



Women: Agents of Change

Boosting social change by kick-starting women leadership

Paper by the Netherlands Council of Women (NVR), umbrella organization of 46 women's NGO's, to the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2010.

In 1995 in Beijing, 198 states declared¹: "We are determined to develop the fullest potential of girls and women of all ages, ensure **their full and equal participation** in building a better world for all and enhance their role in the development process". So why is it, that when women-related issues are addressed, women usually are regarded as either victims or target groups instead of using their potential as agents of change?

“ Be the change that you wish to see in the world. ”

Mahatma Gandhi

This paper explores the subject of **women as agents of change**, both in theory and in practice. It argues a change of perspective on **women leadership** and offers concrete examples of their contributions to a just and sustainable society based on gender equality and shared responsibilities. By offering this food for thought we hope to inspire governments and other sectors in society to facilitate and support the work of women's organizations, to include them as full and equal partner in their activities and programmes and hence use, to full potential, women as agents of change.

¹ Article 34 on page 4 of Annex I of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing, 1995).

Introduction

On the subject of women as agents of change and women leadership

“It is impossible to 'develop' another person from outside. People develop themselves. All that we can do is assist that process.”

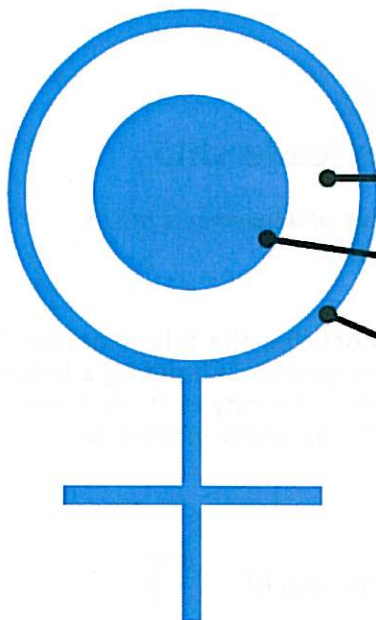
Prince Claus of the Netherlands

Looking at the facts and figures on the status of women, it will not come as a surprise that women all over the world are determined to improve their circumstances. And they are quite capable of doing so. Women are agents of change, but they do not operate on a stand-alone basis. Women act out their role as **Major Group** in society, on different levels and in different spheres of life, in conjunction with other Major Groups, shaping their environments and the future of their communities.

The realisation of gender equality is a process of social change. Creating an enabling environment for this process is key and involves **concerted action** of all sectors in society including the full and equal participation of the Major Group Women.

Facts & figures

Of the 1.3 billion people worldwide that live in profound poverty, about 70% are women. Of all the hours worked, women work two thirds. In rural areas, 60 to 80% of crops are produced by women. And yet, women earn only 10% of the global income and possess only 2% of the ownership rights.²



Women: Agents of Change

but they do not operate on a 'stand-alone' basis

Society, people that can and do make a difference in all of our private and professional lives

Women, core of society, focal point of women-related issues, not (merely) victims or target groups but **agents of change**

Government, protector of a just society and democratic values, champion and facilitator of **women leadership**

NVR-model on women leadership, developed for the CSW 54-paper 'Women: Agents of Change'.

Beijing Platform for Action

The Beijing Platform for Action acknowledges the non-governmental sector - particularly women's organizations and feminist groups - as a **driving force for change**³. However, it mostly pictures women as a target group, not as an important actor in their own right. Of the 625 actions enshrined in the Beijing PfA, only 51 (8%) include some form of involvement of women's organizations as an active contributing party. The vast majority of actions is envisaged to be taken by governments, supported by international organizations and the national machineries for the advancement of women.

² Women & Climate petition: Earthkeeping instead of housekeeping (petition by the Netherlands Women Council (NVR) with respect to COP15).

³ Beijing PfA, article 26

This makes sense if looking at the actions elaborated in the PfA for the achievement of its strategic objectives. These actions concentrate on the development of legal and policy frameworks and on institutional mechanisms and national machineries. Now that this enabling environment is largely in place, we feel that **a shift in attention to the process of realizing gender equality in practice is warranted**. This includes a shift in principal actors that will have to ensure the transition from gender equality principles to the practice of women's full and equal participation in all sectors of society. The women's movement and other civil society organizations play a central role in this process. Only when adequately facilitated by governments and the UN system, their potential can be fully exploited.

Women's social engagement is reflected by the number and the diversity of their organizations. Around the globe, countless women's organizations and networks, large and small, from local to international, demonstrate leadership in their striving for the empowerment and social inclusion of women. They have a unique, **bottom-up approach**, bringing into action their vast networks and providing the means that enable women to change the future of themselves, their families and communities as a whole.

A 'women inclusive' approach is incorporated in the 2007/2008 report of the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs on results in development cooperation. Outcomes of interventions for achieving MDG3 (gender equality) are divided into three categories: institutional, cultural and individual capacities. **Women's organizations**, including those from the Netherlands, are depicted as actors at the various levels.⁴

⁴ http://www.minbuza.nl/en/Key_Topics/Development_Cooperation/Results_in_Development/Results_in_development_2007_2008, figure 3.1 on page 73.

Violence against women

Beijing Platform for Action/Chapter IV. Strategic objectives and actions/Item D

“ Violence against women is blight on society. We must cooperate more to eradicate all forms of gender violence. ”

José Luis Roríguez Zapatero, EU, Presidency, December 2009

Domestic violence statistics are highly distorted since only those cases where domestic violence has escalated are included and moreover, only a small percentage of cases actually gets reported.

The Netherlands government acknowledges that the vast majority of the victims of **domestic violence** are women. In order not to exclude men from the legislation and policies targeting domestic violence, the government has explicitly chosen a gender-neutral formulation of the framework. The main focus however, remains on female victims.

The **registered** incidents of domestic violence in the Netherlands amount to 63.000 reports annually⁵. This does however, not reflect the total scope of all the cases of domestic violence. Because of shame, fear and feelings of guilt only a small proportion of those involved report the violence: an estimated 12% of all domestic violence cases. This means that the number of official reports is merely the tip of the iceberg.

In preparation for Beijing + 15 the EU-Presidency has announced to give **highest priority** to violence against women. As a concrete measure, a European Monitoring Centre for Gender-Based Violence is proposed as well as the adoption of a European Protection Order, which will extend the security measures adopted by a judicial body in one member state to all of the Union's territory.

Such measures pertain to the institutional framework. To effectively break the circle of violence against women however, equal emphasis is needed on **preventive measures**, tailor made approaches and local ownership involving different major groups in society. This should include women's organizations at all levels to raise awareness and empower women to take affirmative action against violence in their own living environment.

Since September 2007, inhabitants of the Malburgen-district who are confronted with domestic violence can turn to **confidential agents**. The agents, who live within the district themselves, may be addressed by victims, witnesses and perpetrators alike. The confidential agents are trained volunteers of all different cultures and backgrounds. The project bridges the gap between hidden domestic violence and the professional aid circuit.

Facts & figures

By 2006⁶, 89 States had some form of legislative prohibition on domestic violence, including 60 States with specific domestic violence laws, and a growing number of countries had instituted national plans of action to end violence against women. This is a clear increase in comparison to 2003, when UNIFEM did a scan of anti-violence legislation and found that only 45 countries had specific laws on domestic violence.

The Council of Europe is currently developing a Convention on the elimination of violence against women covering all aspects of violence against women, including domestic violence. Dutch women's organizations lobby for inclusion of women as actors in their own right, in particular in relation to prevention.

⁵ Met de deur in huis.Beke Consultancy and Research Group, Arnhem/Dordrecht, September 2007.

⁶ According to the Secretary-General's In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women.

Good Practice

Speak Openly about Domestic Violence⁷

Combating domestic violence begins at **lifting the taboo** and making women aware of their collective strength to change prevailing malpractice. This project sets out to lift the silence by informing women of various social strata and encouraging them to talk freely about the subject in their own organizations and spheres of life.



The project **encourages women** at large to take an active stand against violence. As a result, women suffering from (the threat of) domestic violence are enabled to talk to other women about their predicament. Women at large take their social responsibility; denounce domestic violence publicly and in their personal spheres and actively report incidents of domestic violence. Women are informed

adequately so they know what their options are. The project currently runs in 4 of the 12 Provinces of The Netherlands and has already resulted in over 30 active women's groups addressing the issue at local level and in their respective social and cultural environmental. Scaling up is envisaged.

Fast forward >>

In The Netherlands, as in many countries, institutional mechanisms are in place and perpetrators are taken legal action against. Reporting of incidents of (domestic) violence increases. The ultimate goal is that the number of incidents decreases. Breaking the vicious circle of domestic violence takes social change. Due attention of policy and decision-makers for **preventive measures** is required. Women and other major groups in society should actively engage in **awareness building and public denouncement**. As the good practise shows, **women and their organizations** play a key role and facilitation of their actions will speed up the process of social change.

Relevant documents

The Beijing Platform for Action⁸ indicates twelve critical areas of concern. Area number 4 concerns: 'Violence against women'.

⁷ Dutch title: Doorbreuk huiselijk geweld

⁸ See http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/peace_security/facts_figures.php

Women and armed conflict

Beijing Platform for Action/Chapter IV. Strategic objectives and actions/Item E

“ Women are not just victims of violence ... they are above all active agents for peace. ”

María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, deputy prime minister Spain/EU-Presidency, 2010

Resolution 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building. It stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. In order for women's organizations to act out their pivotal role, it is necessary to create an **enabling environment** for their action at home and abroad; this includes providing the means to set-up more well-informed strategic networks on Women, Peace and Security.

In the sphere of Women, Peace and Security **grassroots** women and their organizations have a proven record as catalysts of change especially in situations where societal injustices have to be addressed and social stability has to be (re)established. Despite the concrete commitment at UN-level as laid down in Resolution 1325, however, direct support to these women and their networks is minimal and far from structural.

The Netherlands has, in close cooperation with civil society, developed its National Action Plan 1325¹⁰. Women's organizations are included as **actor** in the process of reconciliation and reconstruction as well as peacekeeping and conflict prevention through fostering social cohesion. Concrete actions are elaborated. Without a concrete budget attached however, this promising NAP1325 will be merely an empty shell. Therefore it is strongly recommended to have a substantial budget for implementation including adequate financing of the work of the women's organizations.

Afghan women in the Netherlands capacity build 'Uruzgan mission'

In order to contribute to post-war reconstruction of their countries, Afghan women in the Netherlands and Dutch women organizations working in Afghanistan have entered in a **constructive dialogue** with members from the Dutch peace mission to Uruzgan in 2007. The purpose was to acquaint the 'Uruzgan mission' with the views and perspectives of the women themselves with regards to peace and post-war reconstruction and to **sensitize** them on the gender practice in the given socio-cultural context.

In resolution 1325 governments commit to supporting women's efforts on achieving security and social justice and maintaining peace. At EU level, this commitment was re-confirmed during the EU/NATO high-level event on Women, Peace and Security (January 27, 2010 in Brussels). "There won't be peace or security without the involvement of women", who "are usually **on the front line** in the battle for life, security and peace", and "we must make a commitment" in order to ensure that women truly participate", said María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, first Deputy Prime-Minister of Spain.

Facts & figures

No women have been appointed Chief or Lead peace mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks, but in some talks sponsored by the AU or other institutions women have joined a team of mediators. A recent positive case is the role of Graça Machel as one of the three mediators for the Kenya crisis in 2008.⁹

⁹ See http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/peace_security/facts_figures.php

¹⁰ Dutch National Action Plan 2008-2011 on Resolution 1325. Taking a stand for women, peace and security. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 2007

Good Practices

Women Create Alternatives for Armed Conflict (WCA 1325)¹³

During the Beijing + 10 review in 2005 women peace organizations from the Netherlands concluded that, notwithstanding the progress made on legal, policy and institutional frameworks, the situation for women on the ground had not changed for the better. They joined forces in the Platform for Sustainable Peace and sparked off **strategic networks** on Women, Peace and Security with women's organizations from various (post)conflict zones.



These networks create an enabling environment in which **women from conflict areas** exchange ideas, share views and practices and, in conjunction with their Dutch counterparts, build their capacity and strength. In 2008, the Netherlands Council of Women (NVR) and the Platform Women for Sustainable Peace invited 26 women from Kashmir, Sudan, Great Lakes district, Balkan, Palestine and Afghanistan for a working visit. The result is a realistic, feasible and specific cooperation programme for the coming years, a network and strong support for women in conflict areas from The Netherlands.



Women stakeholders for peace and security in the Afghan conflict zone

At the initiative of Gender Concerns International (GCI) a regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform was established by **women leaders** from Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Kabul in July 2009. This platform has meanwhile developed a concise programme of work to promote peace and security in the region emphasizing the need for trans-boundary cooperation, incorporating a gender perspective and fostering women's participation in decision-making and in building security and social stability. The women from Afghanistan and neighbouring countries are closely following and feeding into the political process for peace and security in the Afghan conflict zone. The process has brought women out of local solitary confinement into the international support arena. Through **building alliances** with regional and national women's organization women they have achieved visibility and support for their local action



The Liberian Women's Initiative, Liberia

During the civil war in Liberia, 500 women from all over Liberia – in despair because of the continuous battle and thousands of victims – got together after an appeal on the radio. Together they formed the Liberian Women's Initiative. For some years they continuously demonstrated against the war and supported the lingering peace negotiations by their presence in all weather conditions. Eventually they forced the parties into a **peace accord**.

Relevant documents

Beijing Platform for Action, article 134: In a world of continuing instability and violence, the implementation of cooperative approaches to peace and security is urgently needed. The equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

The adoption in the year 2000 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women peace and security is a major success of the international women's movement and its partners striving for the acknowledgement of the disproportionate effects of war and armed conflicts on women and stresses the importance of women's contribution to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

"Innovating Europe" is the title of the Programme for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 1 January - 30 June 2010¹¹

Women have a legal right to be protected from sexual violence, even in the midst of war, and victims have a right to reparations. Amnesty to sexual violence as an international crime (Art. 7 CEDAW; Rome Statute 8(2)(b)(xxii)) is counter international law.¹²

¹¹ See M-53147-2009, to be found at www.eu2010.es.

¹² See http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/peace_security/facts_figures.php

¹³ Dutch title: Vrouwen creëren alternatieven voor geweld / VCA 1325 (www.nederlandsevrouwenraad.nl)

After this, they continued to organise and thus achieved that after the first free elections after the civil war, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson was elected as President. They brought Resolution 1325 into practice.

“ If we look at the range of interventions necessary to address sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, it becomes clear how pressing is the need for a concerted and integrated approach. ”

UN Under-Secretary General Jean-Marie Guehenno

Fast forward >>

In 2010 it is ten years since the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council. Much progress has been made on the development of (national) action plans and institutional support for women as victims of war and violence. **Women's groups** in (post)conflict zones, supported by women's peace organizations from Western society, are increasingly active and join forces in functional networks to contribute to reconciliation and social stability in their home environments. They gather in regional networks to jointly address trans-boundary issues and to seek active dialogue with policy and decision-makers and other parties active in the peace and security process. It is time to grant them a place AT the table and to **empower them to play an active role** in their societies. The work of women and their organizations should be acknowledged by **allocating a concrete and sufficient budget** for their actions.

Women and the economy

Beijing Platform for Action/Chapter IV. Strategic objectives and actions/Item F

“ Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one. ”

Albert Einstein

The Netherlands are amongst the European countries with the largest pay gaps. The most recent research¹⁵ by the Labour Inspectorate shows that women in the private sector in 2006, on average earned 23% less than men. This figure cannot be explained looking at differences in wages in sectors, part-time employment and the likes only. Judging from European statistics the gap is not being reduced at all despite existing legislation. “The indicators for pay, ... have not shown any significant increase for several years. The **pay gap** has remained steady at 15% since 2003, and has narrowed by only one point since 2000.”¹⁶

On its campaign website for equal pay, the European Commission named a few concrete examples of member states to reduce this deeply rooted, gender-biased injustice.¹⁷ In its latest shadow report¹⁸, the Dutch CEDAW network concludes that the government does not take concrete measures to eliminate discrimination with respect to remuneration, nor to bridge the male-female pay gap.

From Sweden's Beijing +15-report:

In 2006 the former Equal Opportunities Ombudsman was assigned by the Government to increase measures concerning examining and supporting employers work with pay surveys and analyses. Employers, both within the private and the public sector, were examined. As a result, more than 5000 people, 90 per cent of them women, **had their pay revised**.

“**Equality** between men and women is one of our priorities as a country and for the Union. So we will support the formulation of the plan for equal opportunities for men and women for the period 2011-2015, with special emphasis on employment matters”, said Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at the Plenary Session of the Conference with the President of the European Parliament and the Presidents of the European Parliamentary Groups¹⁹.

Facts & figures

According to recent research by the ITUC, the widest paygaps worldwide exist in Brasil (38.5%), Mexico (36.1%), South Africa (33.5%), India (29.4%) and Argentina (29.0%).

The ITUC report states that in the majority of countries, the gender pay gap widens with age and that Trade union membership has a positive influence on wage equality.

From the new Eurostat estimates (based on Structure of Earnings survey), it appears that there are considerable differences between the Member States in this regard, with the pay gap ranging from less than 10% in Italy, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Belgium to more than 20% in Slovakia, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, United Kingdom and Greece and more than 25% in Estonia and Austria.¹⁴

This year, European Equal Pay Day is held at 15 April 2010. This date signifies the point into a year that a woman must work to earn what a man made the previous year. A measurable criterion for gender equality is equal pay for equal work.

¹⁴ For specific figures, see <http://ec.europa.eu/equalpay>

¹⁵ De arbeidsmarktpositie van werknemers in 2006; Een onderzoek naar de verschillen in beloning en mobiliteit tussen groepen werknemers. Arbeidsinspectie, november 2008

¹⁶ See COM(2008) 635 of 3.10.2008: 'better work-life balance: stronger support for reconciling professional, private and family life'.

¹⁷ In 2007, Eurostat adopted a new methodology to calculate the gender pay gap in the EU. It is now an EU harmonised source. It is to be noted that the apparent increase (from 15% in 2004, 2005 and 2006 with the old methodology to 17.4% in 2007 with the new one) does not correspond to a real increase of the indicator and is the result of the change in methodology. It is hard to draw some time comparisons. However, national sources indicate that there is, in most cases, no sign of reduction or even an increase of the indicator. See also European Commission 2009, p. 10 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=687&intPageId=108&langId=en>.

¹⁸ Women's rights: some progress, many gaps. Netwerk VN-Vrouwenverdrag, November 2009, p. 24.

¹⁹ Palacio de El Pardo, 3 December 2009.

Good practice

Equal Pay Day: Red Purse Campaign

Equal Pay Day and the Red Purse Campaign find their origin in the USA, where they were introduced by Business and Professional Women (BPW/USA) in 1988. BPW Germany introduced the Red Purse Campaign to their country. It was highly successful and was up-scaled to be a campaign of the German Women's Council. The German government has (also financially) adopted the Red Purse Campaign and equal pay was an issue in the 2009 elections. The campaign will run for the third time in 2010 and has now spread to other European countries and e.g. Australia as a result of the workshop in New York during the CSW last year. Further information (in German) is available at www.equalpayday.de and (in English) on www.bpw-europe.org.



Fast forward >>

Closure of the pay gap would be a powerful indicator for society's true commitment to gender equality. Equal pay day should become an official indicator and used as a tool to raise awareness and active involvement of key partners. We applaud the German government for adopting the German Equal Pay Day and would like to see other governments as well as women's organizations **taking up the issue** with as much gusto.

At the same time, women's organizations can point out (and organise training sessions) to women to change their 'negotiation skills' when it comes to wages or fees (so not only as an employee). Employers and unions could do their part by transparent evaluations of pay systems, raising awareness and combating stereotypes and reviewing job classifications. Also, governments at all levels could incorporate into their public procurement contracts a labour clause, including the issue of equal pay.

European Parliament resolution of 18 November 2008 with recommendations to the Commission on the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women (2008/2012(INI)):

Calls on the European institutions to **organise a European Equal Pay Day** – the day on which women in Europe have earned (on average) the pay which men earn (on average) in a year – which must contribute to raising awareness about the existing wage gap and encourage all those involved to take additional initiatives to eliminate this gap.

Relevant documents

Critical area of concern number 6 in the Beijing Platform for Action, reads: 'Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources'.

The same documents states as strategic objective F.1.²⁰: 'Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources'.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

European directive 2002 and The European Commission has developed a full website²¹ regarding the existing Gender Pay Gap in the European Union. It includes general information, awareness-raising toolkit, national fact sheets.

Gender (in)equality in the labour market: an overview of global trends and developments. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), March 2009.

²⁰ Beijing Platform for Action 1995, chapter F, Women and the economy, p. 65

²¹ See <http://ec.europa.eu/equalpay>

Women in power and decision-making

Beijing Platform for Action/Chapter IV. Strategic objectives and actions/Item G

“ If we can get to at least 30% women as partners at the power tables, we have a chance to change the world. ”

Honorary Linda Tarr-Whelan

Changing what gets decided takes changing who makes the decisions. The critical issue, emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action²⁵, is the gap between the de jure and de facto, or the right as against the reality of women's participation in politics and public life generally. Research demonstrates that if women's participation reaches 30 to 35 per cent (generally termed a "**critical mass**"), there is a real impact on political style and the content of decisions, and political life is revitalized. Women move from a 'Token' position to being an influencing minority²⁶.

The Netherlands Beijing +15-report reads: 'Although the participation of women in Dutch Parliament is rather satisfying (around 40% in the Lower House and 35% in the Upper House), in all other areas, public and private, the **participation is very low.**' 'Especially in municipal councils, often considered a stepping-stone to higher political posts, male members still outnumber their female colleagues by far (on average 74% versus 26%).'

Another quote from the Beijing +15-report: 'The Government wants to be an exemplary employer. In governmental Advisory Bodies it is now compulsory to ensure a **proportional representation** of men and women. Any new appointment must respect this principle. The objective for the central government is to achieve that at least 25% of the senior civil service positions in 2011 consist of women. In order to reach that goal in 2011 the Dutch government is using a range of tools such as networks, deployment of recruitment agencies and an action programme to interest, develop and commit female candidates.'

If research indicates that, to influence decision-making and bring about change, a critical mass of **30 per cent** is required, the above mentioned 25 per cent goal is still inadequate. Furthermore, to yield lasting results, government target setting needs to be paralleled by affirmative action of women themselves claiming their rightful places at the power tables.

As from 2010, the Netherlands Council of Women (NVR) has been included in the national machinery for gender equality. The NVR receives financial contribution for its core activities to support the active involvement of women and their organizations in developing society. This **acknowledgement and support of the role of women as agents of change** is envisaged to positively impact on the other Beijing PfA critical areas of concern.

Facts & figures

As of 2008, 18.4% of national parliamentarians are female (as opposed to 11.6% in 1995), and 17 heads of state or government worldwide are women.²²

Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide since the election in September 2008 (56 percent of seats).²³

A 30 percent minimum for women in representative assemblies was set as a target at the Beijing conference in 1995, while the parity zone is considered between 40-60 percent.

The concept of the 30% solution has already been adopted in 23 countries, which meet or exceed the goal. In 101 other countries, there have been changes to the constitutions, laws and/or political party practices to try and aim for 30% (or more) women in the decision making bodies.²⁴

The concept of a critical mass is borrowed from nuclear physics, where it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction.

In 2009 the Dutch government sent legislation to Parliament, setting a quota of 30% for men and women in supervisory boards.

²² Chapter 2 of UNIFEM's 'Who Answers to Women?', progress of the world's women 2008/2009.

²³ Chapter 2 of UNIFEM's 'Who Answers to Women?', progress of the world's women 2008/2009.

²⁴ Linda Tarr-Whelan (2009). *Women Lead the Way: Your Guide to Stepping Up to Leadership and Changing the World*.

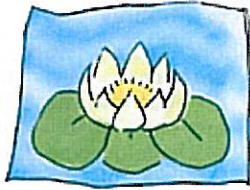
²⁵ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

²⁶ Kanter, R. M. 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Good Practice

Water Boards need Women campaign²⁷

Participation of women on the regional water boards in The Netherlands is way too low. In the census of 2006, only 12% of water board administrators were women. The water boards (waterschappen, in Dutch) are responsible for the essential aspects of water management in The Netherlands. The campaign, initiated by the Netherlands Council of Women in cooperation with the



female water board administrators network²⁸ and supported by the Dutch government, sought to feminise the water boards by **realising a critical mass of 30% women**. Although this percentage has not yet been reached, the progression is positive: 24% women and 17 of the 137 women holding high office.

The campaign ran in 2008-2009 and will, in some form, run again for the 2012 water board elections. Meanwhile the consortium will concentrate on **consolidating the results** and keeping the women in office, in cooperation with the Union of Waterboards. The campaign consisted of informing women about water boards and their administrators, actively canvassing women for office, mentoring and training them (e.g. how to campaign and how to network) and stimulating women to vote for female candidates, through a communication campaign, interactive events and lobby.

From the website on 'Talent to the Top', www.talentnaardetop.nl:

Talent to the Top was set up in May 2007 to stimulate government, corporate business and women themselves to introduce more female talent at the top. On the 30th of October 2007, in the presence of the Prime Minister and other members of the government, a number of proposals were presented to engage and nurture female talent. The Charter Talent to the Top and supplementary plans are intended to increase the number of **women in (the run-up to) top positions**. Considering the sharp rise in the aging population, the shortage in the labor market, and the need for The Netherlands to distinguish itself in the area of innovation, Talent to the Top is convinced that the use of female talent is essential for the future of Netherlands Inc.

Fast forward >>

Active campaigning combined with support for the women standing for election leads to more women standing for election AND staying in the function. Given the critical mass of 30% that is needed to influence the 'dominant' culture, **quota** should be set at 30% minimum.

Relevant documents

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, (sections G and H) commits governments to enhance the position and numbers of women in power and decision-making and to institute mechanisms for the advancement of women.

Critical area of concern number 7 in the Beijing Platform for Action, reads: 'Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels'.

Goal 3 of the Millenium Development Goals, reads: 'Promote gender equality and empower women'.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

On 14 September 2009, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted the resolution on System-Wide Coherence, which will lead to the creation of a strong unified women's rights and gender equality entity led by an Under Secretary General.

²⁷ Dutch title: Water zoekt vrouw (www.nederlandsevrrouwenraad.nl)

²⁸ The network is named waterlelie, meaning 'water lily' (www.waterlelienetwerk.nl)

Women and the environment

Beijing Platform for Action/Chapter IV. Strategic objectives and actions/Item K

“ Filthy water cannot be washed. ”

African proverb

With respect to Women and the Environment, the full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels and women leadership in the development and implementation of concrete programmes and projects are quite advanced. In 1992, three years prior to the Beijing Platform for Action, the member states of the UN adopted a comprehensive framework for concerted action: **Agenda 21**.

Agenda 21 introduces a Major Group approach to sustainable and equitable development. Key is the notion that society is a complex mixture of groupings, each playing a specific and distinguishable role in making our development sustainable and keeping our living environment healthy and safe. The **Major Group Women** is envisaged to have a central and pivotal role in this process. In strengthening the role of the women as a major group (chapter 23) the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy is leading and concrete measures are included to increase the proportion of women in decision-making and to further the empowerment of women's NGOs and women's groups.

In the Netherlands, **women's NGOs** - in particular the umbrella Netherlands Council of Women - have taken an active stand in concretizing the women's role in sustainable development. They have shaped and engendered national action plans, European policies and international agreements and programmes. At national level they have developed and implemented concrete projects on (a.o.) women and health, consumption, women and water and sustainable production.

Women's representative in government delegations

The Dutch government has included a women's representative in its delegation in 2002 to International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico and to the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg. One of the concrete results is the prevention of backtracking on the agreements of Beijing and Cairo, especially safeguarding women's rights to basic health care services (paragraph 54 Jo'burg Pol). Since then there has been an **elected women's representative in all delegations** to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) where the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the outcomes of UNCED, Rio de Janeiro 1992 are elaborated and monitored. The presence of a women representative on the delegation has kept women's and gender perspectives in focus and the specific views of women increasingly appear in negotiated documents. It also leads to more interaction between governments and major group/caucuses. A milestone was the specific mention of women as actors and agents of change in the outcome document of CSD 17.

²⁹ UNDP, 'Water and Human Development Report', 2006.

Facts & figures

Various actors worked to engender the Climate dialogue and the UNFCCC approach and working methodology, notably the Network of the Women Ministers for the Environment and gender CC; women for climate justice. In 2009, UNFCCC agreed to set up a Women and Gender Constituency resulting in the inclusion of some gender sensitive language in core documents already.

Netherlands based Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECEF), founded after UNCED, has contributed significantly to engendering the EU regulation on the protection of human health and the environment from the use of chemicals: REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals).

Since UNCED the Dutch ministry of Environment (VROM) has subsidized the work of the women's major group and included their inputs in their preparatory processes for national policy and action plans.

NL Development Cooperation has in 2007 developed an MDG3 Fund, specifically geared at promoting gender equality and supporting the work of the international women's movement.

If the average distance to the moon is 394,400 km, South African women together walk the equivalent of a trip to the moon and back 16 times a day to supply their households with water.²⁹

Good practices

Ownership in water & sanitation delivery as a tool for women's social empowerment in rural Tanzania

Tegemeo Women Group (TWG) in Tanzania has chosen water & sanitation provisions as an entry point for empowerment. They have successfully forged a dynamic partnership between themselves, the village council, the district authorities and national NGOs such as the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). Adequate water and sanitation provisions are an important goal since they directly improve the livelihoods and well-being of women and their families. The process has given the Tegemeo women status in their communities and helped them to mobilize their organizational and individual strength. **The ultimate impact is that women take development into their own hands.** From developing a water & sanitation project, they are now venturing into village government; they furthermore are addressing the eminent treats of climate change at district level. Further information is available on www.womenforwater.org.



Relevant documents

Critical area of concern number 11 in the Beijing Platform for Action, reads: 'Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment'.

Strategic objective K.1.³⁰ of the Beijing Platform for Action: Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.

The results of the UNCED³¹ included the Rio Declaration³² and Agenda 21³³.

Section III of Agenda 21 is dedicated to strengthening the role of (9) major groups: women; children and youth; indigenous peoples; non-governmental organizations; local authorities; workers; business and industry; farmers; scientists and technologists.

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)

WfWP roots in the Major Group approach of UNCED Agenda 21 (1992) and the Dublin Principles that preceded in the same year, notably Principles 2 and 3 about the participatory approach and the



central role of women in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. With the Millennium approaching, there was no sign of these agreements taking effect; in fact, the World Water Vision for the 21st Century was being developed without incorporating **the voice of the women of the world** at all.

In the context of the 2nd World Water Forum in the Hague, Dutch women took action to **gender and equity mainstream** the Forum through a pre-programme in the Netherlands and massive attention and lobby at WWF2 itself. This in fact, was the beginning of the Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) which to date amounts to 22 women's organizations and networks with subsidiaries in approximately 100 countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the EECCA region and Western Europe.

From its inception in 2002, the WfWP has actively promoted **women leadership** in the water sector and significantly contributed to gender and equity mainstreaming major international water events, notably the World Water Forums. The funding made available by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands since 2005 facilitates **grassroots** member organizations in developing and transition countries to pursue their ambitions by enabling them to build up their organizations, gain timely access to information, obtain access to basic funding and facilities, and hence to take the necessary steps to improve the water and sanitation services in their communities.

The funding has also been critical for obtaining a seat at the table where decisions are made in regard to water resources management. Women are now considered **agents of change** by

³⁰ Beijing Platform for Action 1995, chapter K. Women and the environment, p. 105

³¹ The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 2-14, 1992.

³² The Declaration recognizes that the only way to have long-term social and economic progress is to link it with environmental protection and to establish equitable global partnerships between governments and key actors of civil society and the business sector.

³³ Agenda 21 is the international plan of action to sustainable development. Its 40 chapters are broken up into four sections: social and economic dimensions, conservation and management of resources, strengthening the role of major groups (including women) and means of implementation.

their communities, and in addition to that the contacts with other promoters of women's rights during national lobby and advocacy events have tremendously empowered these women and boosted their drive and concerted actions. The impact of the WfWP approach becomes increasingly visible through initiatives of local women for water groups and their unison in regional and national platforms boosting female leadership and the full and equal participation of women in different spheres of life.

Fast forward >>

Good practices show that **earmarked funds** for women's organizations and their (inter) national networks really make a difference. We feel that they should be a standard instrument of the international cooperation budget, so as to disseminate and promote initiatives which help women to act as agents of change in their communities. A **women-inclusive approach** pertains to all levels and all stages, from the development stage onwards. Last but not least, since it is evident that specific attention to women's and gender perspectives in government deliberations is greatly enhanced by having a **dedicated women's representative** in the delegation, we feel this should be promoted by women's organizations and governments alike.

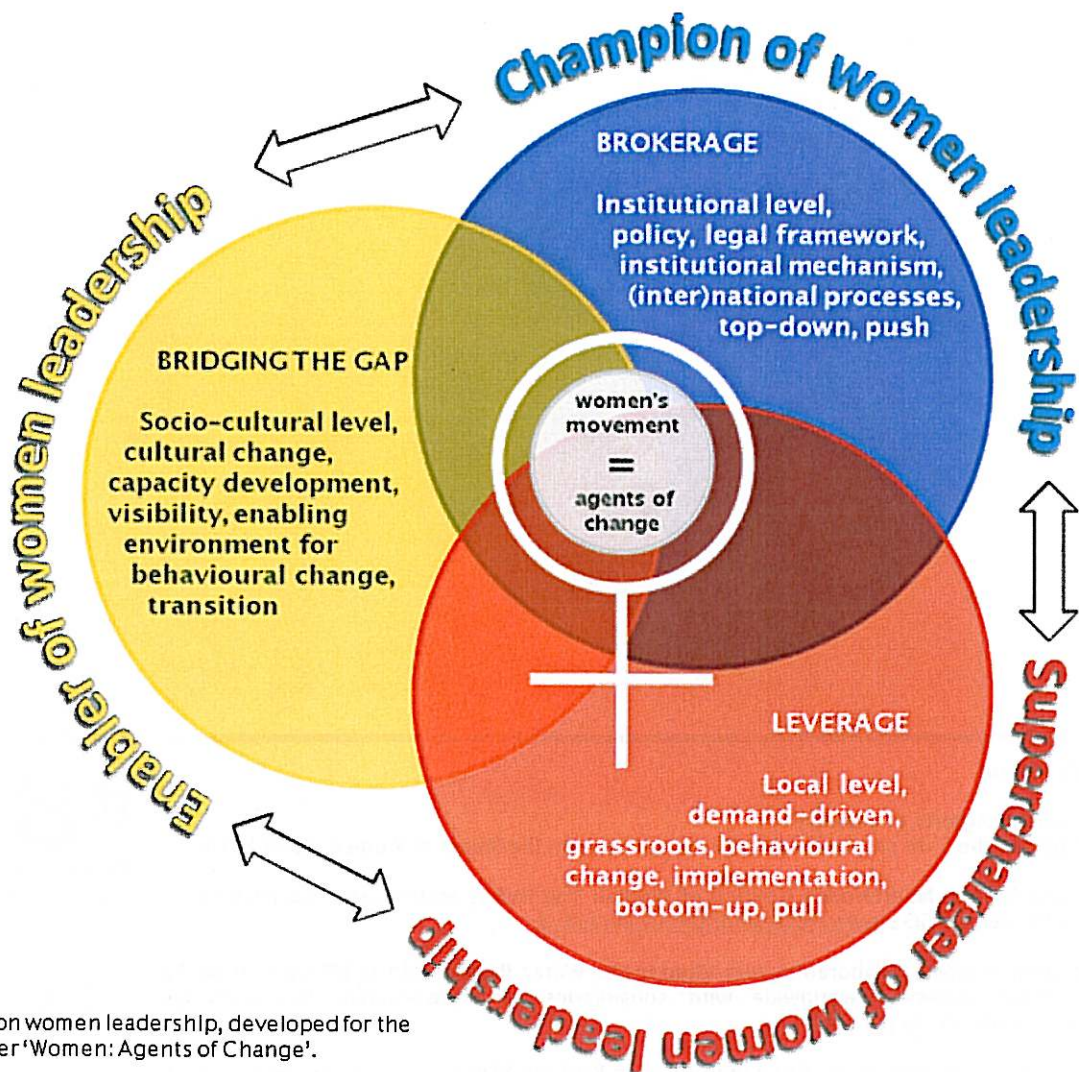
Conclusion

“ We need strong women's movements everywhere. Collective action remains the best means of amplifying women's voice and leverage in public decision-making.”

Anne Marie Goetz, UNIFEM chief advisor for Governance, Peace and Security³⁴

Achieving gender equality proves to be one of the hardest objectives to realize because inequality is deeply rooted in cultures and social structures and socio-cultural taboos and barriers are difficult to break down. **The realisation of gender equality is a process of social change.** Creating an enabling environment for this process is key.

Concerted action of all sectors in society including the Major Group women is needed. The many good practices around the world are testament to women's ability to act as agents of change: they can significantly contribute to make the social transition, the behavioural change a reality. Because of the very nature of its structure, the **global women's movement** can play a central role in bridging the gap between principles and practice³⁵



NVR-model on women leadership, developed for the CSW 54-paper 'Women: Agents of Change'.

³⁴ Interview (February 2010) available on <http://ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=50268>.

³⁵ See 'The clash between principles and practices. How the Women for Water, Water for Women partnership fits into the CSD-12 Agenda' (www.womenforwater.org).

Looking at the main levels of interaction, we conclude that the majority of resources in the past 15 years has gone to the institutional level: to developing legal and policy frameworks, establishing institutional mechanisms, including national machineries for the advancement of women and hence to ensuring that the internationally agreed principles of gender equality are carried through at national level. Now that all this is largely in place, **we feel it is time to switch focus** from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. Women's movements are devoted to improving the situation for women on the ground. Through numerous activities and projects they have moved mountains, often working in splendid isolation and with hardly any (financial) support. Imagine what can be achieved without these limitations...
With political will and promptness of action **you can make it happen!**

We urge you to acknowledge the power that is harboured in women and to **take action** so that their combined force can be unleashed. Women do account for half of the world's population. No country can afford to waste such human capital that is willing and able to share the responsibility for equal and equitable development.

Colophon

Women: Agents of Change

Paper to the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2010

Paper by **The Netherlands Council of Women** The NVR is an umbrella organization of 46 women's NGO's www.nederlandsevrouwenraad.nl

written in close collaboration with **Women for Water Partnership** WfWP consists of 22 women's networks worldwide with subsidiaries in approximately 100 countries www.womenforwater.org

and **Platform Women for Sustainable Peace** Platform VDV has 8 member organizations www.vrouwenenduurzamevrede.nl

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