

Diverting the Flow

A Resource Guide to Gender, Rights and Water Privatization

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Public Citizen is a non-profit research, lobbying and litigation organization that advocates for consumer protection and for government and corporate accountability. Public Citizen's Water-For-All Campaign is working to protect universal access to clean and affordable drinking water by keeping it in public hands.

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Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) is an international advocacy organization that seeks to increase the power of women worldwide as policymakers at all levels in governments, institutions and forums to achieve economic and social justice, a healthy and peaceful planet, and human rights for all.



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Women Challenging Water Privatization

Water is a vital natural resource and human right. But access to potable water is becoming increasingly difficult. When water is scarce, polluted, or unaffordable, women suffer most acutely. As economic providers, caregivers, and household managers, women are responsible for ensuring that their families have water for daily living.

Every day, many women and girls walk or travel long distances to bring water to their families, often at the expense of education, income generating activities, cultural and political involvement, and rest and recreation. Despite this, women's central role in water resources management is often ignored.

Privatization is one aspect of the world's water crisis that is having a deeply negative impact on the livelihoods of women. Increasingly, water resources management in countries across the globe is being determined by policies of the international financial and trade institutions—the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO). More than two decades ago, the World Bank and IMF began to prescribe a new policy package called structural adjustment programs (SAPs) to indebted countries in exchange for loan financing.

SAPs required governments to, among other measures, reduce or eliminate public services, open local markets to foreign interests, and sell off previously state-owned operations to private investors, a process known as privatization. These policies have expanded through the years, and have become a major aspect of 'trade-related' policy at the WTO. As governments relinquish control of domestic water systems under pressure from international institutions and regional banks and trade agreements, transnational corporations (TNCs) are gaining unprecedented access to national and local water supplies. Thus, a few major water corporations such as Veolia, RME/Thames Water, and Suez are increasingly controlling water access in many parts of the world.

Privatization and other interrelated components of neoliberal economic policies, such as free trade and government deregulation, have severely impacted many countries—exacerbating the gap between the rich and poor, worsening social and economic inequities, and intensifying imbalances in productivity, resource flows, and distribution of goods and services. The privatization of water, and indeed all other natural resources, is increasingly infringing on people's rights and livelihoods around the world, most severely on poor women and girls. Water privatization perpetuates gender inequalities by relying on traditional gender roles that have made women and girls responsible for and the main suppliers of water to their families and households.

Thus, over many years women have disproportionately experienced the burdens of privatization policies in the form of enormous price hikes, water cut-offs, deteriorating water quality, and health and sanitation hazards. In response, women have been central to the struggle against the sale of public water services to TNCs, through lobbying local authorities and national min-

istries, forming local women's associations, and organizing marches, pickets, public education campaigns, and direct actions.

WEDO is an international advocacy organization that seeks to increase the power of women worldwide as decision-makers at all levels to achieve economic and social justice, democratic governance, and sustainable development. We developed this publication to advance awareness of the gendered nature of water privatization and its impact on women. Public Citizen, a non-profit research, lobbying and litigation organization that advocates for consumer protection and for government and corporate accountability, provided valuable case studies that illustrate the impact of water privatization on women and the ways in which women have organized against it.

In 2002, WEDO identified women's access to and control of water as a key issue in our work, and as an area in critical need of an engendered approach in global policy arenas. While the most direct challenges to water privatization are against governments and corporations at the local and national level, the demand for privatization often comes from global institutions. Thus, WEDO is working at the global level to challenge the policy environment. Our aim is to pressure global institutions that have direct influence on national decision-making on vital issues such as privatization, and to strengthen the United Nations to become the primary global forum for enforcing human rights, sustainability, and peace.

While much has been written on water privatization, there is a need to link this discourse to the actual impact on women. This publication is a resource guide for policymakers, and human rights, environmental, and economic and gender justice advocates working on global policy, to examine the impact that the privatization of goods and services like water has on the livelihoods of women, particularly poor women.

Section one presents extracts from a variety of sources that highlight the critical issues related to water privatization and women, including: water as a human right, public versus private goods, gender roles and inequities, global policy trends, and governance issues. Excerpts from case studies, compiled by Public Citizen, detail women's struggles for clean, accessible water in Kenya, Uruguay, Philippines, Egypt, South Africa and the United States. Expanded versions of these and other case studies are available on WEDO and Public Citizen websites (www.wedo.org, www.wateractivist.org). Section two presents different arenas for civic engagement. This includes actions at the local level and entry points for advocacy on privatization issues in strategic global forums. Finally, a list of resources is provided to obtain additional information, reach out to others and get involved.

Extracting the Global Issues

THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER

Water is fundamental to all forms of life and must be protected as a common resource, public good and human right. Water has been recognized as a human right in numerous international treaties and declarations, as well as by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in November 2002. The human right to water is essential for achieving other human rights and international development commitments in critical areas such as gender equality, sustainable development, and poverty eradication.

Water is a limited natural resource and a public good fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights.

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
E/C.12/2002/11. General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water.
November 26, 2002. Page 1. www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf.

The right to water is clearly established under international human rights law: all people have the right of access to the amount of water required to sustain life and fulfill basic needs. The right to water has been identified as a component of the right to housing, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to food under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the world's most important social and economic rights treaty.

UNIFEM. "Promoting and Protecting Women's Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty." New York. Page 7. www.unifem.org.

With respect to the right to water, States parties have a special obligation to provide those who do not have sufficient means with the necessary water and water facilities and to prevent any discrimination on internationally prohibited grounds in the provision of water and water services. ... States parties should take steps to ensure that women are not excluded from decision-making processes concerning water resources and entitlement. The disproportionate burden women bear in the collection of water should be alleviated.

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
E/C.12/2002/11. General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water. November 26,
2002. Page 7. www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf.

The ultimate objective should be to achieve universal access. This means that water must be identified primarily as a public good and a human right and not simply as a commodity to be traded in the open market. In determining the mechanisms of

access, reforms must also take into consideration the gender inequities and the power relations at the family, community, and state levels.

Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege." Integrated Social and Development Centre. Accra, Ghana. Page 1. www.isodec.org.gh.

The increase of the global degradation of ecosystems, the excessive consumption of water, contamination and salinization of water-bearings, aquifers and dams, along with the impact of extreme poverty which has been worsened by privatization, are contributing factors to an environmental catastrophe. This has had profound effects on the availability of drinking water and, consequently, has led to the violation of the right to life, safety, food, health and education of billions of human beings.

Obando, Ana Elena. Women and Water Privatization, November 2003, www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-water.html.

PLUNDERING PUBLIC GOODS

As a public good, water must be managed for social needs and environmental sustainability rather than for short-term profit. When public necessities become private commodities, people who are already marginalized become more vulnerable to the whims of the market. Corporate control can entrench existing inequalities and endanger the quality of life—and even survival—of poor people, particularly women. As pollution degrades surface water far more swiftly than nature can replenish it, the shrinking water supply makes privatization an even more contentious and urgent political issue.

Essential services are generally viewed as public goods. Unlike private goods, all people benefit from universal access to public goods, regardless of how much they consume. For example, clean water and accessible health care reduce the overall incidence of illness.

Kessler, Tim. "From Social Contract to Private Contracts: the Privatization of Health, Education and Basic Infrastructure." Social Watch Report 2003: The Poor and the Market. Montevideo, Uruguay. Page 11. www.socwatch.org/uy.

In many countries fresh-water resources are still owned by the state; but these public rights are increasingly being assigned to private interests, usually through licensing and permitting regimes. ... The World Bank is spearheading the promotion of private water rights, water licensing, and water trading in developing countries, as part of an international program to define water as an economic rather than social good. [A] second

strategic growth offensive is the delivery of water services. To date, much of this growth has been accomplished by corporate mergers and acquisitions of private utilities and water companies. For example, the world's largest water corporation, Generale des Eaux, a subsidiary of Vivendi, is a conglomeration of more than 3,000 companies around the world.

Shrybman, Steven. "Thirst for Control: New Rules in the Global Water Grab." Council of Canadians. January 2002. Pages 23-24. www.canadians.org/documents/campaigns-tfc.pdf.

The privatization of water is a radical new social experiment. Most major water privatizations are less than a decade old, but already it appears clear that they follow the pattern of privatization in other service sectors—no commitment to expanded access to low-income consumers, inequity in the quality of service based on the ability to pay, service cut-offs, weak regulatory oversight, and lack of accountability to local consumer needs.

Grusky, Sara. "Profit Streams: The World Bank and Greedy Global Water Companies." Public Citizen. September 2002. Pages 9-10. www.citizen.org.

As the planet dries up and water supplies are bought up by private interests, we have begun moving into a new economic configuration, where sprawling cities and agribusiness operations thrive and the wells of private citizens and local farmers run dry. ...What lies ahead is a world where resources are not conserved, but hoarded, to raise prices and enhance corporate profits and where military conflicts could arise over water scarcity in places like the Mexican Valley and the Middle East. It's a world where everything will be for sale.

Barlow, Maude and Clarke, Tony. *Blue Gold: the Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*. The New Press. New York. 2002. Page 76.

WOMEN BEAR THE IMPACT

As the majority of the world's poor, women are significantly affected when water is privatized. Inadequate access to water greatly increases women's burdens as caregivers and household and economic providers, thereby exacerbating gender inequity. Human rights advocates recognize water as a critical component of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as environmental security and poverty eradication.

Private property regimes tend to perpetuate and can even intensify gender inequalities. Women are often marginalized in monetary economy, and thus suffer when a price is put on water. Willingness-to-pay is not the same as the ability-to-pay, such assessments do not take into account the choices that poor women must make. Domestic or "reproductive" uses of water does not generate income directly, so benefits are not captured in traditional economic indicators.

Liu, Julian. "Human Rights and Gender Inequity in Water Resource Management." Centre for Economic & Social Rights. Page 6-7. www.cesr.org.

Women have been the most adversely affected by these increases [in water prices]. There are several reasons that account for this. First and foremost is the question of gender inequity and the asymmetrical power relations that deprive women of resources while assigning them the most menial, difficult and unrewarding jobs and roles. In most cases power at the household level is concentrated in the hands of men. Men care little about water bills and how and where the water is obtained

Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege." Integrated Social and Development Centre. ACCRA-Ghana. Page 5. www.isodec.org.gh

Kenya: Whether Public or Private, Policies Overlook Women

In Kenya, a 1999 water policy act recognized water as a human right, and made the government fully responsible for ensuring every citizen access. But a new policy in 2002 defined water as an "economic good" and called upon consumers to pay for it. The administration of President Mwai Kibaki, which is trying to curry favor with international institutions to increase aid flows, has also supported private sector participation in the water system. A U.S.

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\$75 million Privatization and Private Sector Development Project for Kenya is in the World Bank pipeline and it has water privatization as a core objective.

For now, the water systems remain publicly owned. In cities, reliability varies, but the quality of piped water is generally good. Overall, however, about 50 percent of the population in both rural and urban areas lack clean water. They must purchase it from vendors, paying more than 30 times the price of piped supplies. Some draw water from polluted sources, such as wells and springs. Water-borne-diseases

are believed to be responsible for most children's deaths.

While women play a critical role in the water sector, they are rarely integrated into actual practice or policy. Some women are taking matters into their own hands, forming local associations that work with municipalities to ensure that piped-water points are established within their reach. They have mobilized neighborhoods, municipalities and other partners to build water tanks, and have generated funds locally to pay for them.

—Annabell Waititu,

Environment Liaison Centre International

Water for Nature is poorly represented in the corridors of power. As a result, wetlands, floodplains and coastal ecosystems are in danger of irreversible degradation. When that happens, there is a gender disparity in the consequences. It is poor families who draw most heavily on “common property” resources like forests, rangelands, water bodies and inshore fishing grounds. Women are usually the ones responsible for providing food and water for the household and suffer disproportionately when common resources are degraded.

Gender and Water Development Report 2003, Gender and Water Alliance, The Netherlands. Page 10. www.genderandwateralliance.org.

When women’s access to water is compromised, a number of negative health, safety and empowerment impacts result. Women and children, often girl children, travel greater distances from home in search of water sources, increasing restrictions on women’s already overburdened schedules and limiting time available for other activities, including growing and preparing food and income generating work.

UNIFEM. “Promoting and Protecting Women’s Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty.” New York. Page 1. www.unifem.org.

Unfortunately, more money and resources are spent in treating water-related sickness than on sanitation provision and hygiene

education. ... As the traditional water bearers and custodians of family health, women shoulder a huge burden in coping with the lack of basic sanitation services.

Klöpfer, Carsten. “Water Privatization from a Gender Perspective.” Heinrich Böll Foundation. June 2003. Page 10. www.boell.org.

Low income women facing time constraints are obliged to accept lower quality water—contaminated ground water normally not used for consumption—threatening family health and wellness. This is a particularly frightening alternative given that 80% of all illnesses are transmitted by contaminated water. Water related illnesses drain limited household budgets as funds are diverted for medical expenses and/or for purchase of water at high costs. Girls may be forced to drop out of school to assist in collecting water or as a result of reduced availability of water supplies for sanitation and personal hygiene.

UNIFEM. “Promoting and Protecting Women’s Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty.” New York. Page 2. www.unifem.org.

Trekking distances to access water or sanitation places women in danger of being victims of physical violence. Women also suffer structural or indirect violence when unjust political and economic factors result in reduced quality of life or life expectancy through lack of access to basic needs, particularly water.

UNIFEM. “Promoting and Protecting Women’s Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty.” New York. Page 2. www.unifem.org.

Uruguay: Privatization With Protest

In the region of Maldonado, water service was not considered a problem until it was privatized in a process that faced popular resistance, lacked any formal public consultation, and was supported only by the hotel industry, large landowners and big government. When water and municipal authorities made the decision to privatize, they followed a policy shaped by agreements with international financial institutions, such as the IMF.

Two companies took part in the privatization: Uragua, a subsidiary of the Spanish company Aguas de Bilbao, in the city of Maldonado, and Aguas de la Costa, a subsidiary of the multinational Suez, in the beach area along the Atlantic coast. Reactions to the privatization have differed.

In the more prosperous beach zone, complaints have centered on the quality and price of the water. The motto is: “Water Yes, Robbery No!”

Rather than protesting the loss of the standpipes, residents decided to excavate

their own artesian wells. This entails some degree of insecurity, since the legalities of “self-supply” are unclear. Others chose to develop a system of rainwater harvesting, with women primarily responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of the rainwater tanks. Women in general have led these initiatives, and have taken charge when supplies fall short and must be brought in from other places.

In the poorer areas of Maldonado, neighborhood organizations have fought to defend community standpipes. The standpipes were installed in different zones around the country by the public water and sanitation ministry to assure that potable water was available in areas that lacked piped services to households. The cost was assumed by the municipalities. When the private companies stepped in, their first move was to eliminate the standpipes, a strategy designed to make people pay high fees for a household connection. Citizens unable to pay would lose access to water.

The neighborhood commission of the

district of San Antonio, which is primarily run by women and has provided nearly 10 years of valuable community work, successfully lobbied the local authorities to maintain the community tap. Now the standpipe in the neighborhood not only supplies water to families there, but also to neighbors from other districts where standpipes have been removed or household water connections cut off due to the inability to pay the high water rates. A lack of resources, however, means the quality of the service has been very low.

Maldonado’s experiences illustrate the importance of incorporating the needs of people most directly affected by water management changes before planning privatization. Water management policies must address the issue of ensuring equal access as well as sustainable use of this resource.

—Juan Berhau, *Dirigentes de la Federación de Funcionarios de las Obras Sanitarias del Estado (FFOSE), and Carlos Santos, Friends of the Earth Uruguay (REDES)*

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POLICY PUTS PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE

In the past two decades, many areas of decision-making have moved from the national to the global level. Privatization of services and natural resources is often demanded by the World Bank, IMF, WTO, and regional banks and trade agreements. These policies are being carried out in nations around the world based on lop-sided conditionalities that give precedence to private profit, often at the expense of people's needs, environmental sustainability and democratic governance.

[The international financial institutions] and the WTO share a common framework and a common approach to global economic governance. The dominant characteristics of this framework are: liberalization and deregulation of domestic markets; privatization and commercialization of all spheres of human activities and the bringing of these activities under the control of the private sector, preferably foreign capital, in developing countries; [a] limited non economic management role for government; [and the] free and unregulated flow of goods, services and capital across national borders.

Williams, Mariama. "IMF-World Bank-WTO Coherence: the Implications for Water Privatization." Presentation for GERA/TWN Public Forum. Accra, Ghana. November 27, 2002. Page 2-3. www.genderandtrade.net/WTO/Coherence_Williams.pdf.

In general, the privatization initiatives are the legacy of the structural adjustment policies adopted and implemented by the government under the aegis of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege." Integrated Social and Development Centre. Accra, Ghana. Page 2. www.isodec.org.gh.

The Dublin Principles, generated at the 1992 Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment, recognize that fresh water is a finite and valuable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment. But they also declare that water has an economic value in all its competing uses, and should therefore be recognized as an economic good.

Shrybman, Steven. "Thirst for Control: New Rules in the Global Water Grab." Council of Canadians. January 2002. Page 26. www.canadians.org.

Governments will sell off their rights to this valuable commodity for cheap; for reduced debt payments; for the promise of market access; and for tied aid. And ultimately, in the future citizens will have to purchase water at a heavy price, if they can, from TNCs and the North if we allow this process to continue.

Williams, Mariama. "IMF-World Bank-WTO Coherence: The Implications for Water Privatisation." Presentation for GERA/TWN Public Forum. Accra, Ghana. November 27, 2002. Page 2. www.genderandtrade.net/WTO/Coherence_Williams.pdf.

Non-compliance with conditions in IMF loans can influence not only the flows of IMF lending, but the IMF's "seal of approval" which regulates access to multilateral credit, bilateral

"As the primary collectors of water throughout the world, women must be recognized as major stakeholders in the decision-making process."

Philippines: Advocating for Water Over National Debt

Water access for the people of Zaragosa Island depends on the ebb of the tide. At high tide, when the crossing to the mainland is deep enough, a group of mostly women and children paddle their small boats to a single communal faucet provided by the municipal government. They collect water in plastic containers, bathe and do laundry. Many spend two hours per day paddling back and forth, on top of considerable time waiting for their turn at the tap.

There are nine communal faucets on the

island itself, that give five hours of water service to 264 households.

Given this condition, 30 households are clustered to one communal faucet averaging 10 minutes of water collection time per household only. This is why the people still prefer to paddle to the mainland to get their share of water.

Scenes like this repeat themselves across the Philippines, which is why the recently concluded National Rural Women's Congress, attended by 280 participants from rural women's organizations, called for increased access to water services as a human right. It asked the government to

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prioritize public spending on basic social services over national debt appropriation, which consumes 48 percent of the national budget.

The Rural Women's Congress also advocated the active participation of women in water supply development projects—most do not recognize them as stakeholders. Yet women are the primary collectors of water. Increasing their participation, with appropriate capability building, is one way to ensure that projects take root and last over the long term.

—Agnes Balota,

Tambuyog Development Center

credit and aid, and private sector investment flows. Eager, and sometimes desperate for external loans, developing country governments often adopt IMF and World Bank policy prescriptions in secret negotiations behind closed doors without the knowledge or consent of citizens.

Grusky, Sara. "Profit Streams: The World Bank and Greedy Global Water Companies." Public Citizen. September 2002. Page 11. www.citizen.org/documents/ProfitStreams-World%20Bank.pdf.

Many World Bank loans require governments to replace public funding of the water utility with a policy promoting full cost recovery. Full cost recovery refers to collecting fees from the consumer for the full cost of the operation and maintenance of the water utility service. ... In 2001, World Bank water and sanitation loans with increased cost recovery measures made up more than 80% of the approved loans. In contrast, it is important to note that public funding of water and sanitation services is standard practice in the United States. ...Public funding, not full cost recovery, will ensure universal access to potable water.

Grusky, Sara. "Profit Streams: The World Bank and Greedy Global Water Companies." Public Citizen. September 2002. Pages 6, 8. www.citizen.org/documents/ProfitStreams-World%20Bank.pdf.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation calls on governments to: "Mobilize international and domestic financial resources at all levels, transfer technology, promote best practice and support capacity-building for water and sanitation infrastructure and services development, ensuring that such infrastructure and services meet the needs of the poor and are gender-sensitive."

WEDO Gender Analysis of the WSSD Plan of Implementation. WEDO. New York. September 2002. www.wedo.org/sus_dev/analysis2.htm.

The WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) will "lock in" privatization and make it practically irreversible while, at the same time, constraining the capacity of the government to regulate the market in the public interest. The GATS strikes at the heart of democracy in Southern and Northern countries alike.

Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege." Integrated Social and Development Centre. Accra, Ghana. Page 2. www.isodec.org.gh.

Egypt: Poor Quality, Limited Knowledge and Threats to Health

In Cairo and other major cities in Egypt, about 95 percent of residents receive treated drinking water. In rural areas, water runs only 50-70 percent of the time due to failed treatment units and excessive pumping for irrigation. Further, in both rural and urban areas the water is often polluted with agricultural, industrial and domestic waste.

Current government policy discourages water privatization. But on the outskirts of many urban areas, which are not served by the public system, the government has

allowed private distribution. Vendors sell water at prices five to 10 times higher than the government utilities charge, and it is delivered in unhygienic tankers.

Women bear the brunt of the impact of the shortfalls and poor quality, because they manage most household tasks that require water, from cooking to cleaning. The burden also extends to healthcare. Due to the poor water quality, bacterial, viral and parasitic diseases often strike children in rural areas, as well as those who use contaminated canals and drains. Although some health services are available, women

Under the "National Treatment" provisions of NAFTA and GATS, signatory governments who privatize municipal water services will be obliged to permit competitive bids from transnational water-service corporations. Similarly, once a permit is granted to a domestic company to export water for commercial purposes, foreign corporations will have the right to set up operations in the host country.

Barlow, Maude and Clarke, Tony. "Who Owns Water?" The Nation. August 15, 2002. www.thenation.com.

THE DEMOCRACY DEFICIT

Governments are ultimately responsible for the provision of basic human needs. However, decision-making today mainly heeds global market trends and private interests. Shifting responsibility from local governments to foreign investors is problematic, as profits often supercede human needs and rights. Institutions creating and implementing new policies that favor privatization of public services remain largely unaccountable to the people they are supposed to benefit. As water is fundamental to life, water management must be democratic and transparent, and represent the needs of the people—none more important than women, who carry out 80 percent of water-related work throughout the world.

...The global trend towards the privatization of what have traditionally been public services reduces the democratic involvement of both citizens and governments in water management decisions. Unlike government, corporations have minimal disclosure requirements in most countries; as a result, the public's access to information from corporations is restricted.

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and children are usually the last to seek care because they lack transportation. With a 52 percent illiteracy rate, women also tend to be poorly informed about health issues.

In response to widening disparities in both supply and price of water, women's organizations have taken the issue to the highest administrative levels in the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Water Resources and Public Works. However, much more needs to be done to correct the imbalances.

—Samia Galal Saad,
Alexandria University

The public is thus unable to ensure that the resource is potable and that it is being managed in a sustainable, efficient manner. Furthermore, the nature of the water industry is such that only one corporation can be involved in the management of water in a given region. Once a private monopoly is established it is extremely difficult to reverse it. ...The concentration of power in the hands of a single corporation and the inability of governments to reclaim management of water services allow corporations to impose their interests on governments, thus compromising governments' ability to govern based on the interests of the public.

Yaron, Gil. "The Final Frontier: A Working Paper on the Big 10 Global Water Corporations and the Privatization and Corporation of the World's Last Public Resource." Polaris Institute. 2000. Page 3. www.polarisinstitute.org.

Responsible management of the environment by governments through laws and regulations is frequently viewed as a liability that decreases international competitiveness. ...In a globally competitive economic climate, transnational corporations will threaten to withdraw their investment plans in a given country unless the government changes the environmental regulation in question. As a result, many environmental regulations have either been overturned or left unenforced while new ecological safeguards have been prevented from seeing the light of day.

Barlow, Maude and Clarke, Tony. *Blue Gold: the Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*. The New Press. New York. 2002. Page 96.

When governments transfer control over their water system to private companies, the loss of internal skills and expertise may be irreversible, or nearly so. Many contracts are long term—for as much as 10 to 20 years. Management expertise, engineering knowledge, and other assets in the public domain may be lost for good.

Gleick, Peter H. et. al. "The New Economy of Water: The Risks and Benefits of Globalization and Privatization of Fresh Water." Pacific Institute. February 2002. Page 39. www.pacinst.org.

At no time were the options published in any newspaper or publicly debated over the radio or in forums that included persons with diverse viewpoints. The public has never been informed of the terms of the contract bidding process, or the background and qualifications of the companies. The people on whose behalf the contracts are being worked out have been left in the dark. To marginalize local influence, the World Bank funds the office promoting privatization on behalf of the government of Ghana, the Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat (WSRS), which is staffed by individuals who are remunerated at private, not public, sector salary scales. Bilateral donors are also bankrolling the Secretariat.

Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege." Integrated Social and Development Centre. Accra, Ghana. Page 3. www.isodec.org.gh.

South Africa: The Struggle for Water, The Struggle for Life

Orange Farm, a township just 45 kilometers south of Johannesburg, is home to approximately 500,000 people. Begun as an informal settlement in 1987 when people started squatting on vacant farmland due to a housing crisis and political violence, it became a township in 1997, in hopes of improved infrastructure for a population considered the 'poorest of the poor'. Instead, despite the struggles of the people of Orange Farm, the township has inadequate services at high costs. The people continue to fight for decent and affordable housing, clean water and sanitation, and electricity. Women have played a central role in these struggles, particularly over water, where they have demanded access for all.

While people once had communal taps in the streets, most households have paid for taps in their yards. A minority have taps in their homes. Some areas have no regular water supply at all. Here, trucks come with water, that is often unclean. For those with running water, cut-offs occur regularly, and the local council attributes this to non-

payment of bills, suggesting that residents should contact the private water provider. But Johannesburg Water Company (JOWCO) is owned by the council; in 2001, it entered into a water management consortium, with Suez Lyonnaise as a major partner.

In 2002, JOWCO told residents in one Orange Farm extension that it would provide proper sewer and sanitation systems for every household that paid 500 rand, and the company began to install pre-paid water meters. In protest, residents, mainly women, took to the streets. A massive campaign against JOWCO was launched, and the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee was born. Residents gave meaning to the graffiti sprayed all over the area: "Break the metre. Enjoy the water!"

JOWCO retreated only to re-surface in Phiri, Soweto and other parts of Orange Farm in 2003, where women have again prevented the installation of meters. Mainly unemployed, with multiple dependents and reliant upon an ever-diminishing social welfare system, they have formed organizations to advocate that the state provide basic services.

While both men and women in Orange Farm have been adversely affected by the government's embrace of neo-liberalism, women have faced additional problems as traditional household nurturers. This may be why they have adopted some of the most radical tactics in opposing the privatization of natural resources. They fear cholera outbreaks, as happened in

Alexandra and KwaZulu Natal in 2000 and 2001, when higher user fees caused people unable to pay to consume contaminated water. Over 250 died. Women also worry that care of the sick, many of whom have HIV, and the elderly will be compromised, and that their large families will not be able to survive on the free six kiloliters of water provided by JOWCO. What will they do when they have no money to re-fill their cards for water? Children will go dirty and hungry, the sick will deteriorate, employment projects will close and women will not be able to carry out the duties that mean the survival of those they care for.

**FOCUS:
WOMEN IN
ACTION**

—Prishani Naidoo
Research & Education in
Development (RED)

Governments and municipalities usually expect privatizations to benefit their own finances, by using the proceeds of a sale to reduce the debts or deficits of the government itself. But this can conflict with the financial needs of the water service itself, because the price that a company is willing to pay to obtain a concession will depend on the profit stream that the private company can expect, which in turn will be affected by the price it charges to users, and how generous the conditions such as regulation are.

Hall, David. "Water in Private Hands." Public Service International Research Unit (PSIRU). June 2001. Page 10. www.psiru.org.

If a government engages a private water service provider, for example, and then discovers that service is not being provided equally to all, the government must step in—either by further regulating the industry—or by establishing government control over the sector.

UNIFEM. "Promoting and Protecting Women's Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty." New York. Page 6. www.unifem.org.

Attention should be given to ensuring that disadvantaged and marginalized farmers, including women farmers, have equitable access to water and water management systems, including sustainable rain harvesting and irrigation technology. Taking note of the duty in article 1, paragraph 2, of the Covenant, which provides that a people may not "be deprived of its means of subsistence." States parties should ensure that there is adequate access to water for subsistence farming and for securing the livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. E/C.12/2002/11. General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water. November 26, 2002. Page 4.

From a human right perspective, the duty to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to water rests squarely on each State. ...Human rights standards are applicable to governments no matter how they arrange water services. These standards include the requirement that drinking water be available and accessible for all without discrimination—rich and poor, urban and rural, male and female.

UNIFEM. "Promoting and Protecting Women's Right to Water in the Context of Globalization and Feminized Poverty." New York. Page 6. www.unifem.org.

"The global trend towards the privatization of what have traditionally been public services reduces the democratic involvement of both citizens and governments in water management decisions."

United States: Refusing to Back Down

The Detroit Water & Sewerage Department (DSWD) supplies quality drinking water to 4.3 million people in Detroit. During the summer of 2002, while protesting gas and electricity cutoffs in Detroit, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO), an advocacy union for welfare recipients, learned that tens of thousand of residents had been cut off from the basic necessity of water. The MWRO sounded the alarm. In partnership with the Sweetwater Alliance, a coalition dedicated to keeping essential resources out of corporate control, an opposition campaign was started against this human rights violation that harms poor women above all.

The two groups set off on a circuitous

journey through the Detroit water bureaucracy, organizing meetings with the city's water commissioners and powerful city council. Eventually, the council president convened an emergency utility task force to address the cutoffs. The task force included, representation from MWRO, Sweetwater Alliance and other organizations. When the activists met the new chief administrator of DSWD, Victor Mercado, they realized the root of the problem was that Detroit's water system was on a trajectory toward privatization.

Newly arrived from the Thames Water corporation, one of the world's largest private water companies, Mercado had instituted an aggressive policy of debt collection and cutoffs for non-payment, which included cementing shut-off valves to prevent residents from turning their water back on. The goal was to improve the

Detroit water service's revenue stream just enough to place it on the auction block for corporate takeover; in addition to the cutoffs, water rates were increased nine percent in 2002.

In protest, the women at MWRO, Sweetwater and other organizations instituted a campaign of public education, part of which included a series of what were called the "Resurrection Marches" where citizens were invited to join pickets around DSWD and, with their water bills in hand, enter the water department offices with an MWRO or Sweetwater representative to get their water turned back on or to avoid having it turned off at all.

Today, the campaign continues. Many residents are still without water, but the women involved in this struggle refused to back down.

—Maureen D. Taylor,
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

**FOCUS:
WOMEN IN
ACTION**

Making Waves

Women are advocating at the local, national and global levels to demand a human rights approach to water and other common resources that fulfill basic human needs. Water management must become more transparent and accountable, in part through the strengthened participation of civil society. The following section presents some strategies that can be used to advocate for our collective human right to clean, accessible water.

ORGANIZE LOCALLY!

Take action to ensure that control over basic human services stays in our communities:

- ✓ **Network** and build coalitions by joining with others who are organizing around the issues in your community.
- ✓ **Investigate** who owns your water? (see box)
- ✓ **Keep pressure** on local utilities (if publicly owned) to properly maintain and update facilities.
- ✓ **Find** out if there is talk of outsourcing, procuring or contracting out operations, or selling water and water waste systems to private companies.
- ✓ **Oppose** national and state legislation that supports privatization.
- ✓ **Mobilize** for public water systems that promote universal access, gender equality, fair procedures and human rights.
- ✓ **Demand** participatory water management.
- ✓ **Ensure** that local decision-makers, the community and media are aware of positive alternatives to privatization.
- ✓ **Promote** democratic, gender-sensitive, people-centered, sustainable models of water management in your community.

For more info: www.wateractivist.org.

CHALLENGE THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS!

Trade and 'trade-related' policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are giving transnational corporations increasingly greater access to public services. As the WTO, IMF, and World Bank work collectively to further open essential services, including water, to private rule, women are at the forefront of mobilizations against these institutions and their policies.

Stop Trading Away Our Human Right to Water!

The WTO, a proponent of corporate globalization, legally binds member nations to trade liberalization and contributes to systems that elevate short-term private profits over social needs, human rights and environmental security. Water is already part of certain WTO instruments and is being negotiated as a profitable service. It is also included under regional trade agreements such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and is now being considered at the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) talks.

In all of these forums, women are challenging the privatization of water, which threatens, among many things, food security, agricultural livelihood, health, access to public goods and biological diversity.

For more info: the International Gender & Trade Network (www.igtan.org), Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch (www.publiccitizen.org/trade) and Third World Network (www.twinside.org.sg).

The Water Corporations

Three corporations now control 40% of the world's commercial water market:

Veolia: The French company (formerly Vivendi) operates in over 100 countries, with \$14.5 billion in annual water revenues. Subsidiaries include: US Filter, General-des-Eaux, Onyx, First Aqua, Culligan, Sade, Southern Water, Vivendi Energy, Vivendi Environment, and Veolia Environnement.

RWE: The German energy company, which entered the water business in 2002 when it purchased British Thames Water, operates in over 50 countries, with \$2.4 billion in annual water revenues. Subsidiaries include: Thames Water, American Water, Umwelt Aqua, RWE Energy Trading, RWE Gas, RWE-GdE, RWE-DEA, Espana S.A., China Water Company, and PRISEDA.

Suez: The French company operates in over 130 countries, with \$15.2 billion in water revenues annually. Subsidiaries include: Ondeo, Aqua Chem, Degrmont, Nalco, Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, Calgon, Elyo, Trigen Energy, United Water Resources, SITA, Groupe GTM, and Tractabel.

Other major water corporations include: Bechtel, Biwater plc, Bouygues/Saur, U.S. Water, Severn Trent, Anglian Water, and the Kelda Group.

Source: Public Citizen, www.wateractivist.org.

Cancel Debt!

Providing basic human services is increasingly difficult for countries crippled by debt and restricted by World Bank/IMF mandated structural adjustment policies that prioritize loan repayments over social spending. When governments cannot deliver services, the private sector steps in to take over, often undermining government accountability, eroding local democratic institutions, exacerbating existing inequalities and threatening human rights. Debt cancellation is vital to women's struggles for clean water, safe food, shelter, healthcare and education.

For more info: Jubilee South (www.jubileesouth.org) and 50 Years is Enough Network (www.50years.org).

STRENGTHEN THE UNITED NATIONS!

The UN is the principal global forum for an internationally agreed development agenda with a primary focus on people, rights, peace and sustainability. But the steadily encroaching dominance of international economic institutions, corporations and a handful of powerful governments is undermining the UN.

To counter this threat, women's rights and other activists are campaigning to strengthen the UN and are backing structural and institutional changes that will affirm the UN as the primary forum for global governance. The UN has also set up high-level panels to examine various components of institutional reform.

At the same time, women are using existing UN processes to fight for gender equality and human rights, and to protect public goods like water from private plunder.

For more info: Center for UN Reform Education www.unreformcenter.org, Ubuntu www.ubuntu.org, and Global Policy Forum www.globalpolicy.org/reform/index.htm.

Millennium Development Goals

At the 2000 UN Millennium Summit 191 heads of state re-committed their governments to a global development agenda. The resulting eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide numerical, time-bound targets to improve living conditions and remedy global imbalances by 2015. They include Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty, Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, and Goal 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability. One specific target under Goal 7 calls for halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

The MDGs, with their high level of international consensus offer the possibility of addressing some of the world's most urgent development needs. However, women are arguing that none of the goals can be achieved without gender equality.

Globally, gender advocates are already monitoring analyses produced by expert task forces on each goal, including the Water and Sanitation Task Force. National monitoring and advocacy should encourage government ministries to integrate a gender and human rights approach into all discussions, including water. Governments should also move beyond education and health when talking about gender, adopt additional gender-related indicators and collect sex-disaggregated data.

As a further step, activists can monitor national poverty reduction strategies. Mandated by the World Bank in exchange

Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW is a binding UN treaty that mandates equality between women and men. It calls for women to have equal access to natural resources, education, health and employment opportunities. It also defines what constitutes discrimination, sets up an agenda for national action to end it, and explicitly states that each nation has responsibilities to women. As of June 2003, 174 countries had ratified the treaty.

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW allows the CEDAW Committee to receive complaints from groups or individuals about violations by state or non-state actors. An inquiry procedure is triggered when the committee receives reliable information pointing to "grave" or "systematic" violations.

At its biannual meetings to review country reports, required from state parties every four years, the committee has recognized that structural adjustment programs, including privatization, pose serious challenges to women's rights. Activists should pressure the committee to more fully address the impact of privatization. Possible actions include:

- Lobbying the committee to adopt a general recommendation on women's equal access to and control over natural resources so that governments must report on measures to minimize or counter fallout from privatization.
- Sensitizing national women's groups to use the Optional Protocol to challenge privatization.

For more info: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw, or www.iwraw-ap.org/AboutIWRAW-AP.html, global50goingovernment@yahoogroups.com.

for loans, these strategies are closely linked to the MDGs, but they often overlook women and gender.

For more info: www.un.org/millenniumgoals, www.unmillenniumproject.org and www.developmentgoals.org.

Commission on Sustainable Development

The primary global forum where governments make decisions related to water is the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The CSD, which was established at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, now monitors commitments made by governments at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

In 2003, at the first CSD session after the summit, women's rights advocates successfully lobbied governments to adopt gender as a cross-cutting theme for their work over the next decade. Governments also agreed to policy and review sessions every two years, with the first cycle (2004–2005) focusing on water, sanitation and human settlements. At stake is whether governments will take actions that will reflect the gender and poverty dimensions of water and sanitation. So far, the UN, international financial institutions and some governments have emphasized private investment with little mention of human rights—a notion echoed at the Third World Water Forum in March 2003 in Kyoto, Japan.

Women's organizations and others can get involved by

approaching environment and finance ministries to find out about national preparations for regional and global CSD meetings. They can advocate for gender perspectives and human rights in government discussions on water, and share information about local and national problems, how women are affected, and how they are fighting back.

CSD sessions are held in April-May each year. The official CSD website is www.un.org/esa/sustdev/index.html. For updates, join WEDO's Sustainable Development listserv by sending a blank email to WEDOSustDev2002-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Financing for Development

The Financing for Development (FfD) process brings together the world's governments, the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO), global civil society

and the business sector. Collectively, they discuss global economic issues related to trade, development aid, external debt, resource mobilization, and global economic governance and architecture, and advocate for a more democratic, transparent, and accountable approach to economic decision-making.

Although women were disappointed that the outcome of the 2002 FfD Conference—the Monterrey Consensus—contained few commitments and did not take concrete steps towards a new global economic framework, activists and other stakeholders continue to push for a more far-reaching agenda at the annual ECOSOC meeting on FfD and the biannual high-level General Assembly dialogue on FfD.

FfD decisions on global economic policy and governance carry serious implications for the UN's work on protecting natural resources including water, and human rights.

For updates and discussion, join the FfD Women's Caucus listserv by sending a blank e-mail to ffd_wc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The FfD official website is www.un.org/esa/ffd.

Resources

EXTRACTS

The Final Frontier: A Working Paper on the Big 10 Global Water Corporations and the Privatization and Corporation of the World's Last Public Resource. (Polaris Institute)

312 Cooper Street, Ottawa, ON K2P 0G7, Canada. Tel: (613) 237-1717; Email: polarisinstitute@on.aibn.com; Website: www.polarisinstitute.org

Financing Water for the World: An Alternative to Guaranteed Profits Water in Private Hands. (Public Services International Research Unit)

School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences, University of Greenwich, Park Row Greenwich, London SE10 9LS, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 208-331-9933; Email: psiru@gre.ac.uk or psiru@psiru.org; Website: www.psiru.org

From Social Contract to Private Contracts: The Privatization of Health, Education and Basic Infrastructure. (Social Watch)

Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay. Tel: 598-2-419-61-92; E-mail: socwatch@socialwatch.org; Website: www.socwatch.org/uy

Gender and Water Development Report 2003. (Gender and Water Alliance)

c/o IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre PO Box 28692601, CW Delft, The Netherlands. Tel: 31-15-219-2943; E-Mail: suvrat@genderandwateralliance.org; Website: www.genderandwateralliance.org

Human Rights and Gender Inequity in Water Resource Management. (Center for Economic and Social Rights)

162 Montague St., 2nd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201 USA. Tel: (718) 237-9145; E-mail: rights@cesr.org; Website: www.cesr.org

The New Economy of Water: The Risks and Benefits of Globalization and Privatization of Fresh Water. (Pacific Institute)

654 13th Street, Preservation Park, Oakland, CA 94612, USA. Tel: (510) 251-1600; E-mail: pistaff@pacinst.org; Website: www.pacinst.org

Profit Streams: The World Bank and Greedy Global Water Companies. (Public Citizen, Water for All Campaign)

215 Pennsylvania Ave, SE, Washington, D.C. 20003 USA. Tel: (202) 546-4996; E-Mail: cmep@citizen.org; Website: www.wateractivist.org

Promoting & Protecting Women's Right to Water in the Context of Globalization & Feminized Poverty. (UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) -Secretariat)

304 E. 45th Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10017 USA. Tel: (212) 906-6400; E-mail: unifem@undp.org; Website: www.unifem.org

Thirst for Control: New Rules in the Global Water Grab. (Council of Canadians)

502-151 Slater Street, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5H3, Canada. Tel: (613) 233-2773 or (800) 387-7177; E-mail: inquiries@canadians.org; Website: www.canadians.org

Water Privatization from a Gender Perspective. (Heinrich Böll Foundation)

Hackesche Höfe, Rosenthaler Str. 40/41, 10178 Berlin, Germany. Tel: 30 285 34-0; E-mail: info@boell.de; Website: www.boell.de

Water Privatization in Ghana: Women's Rights Under Siege. (Integrated Social and Development Centre)

Accra, Ghana. E-mail: isodec@isodec.org.gh; Website: www.isodec.org.gh Public Citizen

Women and Water Privatization. (Women's Human Rights Net)

96 Spadina Ave., Suite 401, Toronto, ON, M5V 2J6, Canada. Tel: (416) 594-3773; E-Mail: whrnet@awid.org; Website: www.whrnet.org

CASE STUDIES

Alexandria University, PHD Head of Environmental Health Dept., High Institute of Public Health.

165 El Horria Ave., Alexandria Egypt. Fax: 203 429 8379/ 203 428-8436; Website: www.frcu.eun.eg/www/universities/html/alex.html

Dirigentes de la Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado (FFOSE)

Fernandez Crespo 2256, Montevideo, Uruguay. Telefax: 924-4858 or 924-2477

Environment Liaison Centre International

P.O. Box 72461, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-576114, 576154; E-mail: herineo@elci.org; Website: www.elci.org

Friends of the Earth Uruguay

San Jose 1423, 11200 Montevideo, Uruguay. Tel: 598 2 9082730/ 2 9022355; E-mail: redes@redes.org.uy; Website: www.redes.org.uy

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Tambuyog Development Center

Address: 91 V. Luna Rd, Sikatuna Village, Quezon City, Philippines. Tel: 632-928-8289; E-mail: admin@tambuyog.org; Website: www.tambuyog.org

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