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Fostering new cultures of participation – WWF8, Brazil

Dear friends,

Thank you very much for this invitation. The topic participation is a topic close to my heart. We all know that participation of all stakeholders- be it private sector, government or civil society- is of utmost importance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participation: a challenge



Slide 2 However, in reality genuine participation is a real challenge!

I will focus on the participation of women, because that is my field of expertise.

Women for Water Partnership lobbies and advocates continuously for the inclusion of women in decision making processes in all phases of water programmes and projects. From design, to allocation of means, to implementation and collecting monitoring data. In practice, we often see that women are asked to take part in the implementation of a project, a phase in which major decisions have been taken. The fact that women are not involved and being heard earlier, may result in insufficient knowledge about the state of affairs of the local water sources, about the use and future use of water, about the location of the new water source. For example: is this new location safe and will women go there to fetch the water, is a very relevant question. Other examples are questions about the governance of the new sources or the maintenance. And I can go on. Many projects fail because the users were not sufficiently involved or heard during the design phase and the allocation of means. In fact, that is a waste of the investment. It would have been so much more efficient and also more sustainable to involve the users, who are in the case of water often women, from the start.

Women for Water Partnership works with many different partners and applies multi-stakeholder approaches in the knowledge that men and women, girls and boys, government, private sector, civil society are all needed to come up with feasible and practical solutions.

Meaningful participation

Enable women to raise their voices

40% of women in water governing bodies

Voices being heard

Slide 3 When talking about participation, I talk about meaningful participation. It is not enough to have women sitting in a meeting, it is important to create an atmosphere to enable women to raise their voices. Experience shows that having at least 40% of women in water governing bodies helps ensure their voices are actually heard.

We forge partnerships at all levels: at the village level where people get access to water and sanitation; at district or national government level where, besides providing services, it is often necessary to create an enabling environment for projects to succeed; and at the United Nations level to ensure that women are acknowledged as actors in water management in international statements.

Participation: bridging differences



Slide 4 In practice, forging partnerships is often not easy because of the different positions the different partners hold. In the Netherlands we have a saying: “He who pays the piper, calls the tune”. And I believe this is often the case in multi stakeholder settings, despite the good intentions of the sponsor. Next, it might take a while to really understand each other. For instance, when a group of women in Tanzania needed to establish gravity flow schemes to get access to water, Women for Water Partnership helped by strengthening their capacities, negotiating cooperation with the authorities and finding donors to financially support them. One of the sponsors was a company and we had to bridge some differences at the start of our partnership. In order to be able to collaborate - a special structure had to be created - resulting in additional costs and slowing down the decision making process. Next they preferred to only invest in hardware, so in water pipes, pumps, taps and the like. That seems straight forward, but often the reality is more complex.

For instance maintenance need to be organised. Who will take the responsibility? To decrease the risk of water borne diseases, people need to be trained. Is that foreseen in the budget? In order to become sustainable, hardware has to go hand in hand with software. This is what companies have to learn. What NGO's have to understand is that companies use the results of projects for marketing purposes. It takes time, openness and willingness to overcome these differences, but we achieved great results and extended our cooperation to Uganda.

Participation: a human right



Thank you

Slide 5 In sum, participation ensures better implementation and enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions. It leads to an increased knowledge of local conditions and local needs, which is indispensable for any sustainable intervention. Moreover, participation is not just an effective approach that may be adopted. Participation is a human rights principle and firmly grounded in international law.

Thank you for your attention.