

## Gender Forum

### High Level Panel

#### The social equity component of water cooperation

By

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Excellencies;

Dear colleagues and friends

Ladies and gentlemen

I am grateful for the invitation to speak in this panel. I was asked to focus my remarks on the social equity component of water cooperation.

As you know social equity is one of the stated goals of integrated water resources management (IWRM), along with economic efficiency and environmental sustainability. But what does social equity mean in the context of water management? And what are the factors that are need to consider in pursuing this goal?

I would like to stress that social equity in water management is primarily about people, not water. Water may be allocated equitably, distributed equitably, and even accessed equitably, but if people are unable to derive benefits from it, the end result is not social equity. Thus it is not enough to consider only policies and processes within the water sector, but also the combined effect of these with other policies in other sectors and national development and economic policies. Ultimately, social equity should be judged by the final situation of people, and the distribution of the totality of benefits from water, both direct and indirect.

Thus, for me an integrated approach to water resources management is one that considers water management as a means to advance a society's equity goals and not an end in itself. Another important message is that although trade-offs are sometimes required between the goals of social equity and economic efficiency, well-designed policies that look at benefits and costs holistically rather than in piecemeal sectors, can often advance both goals.

These reflections lead me to stress that policy-makers, analysts and you, as stakeholders, should:

- Ensure that the State's legal and macro-economic policy framework promotes the equitable allocation of benefits as well as the control or repayment of costs. This is especially important where water resources development requires large investments
- Set up national and local institutions to ensure the effective participation of all interested groups in water-related decision-making. This will require expert knowledge of both local environments and the people(s) associated with them
- Recognise initial inequality of different social groups, which leads to different levels of benefits and access to benefits, and design programmes to overcome it. In some cases this may mean the application of subsidies on behalf of poorer sectors
- Support negotiation between stakeholders by conducting research and providing data that indicate the impacts of different management alternatives
- Enlist technical support to reduce the productivity gap in weaker sectors, especially agriculture, and to minimise trade-offs between equity and efficiency
- Promote other sector policies, and general economic and social policies, that complement equity-oriented water sector policies.

Let me conclude by saying that human civilization – we know- is a response to challenges. I believe that our civilization can find itself the resources to respond successfully to the many water challenges, and in the process make water a learning ground for building the expanded sense of community and sharing necessary to an increasingly interconnected world.