

## Recommendations MPI gender & water

Equitable access to and control over water is a basic human right. Unfortunately, many women and girls worldwide still lack access to and control over water. Water that is needed for drinking, cooking, hygiene and health, farming and generating an income. In many developing countries women and girls are responsible for collecting water for their households and communities. The lack of sufficient quality and accessible water thus results in a far greater burden on women than on men, whilst a denial of women's rights to water ultimately affects all. Increasing pressure on land and water leads to insecurity and even land and water grabs<sup>1</sup> or pollution (e.g. due to mining or agricultural use of pesticides). Vice versa, improving access to water will ease women's time constraints – which, in turn, free up time for educational opportunities, productive work, and participation in community life and decision making. Improved access and good water governance is a key policy priority put forward by women and women-led groups and movements.

Women have knowledge and needs that are crucial for water management. There is a wealth of examples of women claiming their rights and taking on active roles in decision-making that result in different successful approaches and outcomes, both on water and empowerment more broadly. Decision-making processes around water use and water resources management are however mostly in the hands of men, at both local and national level. Providing women an equal voice and role in water related decision-making processes not only leads to more equitable water use but also to the overall empowerment of women and girls. This is a responsibility of local and national governments primarily, yet international players including the Netherlands government and Dutch water sector play an important role too.

As a world leader in participatory water management, and a global promotor of human rights and women's rights, the Netherlands is well positioned to promote gender equality; both in their water projects and investments as well as in other international portfolios that may have an impact on the right to water such as climate, CSR and trade policies. Policy coherence for development can be further strengthened by integrating gender in these policies.

### **Implement and monitor gender mainstreaming in Dutch Water Policy**

The International Water Ambition (IWA) unites the ambitions of the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs and Infrastructure & the Environment to address global water issues integrally. IWA focuses on water security of urban deltas. As part of this ambition, in May 2016, Minister Schultz-van Haegen launched the International Delta Coalition in which governments of the Netherlands,

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<sup>1</sup> Recent large-scale land acquisitions for agricultural production (including biofuels), popularly known as 'land grabbing', have attracted headline attention. Water as both a target and driver of this phenomenon has been largely ignored despite the interconnectedness of water and land. Despite headline attention to 'land grabbing' the implications for existing water resources (both surface water and groundwater) have largely remained ignored. Growing evidence suggests that in many cases land grabbing may be motivated by the desire to capture water resources. Introduction to the Special Issue: Water Grabbing? Focus on the (Re)appropriation of Finite Water Resources, by Metha, L., Veldwisch, G.J., and Franco, J. 2012.

Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, France, Myanmar, Indonesia, Japan, Mozambique, the Philippines, South-Korea and Vietnam join hands to prevent water disasters and create deltas resilient to climate change.

- = While human rights, gender equality, good governance and sustainability are central to achieving the IWA, they are not an integral part of its implementing framework. Gender equality should be part of the concrete IWA action plan. In line with international best practices, IWA's assessment framework should include progress and impact indicators to measure IWA's progress on realizing gender equality.
- = Request and monitor a gender sensitive approach to be adopted in all Dutch water projects and investments. This approach should recognize that women have specific proposals, demands and priorities. Therefore, Dutch water policies and investments should be based on inclusive, participatory and gender specific Environmental Impact Assessments. Such gender disaggregated analyses will help to avoid policy and investment choices that disregard optimal solutions from the perspective of gender equity. Without a gender focus, projects risk to increase gender inequalities<sup>2</sup>.
- = To ensure sustainability and avoid conflicts, an inclusive decision-making process in the development of projects and a clear assessment framework is needed *from the start*. Stakeholders -men and women - should not only be heard but should be given equal opportunity to be informed and voluntarily decide whether or not to grant permission. Projects need thorough analysis of the social-economic, political and cultural context and define the target groups and their interests and needs, based on gender disaggregated data that allow for the differences between men and women to become known and to define practical and cultural obstacles to women's equal participation. In order to assure that Dutch policies and investments uphold these standards and meet their own ambitions, there is an urgent need to actively monitor if and how the Dutch water sector respects internationally recognized standards including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- = Link SDG 6 to SDG 5 when creating and implementing national action plans for the implementation of sustainable development goals. "Water for Women" and "Women for Water" go together to empower women and sustainable water supply

### **Avoid negative effects of Dutch climate and investment policies**

Women and water are two spearheads of Dutch development policy. However, these cross-cutting issues are not well integrated into *all* Dutch policies. Notably climate and investment policies can have adverse effects on water quality, access to water and water-related ecosystems that form the basis for the existence of large groups of people, and can affect women disproportionately leading to aggravation of existing gender inequalities.

- = Assure gender considerations to be assessed and integrated in *all* Dutch policies, by following up on the adopted motion of Van Laar in March 2016
- = Due to their specific roles women are disproportionately affected by climate change, while at the same time they are at the forefront protecting their environment and leading innovative adaptation

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance the consequences of the project 'National Capital Integrated Coastal Development' set up to protect Jakarta from floods, with the involvement of the Dutch government and Dutch water sector.

<http://www.bothends.org/nl/Nieuws/newsitem/488/Kustbeschermingsproject-in-Jakarta-lijkt-meer-handel-dan-hulp>

and mitigation strategies. Since the effects of climate change are mostly felt through water related disasters and variability, inclusive water governance and gender-responsive adaptation solutions to floods and droughts and risk prevention are key to develop resilience while providing opportunities to empower women.

- = Investments in large-scale infrastructure and hydropower dams (e.g. via the Green Climate Fund, FMO or World Bank) are promoted as renewable energy, but often have negative social and environmental impacts and cause methane emissions. Women are disproportionately affected because they have to work harder on the often more marginal land they are relocated to and because compensation is negotiated with their husbands. It is essential that these investments do not aggravate already existing gender inequalities or even *reduce* adaptation capacity<sup>3</sup>.
- = In relation to the above: the World Bank is weakening its social safeguards, FMO still has to work on its gender policy, and the Green Climate Fund has a good gender policy in place while implementation is lacking. These policies need urgent strengthening, implementation and monitoring.

### **Stronger Corporate Social Responsibility implementation**

Dutch companies are in a unique position to contribute to women's rights and inclusive sustainable water management. This requires both a do no harm and do more good approach, that the Dutch government can and should actively promote as part of its women's rights and water ambitions.

- = Dutch companies can only join government trade missions if they publicly recognize the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, that – if used well - are a key instrument also for women's rights and the right to water. Research from MVO platform<sup>4</sup> shows however that compliance of the participating companies with the Guidelines is by no means commonplace. At the same time, the trade missions tend to focus on very water intensive industries, which seems to be at odds with the Dutch ambition of reducing its water footprint. Selection for participation of trade missions should be made based on companies' adherence to OECD Guidelines and human rights due diligence implementation as well as the way in which companies are pursuing a positive women and water investment agenda (or scoping opportunities thereof).
- = Forthcoming sector agreements, such as those on agriculture and horticulture, the metallurgic industry and the chemical industry need to execute gender analyses and pay specific attention to the impact of these sectors on the quantity and quality of water in the producing country in relation to gender. ActionAid and Both ENDS published several cases on how extractive operations impacts women's access to water and what needs to be done to address these challenges. <sup>5</sup>

### **Ensure Women Human Rights Defenders are capacitated and protected**

- = Request pro-active protection and support (in the form of capacity building, diplomatic pressure by embassies, and direct protection in emergencies) to Women Human Right Defenders who fight for

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<sup>3</sup> The dredging of Van Oort in Suape, Brazil, for example, supported by Dutch Export Credit Agency Atradius, destroyed coral reefs and mangroves that protect coastlines against climate impacts.

<sup>4</sup> MVO platform letter on CSR in trade missions: [http://mvoplatform.nl/publications-nl/Publication\\_4337/](http://mvoplatform.nl/publications-nl/Publication_4337/)

<sup>5</sup> In a four-year project (2014-2018), Both ENDS, ActionAid and their partners, set out to explore how the Human Rights system could be used to support women whose rights are threatened or infringed upon, notably the Human Rights to Water, to Food and to a Healthy Environment: <http://www.bothends.org/nl/Themas/Projecten/project/51/Milieu,-mensenrechten-en-gender>

their right to clean drinking water or safe access to water resources. Women HRDs face different risks compared to men, including physical assaults, sexual violence and stigmatization. Because they have to defend their rights against powerful actors and 'vested interests', their work in many countries is dangerous. <sup>6</sup>

- = Invest in empowerment of women to be able to claim their right to water. There is a huge need on the ground to build up the capacities of already marginalized women to fight against patriarchal power structures and speak up.
- = Ensure that women and women's organizations (including the medium and smaller sized organisations) have direct access to financial resources. Women's organizations receive only 9% of funds worldwide, while they are the ones that change the status of women and girls. In addition: reserve money for capacity development, vocational training, communication and awareness in projects and programs (hardware and software are important) and make sure that gender is an integral part of scoring in funding proposals
- = Be more sensitive with regard to grassroots organisations practical set-up who often cannot cope with the donor's increasingly complex bureaucratic requirements for monitoring and reporting. Design a minimum criteria for monitoring and reporting with their participation rather than a top-down complicated format which they cannot feasibly comply with.

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<sup>6</sup> In the coal rich province Mpumalanga in South Africa women are beginning to use the Equality Court as a channel to ensure that powerful mining companies and the state are not able to unfairly discriminate against and further them in a cycle of poverty and inequality. *Women Undermined*: <http://www.bothends.org/nl/Themas/Projecten/project/51/Milieu,-mensenrechten-en-gender>