

Women for Water and the Power of Networking



An introduction to Functional Networking
for partners in sustainable development

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Women for water

'We do not develop people, people develop themselves'

Women for Water (WfW) is a worldwide movement of women's organisations that supports the initiatives of grassroots women to improve the living conditions in their communities.

Women for Water uses local ownership and empowerment as an entry point to sustainable development and poverty eradication. The focus is on water and sanitation.

Women for Water consist of organisations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Eastern Europe and South America. The partnership is recognized by the United Nations. Currently the partnership unites eighteen national and international women's organisations with a rank and file of millions of women worldwide.

Women for Water's unique strength lies in its diversity and its participatory approach, uniting women from all walks of life, at the local, national and international level and positioning them as equal partner.

Daily practice

The improvement of water and sanitation is an important Millennium Development Goal and central when addressing poverty and sustainable development at local level.

Women for Water believes that the vital role of women – although stressed in international agreements and action plans- is not given enough attention in practice. Women should move from target group to partners in their own development.

They are the ones who are confronted with problems concerning water and sanitation on a daily basis. And they have ideas about solutions that are feasible in the local circumstances.

Despite this they are often not involved in the development and implementation of plans. Women for Water fills this gap between the local day-to-day practice in water management and the international agreed principles for sustainable development.

The partnership is the missing link between macro and micro level interventions.

The history

The idea to join the forces of grassroots women's organisation originates from the Second World Water Forum in The Hague in 2000.

At the WSSD in Johannesburg the initiative to set up a world wide partnership for women's organisations within the field of water and sanitation was taken.

At the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto Women for Water was further developed. During the 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development Women for Water was registered as UN type 2 partnership.

Tasks

- To make sure women's organisations are accepted as equal partners in the water and sanitation field.
- To link grass root women's organisations to governments-developmental organisations-entrepreneurs.
- To enable millions of women to interact and exchange knowledge and experiences via its worldwide partner network.
- To facilitate and create grass root development projects based on equity mainstreaming.
- To advocate local ownership and empowerment by women as condition for water and sanitation projects.
- To link existing needs to water and sanitation related MDG's.

Women as partners for sustainable development

Women for Water builds partnerships for sustainable development, with local initiatives of grassroots women groups as a starting point.

Women for Water advocates the specific role of women in community development: in order for projects to take long-term effect, women have to be a partner from the very beginning.

Our own methodology: Functional Networking

WfW recognises that equity and local ownership are key, stimulates and supports local initiatives and uses the strength of networks.

To make this approach optimal and operational Women for Water has asked a professional to further develop the Women for Water Functional Networking methodology.

This methodology is based on its members' long-standing experience of gender sensitive sustainable community development.

Sustainable development requires cooperation between the various ranks and levels in the social hierarchy, and acceptance of the individual responsibility. Functional Networking makes equal cooperation possible from the very beginning.

Functional Networking methodology

Functional Networking is a methodology for partners in sustainable development. Women for Water members use Functional Networking to support grassroots initiatives, and to stimulate partnerships.

Their point of entry is provided by local initiatives in the area of water. Members support local initiatives by building a network that connects all entities involved. This is achieved with the aid of the network analysis method for initiators¹




From thereon, Women for Water aspire to work together with the network to explore the potential of the proposed initiative, and to search for appropriate solutions.

In seeking solutions that respond to the local initiative, Women for Water stimulates partnership development. This starts with the building of a network and is further developed as the possibilities are explored with the network for getting the initiative off the ground.

Once the possibilities have been mapped within the network, Women for Water members observe how water and sanitation issues are dealt with in practice, relying on the strength of the network. Support is given where necessary to stimulate sustainable development. An essential principle is that Women for Water strives to make itself redundant, by eventually transferring the partnership to those immediately involved with local initiatives in the area of sustainable water and sanitation provisions.

¹ Poorthuis, A. (2004) De aandacht voor het netwerk, Kortenhoef
www.netwerkimпульs.nl

Functional Networking distinguishes three levels² of activity. The first level describes the grassroots initiative, analyses the network, and sets up a partnership. The second level creates a network environment for exploring the feasibility of the initiative, making the network a functional instrument, and sharing the partnership. The third level undertakes and guides the practical activity and passes on the partnership. Women for Water always works in partnership, on the assumption that all women are partners. Through Functional Networking WfW supports skills development in initiating, sharing and passing on a partnership in sustainable development.

	level 3	following and leading practices	passing on partnership
	level 2	creating a network environment	sharing partnership
	level 1	analysing the network	initiating partnership

Level 1: Analysing the network

The point of entry is the grassroots initiative. The network of the entities involved is analysed from the perspective of its capability to lend the initiative a basis for sustainable development.

The analysis begins by placing the grassroots initiative at the core of the network. From there, we order all entities involved and place them in a wide circle around the initiative. This will show up a large diversity of ingredients in terms of people, ideas, theme areas, materials, examples or concrete sanitary provisions, water distribution systems, grassroots organisations, money, local leadership, information, knowledge, technology, inquisitiveness, policy, donors, travel, and so on. The last step is analysing the commitment levels. Working out from the core we distinguish various levels of commitment, i.e. partners, links, suppliers, and users. We have now established the connections within the network.

A network is a dynamic organism. The network analysis is a more or less random picture of this living network, where the entities continually regroup, and commitment levels shift. Commitment levels are not bonded to formal positions. Participants can have multiple levels of commitment. Some will become a partner or link in the chain, elsewhere a commitment level may decrease. What matters is to be continually aware of the commitment position of any one acting in the network, at any given time. Actors can be encouraged or challenged to change to another level of commitment within the network.

² Poorthuis, A. (2006) De kracht van netwerkbenadering, Assen www.netwerkimпульs.nl

Level 2: Creating a network environment

The challenge, now, is to get the grassroots initiatives off the ground and make the network functionally effective. This wants an environment where network members can meet, perform case studies, organise projects, and develop partnerships. A home base for the local initiatives and networks, a place that stimulates the courage to make things happen, supports network members in their right to take action, and provides a knowledge base for sustainable development. Women for water facilitates the network environment with *a WfW-Land-Net, a WfW Network Programme, a WfW Regional Working Conference and a WfW Database*.

The WfW-Land-Net

Women for Water introduces the WfW-Land-Net as a national / regional support base for grassroots initiatives in the area of water and sanitation, and a place to work for networks built around grassroots initiatives. The WfW-Land-Net offers the networks a place to meet, undertake research, experiment and work together.

Women for Water members initiate WfW-Land-Nets in their own country or region. Everyone who is involved in water and sanitation issues is a welcome participant.

Depending on the number of initiatives in progress and the scope for networking, a region may have multiple WfW-Land-Nets. Likewise, several WfW-Land-Nets may at some point merge to join forces.

Women for Water Network programme (WfW-NP)

Women for Water applies a WfW Network Programme that supports grassroots initiative networks, and helps develop partnerships. The implementation of this WfW Network program is undertaken by a network team of local initiators and partners. Women for Water members support the programme by supplying a network programme coach, who is at the same time a Functional Networking guide, and who maintains communications with the Women for Water secretariat. Having NP coaches on location allows the WfW secretariat to fulfil most of its tasks from a distance. The NP coaches are the link between the WfW-Land-Net, the network team and the WfW secretariat. The WfW secretariat supports the NP coaches.

The Working Conference

An important meeting point is the Working Conference. Twice a year Women for Water supports the organisation of regional working conferences, in each case organised by a different partner in the world, focusing on grassroots initiatives in a certain region.

The working conference includes interactive work sessions, case studies, network analysis, workshops, excursions to projects, presentations of example projects of other partners, round-table discussions with people in key positions, talks about micro-credits, exhibitions, and so on.

The network analysis and the case study have a special place. The network analysis provides an ongoing picture of the levels of commitment within a particular grassroots initiative. With the case studies, networks are invited to explore particular grassroots initiatives from every angle.

This can involve, for example, a women's organisation, experts in the water sector and development cooperation, local businesses, government agencies, and so on. A large diversity of participants in the case studies is stimulated. Information from the case studies is incorporated in concrete project proposals.

In addition to inviting the regional network, Women for Water members from other countries or regions are invited to share their experiences in a different environment and be inspired.

The experiences, examples and results from the various Women for Water members are also used as input and shared at international water and sanitation meetings like the World Water Fora, the United Nations commission for sustainable development, and so on.

The WfW Database

Finally, the Women for Water database is a valuable instrument for members looking to find and share expertise. Women for Water members can use the database to study grassroots initiatives and projects from all regions, exchange information, and to contribute to projects. The database also provides an inventory of instruments supporting project implementation.

Level 3: Following and leading practices

Working from the strength of a grassroots initiative, with networks and an enabling network environment, are essential preconditions for sustainable development.

Yet it is always a surprise to see how sustainable development takes form in actual practice. In how far is the preparation work retrieved? Where did we connect, and where has it been difficult to get things off the ground? Many developments in a country or region will determine whether or not an initiative has a chance of survival. In some cases it may be necessary to reassess commitment levels through a network analysis, or to create a new network environment to prepare for the practical conditions.

Functional Networking is about the art of following and leading. It is a continual state of curiosity and wonderment in following the process of sustainable development. It is about giving direction with Functional Networking where direction is wanted. And, finally, about letting go were a sufficient level of independence exists in following the path to sustainable development.

Acting in partnership

Through Functional Networking, Women for Water stimulates acting in partnership. This is the challenge for everyone involved in grassroot initiatives. Functional Networking as a method paves the way for acting as partners in sustainable development. With the aid of a common systematics to which all parties subscribe, partners learn to apply, share, examine and pass on sustainable development initiatives, and to aware of their acting and interacting with other ones.

Vital throughout the process is a consistent referencing to the grassroot initiative that is carried by the partnership.

Partnership grows from a commitment to the grassroot initiative, and follows the steps of *functional networking*:

- Building the network: the first step in which we initiate partnership
- Creating an enabling network environment: enabling partnership sharing
- Following and leading practices, in which we pass on partnership to others.

Women for Water specifically relies on the strength of women. Through its member organisations Women for Water creates the conditions enabling women and their organisations to become partners in their own living environments. Ultimately, WfW wants to make itself redundant, by transferring the developed partnerships to those immediately involved.

Women for Water builds on a global team of *Functional Networking Guides* to support members and others on the way to partnership in sustainable development.

Women for Water and the power of networking

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