CHAPTER 2

CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL WATER POLICIES: BRINGING IN THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Before looking into issues of water management at the community level, it is important to discuss the water policy environment. This chapter undertakes this task and focuses on the question of how gender has surfaced and influenced emerging international policies as well as national policies across the globe. In particular, it notes the references made to gender and water in various international meetings, conferences and forums and outlines the shortcomings in the implementation of these policies impacting women at the grassroots level.

Focus on Gender and Water: International Context

The first international attempt at integrating the aspect of women into policies of natural resources management was made at the beginning of the 1970s. This approach later referred to as the "women in development" (WID), prevailed into the 1980s and was used by organisations such as the United Nations and its agencies (Deshingkar 1995; Brismar 1997). The underlying rationale in this approach was that development processes would proceed much better if women were fully incorporated into them. (Moser 1993; Braidotti et al. 1994). The first systematic concern with women and water began with the UN Water Conference in 1977 in Mar del Plata in Argentina, which initiated a new era in international co-operation for improved water supplies and sanitation in the developing world by adopting 1980s as the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD). The slogan for the Water Decade was 'Water and Sanitation for All.' The 1980 United Nations General Assembly ratified this proposal and the Water Decade was officially flagged off. As far as specific topics of water are concerned, the relevance of women in relation to water supply and sanitation became apparent during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981–1990) and at the conference marking the end of the Decade in New Delhi in 1990, where women made a significant contribution to the discussions. The New Delhi statement recognized that the poor, especially women and children, are the main victims of problems arising from the lack of safe water. The statement recommended institutional reforms, including the full
participation of women at all levels in sector institutions, and that women should be encouraged to play influential roles in community-water management and hygiene education. The Delhi Principles, 1990, stated, "Women should be encouraged to play influential roles in both water management and hygiene education. Leadership training and awareness building is necessary to make community management effective and enable women to play leading roles" (Cleaver and Elson 1993-94). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was designated as the nodal or 'lead' agency for the Water Decade. The World Bank (WB) also stepped in to run the UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme. This programme actively promoted extension of rural drinking water supplies to low-income populations during the Water Decade. The goal of the decade was "to provide clean water for all" (Lundquist & Gleick 1997). Guided by the WID approach, activities during the decade focused on women as a "target group" to be benefited through the installation of low cost technology in DWSSs that the users could help build and maintain themselves (Elmendorf & Isely 1983; Kalbermatten 1991; Deshingkar 1995). One of the grounds for action under IDWSSD was the realisation of the fact that women have to invest heavy inputs of time and energy in water-fetching activities that not only adversely affects their health but directly as well as indirectly also precludes their involvement in economically productive activities. Equally important was the ground that the quality of water fetched and used for drinking at the family level is not adequately good as it is not "safe" on health grounds. Thus, the needs of women were seen as largely pertaining to having access to new, improved, reliable, safe and sustainable water systems close to home (Elmendorf & Isely 1983; Poluha 1993).

However, as the limitations of the guiding philosophy of WID came to be realised, a policy shift was adopted for securing women's "participation" in water projects (Parker et al. 1995). It was also realised that WID was unable to integrate the issues of women into full-length programmes. Instead, a section on women's issues simply seemed to be added onto their ends — "like an afterthought" (Deshingkar 1995). In fact, during the 1980s, it was also with the coming of the "community participation" approach in the development sector that women's potential role in improved water supply and management programmes was envisaged. Thus, they came to be identified and involved as candidates for training in tasks associated with the management and maintenance of drinking water supply and maintenance, such as in handpump maintenance (Elmendorf & Isely 1983). Moreover, at a wider level too, it came to
be eventually realised that the existing water policies had failed to eliminate widespread human health problems, declining ecosystems, growing conflicts over water and poor project performance (Falkenmark & Lundquist 1997; UNCNR 1996). Among the missing dimensions identified were a lack of active and responsible user participation, a failure to recognise and integrate the many functional roles of water, and a failure to understand and correct enormous water waste and contamination (Lundquist & Gleick 1997). Thus began a new debate in the field of water policy in general and about women and water in particular. The development community also recognised greater women's involvement as a critical element in reaching the water decade's target of water for all. Women's participation was mandated in water committees. During the past decades the concept of the significance of women in relation to the sustainable development of our natural resources has received an increasing amount of attention. The principle of increasing women's involvement at all levels has been strongly advocated in statements and recommendations from major international conferences. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (1987), brought the world's attention to the term 'sustainable development' as the ability to meet the needs of the here-and-now without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However it included very little reference to the role that women play in this concept.

Another important aspect to be discussed in addressing the issue of increasing women's involvement in the water sector refers to the position and status of women, legal and political, within the labour force in general. The International Labour Conference, at its 78th Session held in Geneva in June 1991, adopted a resolution, which reaffirms the ongoing concern that ILO has had for women workers since its establishment. It recalled the Resolution on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women in Employment, adopted in 1985, and stressed that an effort between governments, employers' and workers' organizations was needed to implement the principle of equality. These include the adoption of comprehensive strategies to eliminate continuing barriers to the equal participation of women in employment, including that of the labour market, the proper recognition and fair valuation of work—including work which has traditionally been done predominantly by women—and the adoption of measures to help women and men to reconcile work with family responsibilities (ILO 1991). In this declaration, the International Labour Conference noted its concern that considerable
discrimination against women workers persisted and was incompatible with economic development, social progress, social justice, the fundamental rights of women and men, and the welfare of the family and society. The declaration called for the protection of the family and society. The declaration called for the protection of women at work as integral to the improvement of living and working conditions of all employees. The declaration also states that 'positive special treatment during a transitional period, aimed at effective equality between the sexes, shall not be regarded as discriminatory' (ILO 1991).

The present policy concerning women and water was crystallised at two major international meetings – International Conference on Water and Environment (ICWE) in Dublin, Ireland in January 1992 and the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. At the Beijing Conference, in the Platform for Action (PFA), concern with women and water was identified as a critical area of concern under the section "women and environment". One of the relevant strategic objectives in PFA is to involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels. PFA states a commitment to ensuring clean water by the year 2000 and recognises women's importance in making environmentally responsible consumption decisions. The former adopted the Dublin Statement that called for fundamental new approaches to the assessment, development and management of freshwater resources, one of the essential means of which has been identified as involvement of the smallest communities. One of the four guiding principles in the Dublin Statement recognises women as playing a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Acceptance and implementation of this principle calls for positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation (UNESCO 2002). The Dublin findings figured very largely in the policies and programmes for water adopted by Agenda 21. (Sitarz 1993), which is described below.

Significantly, in the same year, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) called the Earth Summit was organised in Rio-de-Jeneirio, in 1992, and the issues of women was included as a distinctive item and was mainstreamed throughout the conference. The Summit played an important role in global co-operation for environmental conservation. It made developing nations assume greater responsibility for conducting
environmental reforms and it also established the responsibility of industrialised nations within the same context. The developed nations must modify their production and consumption patterns, with greater consideration given to the environment and existing natural resources. The main output of the Earth Summit was Agenda 21—the plan of action for sustainable development for the twenty-first century. The chapter in Agenda 21 (UNCED) 1992) devoted to women, 'Global Action for Women towards Sustainable Development', sets out objectives for governments with recommendations for action and implementation to increase women's presence in decision-making positions. In addition, it urges governments to ratify, implement and strengthen existing internationally agreed instruments relating to women. Agenda 21 recommends that governments increase the number of women involved as decision-makers, and as scientific and technical advisers. There is also the mention of development of public participatory techniques and their implementation in decision-making, particularly the enhancement of the role of women in water resources planning and management (UN 1992). This plan included a separate chapter on women and specific recommendations were made considering the role of women as related to poverty, human settlement, health, forests, biological diversity, sustainable agriculture, education and freshwater resources (UNCED, 1992). At another level, the need for greater attention to be given to programmes and projects involving women, especially on matters relating to societal development and the environment, was emphasized at the inter-regional workshop on the role of women in environmentally sound and sustainable development, organized by the United Nations in Beijing in 1992 as a follow-up of the UNCED Earth Summit. It was generally recognized that women in most developing countries lack the required skills and experience in preparing technical co-operation programmes and that this needs to be remedied if women are to participate fully. However, in the Americas for instance, the gender gap in the level of preparedness to participate in development projects is barely significant. In most cases, the lack of political will or vision is the major obstacle impeding full women's participation in development activities, both at the planning and implementation levels. The workshop concluded that despite the fairly limited and contradictory beginning in the early second half of the century, the process of involving and consulting women in development projects relating to water is under way. Today, agencies and organizations responsible for projects are looking at the gender dimension particularly in relation to the participatory approach. In questions relating to national resources and sustainable development, it is critical to involve women as experts and advisors.
On the whole, then, the Rio and Beijing Conferences set the developmental focus on the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive and environmentally aware development policy (UN 1995). From the experience of water decade and for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the water sector was learning that services should respond to demands i.e. to what users want. The advocates of women's participation were also learning that along with promoting women's involvement, a focus on gender must include how decisions are made and what roles and responsibilities men and women take up (Bruce Gross 1998).

The issues concerning women and water have also been debated at other international forums throughout the last decade. These debates have largely supported the Gender and Development approach within the sector. At the Latin American Workshop on "Contribution of Women to the Planning and Management of Water Resources" held in Mexico City in May 1998, the roles that women could play in sustainable water resources management, not as an end but as a means to an end, was analysed. The end was recognised as efficient and integrated water resources management that would improve the quality of life of the people. A significant outcome of the workshop was recognition of the importance of women in management, planning, conservation and use of water resources (Tortajada 1998).

Similarly, at the 8th Stockholm Water Symposium in the same year, it was realised that there is a need to break the limiting barriers so that women are equally involved not only in the decision-making process but also in the actual planning, design and construction of water supply structures and in the overall management of water resources. There was consensus on the provision of equal opportunities to women for education, especially in the scientific and technological fields, appointment of women to top decision making positions and improving their access to human resources training for the water sector and conducting institutional overhaul to create a favourable environment devoid of gender imbalances. Furthermore, women's participation was envisaged as extending beyond residential water uses to the social and economic uses arising out of the construction of major hydroelectric dams, functioning of the water sector market and water pollution control (Michael 1998; Tortajada 1998; Rico 1998; Sudman 1998).
Women-focused policies have been adopted by various international agencies supporting water development and management activities as well as by several national governments. As an example, since 1994, UNICEF's global policy emphasises gender equality and empowerment of women and girls using the "Women's Equity and Empowerment framework". During the last decade, UNICEF has further broadened its programme priorities by "using water and environmental sanitation services as an entry point for empowerment of women" (Davis 1996). Similarly, since 1992, DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) has developed guidelines for the water sector supporting women's involvement at all levels, including design, construction, operation and maintenance, as well as management of facilities for water. DANIDA policy guidelines also try to ensure that women have equal opportunities for employment as staff and managers (Davis 1996). Also, SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) has formulated a water strategy that emphasises women's participation in order to ensure the sustainability of water projects. Recently, SIDA guidelines on gender and water resources have been developed to further ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from improvements to water supply. It realises that it is essential for the sustainability of water programmes to actively involve women in planning, construction, operation and maintenance (SIDA 2002).

Under the international policy guidelines, governments in several countries have drafted guidelines for ensuring a minimum level of women's participation in local management structures. Tanzania is one such country that has included explicit statements about gender in general, and women in particular, in its national water policy. It has formalised the training, participation and involvement of women and lays down more equal gender involvement in the control of benefits from rural DWSS projects, with half the members of village water committees being women (Davis 1996). Thus, participation of women at all levels is broadly accepted and there seems to be no 'glass ceiling', especially in water management-related issues. Therefore, politically, the roles that national governments perform are changing in many countries. No longer does government try to do everything down to the installation and maintenance of the hand and motorised pumps. Direct implementation, maintenance, management and increasingly also financing, are left more and more to local authorities, new civil groups and the private sector. Governmental roles are changing to creating the overall...
legislative and institutional framework, keeping the overview of development and efforts and seeing that undesirable negative effects are kept back.

At the institutional level, one of the important international water organisations is the World Water Council, which was created in 1995 by the UN and the World Bank. Its report formed the basis of creation of the World Water Commission. The World Water Commission came up with a document, the World Water Vision followed by a Framework For Action (FFA) (Cosgrove and Rijssberman 2000). The World Water Vision document was based on the participatory exercise, which was officially launched in Stockholm in August 1998 with approval of the work plan by World Water Commission. Its objectives were the following:

to develop knowledge and raise awareness of issues among the general population and decision-makers, to foster political will and leadership, to develop a vision of water management in year 2025 that was shared by water sector specialists and civil society and to provide input to the vision implementation strategy for which another network of organisation called the Global Water Partnership (GWP) was formed to take the lead (GWP 2000). This process of global consultation by World Water Commission and Global Water Partnership continued in Second World Water Forum, Ministerial Conference and in the meeting in Bohn in 2002 ('Dublin +10'), through the 10-year review of implementation of Agenda 21 and beyond, and more recently in the Third World Water Forum; in Japan in 2003.

As a participant and luckily during the field work years of the thesis, I was exposed to the Second World Water Forum in March 2000 and therefore would like to give a brief overview of this experience. Basically, the Second World Water Forum was organized as the concluding meeting for the World Water Vision process, and was envisaged as a stocktaking moment for the Framework for Action project, and an opportunity to initiate a process leading to action on the ground. Thus, through the development of the World Water Vision hundreds of preparatory meetings took place in which some fifteen thousand people participated. About 40 sector, regional and special subject Visions and Frameworks for Action were prepared. All these have value in their own right and as contributions to the World Water Vision and Framework for Action (WWC 2000) This was a meeting of water users, water decision makers, and water experts jointly affirming the importance of water for everybody and announcing their widely shared intention to make a difference. After the meeting, the Netherlands government
committed to doubling the investments in the water sector through international cooperation—an increase of 100 million guilders per year; to support a major initiative related to water for food; and establish a UNESCO Institute for Water Education in Delft. The UK government pledged to increase its focus on water in the next three years. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Global Environment Facility announced a doubling of the freshwater-related budget. The local government session pledged to set up water cities network and report their progress to the Third World Water Forum in March 2003, in Japan. A group of organisations also pledged to form a Water and Gender Alliance. At the global institutional level, the World Water Council, World Water Commission, World Water Forums and Global Water Partnership operate around the world through Regional Water Partnerships and Technical Advisory Committees down to the country level like the India Water Partnership and further to River Basin Partnership Structures. Many Indians, technical experts, economists, administrators, policy makers and politicians have formed an India Water Partnership, which is being funded by the Global Water Partnership and they prepared two documents, the 'India Water Vision 2025' and the 'Framework For Action (FFA) for India Water Vision 2025'. All this has been pushed through in during the last decade. At the upper end, these are also being powered by the IMF and the World Bank. Other organs that have have been working in this sector include—the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), the International Water Resources Association (IWRA), the International Water Association (IWA) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) (WWC 2000). In conjunction to all these, the efforts in the new direction that have come through statements in the 1992 Dublin Statement and Agenda 21 from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as well as initiatives like the Global Water partnership need special analysis here. These efforts have called for new definitions and concepts in an effort to incorporate characteristics of "sustainability" and "equity" in water planning (Lundquist & Gleick 1997). Within this broad sectoral framework, the debates on women and water issues have come to be addressed through a mixture of past approaches and the current approach of "gender and development". Gender and development has heralded a shift towards a more holistic perspective to explore the relationship between women and men in the development process. The goals of development in general and those within the water sector in particular have thus been redefined. The goal is now to move towards equitable and sustainable changes with mainstreaming of gender issues. This, in turn, involves sustainable reshaping of the power variables within the sector so as to introduce a greater power balance between men
and women while giving women an adequate stake in participation and in the forthcoming benefits, so that they are able to share in the process of decision-making (Parker et al. 1995).

Stated otherwise, under the guiding framework of gender and development, the present policies linking women and water have come to acknowledge that it is not only men but equally women who have assets and opportunities in the sector and that both of them must be involved in water development and management activities, from decision-making to evaluation. In practice, it implies that all decisions regarding the design, localisation, development, operation and maintenance, management and assessment of water resources must pay adequate attention to the needs, interests, opportunities and powers of women and not only men (Brismar 1997). The present policy envisages an enhanced role for women in the water sector as planners, technicians, social development advisers, etc. It has been observed that the “water world” is almost solely male (Athukorala 1997). Thus, the focus is on enhancing their participation in decision-making positions in government institutions and international donor agencies. Simultaneously, at worldwide water meetings, the numbers are seen as weighted against women (Athukorala 1997). So, an emphasis is being laid upon supporting the development of career opportunities for women in this sector. There is also an emphasis on creating an enabling environment for community women to be involved in planning and decision making in local water committees, etc. Simultaneously, the concern with providing women with training and opportunities to be involved in more technical activities, rather than simply in relation to health and hygiene within the household, is being strengthened (Abzug & Islam 1996; Davis 1996; SIDA 2002; Thomas et al. 1996).

At the critical level, there have been several protests against water privatisation, which it is being pointed out has been spearheaded by the World Water Council, which helped to establish the World Water Commission to look into the world’s water needs in the 21st Century as discussed above. Also it is criticised that to follow up on its recommendations, the Global Water Partnership has been created and is pursuing its agenda of creating confusion by pretending to be pro-poor and anti-rich, sowing seeds of discontent and pushing its business agenda of privatisation of water (Ghoge 2002). In July 2002, the Governing Board of the World Bank discussed its Policy for Rural Development and one of the key elements of which was ‘privatisation of water’ (Hofwegen, and Svendsen 2000). This drew the attention and protests
of Western NGOs. As per the information available from several reports, privatisation of water supply has already started in some of the smaller countries of the world- Bolivia and Nicaragua in South America, and on the African continent, Mozambique, Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Tanzania and South Africa. In all these countries, there have been widespread protests, and in Bolivia, three people died in anti-privatisation protests, and a state of emergency had to be declared with the army being called out to control protestors in March 2000. International and local experience in South Africa shows that privatisation of water delivery leads to higher costs for consumers. "The Water Manifesto", has been created which is an international document published in 1998 and has been signed by intellectuals, politicians and civil servants from Portugal, Argentina, Morocco, Spain, Italy, Tunisia, USA, France, Belgium, Brazil, Bangladesh, India, Canada, Senegal and Sweden. It states in Principle 6: "A partnership predominantly subject, as at present, to the logic and interests of private actors in relentless competition against each other for market conquest, could only do harm to the objectives of access to water for all and global integrated sustainability" (The Water Manifesto 1998). Tens of thousands of people also joined a signature campaign in three countries Belgium, Italy and Quebec (Canada) against the major threat represented by water privatisation and commodification (The Blue Book 2002:1). Thus there is a growing fear is that if the privatisation and commodification of water is allowed to occur, aquatic ecosystems and life forms will degenerate and eventually perish. Hence, it is argued that control of water must reside in the public domain, in the interest of unborn future generations, which cannot voice their say. Thus privatisation of water is not considered the most ideal solution for efficient governance.

To briefly sum up this chapter it can be stated that in the political context, the above analysis shows that the international and national policies linking women and water have undergone a gradual shift from visualising women as mere "passive recipients" of the output of water projects to "active participants" in their planning and implementation. However, although it can be stated that the gender dimension has received an increasing amount of attention in the international arena, the implementation of the ideas and theories of sustainable development, especially in the rural environment, require the further involvement of women. Also, a paradigm shift still needed in the thinking and approach and in the attitudes of current power holders (including the bureaucracy and the politicians) as well as change in the mindset of communities from passive dependency to active participation, especially in the Indian context.