



CONCEPT NOTE

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND WATER MANAGEMENT: THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE WAY AHEAD IN THE ARAB REGION Morocco, 9-10 October 2008

ORGANIZERS

- UNESCO Chair “Water, Women and Decision Power” at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI), Morocco
- National Office for Potable Water in Morocco (ONEP), Morocco
- UNESCO / ISESCO
- World Bank Institute (WBI)

CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

The Arab region is the most water scarce area in the world and it is facing numerous water related challenges. Various factors contribute to the demand for water in the region such as populations growing needs for drinking water, agricultural intensification, industrial expansion and climate change. Today, 11 Arab countries suffer from water scarcity and this number is anticipated to reach 18 by 2025. From the 1.1 billion people worldwide with no access to improved water, 37.7 million individuals are from Arab countries and of the 2.6 billion people with no access to improved sanitation, 80.1 million live in the Arab region. At current rates of progress, the water and sanitation Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation will not be met until 2042 and 2019 respectively.

As a result of these issues, there is an urgent need to engage in the most effective water management strategies and to give a high priority to the development of human capacity building programs.

A strong paradox is that while the Arab region is in great need for qualified human resources, it has the lowest female labor force participation rates in the world. The Arab region requires approximately 100 million jobs by 2020, and since the total population stands at approximately 300 millions, the participation of women within the workforce is an economic imperative.

In the Arab region, women as vital human capital, economic and development contributors are not optimally utilized. Arab women are highly educated (women are often graduating from universities in higher numbers and with better achievements than their male counterparts), they commonly use information and communication technologies, and they have international perspectives, and have an optimistic outlook.

Sustainable development in the Arab region is tightly linked to the empowerment of women and their full involvement in the social, economic and environmental arenas.

It is now widely recognized that women play a fundamental role in water resource management. In many cultures, including Arab countries, women are primarily responsible for the use and management of water resources, sanitation and health at the domestic level. Accordingly, the importance of involving both men and women at all levels of decision-making and implementation in water management is commonly accepted and several

mechanisms are being put in place in order to mainstream gender at the operational level of water programs.

However, limited attention has been directed towards promoting women's leadership within the water sector, despite women having proven their capacities in all fields from science to business and having demonstrated their entrepreneurship and leadership skills.

The "water world" complies with the general pattern where very few women make it into the C-suite. Recently, a paper published in the Harvard Business Review puts forwards an interesting metaphor for what confronts women in their professional endeavors: the labyrinth. It is not the glass ceiling but the sum of many obstacles along the way. "For women who aspire to top leadership, routes exists but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected".

Since the overall complex water issue in the Arab region calls for innovative, non-classical and audacious approaches, the UNESCO Chair "Water, Women and Decision Power" and its partners have chosen to focus their attention on the leadership of women in water management in the region. The paradigm shift in the water sector which has evolved from a hydraulic mission towards a water for sustainability and growth mission, calls for a shift in organizational and leadership styles from "mechanical" to "soul and heart oriented". This setting can provide a timely niche for women to cultivate their leadership.

Women leadership in water management in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was first discussed during the International Workshop on "Women in Water Management" organized by the UNESCO Chair in Ifrane, Morocco, in March 2007. In the Ifrane workshop, Arab women water-experts from 7 countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and Morocco) participated in a dialogue on "Leadership and Change of Water Sector Organisations" that was facilitated by the World Bank Institute and discussed the values that women represent in providing leadership to the water sector.

The discussions triggered further questions:

1. Is the contribution of women's leadership at the planning and macro level of water politics and programs embraced? How is this reflected in reality in the MENA region?
2. What added value can women bring to the C-suite in the water sector with respect to occupying positions such as CEO's, DGs, vice-presidents, presidents, members of boards of directors?
3. Does a distinct "female leadership" exist?
4. What needs to be done in order to take women's leadership to the decision-making level?
5. Are there any specific challenges linked to the Arab / Muslim context?

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Workshop Women Leadership and Water Management: Current Situation and Way Ahead in the Arab region aims at establishing a strategy to promote and strengthen the integration of women as leaders, senior managers, and executives within the water sector with the overall objective of sustainable development and growth in the Arab region.

The workshop participants are experts and leaders from the MENA region within and outside of the water sector, who will engage in active dialogue discussing perspectives and lessons learned with successful Arab women leaders based on scientific and leadership research, regional and cultural norms as well as best practices.

The expected outcomes of the workshop include:

- To bring insight into the social influences and their impact on women and performance in leadership.

- To understand women's ability to lead and share knowledge, and to define and discuss how female characteristics add value and contribute to successful leadership.
- To profile the way forward and to determine next steps in order to incorporate women's leadership into the decision-making level, while taking into account the specificities of the MENA region. The workshop will aim to propose short, medium and long term strategies and actions such as relevant professional training, human capacity building programs and awareness-raising events.

PROGRAM

The program of the workshop will include both face-to-face and video conference based sessions through GDLN (Global Development Learning Program) as follows:

- Thursday October 9th (9:00am – 1:00pm GMT):
 - Opening ceremony and keynotes, followed by GDLN dialogues guided by questions with Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. In each country, a local facilitator will moderate a group of 10-15 participants.
- Thursday October 9th afternoon (2:00pm – 5:30pm):
 - Further discussion and exploration on questions and answers received.
- Friday October 10th morning (9:00am – 12:00pm):
 - Recommendations, conclusions and follow up program.

In each of the MENA countries the target audience will include change agents, men and women from academia, government, public and private sector companies, civil society and the media.

VENUE

Thursday October 9th: GDLN Center, University Hassan II, Mohammedia

Friday October 10th: Bouregreg Center, National Office for Potable Water (ONEP), Rabat