and capacity to control and monitor governance performance.

Donors are not always fully aware of what is going on in civil society. Funds are directed to implementation, not to social empowerment processes. Challenges also come from the side of community and civil society, who lack information, particularly in rural groups, as well as knowledge and capacity in regards to resource mobilisation. Leadership, communication and integrity are also challenges identified.

Capacity Building

Capacity development is an ongoing process needed both in the soft scale and in the hard scale and requires time, people involvement, taking into account social-cultural aspects, maintaining and upgrading capacities inside local institutions, and understanding the value of building capacities.

There is limited human capacity at the field level, as well as information, communication and financing gaps. Participants expressed gap in knowledge transfer and learning exchange between field workers and end users and WASH Project managers and specialists. IWA in their 2013 study in 15 developing countries, pointed out that millions of professional and semi-skilled workers are needed in the WASH sector.

The most unused resources that must be unleashed in order for communities to achieve water security on the long term are the human resources. Women and youth in particular represent a huge potential, if well trained and well empowered. Furthermore, training young people to contribute to the delivery of basic WASH services can also help addressing youth unemployment. Successful examples exist whereby young people were trained a community-level to build and maintain low-cost toilets, or hand pumps in rural areas.

Local actors should work in cooperation with external actors, whereby external actors should avoid to impose their solutions. Working demand driven, in true partnership is the most effective and sustainable way to capacitate local actors and will contribute substantially to achieving the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation.

Technology

An important challenge is to attain affordable and adequate technology that is adapted to people with special needs and requirements and that aims at universal access. It is necessary to bridge the gap between academia and reality and to involve civil society during the whole cycle, ensuring linkages to local ownership. Lack of willingness to adapt or employ new technologies and reluctance to change was also identified as an issue. Lack of knowledge sharing across global stakeholders between similar contexts, South to South, is insufficiently taken advantage of. Finally, there is also a gap in relation to technical skills, as highly qualified staff is needed in this area.

Governance

Local ownership is seen as the most important challenge. The challenge of sustainability is equally stressed. Participants agreed on the need for governance that is local to the furthest extent possible. They pointed to the need of democratic processes and systems, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, financial stewardship and control, and clear measurement of indicators of success. Governance is not the same thing as government, while there are often misunderstandings. Civil society organizations should also look at their own governance and encourage others to do so.

There is still work to be done to create clear definitions, as hygiene, for instance, is more than just washing hands and access to an improved water source does not necessarily guarantee all component of the human right to water and sanitation.

Capacity building of CSO's and local authorities is key as overcoming the barriers between CSO and Government is needed, promoting inclusiveness, transparency accountability and participation. States need to create opportunities for and eliminate barriers to participation. Barriers that prevent meaningful participation may relate to language, literacy, meeting times and venue, but also include financial restrictions, lack of information, and socio-cultural traditions that prevent women from having a voice in public life. Enabling people, especially marginalised groups to participate meaningfully needs supporting measures that break down these barriers and change the mind-set of those in power.

Tools to implement the human right to water

Tools (solutions and opportunities) proposed regarding **financing** include seed funding, revolving funds/micro financing, payment for water services (self-funds), enterprises contributions (private sector), public/private partnerships and local cooperatives. Participants highlighted that financing for capacity building and increasing accountability need to be reinforced. Local actors, in particular women's civil society have a track record of preventing and curbing corruptive practices which account for approximately 20% loss of investments in water.

In regards to **capacity building**, tools to implement the human right to water include identifying needs and recourses, identifying local knowledge and using it, and undertaking intensive communication to bridge the gap between decision makers, experts and local communities. Advocacy, scaling up, social mobilisation/building networks are also necessary tools. Improved access to information, sharing capacity (trainers become trainers), and including youth and children in trainings. Online platforms of open content education and training materials can facilitate these processes. Good planning and demonstration projects have also proved to be useful tools.

Technology tools raised in the discussion included low-cost, simple technologies that can be implemented, operated and maintained locally. Examples include biosand filters in Peru and rainwater harvesting in Haiti. The need for effective tools to compare and choose between techniques and systems for specific local conditions was identified. Innovation can also be about new uses of old tools and it is important to work with a longterm vision and therefore to address technology adapted to climate change. Incorporations of local knowledge and resources, as well as evidence based research/ research based on local demand are key points to take into account when deciding upon technological options. Equal access to technological information, technology dissemination and adaption is necessary, gender cooperation and mainstreaming and a bottom-up approach will enable sustainability. Specific means can be through forums to allow scientific knowledge transfer to locals, social networking and capacity building programmes.

Incorporating a human rights perspective was considered as the most important tool in relation to **governance**. It is the basis of governance and relates to all the criteria of the human right to water and sanitation: availability, quality, affordability, acceptability, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, accountability. A holistic vision of WASH, that takes into account different water-related aspects, like health, education etc. is vital. Trust is the key ingredient of inclusive and equitable governance of water as well as empowerment. To this end, a good framework needs to be put in place to ensure meaningful participation. Likewise, to guarantee access to information - full transparency and accountability, regulations need to be set. ICT/media can play an important role in this area. Sharing good practices/lessons learned is also a valued tool.

Session photos:

