

...implementar u...
...de una cultura del encuentro en tot...
...derechos universales. La ciencia, la cultura, la...
...contribuir al logro de sociedades más justas, so...
...comprometidas con el cuidado de la casa común.

Francisco

PONENCIAS

SEMINARIO DERECHO HUMANO AL AGUA

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23 al 24 de febrero de 2017
Casina Pio IV | Ciudad del Vaticano



PONENCIAS

SEMINARIO

DERECHO HUMANO AL AGUA

APORTES Y PERSPECTIVAS INTERDISCIPLINARIAS SOBRE
LA CENTRALIDAD DE LAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EN LA
GESTIÓN DE LOS SERVICIOS DE AGUA Y SANEAMIENTO

23 y 24 de febrero de 2017

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CÁTEDRA DEL DIÁLOGO Y
LA CULTURA
DEL
ENCUENTRO





“En realidad, el acceso al agua potable y segura es un derecho humano básico, fundamental y universal, porque determina la sobrevivencia de las personas, y, por lo tanto, es condición para el ejercicio de los demás derechos humanos.”

(Laudato Si', 30)

EJE 1

EDUCACIÓN PARA UNA ECOLOGÍA INTEGRAL: EL DESAFÍO DEL FUTURO



Panel 2

EL LUGAR DE LA EDUCACIÓN Y LA CIENCIA EN LA PRESERVACIÓN DEL DERECHO AL AGUA

THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER, GENDER JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

FARHANA SULTANA¹⁰

ABSTRACT

The 2010 UN resolution on the human right to water urged the global community to accept and implement equitable access to safe clean water for all. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the new development targets for the global community between 2016-2030, articulated the importance of gender rights and access to water. Given both these policy imperatives, countries are faced with normative goals of achieving difficult and complex sets of rights and justices regarding water as well as gender equity. In this context, how policy prescriptions and ambitions can be materialized on the ground require closer attention to the ways that gender-water relations are co-constitutive of broader issues of development and social justice in any context. Water is a gender issue, as women and girls around the world labor to provide clean water for their households and families, and water influences people's subjectivities and aspirations. Given this, greater action is needed to address the socio-ecological issues that affect access to, control over, and rights to water, which have intersectional gendered implications and impact social justice. Implementing the human right to water can help achieve broader issues of gender equity and gender justice, and thereby contribute towards the goals of sustainable development.

THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER, GENDER JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING CONNECTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Water is life, water is the one thing none of us can live without. We all know this intuitively. Yet we are witnessing increasing water crises and water struggles worldwide. This is not equal everywhere, however, as there is a great difference in the history, spatiality, and social difference in who has access and control over what kind of water across the world. Some can take water for granted, while others suffer from the lack of clean safe water daily. Water crises affect communities in many ways and it is imperative to understand the multifaceted

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ways water management can facilitate or hinder well-being, progress, and development anywhere. Water is important for poverty alleviation and sustainable development, and these are common phrases we hear all the time. Water is also essential for the future of all societies, and their ability to flourish as a community as a whole as well as the abilities of individuals in every community to thrive. The lack of water is a major cause of continued suffering, impoverishment, marginalization, and hindered upward mobility. Everything depends on water in the end. The need to view water as a many-splendored thing cannot be overstated. It is urgent and vital that we pay more attention to the different ways that water insecurity affects people. In this regard, the human right to water is basically about water justice in my opinion, and it is our moral and ethical responsibility to ensure that water is available to all. Building awareness and education on these issues can help promote understanding and acceptance of the importance of global water justice.

As we know, the 2010 UN resolution on the human right to water urged the global community to accept and implement equitable access to safe clean water for all. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the new development targets for the global community between 2016-2030, articulated the importance of two interconnected and important SDGs: the connections between gender equity (in SDG5) and access to water (in SDG6). Given both these policy imperatives, countries are faced with normative goals of achieving difficult and complex sets of rights and justices regarding water as well as gender equity. In this context, how policy prescriptions and ambitions can be materialized on the ground require closer attention to the ways that gender-water relations are co-constitutive of broader issues of development and social justice in any context. Given this, greater action is needed to address the socio-ecological issues that affect access to, control over, and rights to water, which have intersectional gendered implications and impact the lived realities of water justice and injustice on the ground. I argue that implementing the human right to water can help achieve broader issues of gender equity and gender justice, and thereby contribute towards the goals of sustainable development and an inclusive vision of the future. Having lived and worked on three continents, I speak from both personal and professional experience.

Water is very much a gender issue as women and girls are burdened with providing water for their families worldwide, as they are often the managers of water in the home, for a multiplicity of purposes such as drinking, cooking, bathing, cleaning, sanitation, livestock and poultry management, kitchen gardening, and small-scale household-based economic activities. In many places, while men are generally engaged with productive water, such as irrigation for farming, women are largely responsible for reproductive water needs, such as domestic water. Ensuring secure access to safe water increases educational, employment, and health opportunities, and reduces gender disparity. Over-exploitation of the environment, ecological degradation, and contamination of water sources affects the poor disproportionately around the world, and among the poor, it impacts women and girls significantly, especially in female headed households. Poor water supplies or lack of access to safe reliable water results in women and girls spending hundreds of hours a week fetching or securing precious water for their homes. For those who may somewhat secure water access, they might not have control over this valuable resource. Insecurity of water affects not only the abilities to carry out tasks and responsibilities, but jeopardizes the wellbeing of the entire household and society at large.

Girls often drop out of school and miss out on educational opportunities when they have to help fetch water for their families. This has significant impact not only on their education but the future of the society as a whole. Women, young and old, lose out on income-generating activities, further opportunities for advancement, tending to other responsibilities, or even resting, when they have to spend hours each day seeking out and procuring water for their

households. The various water crises globally thus have severe gendered ramifications that are inter-generational, limiting the options and opportunities for millions of people across places and age groups.

If we want to advance gender rights and empowerment, ensuring the human right to water for women and girls becomes critical. This means that water must be available in sufficient quantity, quality, safety, affordability, acceptability, and reliability in each context. Reducing the physical, economic, social, and emotional burden of the daily drudgery of fetching or securing domestic water is a way to ensure greater wellbeing and welfare of girls and women around the world, especially in developing countries.

Gendering the human right to water thus means ensuring women and girls, and men and boys, have equal access to realizing their right to water. Failure of governments and relevant institutions to ensure the right to water results in increased burdens for women and girls. The policy discourses that are not implemented conscientiously result in gendered impacts that can have opposite results, thereby linking the state to continued or new gendered sufferings. This connects policy imperatives on the human right to water to formal gender equity policies and goals that are overtly, and often not so overtly, stated in the policy documents of many nation-states. Given the challenges women have historically faced in accessing rights and having voice, it is particularly poignant that gendered equity is ensured in the ways water is managed and governed. Materializing the right to water thus becomes critical in landscapes of both disenfranchisement of populations in accessing water as a group as well as the gendered relations of power and division of labor in patriarchal contexts within these groups. Even in places where the right to water has been officially formalized in policy or law, these rights are not easily actualized for marginalized women, who are technically the right-bearers, due to contextual challenges (such as cultural perceptions, social norms, economic ability and other factors.). Social norms and power relations affect water access and use, and what may appear to be fair on paper may in reality not be so.

Gendered differences in how people relate to water are influenced by predominantly a gendered division of labor in and outside the home, the relationship to water resources based on tasks and responsibilities, valuation of women's and girl's labor and time, and their decision-making powers in general. Similarly, social norms of who does what also places differential burdens of water-related activities across different groupings of people, and the relationship that marginalized groups have to water is often different from those who are less directly affected by or dependent on water on a daily basis. Men and women across social strata prioritize different aspects of water such as quantity, quality, reliability, timing, and cost. For instance, men might want to focus on costs and prices, whereas women often focus on equity of access and improved services, as this reduces their burden. The externalization of costs (that are physical, social, emotional) onto women and girls results in obscuring the true cost of obtaining water beyond its monetary price. This socio-cultural tax transferred to women and girls through the gender division of labor and norms thus doesn't fully address the overall costs of household water security around the world.

In instances where water is not available at all, the double burden of not having access to reliable water, as well as the gendered burden of procuring water for the home from unreliable and insecure sources, means that the right to water for poor women is twice as difficult and often doubly unrealized. Translating the goals of the right to water to meaningful outcomes means addressing contextual socio-ecological relations of power. These issues thus need continual attention, which is often sadly missing. The further marginalization through intersectionalities of disability, race, class, sexuality, religion, or other forms of locally-relevant axes of social difference also must be accounted for in advancing the human right to water.

Gendered inequalities thus operate and manifest across a range of factors, and ignoring these intersectionalities results in failing to work towards gender-sensitive solutions. Policy discourses on commitments to fulfilling state obligations to meeting the right to water often remain largely lip service and mired in a range of conflicts, cross-scalar politics, and water governance challenges in many countries around the world – whether it is for the racialized minority communities in Flint, Michigan, USA or the urban poor living precarious lives in informal settlements in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The differentiated power relations and inequities that exist can further disenfranchise the poorest people through the improper governance of water. Therefore, in advancing water justice that accounts for gender justice, we must pay attention to how water is governed and create meaningful and inclusive participatory and democratic processes to actualize the human right to water. Inadequate access to information and decision-making powers generally leave out the powerless from influencing policies that impact their lives. The social norms and regimes of gender participation and gendered exclusion further discount women's and girls' voices and opinions in planning processes. Thus, making space for meaningful participation, accountability, and inclusivity in mechanisms for water governance that are gender-sensitive are absolutely critical. The continued dispossession that the world's poor face in water governance policy and practice point to the great need to shift planning processes and project implementation towards more equitable systems that focus on social justice more broadly.

All these complexities that I've outlined are vitally important in light of two current trends that are affecting the human right to water right now: first, climate change and second, the increasing commodification of water.

First, climate change makes water more unsecure, with variability in water-related events, such as floods, droughts, and storms and placing greater stress on existing water sources. Climate change will exacerbate existing disparities and create new water crises. This will further worsen gendered inequities in water. Given these growing challenges, we must consider local societal differences and realities more carefully in order to combat climate change's impact on realizing the human right to water in each context.

Second, commodification of water makes water more unaffordable, especially for the world's poor, as water is given a market value with a profit logic, stripping water of all its other values (e.g. spiritual, cultural, social, collectivizing, etc.). This has severe impacts for poor women, especially female headed households, as they are pushed out of the market when they cannot afford to purchase water that is priced to produce a profit. To this end, keeping water as a public good promotes gender justice as the human right to water becomes easier to implement more fairly and equitably.

Considering both these challenges that exist and are becoming more prescient, it becomes even more important to ensure water governance that is attuned to gender justice, inclusive democracy, solidary, social justice more broadly, and sustainable development. Critical effort must be enhanced to keep water in the commons, as a public good, with democratic water governance fostered and supported. Otherwise, any attempts to promote a culture or ethic of water justice will be subverted.

Therefore, supporting endeavors and enhancing global education about all these issues in ensuring the human right to water for all are ethical and moral imperatives for all of us today. Thank you.