Brief on Gender and Water

The use and management of water is affected significantly by gender relations. Inadequate water access and poor water quality affect women's crop and livestock production, increase their work to collect, store, protect, and distribute water, and impact women's health and that of their families.

In regards to water quality, millions of poor are affected every year by all types of water-related diseases. As the traditional water bearers and custodians of family health, women shoulder a huge burden in coping with the lack of basic sanitation services. Women also have less access to the resource, as water projects often favor men's uses of irrigated water. Frequently, planners consider only women's domestic water needs, overlooking farming and commercial uses. Women in developing countries are most often the collectors, users, and managers of water in the household and on the farm. It is estimated that women and girls in low-income countries spend 40 billion hours every day fetching and carrying water that may or may not be clean.

Women have considerable knowledge about water resources, including water quality and reliability, and are key to the success of water resources development and protection. Yet women's knowledge and role in water resource management is still largely unrecognized, and social and economic norms often reinforce unequal participation and decision-making in community organizations. Recently, however, more women are beginning to bring their voices to the water debate. WOCAN aims to support the women's initiatives and coalitions formed to take action on water for the environment, food, sanitation and development. By acknowledging the crucial role that women play in water management, it is possible to understand and create more effective, equitable, and sustainable water policies and programs.

For more information:

• IUCN Fact Sheet on Water:
http://generoyambiente.org/admin/admin_biblioteca/documentos/Water.pdf

• Gender and Water Alliance: www.genderandwater.org