

“Step It Up for Gender Equality” – The Global Water Partnership Southern Africa Marks International Women’s Day 2017

The gender gap in the water sector is a significant challenge both internationally and regionally as those involved in development strategies tend to have many years of experience, traditionally associated with more established male role players. Bridging this gap is a means of ensuring that both genders, and the youth are part of the process of designing and shaping the future they inherit. Addressing this means providing shared ownership and capacity with respects to the global water challenges.

Drawing on the global theme for this year: ***Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality***, The Global Water Partnership Southern Africa partners reflect on some initiatives in the region that have narrowed the gender gap in the water sector, and provide perspectives aimed at contributing to more effective gender mainstreaming in the water sector.

‘Stepping it Up’- through Capacity Building Programmes



Prof. Theresa Mkandawiri, Associate Professor and Dean of Engineering, University of Malawi Polytechnic

There has been an increase of female intake in water-related programmes. Theresa Mkandawira, Associate Professor and Dean of Engineering at the University of Malawi Polytechnic notes:

“On increasing female intake, I have seen a tremendous increase in our engineering programmes during the past 2 years of up to 40% in degree programmes. This has been as a result of intensive career talk programmes all three regions of the country including rural schools. We have also embarked on a programme (we are writing a proposal now) to mentor or encourage female engineers already in the system so that that they do not quit engineering. The university is also considering incentivising female students with scholarships, as this would go a long way in including more female into our programmes.”

‘Stepping it Up’ – through Gender Disaggregated Water Indicators



Barbara Schreiner, Executive Director, Pegasys (South Africa)

Gender disaggregated data is always a considerable gap in water reports. The collection and production of these types of information is of utmost importance and priority as has been universally agreed in international and national policy circles. Such data can yield gender disaggregated data on topics such as women's water empowerment and participation in water decision making.

Speaking on the occasion of International Women's Day, Barbara Schreiner, Executive Director of Pegasys (South Africa) notes that: *"The water sector needs clear and simple gender indicators, that reflect the benefits accruing to women living in poverty in particular. We need global monitoring and reporting of how women are faring in accessing the benefits of water. And then we need gender-transformative action using water as a catalyst to change the lives of women."*

‘Stepping it Up’- Policy to Practice



Ms Chishala Kapupu, Swaziland Water Youth Forum

Much has been achieved to bridge the gender gap through initiatives set in the context of the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) Gender Strategy (2011), the SADC Treaty of 1992, the SADC Gender Protocol (2008), and the Policy Framework for Gender Equality in the Water Sector, all aimed to provide for the empowerment of women, and to eliminate gender-based discrimination. As an eager youth wanting to make a difference in the water sector, Chishala Kapupu member of the Swaziland Water Youth Forum notes: *"Let us follow up on the commitments to mainstream gender in the sector, the playing field still needs levelling."*



Dr. Joanna Fatch,
Regional Youth Focal Point Person
GWPSA/ WaterAid/ WaterNet Alumni Association
Chairperson

Adding to issues relating to policy and practice, Joanna Fatch, Regional Youth Focal Point Person for GWPSA/ WaterAid notes that:

“One has to acknowledge that we are making progress towards gender equality in the water sector. the WaterNet Master’s programme is an example where more female students are graduating from the programme. However, as graduates are at a higher level, we need to get it right by start with youth programmes. It is highly commendable that Youth programmes have been included as standalone programme in the SADC Regional Strategic Action Plan IV and under the AMCOW youth strategy. However, we have to get beyond words to resourcing these intensions at national and regional level. As a starting point, issues of gender equality have been considered in the setup of the youth Steering Committees by encouraging equal numbers of male and female youth steering committee members. However, we have to get beyond these efforts to actually implementing activities on the ground that encourage equal participation that would promote water as a multidisciplinary career option.”

Gender mainstreaming in the water and sanitation sector has shown tangible results in improving ownership, participation and ultimately efficacy and efficiency. But gender mainstreaming seldom just happens. There needs to be conscious, clearly spelt out policies that are operationalised throughout the project cycle, monitored, evaluated and adjusted to ensure the best results. This requires commitment and resources. It also requires institutional mechanisms, that involve human resource, policy, planning and implementation arms of government; as well as gender structures in related agencies. Increased gender awareness through training is key, as well as developing the necessary skill gap. As can be seen, “Stepping it up” in gender mainstreaming into national strategies, policies and programmes can lead to better outcomes towards achieving gender equality and for achieving water security. This can allow the sector to build on existing efforts, share best practices, and assist in focussing efforts where gaps exist and particular attention is needed.

You too can make a change in reducing the gender gap in the water sector! Join us in commemorating International Women’s Day 2017 and share your thoughts on “Step It up for Gender Equality”

#IWD17; #BEBOLDFORCHANGE; #STEPITUPFORGENDEREQUALITY