



INTERNET ARTICLE

Putting African women at the centre of water management and distribution

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Active and meaningful engagement of women in the provision, management and safeguarding of water is known to decrease irresponsible water use and pollution, to prevent corruption and conflicts, as well as to increase water efficiency and the sustainability of interventions. This is but one of the major topics taking centre stage during the on-going Gender, Water and Development Conference in East London this week.

The South African Minister of Department of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane emphasized that women all over Africa are the main custodians of water security and water resources management, and that the involvement of women in the sector is therefore important in accumulating considerable knowledge about water resources management. This would include water consumption, conservation, and water quality and storage methods. Minister Mokonyane made these sentiments during her keynote address to delegates from various African countries and water sector stakeholders present at the conference.

Mokonyane added that efforts geared towards improving the management of water as a scarce resource and extending access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, often overshadow the central role of women in water management. Asked whether strategies surrounding gender mainstreaming in the water sector also included the empowerment of men as curators of water management, Minister Mokonyane who admitted to being a true believer in women development and empowerment, said that the ultimate mission should be a joint collaboration between men and women. "We need men to realise and acknowledge that whatever contribution they make in ensuring full access to water by all citizens, women can also make. We need to work hand in hand in achieving gender equity."

During the course of the proceedings, delegates convened on how to channel the obligation of different states to do away with cultural beliefs and ideologies that oppress and demean women as well as violate the rights of women and girl children. There needs to be a concerted effort to challenge the exclusion of women in the decision making processes that impact on them directly, and society in general. Consensus was also reached to include certain laws and policies in the national constitutions of the present member states that will improve the participation of women in the water sector.



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Throughout the week, the conference will in various sessions be deliberating on a number of issues that centre on the essence of gender and development in the water sector. These will include amongst others policy, legislation, human rights and gender mainstreaming in African water policies and strategies, especially as to how far we have come as a continent and looking beyond the Millennium Development Goals into the Strategic Development Goals.

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