



# Women & Environments

international  
magazine

## Women and Water

**The Anishinabe  
Kweag**

LINDA BRUCE &  
KATE HARRIES

**Skeena Sisters:  
Fighting to Save a  
Sacred River System**

AMANDA FOLLETT

**Women & Water in  
the Age of  
Globalization:  
Protecting Our Most  
Vital Resource**

BAYLY GUSLITS &  
JYOTI PHARTIYAL

**Lest the Creek  
Run Dry**

ANURADHA S. RAO &  
DICKSON YAW AGYEMAN



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DOUBLE ISSUE

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**Mission Statement:**

Women & Environments International is a unique Canadian magazine, which examines women's multiple relations to their environments — natural, built and social — from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. It is published by a volunteer editorial board and contributes to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University and has been previously associated with the Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto.

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To make a donation, please make it out to WEI Magazine, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, HNES Building Room 234, 4700 Keele Street. Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada.



## ON THE COVER

Allan Lissner is an independent photojournalist. Allan's ongoing project, "Someone Else's Treasure" examines the impacts of the mining industry on indigenous communities around the world. Allan has done work with Amnesty International, Oxfam, Make Poverty History, Norwegian Church Aid, the Ontario Council for International Cooperation, and the United Nations Development Program.

In the village of Nyamongo, in Tanzania, the Mwita family lives right next to the Canadian-owned North Mara Gold Mine (the edge of the mine pit can be seen in the top left corner of the image), owned by the world's largest gold mining corporation, Barrick Gold. This water hole was built by the company as part of their 'community development strategy' as a gift to the neighbouring community. The water appears milky and dirty and the plants around the water appear to be dying but the water in the nearby rivers is no better. The family has said that they used to live quite comfortably by farming and raising livestock but that "now there are no pastures because the mine has almost taken the entire whole land and we had never experienced poverty before the mine came." Local residents accuse the company of lying about the benefits they claim to have brought to the local community. "All we want" says Buchard "is for the company to just sit down at the table with us so we can discuss where we can go from here but they never listen to us and they are lying to people in Canada...we know Canada, we know the history of Canada, we know the Canadian people are good people that believe in human rights. But what this Canadian company is doing here is just terrible!"

## Thank You

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## WE Speak

- 4 **A Word from WEI Magazine — Editor's Note**  
Sybila Valdivieso
- 5 **An Introduction — Editorial**  
Genevieve Drouin

## Features

- 6 **The Anishinabe Kweag Were Bound to Protect the Water for Future Generations**  
How a Group of Indigenous Women Galvanized a Decades-old Environmental Battle and Won  
Linda Bruce & Kate Harries
- 10 **Skeena Sisters**  
Fighting to Save a Sacred River System  
Amanda Follett
- 12 **Women & Water in the Age of Globalization**  
Protecting Our Most Vital Resource  
Bayly Guslits & Jyoti Phartiyal
- 16 **Lest the Creek Run Dry**  
Anuradha S. Rao & Dickson Yaw Agyeman

## WE Research

- 20 **Gender and Careers in the Canadian Water Policy Community**  
S. E. Wolfe & Susan Wismer
- 22 **Giving Women a Voice on Water**  
Kelly Haggart
- 24 **Women Working on the Water Front**  
Kelly Haggart — A Sidebar
- 25 **Women's Household Water Management in Mylai Balaji Nagar, Chennai, India**  
Prabha Khosla

## In The Field

- 28 **"The Water Front" Documentary**  
Water Politics From a Feminist Perspective  
Liz Miller

## Poetry

- 5 **Water Gossip**  
Debbie Ouellet
- 15 **Water in my Blood**  
Joanne Streetly
- 19 **The Weight of Water**  
Janke Wielenga
- 31 **Pacific Flow**  
Rita Wong

## WE Resources

- 32 **In Print**
- 34 **Web Resources**

# WE Speak

## Editor's Note

On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly declared, for the first time, that access to clean water and sanitation is a fundamental human right. The historic resolution was put forward by Bolivia and co-sponsored by 35 countries with 122 countries voting in favour and 41 countries abstaining. There were no votes against the resolution.

UNICEF has said that 40% of the world lives without adequate sanitation and that more than one billion people have little or no access to clean drinking water. The ones most affected by this crisis are women because they are the primary caretakers of the home, the ones who search for water, who tend to crops and who raise children. For the same reasons, women also suffer disproportionately from the push to privatise water in developing countries. However, it is important to point out that women have also fought back and in many cases have developed workable public mechanisms for meeting the needs of their communities for clean water and sanitation. Their expertise needs to be considered. This issue of *WEI* provides a link between and insight into gender and this water crisis while reinforcing the concept that any solution to the problem needs to include the participation of all.

*WEI* thanks all the contributors who shared their words, perspectives, art and insight on this issue. We also thank the issue coordinator Genevieve Drouin for her dedication to ensuring this issue was developed. A thank you also goes out to the entire issue team consisting of Sarah Atchison, Sara Burgess, Genevieve Drouin, Sonja Greckol, Karla Orantes, Dayna Scott and Elliot Spears.

*WEI* was started up, and is currently run and managed, by a team of dedicated volunteers with a variety of community and academic experience without whom this publication would not be possible. Having said that, of course content is our top priority. But we cannot deliver the content you want without your feedback! We invite as much feedback as possible. As a result of what we have been hearing back from you, we have made several changes to the *WEI* dynamic. In the upcoming months, we will be updating our website to introduce our online store and we will be updating our back issues information over the next few months, with selected articles from the past 34 years to show you how far we have developed. As 2011 marks the 35th anniversary of *WEI*'s existence, we will also be inviting you to a very big party sometime in 2011. We will keep you posted.

Please note that we are currently working on the following topical issues: women, ageing & poverty and our themes for 2011 will focus on labour and food security. If you wish to apply as a volunteer editor, please email us. What is required? Resonance with *WEI*'s mission and editorial experience.

If you would like to receive an e-mail announcement when a new issue of *WEI* is published, or when a call for submissions goes out, please send us your name and email address.

Finally, we want to extend a special thank you to Karla

## Putting This Issue Together

**Sarah Atchison** has graduate degrees from Northern Ireland in peace and reconciliation studies and human rights law. She worked on the Bloody Sunday Inquiry in Northern Ireland and while at law school was selected for a clerkship with the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories. She has also been the recipient of a Social Justice Fellowship, which allowed her to intern with the World Organization against Torture. Her research interests are in Aboriginal rights, human rights, and women's rights.

**Sara Burgess** holds a BFA in dance and is currently completing her masters in environmental studies at York University. Her interests in feminism and the environment are particularly philosophical and theological, focusing on how we experience our environments. In her daily life, Sara supports local food initiatives and bikes all over Toronto. She is excited to serve on the Editorial Board of *WEI* Magazine.

**Genevieve Drouin** works with Rooftops Canada, a NGO, where she is involved in housing and land rights programming in Africa. Genevieve has worked with the World Food Program in South America, with global and environmental education programs in Canada, and with community-based organizations in Ecuador and Peru. Genevieve holds a MA in international development from Dalhousie University and a Hon BA from Trent University. She has been involved with *WEI* Magazine since 2008.

**Sonja Greckol**'s work has appeared in the *Literary Review of Canada*, *Canadian Literature*, *Dalhousie Review*, *CV2*, *Canadian Women's Studies*, *Fiddlehead* and *Matrix* and her long poem 'Emilie Explains Newton to Voltaire' was shortlisted for the CBC Literary Prize in 2008. She has taught college and university, written a dissertation on order and disorder in jokes, done human rights and gender-based research and organizational consulting, and continues to do local activism while she writes. Her first book of poetry, *Gravity Matters*, was published by Inanna Press in April 2009. She is a member of the Editorial Committee of *Influency Salon* <http://influencysalon.ca/issues>, a new on-line poetry venue.

**Karla Orantes** completed an Honours BA at the University of Toronto in Political Science and Ibero-American Studies. Her area of interest is social development. She has worked in Mexico, Cuba, Belize, and Guatemala on issues of migration, social justice and popular education. She has been involved with *WEI* Magazine since 2005 and was the editor for the magazine's issue on Women and Global Climate Change.

**Dayna Nadine Scott** is cross-appointed between Osgoode Hall Law School and the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. She is currently the co-Director of the National Network on Environments and Women's Health, where she has led an interdisciplinary team of researchers on the project "Women and Water in Canada" ([www.womenandwater.ca](http://www.womenandwater.ca)). Dr. Scott's expertise is in environmental law and policy; gender and environmental health; and the regulation of toxic substances. She is currently partnering with the Health and Environment Committee of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia to host a "Community Forum on Pollution and Action".

**Elliot Spears** currently practises law in Toronto. She served as a junior editor, then senior editor, for her law school's law journal. Elliot is happy to have had the opportunity to edit once again and to learn more about women and water.

Orantes, *WEI*'s Managing Editor for the last two years as she moves on to other feminist adventures and to welcome our new Managing Editor, Sharmila Shewprasad, a long-time friend and supporter of *WEI*.

Thank you everyone for your support to date, and we look forward to sharing our content with you in the future! ❦

**Sybila Valdivieso, Editor**  
[weimag@yorku.ca](mailto:weimag@yorku.ca)

# Editorial

## An Introduction

**Genevieve Drouin, Issue Coordinator**

**T**he UN suggests that each person needs 20-50 litres of safe freshwater a day to ensure their basic needs for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. More than one in six people — 894 million — worldwide do not have access to this amount of safe freshwater. In many communities, especially in the developing world, women and girls are the fetchers and bearers of water. When access is limited, they are often more deeply affected than men. Poor health resulting from inadequate water and sanitation prevents children from going to school and robs adults of earning power. This situation is aggravated for women and girls by the daily chore of collecting water. The vulnerability of women in this situation is clear. Strengthening the role of women in decision making is a key factor in improving women's water rights, as several authors explain in this issue.

In the developed world, where access to clean freshwater does not present the same sort of daily challenge, women are confronted with and respond to water issues in a different way. When this resource is threatened in any way, women have jumped into the struggle, at times literally (as you will read in the article *Skeena Sisters* about one woman's swim to save a watershed), and with an unmatched passion and resilience to protect this vital liquid that sustains them, their families, and future generations.

There are many ways in which safe freshwater is used, abused, conserved, and fought for across the world, but the simple fact is that water connects us like no other resource. It is estimated that by 2025 about two thirds of the world's population will live in areas facing moderate to severe water stress. None of us, men and women alike, are immune. But if women are not working for greater water sustainability, then women's needs are

less likely to be met. It is our responsibility as women of scarce or abundant water means, to ensure that it is managed sustainably by and for women, our families, and our communities.

In our quest to critically examine

women's right and access to, relationship with, and consumption of water across the globe, we hope you will agree that we have collected an excellent set of articles that speak to the topic in an important way. Enjoy the read!✽

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## POEM by Madeleine Natrass

### Water Gossip

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The creek crept  
out of its bed this morning,  
swallowed a wooden bridge  
for breakfast,  
spread itself like butter  
over green fields,  
drowning daisies,  
bending cattails.  
Waters gossiped  
with the neighbours,  
come to get a better look.  
Ripples giggled  
at the sight they made  
standing on the hill,  
bathrobe chatting  
with Sunday best,  
like they'd never seen  
water dance.

**Debbie Ouellet** chairs the Vaughan Poets' Circle. She has been published in numerous poetry journals and magazines. "Water Gossip" was originally published in "The Uncluttered Cluster" in *The Writers Journal* 2003. Her children's book *How Robin Saved Spring* (Henry Holt & Company, NY) was named an Upstander Honor Book in 2009 and Pick of the Month on Amazon.ca.

# Features

## The Anishinabe Kweag Were Bound to Protect the Water for Future Generations

How a Group of Indigenous Women Galvanized a Decades-old Environmental Battle and Won

Linda Bruce & Kate Harries

**S**ite 41: it is a sterile name for a fertile patch of land chosen almost a quarter century ago to be a replacement dump site. But Site 41 became known across Canada and beyond as the location of a significant environmental victory, won at the 11th hour thanks to the determination of a core group of thoughtful women.

It's an unlikely spot for a dump site. It is prime farmland that is a few kilometres from the freshwater beaches of Georgian Bay atop an aquifer that had tested as pure as the cleanest Arctic ice. Site 41 had even been rejected by an environmental review board; a decision that was overturned in 1990 by the Ontario cabinet. The County of Simcoe had disregarded petitions, rallies, lawn sign campaigns and legal challenges. The site was scheduled to begin accepting garbage in the fall of 2009. Most people considered this to be a lost cause. It's a done deal, they said.

On May 8, 2009, everything changed. That's when five women from Beausoleil First Nation — Elizabeth Brass Elson, Alida Elson, Shelley Essauce, Pauline Monague and Vicki Monague — got permission from farmer Art Parnell (a long-time dump opponent) to set up camp in his clover field across from Site 41. They called themselves the Anishinabe Kweag (kweag means women). In a letter to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty

(although this was a Simcoe County project, the province is responsible for environmental approvals) the five served notice that, as Indigenous women, they were there to protect the water for future generations. The unexpected support seemed almost miraculous to the local activists. "This brings tears to my eyes," said Stephen Ogden, an original member of the Why WYE citizens group, who had been fighting Dump Site 41 for 25 years.

But it is not surprising that the final protests over the dump site were led by women. Women around the world often spend much of their day collecting and conserving water, carefully measuring out the precious liquid for drinking, cooking and bathing. In Canada, where most take plentiful clean water for granted, there are many communities, often First Nations, where water is contaminated and cannot be used, or must be boiled before consumption. Women, as the protectors of water, play an intimate role in defending this precious resource. The Aboriginal women who set up camp consciously took

The protest camp: The farmer's field opposite Site 41 was turned into a village of teepees and tarps and tents.

their place in a global quest to protect water.

Across the road, though, the County was intentionally picking up the pace to get the dump opened. A tractor protest was one of the early actions aimed at slowing the process. Around 40 farmers were able to stop work on the dump for the better part of a day, by driving their heavy machinery back and forth along the county road. The protest camp women quietly stood in support of the farmers' demonstration. Later some farmers dropped by the camp to help build a shelter for the campers and for the sacred fire which had been lit, and a collaboration blossomed. From then onwards, firewood, food, batteries, tarps and other needs of the women were met through the generos-



ROBERT PRESTON



KEVIN DESORMEAUX

Arrest at Site 41: Algonquin activist Jen Meunier peacefully resists as she is carried from a Site 41 gate by two police officers.

ity of the community at large. The camp grew beyond its original members to welcome anyone who wanted to come in peace and support the women.

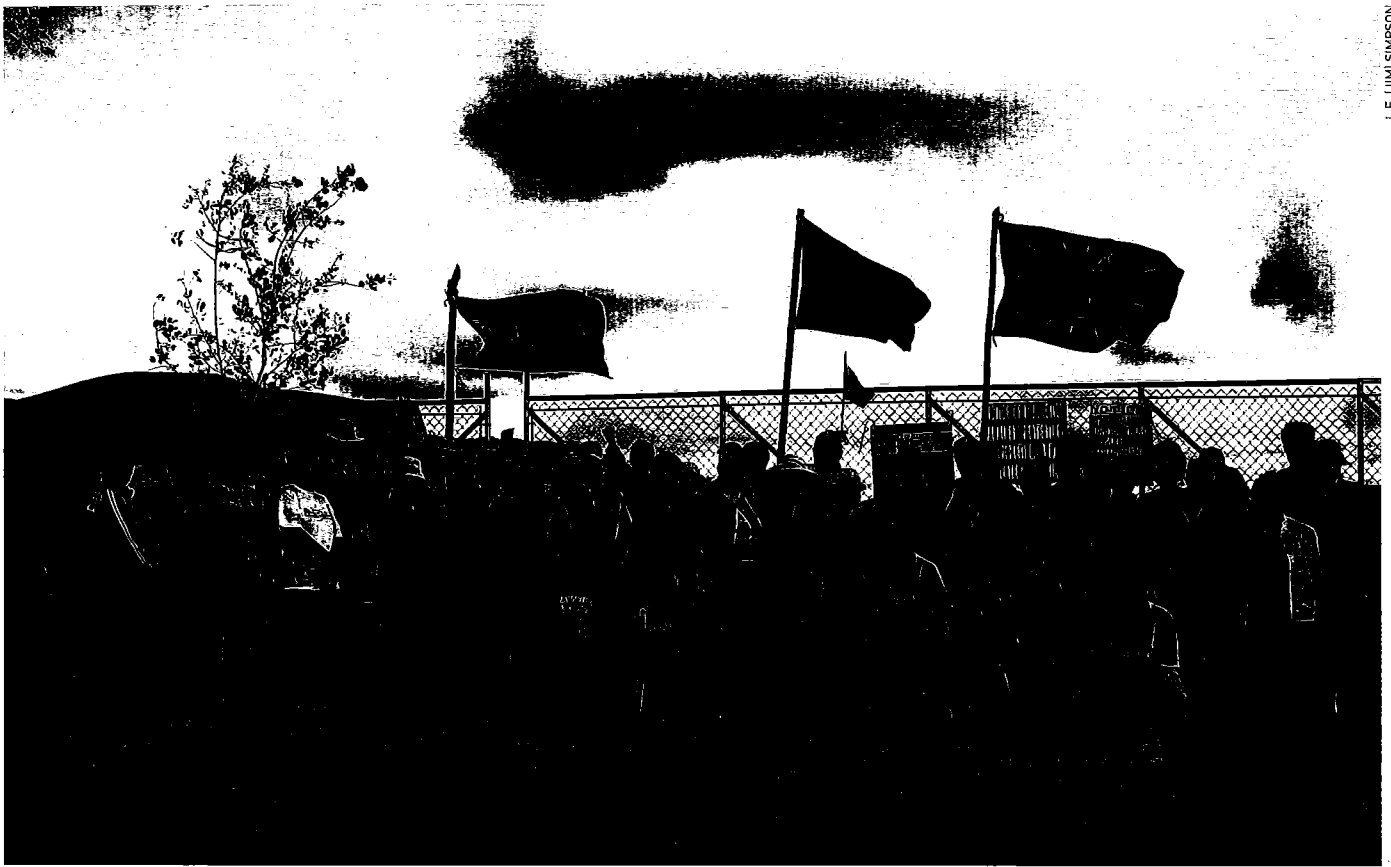
During the 137 days that the peaceful protest camp was in existence, thousands of people were inspired to join in the fight to protect a vital source of clean water in Central Ontario. It was a unique alliance in which First Nations members joined with non-aboriginal people to stand "Shoulder to Shoulder" to protest the dump. In recent times Aboriginal activists have been stereotyped as "warriors," with connotations of violent confrontations between protestors on one side, and local community members and police on the other. The women leaders of this camp decided at the very beginning that this was not to be. Weapons, drugs and alcohol were expressly forbidden. Those who offered to come to show support through force were turned away.

**Quiet determination and unselfish service to others became a hallmark of the camp. Grandmothers and elders provided wisdom and helped keep the focus on protecting the water. Young people brought energy and hope for the future while they camped, sat at the gate blockades and helped keep fire.**

Campers and community protestors worked cooperatively with police to ensure that the camp did not attract those who could not agree to the rules. Even when some protestors were arrested for blockading the gates, respectful, cordial relationships continued. On the day that the County Sherriff arrived to read out the injunction forbidding the blockade of the gates, peace and kindness prevailed. As the Sherriff was reading the restrictions aloud, it was clear his mouth was dry and Shelley Essaunce quickly brought him a refreshing drink of the pure water that the women had pledged to protect. This sim-

ple gesture of kindness defused the tension and was typical of how, on a daily basis, the group was always focused on small steps forward.

The peaceful camp became home to those who travelled from near and far in order to quietly and persistently stand in protest against the dump. The group grew to include farmers, retirees, church groups, families with children, students, cottagers as well as local aboriginal people. Some camped; many others came out every day to join in support of the camp, and a month-long blockade of the gates brought the construction work to a complete halt.



Going to be charged: Ina Wood and her husband Keith (with the cane) sit with a group of supporters at the main Site 41 access gate before heading to the local Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) detachment where they had been ordered to surrender themselves to be charged. A cavalcade of more than 100 vehicles accompanied them, and many more supporters gathered at the OPP station.

Groups such as the Christian Peacemakers Teams and university environmental associations arrived. All were equal, all were respected and all were valued.

Quiet determination and unselfish service to others became a hallmark of the camp. Grandmothers and elders provided wisdom and helped keep the focus on protecting the water. Young people brought energy and hope for the future while they camped, sat at the gate blockades and helped keep fire. The media spotlight fell here and there, picking out a few who became the public symbols of the Site 41 protest. There was Vicki Monague, a vivid personality who always found the right words to fire the enthusiasm of a crowd (there were many rallies, one of which attracted 1,200 supporters) and who was steadfast as the key defendant during a court hearing that resulted in the key decisions being referred back to County council where they belonged.

Algonquin activist Jen Meunier left us with the enduring image of a graceful young woman cradling a sacred eagle feather as police officers breaking up a blockade carried her to a cruiser. There was the composure and good humour of retired farmer Keith Wood and his wife Ina, at 82 and 76 years the oldest protesters to be charged, undaunted in their determination to protect the water. There was the remarkable courage of dairy farmer Anne Ritchie-Nahuis, who elected to stay in jail overnight rather than concede her right to visit the peaceful protest camp. The next morning, a justice of the peace agreed with her argument that police were violating her Charter right to freedom of speech by requiring her to sign an undertaking to stay away. (Eighteen people were charged with mischief in the protest; in December, after an online petition and email campaign, all charges were dropped or stayed.)

A small army of rural women who arrived each day with food was a reminder of the power of community. Another group of women who set up recycling systems and worked in the kitchen turned the camp into a model for zero waste, respectfully refusing bottled water and non-reusable, non-recyclable material. Respect for each other and Mother Earth was etched in the smallest details at camp. Daily prayers were offered for the land and the water, in a multitude of ways. While not a religious camp, spirituality was evident in daily actions.

Residents of the camp extended an open invitation to the community to drop by, share some pure water or a meal. Visitors were warmly greeted by grandmothers and fire keepers, information about the cause was shared and dialogue was open. Weekly pot lucks each Saturday evening attracted scores, and sometimes hundreds of people. Local



ministers came with their congregation members for prayer circles, combined with traditional Anishinabe prayers. Tolerance and acceptance of others became the unexpected lasting byproduct of the common goal to protect the water.

The Site 41 protest attracted national and international attention, both for the cause of protecting the water and Mother Earth, and for the philosophy of peaceful protest and non-violent civil disobedience. Support came from esteemed scientists, environmental groups, even a noted environmental crusader from the US: Ralph Nader dropped by unexpectedly one afternoon, having learned about the protest while vacationing on Georgian Bay. Support and expertise came from the Council of Canadians, headed by Maude Barlow — who was serving as the United Nations advisor on water in 2008-2009. She played a key role in turning the tide on Site 41 by making the links to battles waged by women in the developing world to protect their water from multinational industrial polluters, and by working one-on-one with the Simcoe County politicians whose decision had to be reversed.

Many initially viewed the protest as a token exercise fully expecting that the dump would proceed as planned. The outcome is a testament to the power of a grassroots movement. As anthropologist Margaret Mead noted: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Those who worried about landfills experienced a hands-on course in civics, government, how to navigate media and deal with elected officials. Local council meetings attracted citizens like never before. Determined mothers and grandmothers armed with leaflets fanned out across the county to get the message out, and went from door to door talking to the voters whose politicians supported Dump Site 41.

On September 22, 2009, Simcoe County councillors voted overwhelmingly to cease forever the construction of a dump at Site 41, ending years of protest and reversing the original county approval. The efforts of thousands of people, from the first group of concerned res-

idents, the Why WYE environmental group, those who doggedly wrote endless letters to politicians and newspapers, those who bought and displayed lawn signs and those who attended public meetings and rallies — all contributed to this grassroots victory. But without a doubt, the Aboriginal women's protest group raised the profile of the cause considerably at the most crucial of times, when the dump was within weeks of accepting the first loads of garbage. A few thoughtful women inspired an immense political uprising, while never wavering from their original purpose of a small peaceful protest camp in defence of pure water.

The dump will not be built on Site 41 and the water will be protected, at least for now. The protest raised important questions of how we deal with garbage in our society, and initiated valuable dialogues within the community, the province and country. Perhaps even more significantly, First Nations and non-aboriginal peoples developed a deep, sincere and lasting bond based on respect and newfound awareness of cultures, beliefs and the power of a common cause. Rather than ignoring cultural differences, the people involved in the protest celebrated and shared their traditions. Community members who had lived their lives a few short miles away from Beausoleil First Nation learned for the first time of the significance of Aboriginal practices and beliefs. All were welcome to participate in ceremonies celebrating the water as well as daily prayers, drumming and teachings. First Nations members learned how local farmers had been careful stewards of the land for generations.

A true community in every sense of the word grew at the peaceful protest camp. People learned to depend upon and trust each other. Out of a common purpose grew cooperation, friendship and a sense of belonging. As in every community, differences of opinions sometimes surfaced. Circles were held where each person was given all the time they needed to thoughtfully express their views. Consensus takes time and time was given to ensure that everyone was heard. Every contribution mattered, and everyone con-



HAMISH GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY

Making it happen: Vicki Monague of Beausoleil First Nation, Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians and Elmvale dairy farmer Anne Ritchie-Nahuis acknowledge the applause of a crowd of 1,200 people at a rally in July 2009, as the Site 41 movement began to roll towards victory.

tributed. People began referring to their fellow protestors as their Site 41 family, for that is indeed what it was. None of this remarkable dynamic would have been possible without the clarity of vision and purposeful determination modeled by the Anishinabe Kweag.

While the battle for Site 41 has been won, the women's group and its supporters know that the war on Mother Earth continues. While all outward signs of the peaceful protest camp are gone (the field was plowed ready for next year's planting and the construction equipment has been moved from Site 41, and the weigh scales and waste cells dismantled), vigilance is maintained. Simcoe County's actions are being monitored by groups attending meetings and news and information is updated daily through an active website, Facebook and Twitter. A small tree, planted in the gravel in front of the main Site 41 access gate by a group of young garden centre employees, stands strong in the snow, a lasting testament to the power of a small group of determined women. ☸

**Linda Bruce** has a background in social work, community advocacy and adult education and has been a resident of North Simcoe County for over 30 years. After following the Site 41 journey for two decades, she is one of many who found the summer protest a life changing event.

**Kate Harries** is a freelance journalist who has worked for the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail. A resident of North Simcoe County for almost 30 years, she joined the Site 41 protest in May, 2009 and heads the Site 41 communications team.

# Skeena Sisters:

## Fighting to Save a Sacred River System

Amanda Follett

Last summer, Ali Howard cannon-balled into the Skeena River's headwaters in northwestern British Columbia's Spatsizi Plateau. She raised one arm, then the other, for the first strokes in her 610 kilometre swim to the Pacific Ocean. Inside, she felt immense anxiety — tumbling whitewater, whirlpools and tidal currents were only a few of the challenges ahead — and she silently said a prayer to "Mother Sister Skeena."

Howard had no idea how apt the impromptu pseudonym, which stayed with her throughout her 28-day journey, would become. The river would beat her down — Howard compares it to feeling humbled by a sibling — while keeping her safe in its maternal grasp.

"We were so well protected and embraced by the river. It felt like we were being led down and mothered," says the 34-year-old Smithers woman. "The Skeena absolutely brought out the best in me. I didn't know my own potential. Discovering it was the greatest gift of the river."

Howard is just one in a handful of women in northwestern B.C. that have fought to save a watershed currently threatened by resource development. The Spatsizi Plateau — dubbed the Sacred Headwaters for its conspicuous role as the birthplace for the Nass, Stikine, and Skeena rivers — is currently under the gaze of multi-national corporations like Royal Dutch Shell, which has fought to begin coalbed methane exploration in the area.

As the headwaters for three of the province's top salmon-producing watersheds, the Spatsizi Plateau (known as Klappan to the local Tahltan First Nation) supports a partially-subsistence culture that has thrived in the area for countless millennia. In recent years, members of the Tahltan Nation built and occupied a road-block shelter at the Klappan River Road

turnoff. In 2006, the blockade resulted in several elders being arrested when Shell was granted a court injunction to proceed with its exploration.

### Unlikely Activists

Rhoda Quock lives in nearby Iskut, a mostly aboriginal community a few hours' drive south of the Yukon border, tucked in the shadow of a mountain and home to only a few hundred residents. A mother of four, Quock was an unlikely spokesperson in the battle against Shell's interest in the Sacred Headwaters. Born and raised in Iskut, it was her passion for the land and her traditional culture that brought her to the front lines of a fight with a multi-national corporation with billions to gain from the methane gas that lies below Klappan Mountain, where her family's traditional hunting camp is located.

"Sure, we can say let's go for the money now, but in 30 or 40 years, when it's a boom and bust, what are the kids going to have?," Quock said in an interview several years ago, just as the battle with the oil and gas magnate was igniting. Despite the argument that drilling and mining would bring much needed jobs to the area, Quock and her supporters, a local elders' group known as the Klabona Keepers, desperately tried to communicate the importance of maintaining the area's long-term sustainability. "It's just not for sale," she said about the Tahltan's traditional hunting and fishing grounds in the Klappan.

Lillian Campbell, a Tahltan elder who lives 80 kilometres further north in Dease Lake, echoes Quock's opposing voice. Her feisty demeanor earned her the nickname Tiger Lil and she was one of the elders arrested during the 2006 standoff with Shell. The charges against the grandmother, then in her late 60s, were later dismissed. The following year, she was

honoured as a finalist in the Ecotrust Indigenous Leadership Awards.

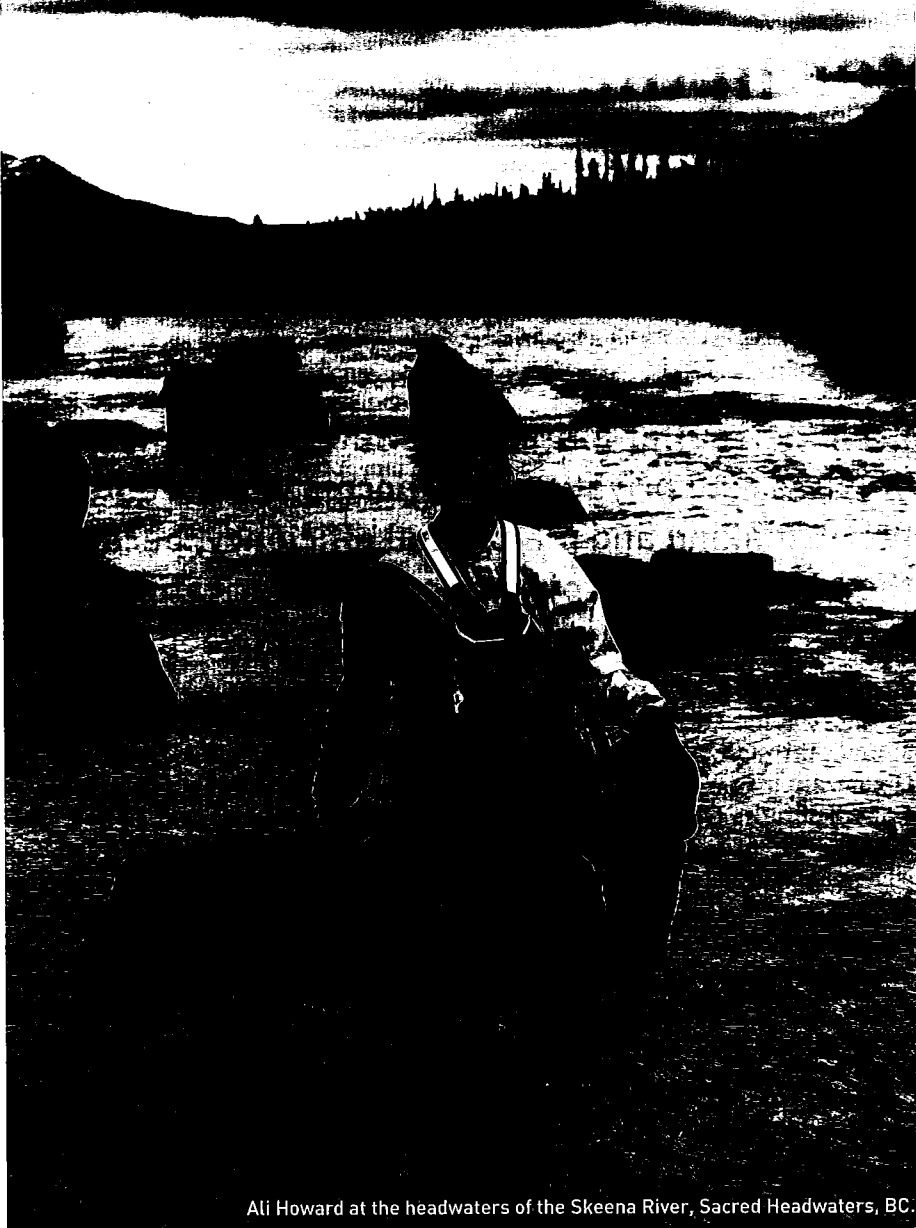
A common passion brought together these strong Tahltan women with people like Shannon McPhail, who was born into a guide outfitting family on the Kispiox River, a tributary of the Skeena. McPhail, an outspoken force, has given birth to two children during her years fighting development in the watershed. She created the non-governmental organization, Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition, in response to proposed threats to her family's fishing business and the lifestyle she has always known.

"I was the daughter of a big game outfitter and a rodeo contractor and my husband worked in the oil sands. So I wasn't the most likely candidate to get started on this," she says, describing her organization's beginnings as "a bunch of local yokels" that set out to fight development in their valley. "Rhoda Quock has four children and she's running the Klabona Keepers, she's dealing with the second largest company on the planet. She gave birth to twins during this whole battle. She gave birth right when this whole thing got started and she's raising twins plus her two other kids." Another friend joked to McPhail, "You bring your kids everywhere. You even brought them to the revolution!"

### Sacred Swim

It was McPhail, whose family owns the Bear Claw Lodge where Howard works as a chef, who convinced the former water polo player to take the plunge in swimming one of North America's mightiest rivers. When Howard offhandedly suggested getting another distance swimmer to take on the task, McPhail's response was simple: "You swim. You do it." Howard agreed.

On Aug. 15, 2009, Howard became the first person to swim the Skeena River in its entirety when she pulled herself onto a wharf at Port Edward on B.C.'s northwest coast. Her efforts were recognized soon after by outdoor retail giant Patagonia, which created its first-ever annual Activist Award for the swimmer. Howard has also been nominated for National Geographic Adventure magazine's Adventurer of the Year award.



Ali Howard at the headwaters of the Skeena River, Sacred Headwaters, B.C.

She attributes her safety, a strong team dynamic, and the warm reception she received in numerous communities for allowing her to have the profound experience of living as one with the Skeena River for a month. "It really felt like we were operating in a state of grace. It allowed me to take everything in stride and experience everything with an open mind and, especially, an open heart," she says. "When we were in the communities people spoke about it — that we were swimming with the ancestors."

Just as the river brings together its tributaries, similarly these women's common bond with the watershed brought them

together in a fight against what many would feel typifies the masculine: industry, economy, and capitalism. With limited budgets, they stood up to an industry that seeks to pillage the landscape of its ability to yield for future generations and gave B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell's pro-industry government pause in its crusade to sell the Sacred Headwaters.

In 2008, the province declared a two-year moratorium on coalbed methane development. The gas, which has never successfully been developed in British Columbia due to strong public opposition, is relatively new and its extraction methods untested. The moratorium expires this

year. It remains to be seen if the Klappan — a magical place where the tracks of grizzly, caribou, moose, and wolf can all be seen within a few square feet — will be safe from the precious gas that lies beneath its surface.

Dissent within the Tahltan Nation — between those who welcome the jobs that come with resource development and those that want to protect traditional lifestyle — resulted in a change of government. In 2007, an Iskut Band Council election saw the council replaced by an all-female chief and council. The Tahltan Central Council, which represents all three bands within the nation, replaced chair Jerry Asp — a central and much vilified figure in the nation's initial dealings with mining companies like bcMetals and Fortune Minerals — with Anita McPhee.

Today, at the Klappan River Road turnoff, a spray painted plywood sign hanging askew reads "Save our Sacred Headwaters," reminding passersby that the battle for these traditional hunting and fishing grounds has not yet been won. Families still gather at the roadblock shelter to cook moose meat over the campfire, play cards around a circular table, and talk about ongoing threats to their traditional lifestyle. More than 100 kilometres upriver, in the wild and vast Spatsizi Plateau, the Skeena River begins its tireless journey to the Pacific Ocean. As it has since time immemorial, Mother Sister Skeena provides sustenance for the delicate and diverse ecosystem it supports, which further supports a lifestyle held close by those that love and revere its waters. Through the efforts of women that identify with its nurturing spirit, the Skeena — at least for the time being — will continue to support the lives and cultures that thrive in northwestern B.C. ❧

**Amanda Follett** lives and writes in Smithers, B.C., a small northern community that never fails to amaze her with its colourful characters and cultures. Last fall, Amanda completed a Master of Communication specializing in intercultural communication through Royal Roads University in Victoria. Her thesis explored media coverage of the Sacred Headwaters issue. She may be reached at [afollett@bulkley.net](mailto:afollett@bulkley.net) website: [www.amandafollett.com](http://www.amandafollett.com).

# Women & Water in the Age of Globalization

Protecting Our Most Vital Resource

Bayly Guslits & Jyoti Phartiyal

**T**his article considers strategies for addressing scarce water resources — privatization, a human rights approach and community control — from a gendered health perspective. The availability and cost of water has implications for women, both in terms of their own personal health, and because women are very often primary caretakers, responsible for caring for the structural and health needs of their families and community. Women are the majority of water providers for their families and are responsible for obtaining safe drinking water for their households. Women also often do the budgeting for the household uses for water such as drinking, food preparation, farm maintenance, cleaning and laundry. This means women suffer more when water is commercialized, emphasizing private sector norms which center on profit-making and maximized efficiency, because, as the bearers and providers of water, privatization often forces women to make the choice between clean water and cheap water.

## Privatization: Putting a Price on Water

With privatization, the definition of water shifts from that of a common resource to that of a product to be bought and sold in the market. Proponents of this strategy call for the removal of limits and regulation of water use, but the concept of commoditizing water is in opposition to many cultures' traditional view of communal resources and women's role as the caretakers of water. Removing women from this role poses risks to water sustainability, gender equality and cultural integrity.

The commoditization of water and water services have been globally pro-

**... women suffer more when water is commercialized, emphasizing private sector norms which center on profit-making and maximized efficiency, because, as the bearers and providers of water, privatization often forces women to make the choice between clean water and cheap water.**

moted through the World Trade Organization's (WTO) free-trade rules embodied in its Global Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), as well as other international institutions pressuring national governments for policies around privatization of water infrastructure. This becomes problematic because in the current globalized neoliberal economic system the trade interests of corporations legally supersede state, community and environmental interests. For instance, the local officials of the Mexican state San Luis Potos shut down Metalclad's (an American water management company) hazardous water treatment and disposal site on the grounds of it being unsafe and environmentally detrimental. Metalclad was then able to collect \$17 million USD from the Mexican government because under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) companies may sue governments for compensation if a country implements legislation that "expropriates" the company's future profits, even though, in this case, there was extreme community opposition to the facilities.

Supporters of water privatization believe that private ownership and commoditization should be implemented as a means of addressing water scarcity. Experts suggest that private ownership

would result in better care of natural resources as private entities have a vested financial interest in the sustainability and quality of the resource and that by treating water as a commodity reduced consumption will be encouraged. In theory, privatization of water can be a sustainable and self-regulating solution to managing a scarce resource. In practice, however, the privatization of water has proven detrimental by increasing levels of water scarcity, increasing inequity in distribution of resources, and harming human health and the health of women in particular.

Water privatization projects since the 1990s have largely failed to meet their proponents' ideals because of the lack of regulations and the inequality of distribution inherent in the global neoliberal economy. Water multinationals, like Suez, Vivendi, and Thames Water, claim that through privatization they will enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and quality of water resources, yet examples from Canada, Europe, Latin America and Africa demonstrate their repeated failures in all three areas. Government-operated water systems are often perceived as inefficient because of overstaffing, thus privatization usually brings a decrease in employees, which should allow the company to operate more efficiently and

reduce prices. This was not the case in Buenos Aires when the newly privatized water company reduced its staff by 3600, yet the cost to consumers still rose 13.5% (Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), 92 "Shiva"). Privatization in France led to a cost increase of 150%; the Philippines 400%; England 450% (Shiva 98-99). Evidently, privatization does not automatically bring increased efficiency in management and instead, usually leads to increased costs. As women are disproportionately represented amongst the world's poor, and are more likely to lead sole-parent households, they bear the brunt of increases in water costs.

Levels of accessibility and water quality have also deteriorated as water source management has been privatized. In England, the British Medical Association condemned the privatization initiatives for their effects on the health of residents. In addition, privatization is often accompanied by infrastructure neglect, labor cutbacks and a decline in regulatory oversight — often resulting in threats to water quality. Hamilton, Ontario made the decision to pursue a public-private partnership to address efficiency issues, but after privatization management the central sewage treatment plant failed, flooding the city with 182 million litres of sewage, chemicals and heavy metals. Water privatization can also lead to a declining water quality with respect to chemical parameters, for example, which again could produce a gendered impact.

Water and the health risks posed by privatization are further increased by practices of unequal distribution as high water costs can lead to greater water poverty (i.e. being denied access to dependable water resources or not having the means to pay for available ones) for low income families who are often forced to choose between the basic necessities of life such as food versus water. Beyond domestic responsibilities, water activist Maude Barlow highlights that, "women carry out 80 percent of water-related work throughout the world and therefore carry the greatest burden of water inequity" (Barlow, Maude, 2008, *Our Water Commons: Toward a new*

*Freshwater Narrative*. The Council of Canadians, 17). The unregulated nature of private water companies in a neoliberal market also allows these companies to deliberately exclude the poorest demographics from the water networks to increase their profitability. This is the way to maintain a competitive edge in a global capitalist economy, since the private company must ultimately answer to shareholders, not voters. In Cochabamba, Bolivia,

## This duality in the treatment of water as a human right and an economic resource is worrying.

the Bechtel Corporation (with its headquarters stationed in San Francisco) selectively left 200,000 of the city's poorest citizens off the water network to increase the profitability of the operation. Similarly, in 2008, a South African court ruled that the pre-paid water meter system in Soweto (an impoverished and predominantly black district of greater Johannesburg), South Africa, was unconstitutional because it was discriminatory on the basis of financial situation and skin color.

### Water as a Basic Human Right

The failure of privatization initiatives, the persistent distribution inequalities and the continuing degradation of water resources, have increased popular support for the global recognition of water as a basic human right. There have been a series of well-funded human water rights campaigns by high-profile non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Amnesty International, the World Development Movement, and the Sierra Club, which have gained support from international development agencies, like the World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. Opponents of water privatization (as a means of both profit and free-market environmentalism) argue that "water is a non-substitutable resource essential for life," and that recognition as a human right would put "an onus upon states to provide water to all" (Karen Bakker, "The 'Commons' Versus the 'Commodity': Alter-Globalization, Anti-Privatization, and

the Human Right to Water in the Global South," *Antipode* (2007), 440 ("Bakker").

However, it is not clear the extent to which a human rights approach would be effective in combating water scarcity in the globalized economy precisely because it does not explicitly preclude private sector participation.

The two most frequent arguments made by supporters of a human right to water are that water is crucial to human

survival, and that there are already several other human rights conventions which imply water is a right because such recognized rights as the right to food are based upon the availability of water. This is true, but it simply makes clear that a human right to a resource does not necessarily imply that the resource is free or cannot be privatized. This is evident in the case of food; while food is internationally recognized as a human right, it is also a highly privatized and profitable industry.

This leads to international treaties that support the idea of a human right to water congruently supporting the commoditization of water. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC) issued a statement in 2002 which asserted that everyone has the right to "sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water" (Bakker 437). In other words, in ECOSOC's recognizing water as a human right which should be "affordable," it is sanctioning the concept that water can be both a human right and a marketable commodity. This duality in the treatment of water as a human right and an economic resource is worrying.

The recognition of a human right to water at the national policy level has also lacked the necessary teeth to improve standards of living for vulnerable populations. For example, the right to water is enshrined in South Africa's post-apartheid constitution. Yet, as the aforementioned case of Soweto demonstrated, it has not been effective at managing accessibility and reducing the persistent inequities in

distribution practices. Since the international recognition of water as a human right will only be as far-reaching as the governments that can enforce it, the onus is left on individuals, families and communities to bear responsibility for controlling water use and develop water access systems, with much of the responsibility being shifted to, or directly felt by, women.

### **Participatory Community Action: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally**

Local community mobilization has proven the most effective means of addressing water scarcity, and in some cases resisting the injustices of privatization. Environmental and water activists, agree that water requires community management because it is the ecological and chemical

## **With a focus on empowering women and sustainable practices, communities can be effective at addressing water scarcity, even within the neoliberal market, and can manage water as a common resource.**

basis of all life and because its sustainability and equitable distribution depend on cooperation among community members. With a focus on empowering women and sustainable practices, communities can be effective at addressing water scarcity, even within the neoliberal market, and can manage water as a common resource.

To address the problem of depleting water resources in the American southwest, rural and agricultural communities have turned to the traditional system of Acequias (Arabic, meaning, "quencher of thirst"), which translates into the concept of water democracies. Acequias are based on principles of equity, cooperative labor and community participation. They are systems of diverting water from a source, such as a river, which use gravity and intricate earthen waterways to direct the water to irrigable land. Acequias require community mobilization to construct and maintain as each acequia elects a mayordomo (caretaker) and three-person comisión (commission) which is entrusted with implementing the bylaws that govern the acequia. Furthermore, each acequia

community is required to provide peones (workers) for annual cleaning practices. Acequias, and communal water networks in general, are inherently a democratic water management system at multiple levels which are highly effective in addressing sustainability, water scarcity and distribution problems.

These communal networks allow users to be involved in decision-making where the goal is to provide members with effective management. However, even with these progressive systems, women are often systematically excluded from the decision-making processes over water control and are underrepresented in positions of water management. The idea of communal water supply and management tends to be "romanticized" in its

portrayal of communities as equitable social structures, despite the prevalence of inequitable power relations and resource allocation based on the gendered division of labor. Experts have proposed that the decentralization of water management must be accompanied by inclusivity of women as participants to enhanced sustainability of the resource.

Gendered labor divisions and the importance of including women in the water management process is exemplified in the case of Llullucha, Peru, when engineers from the Netherlands Cooperation for Development Service and the Institute for Water Management and Environment consulted only the landowning men in the community for their input on an irrigation project. The engineers were unaware, however, that the traditional division of labor – with men working in the fields and women tending to the sheep and cows – meant that the village's water needs were gendered as well. Once the project's construction began, the women protested because the field irrigation system was preventing water from reaching the water-

ing holes for the village animals and the project could not go forward. The outcome of the Llullucha experience resulted in the Netherlands Cooperation creating a policy to include a gender perspective in all stages of project work. Communal water management with attention to empowering women and environmental sustainability is not only compatible within a globalized economy; it is also aided by international partnerships of information and technology sharing.

It is essential to appreciate the distinct role that women play in both their communities and effective water management. We must recognize that control over water directly translates into economic and political power, thus community mobilization to collectively manage this vital natural resource helps empower civil society at its foundation and bring equity to women as we grapple with the challenge of water scarcity.

Bayly Guslits is finishing her fourth year of undergraduate studies in an Honours Specialization in International Relations at the University of Western Ontario. Her studies have focused on conflict resolution, water scarcity and how these topics relate to gender issues. ☞

**Jyoti Phartiyal** is the Projects Coordinator for the National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH), a Centre of Excellence focused on policy-oriented research relating to the impact of different environments on the health of women.

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Snitow, A & Kufman, D. (2008). The New Corporate Threat to Our Water, in *Water Consciousness*, Tara Lohan [Ed.]. San Francisco: AlterNet Books.

Bennett, V., Davila-Poblete, S. & Nieves-Rico, M. (2008). Water and Gender: The Unexpected Connection that Really Matters. *Journal of International Affairs*, 61.2: 107-126.

Women and water policies in Canada, [www.womenandwater.ca](http://www.womenandwater.ca)

**Water In My Blood**

I. Iere Village, Trinidad 1975

Wet season, dry season, cricket season, kite season  
I knew their names, their signs  
knew the smell of the first rain  
danced in it with my brother  
by the giant mahogany  
shirts no longer damp with sweat  
held to our skins by monsoon pressure.  
Later, in hammocks  
under the galvanised tin roof  
we'd swing without words, the roar of rain  
a blanket around us.

I remember bright women  
stately as ships  
water on their heads as they sailed my skyline.  
Coming home from the standpipe  
I would try and try to balance  
anything — a grapefruit, a pebble,  
trailing in their dust, chin up,  
the thud of ever-tumbling objects  
barely audible  
above the voices raised in song.

II. Vancouver Island 2006

My task takes me by boat at high tide  
ducking beneath evergreen branches,  
moss in my hair, twigs.  
The waterfall froths and spills its sweetness  
into salt, pushes the boat away.  
On days when I get it right  
I can balance in the perfect spot  
fill a bucket quick as I fill my lungs,  
hold out a girl-child, cup in hand  
so she can do the same

Afterwards, we slip-slide among boulders  
under branches, over slick logs,  
hands held tight, to the deepest pool.  
We gasp and shriek at the cold!  
Slither in, leap out, laughing into the  
thick wet air, breathing water and moss  
and cedar and salmon.  
Back in the boat, goosepimpled,  
we cross the inlet, slow against the skyline  
(mustn't spill a drop)  
blankets around us, and the motor  
humming us home,  
our voices raised in song.

Born in Trinidad and educated in England, **Joanna Streetly** is an author, illustrator, sometimes poet and mother who now lives on a floathouse in Clayoquot Sound, Vancouver Island. She has published books of non-fiction, (**Paddling Through Time**, Raincoast), fiction (**Silent Inlet**, Oolichan), and is at work on her third title, **Rock, Water, Light: the dual lives of Clara Benton**, a novel set at Lennard Island lighthouse in 1918.

# Lest the Creek Run Dry

Anuradha S. Rao & Dickson Yaw Agyeman

**A**fter having danced barefoot in the village for two weeks and walked around in flip-flops for the other six, I was not quite sure how I would get rid of the perma-dirt that had formed crosshatches on the soles of my feet. I had just returned to Canada after having spent two months in Ghana and I was about to take my first hot water shower in what felt like a long time. My body was weary from the long journey. It was difficult to leave the comfort of the warm water. I thought for a moment and then I did something I had never done before, I followed up my shower with a bath. Filling the tub only partway, I lay down and allowed my muscles to relax but my guilty conscience remained alert. I was aware that no woman I had met in Ghana would ever use this much water, let alone on herself. — ASR



Scoping water from London creek at high tide.

There are a number of standard domestic and village sights that one may see in Ghana, which often do not elicit a second glance. There are women and girls squatting behind houses and washing dishes in metal bowls. Women in beautiful batik dresses bending at the hip over washbasins by a communal tap to wash their family's laundry, squeezing every drop of water from each garment with their strong hands, to reuse the water for the rest of the clothes. A woman positioning barrels during a rainstorm for the brief luxury of avoiding the chore of pumping or drawing water, and carrying it on her head to the house. In Ghana, carrying water is typically the role of women and children.

In Canada, turning on one of several taps in one's private abode is standard practice. However, for some rural people in Ghana, for example, for the women in the village of Tekpekope access to pumped water at a communal village tap would be a luxury.

London Creek used to run through the

village, which is near the coastal community of Ada-Foah, once a primary water source. The creek was last used in 1966 when the Akossombo and Kpong dams were constructed upstream on the Volta River, which runs through eastern Ghana and empties into the Gulf of Guinea. The creek has become unusable due to reduced water flow after the construction of the dam as there is an invasion of aquatic weeds that clogs the water channel and there is a heavy influx of silt as well as contamination from sulphur dioxide, which is present in the soil.

On the drive towards Tekpekope, we stopped to pick up a woman who was carrying a bucket of water. She was very happy getting a ride as her journey from substitute water source to the village is 8 kilometres and she normally walks the entire distance.

When we arrived in the village we were greeted by Doris, a community leader. She lay down the large load of firewood that she had been carrying on

her head before shaking our hands. She showed us the place where the stream used to run and one could barely imagine that there had ever been water there. The grass was yellow and the mangrove trees that had been planted were stunted and clearly struggling to survive.

The loss of London Creek and the long distance to the nearest water source has led to children reporting late for school, women arriving late for work on farms and elsewhere which in turn has led to reduced incomes and loss of livelihood from farming and fisheries that were



The cattle's turn to drink water from the dam.





The dam that serves both humans and animals.

dependent on the creek. Besides, the water from the new source is not even potable as the source is used by both people and cattle. It is difficult to imagine how people in rural areas, where they often live hand to mouth, are coping with this hardship.

*The experience becomes real when you carry bottled water from the city to the community and you are offered coloured water to drink as a welcome. You give an excuse not to accept the water offering but this is the water that women and children have fetched for use in domestic activities and they have often traveled between 6 and 8 kilometres to get it. The unwashed bowls with flies, the unwashed clothes, the skin rashes and the dry water containers are all indicators of the health, social and economic deprivation of women and children living without safe and affordable water. – DYA*

How many women and children will have made the journey, how many buckets, and how many times will they continue to make the journey to access water compared to the access to safe and affordable water of an average Canadian?

Unfortunately, the experience of Tekpekope is not unique as the effects of water shortages on women are symbolic of the human impact on Mother Earth. The water shortage combined with unsustainable logging, mining, agriculture, and infrastructural development indicate that not enough is being done to maintain and conserve water resources.

In Ghana, local capacity building is necessary to develop locally feasible technologies to explore sources of potable water. Technology is not enough. For example, the use of treatment plants only becomes effective after sustainable water sources have been conserved and water pollution has been reduced or eliminated.

Technology to supply potable water to communities needs to be integrated with programs that protect and restore the quality of lakes, rivers and natural buffers such as wetlands. Watersheds must be considered and managed in their entirety from headwaters to estuaries. International cooperation is also necessary to fully protect some watersheds including the Volta River because it spreads between political and physical borders.

Traditional practices that once served to protect watersheds in Ghana are often disregarded. Many of the rivers in Ghana that remain unpolluted owe their survival to traditional watershed protection systems. Therefore, collaboration between local leaders, district, and municipal governments is important and can result in the protection of water catchments through the combined effort of legislation and traditional practices.

Moreover, given the disproportionate



Boy carrying water on bicycle to Tekpekope, Ada, Ghana.

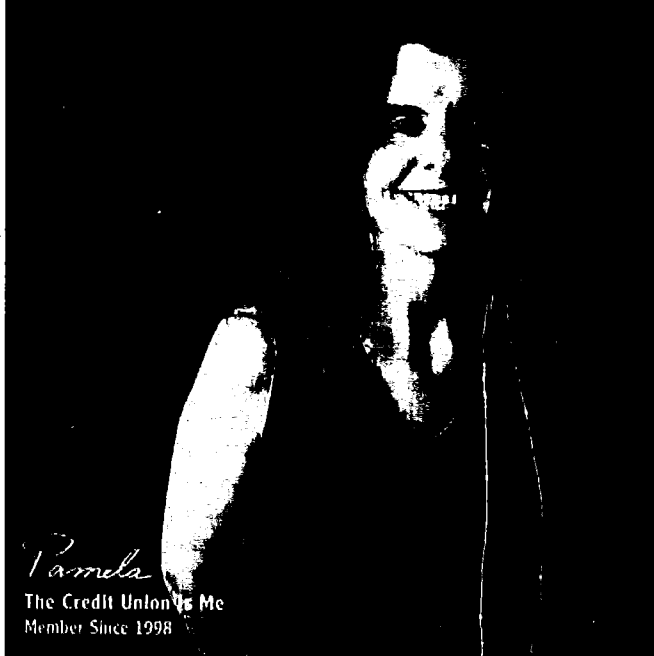
women have been moving into political positions that represent the water sector in Ghana. However, the concerns of women are still not considered and their perspective has not been taken into account in program design. Further work is still needed to ensure that water policies translate into actions that bring long-term relief to affected women in rural communities who are often easily forgotten. ❧

**Anuradha Rao** is a conservation scientist and human rights activist, and is currently based in Vancouver. She has traveled to West Africa several times to study music and environmental issues.

**Dickson Agyeman** is Senior Wildlife Officer at the Songor Ramsar Site, a wetland conservation area, and leads a number of conservation programs with local communities. He is based in Ada-Foah, Ghana.

effect of water shortages on women in countries like Ghana it is logical that women be involved in developing solutions. In the last ten years, women have been at the forefront of accessing safe and affordable water in Ghana. There is much strength in the efforts of women advocacy groups and NGOs. More than ever

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The Weight of Water

My father believed in purifying tendencies  
Stranger to bathtubs fearful of soap's itch  
he sang lustily *now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow*

Our bathtub was a resting place for flies  
that died and tumbled in out of the windowsill  
after trekking up and down the pane  
as patiently as Sisyphus with his stone

We never questioned  
that the bathtub on its claws obese as any mother sow  
stay dry plugged shut to keep flies from dropping  
down the drain dust balls comforting the dying

Just once my brother filled the tub  
with his long underwear soaked with mustard plaster  
he'd applied to suffocate his chest  
and smother winter's cough

But no we never bathed  
Water was too valuable for that frivolity and splash  
a miracle to hoard like loaves and fishes  
the faith that wobbled my father and stepmother

We never asked why water was so hard to find  
the flushing toilet cringed its rush a waterfall marked shame  
The pipe ran through the kitchen closet  
what a waste cows nuzzle water like velvet teacups  
lick and shower saliva flies and tails flick

Water cost so much confusion listen  
the counting gravel rushes down the pipes  
cringe before the law marked father  
hide inside the calendar marked mother

sleeping in her yellow bed with her own bandages  
her own pain crooning a pathway in her head  
showing her the way to jesus

escape is longing to be empty  
of these things we gather and store to shore us up  
dust lives happily ever after  
if we could just arrange to listen to its lullaby

This morning the water lies in dunes  
the tub wipes its windshield on my toes

Diogenes loved water too

Janke Wielenga is a poet presently living in Orillia, Canada. Perpetual transient in search of home, born in the Netherlands, she immigrated to Canada at age three and by six had moved across Southern Ontario — Aylmer, Kirkton, Kippen, and Clandeboye (where her mother died). Moves continued: Hensall, Farquer, Drayton, Kitchener, Listowel, Waterloo, Thunder Bay, Paris, Orillia. Transience of careers and education matched the moves: farm worker, dental assistant, receptionist, teacher, librarian, bookseller, researcher, homemaker, writer with BA in English and MA in Religion & Culture.

# WE Research

## Gender and Careers in the Canadian Water Policy Community

S.E. Wolfe & Susan Wisme

### **A**n Urgent and Neglected Problem: Retaining Talent Across Life Stages

Water research and policy conferences are great for candid conversations, particularly with women who juggle parenthood and their professional opportunities. Mention “children-under-five” and, if after-event-cocktails are available, the “Bad Mummy” stories are recounted, compared and laughed over. Younger colleagues listen quietly and wonder why the fuss.

But the fact is that the career expectations and family structures of young professionals are changing, and these changes are creating a need to examine the ways in which the Canadian water policy community (WPC) is using its human resources. Broadly defined, the WPC is a dynamic and intellectually diverse community of engineers, technicians, biologists, planners, economists, scholars conducting physical or social research, politicians, public servants and civil society activists, all of whom generate ideas, policies, strategies and plans.

Questions remain about to what extent is the WPC able to retain and maximize its talent pool over the long term. What are the consequences if it fails to do so? If those consequences are important, what needs to be done to ensure that young talent is retained across their diverse life stages?

The problem of talent retention is sorely neglected in the conventional corners of the WPC and its professional associations. And yet the need to address it is urgent. The WPC must be able to attract and retain available talent, now and in the future, for the following interrelated reasons.

First of all, the Canadian context for water policy development is evolving

rapidly. The increasing frequency of extreme events, such as droughts in the Prairie Provinces and urban flooding, and climatic uncertainty mean that governance structures and water management strategies will need to adapt quickly.

Secondly, impending demographic changes and subsequent retirements — a “silver tsunami” — in the WPC will erode institutional knowledge (CIWR 2009). This erosion could weaken the WPC’s ability to anticipate and respond to the evolving context of water management.

And finally, the WPC requires diversity in its opinions and its participants to be resilient and able to respond effectively to a quickly changing environment. Diversity generates more critical and comprehensive problem-solving and, potentially, more successful policy construction and implementation.

### Transitions in the Water Policy Community

The WPC could experience an enormous loss of senior personnel, along with the related loss of knowledge and experience. While statistics on retirement rates in the Canadian WPC appear to be unavailable at this time, anecdotal evidence from the energy and water sectors suggests there will soon be significant losses. Almost 30 percent of Ontario’s Hydro One workforce, for example, is expected to retire in the next three to five years. Ontario’s Grand River Conservation Authority has a horizontal management structure and insiders suggest potential human resources problems with impending retirements at one end and recently hired, highly educated, and ambitious, female employees on the other.

These changes suggest both positive

and negative implications for the water management profession, which has traditionally been male-dominated, supply-focused and engineering-driven (Tortajada 2003; Turton et al. 2001). Large-scale retirements could allow an infusion of new knowledge, values, innovations and norms into institutional structures. This infusion could open up new opportunities for change and counter the “old thinking” that some commentators have suggested is entrenched within the WPC’s culture and identity (Gleick 2000). Earlier research in Canada has indicated, more critically, that retirements could mean a substantial loss of institutional and experiential knowledge and a dismantling of the WPC’s professional networks, if established relationships are severed and if knowledge is not effectively transmitted to incoming professionals (Wolfe 2009).

### Assessing the Canadian WPC from a Feminist Perspective

In this context of workforce transition, and in light of the urgent need to address the problem of talent retention, we have begun a new research program that investigates and explains the contributions of Canadian women and men, across their career and life stages, to the Canadian WPC.

Unfortunately, investigation of women’s professional roles in, and contributions to, the development of water policy has been limited. Women are still largely investigated as the Other — as passive recipients of water policy at the household, local or agricultural levels — rather than as active determinants or creators of water policy.

In contrast, our research project investigates the perspectives of *female and male*

individuals contributing to all facets of Canadian water policy. While our focus is on the gender-related dimensions of career trajectories, we do not exclude from our research other diversity issues related to race, class, ethnicity or dis/ability.

Our research grapples with the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, explanations given by our research participants in response to the question of how gender modifies career trajectories within the WPC. These arguments include: biological (e.g., realities of childbirth, nursing, family responsibilities); psychological (ambition, satisfaction and recognition); structural (e.g., career trajectory norms and institutional expectations); and economic (e.g., the dis/incentives for women's ongoing participation in the workforce).

Will the women 'in the pipeline' replace those WPC members who will be retiring in the near future, and eventually move into the more senior positions to contribute their diversity of skills and perspectives? Possibly, but we should not mistake the participation of young women in the early parts of their careers for a long-term supply of human capital (Turton *et al.* 2001). Overall, women's representation in professional fields such as engineering and medicine has increased (Statistics Canada 2006), but research suggests that women continue to take primary responsibility for childcare and "household" tasks (Statistics Canada 2006). Studies also show that for female researchers and academics, the overlap between pre-tenure years and early motherhood with its intense familial obligations may impede productivity, progress

on the salary scale and long-term career prospects. While in the early 20th century, marriage was the primary catalyst for women to leave the workforce, it is now the birth of the first or second child (Hewlett and Luce 2005). It is in the WPC's best interest to ensure that any departure from the professional track, which women usually intend to be temporary, includes explicit 'on ramps' and ongoing mentorship opportunities for returning professionals.

The Canadian WPC is extraordinarily dedicated to meeting the demands of water resource management and applied research. We hope that by revealing the constraints upon professional careers within the WPC, our research will contribute to an improvement in talent retention and ultimately a richer resource with which to address water issues in a rapidly changing and increasingly challenging environment. ❧

**Dr. Sarah Wolfe** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Environment and Resource Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada. Her previous research examined the tacit knowledge of water efficiency practitioners, residential builders and professional plumbers and the influence of social capital on a community's water decision-making processes. Her current research explores water cognition and the gender dimensions of Canadian and international water policy.

**Dr. Susan Wismer's** research focus is on equity issues: environmental, social, political and economic. Her areas of emphasis are sustainable livelihoods, and participation in development in Canada and overseas. She

has a long term interest in the relationships in policy and practice between women's education and training and livelihoods and in gender/environment relationships both domestically and overseas.

#### Further Resources:

Centre for Integrated Water Research (CIWR), "Symposium on How Higher Education Can Help Meet the Workforce Challenges Facing the Water Industry", January 29th, 2009, University of California, Santa Cruz. Available at: <http://ciwr.ucsc.edu/initiatives.html>

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**UNDERGROUND**

# Giving Women a Voice on Water

By Kelly Haggart

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In the past two decades, decentralization of power and responsibilities from national to local levels has changed the face of governments around the globe. It has also given women new opportunities to participate in local decision-making.

Most developing countries have undertaken reforms in recent years that have resulted in a transfer of varying degrees of responsibility for basic services to lower levels of government or to private companies. How has this shift affected women? Has the shift in power and resources given them any greater access to water, for example, or more of a say in decisions around its use?

Research supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre in Asia, Latin America, and Africa has explored how these changes have affected women. Around the world, 13 research teams found that for such reforms to benefit women, they must be designed with women's particular needs and situations in mind, and with their active participation.

Social scientist Seema Kulkarni took part in one of the studies, which looked at the impact on women of reforms in the water sector in drought-prone western India. Kulkarni works with the Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management; an NGO based in Pune, Maharashtra, which does research and advocacy around rural livelihoods, and natural resources, especially water. She also belongs to the Gender and Water Alliance, a global network with more than 1,400 members in 106 countries that advocates for gender equity in water policies and practices. Kulkarni spoke to IDRC's Kelly Haggart about the decentralization study and a new initiative stemming from it that aims to help women farmers play an active role in

managing irrigation water in Maharashtra.

Since the early 1990s, the trend internationally has been to view water as a commodity, as an economic rather than a social good. There has been a clear shift away from the model in which the government invests more in infrastructure, to make more water available. Now the idea is to introduce better pricing policies, so that people start valuing water and use it more carefully.

If you want people to pay for water and manage the resource better, participation is seen as crucial. Decentralization is equated with democratization and involv-



Seema Kulkarni.

ing people in planning. Decentralization is also geared toward building people's participation in order to achieve better recovery of costs.

Most water schemes in India are now planned around contributions from people though they still represent a small proportion of the total. A typical water scheme involves 10% contribution from villagers and 90% from the government, which still seems like a fair scenario. Ownership comes from contributions, and people should make a contribution to their own resources. However, this is set to change. Policy documents talk about a gradual shift toward full cost recovery, which would mean villagers bearing the whole cost of building, operating, and maintaining water schemes.

Maharashtra was the first Indian state

to introduce decentralization in the water sector. Under reforms launched in the mid-1990s, water committees were set up to involve users of the resource in its management. These are called Village Water and Sanitation Committees in the domestic water sector and Water Users Associations in the irrigation sector.

On the face of it, these reforms appear to be very pro-people. They involve people coming together, talking, planning, and deciding about their own resources. Maharashtra introduced a 50% quota for women, so a lot of women belong to the water committees, especially in the domestic water sector. Although women are visibly present, their participation tends to be nominal. When it comes to financial or other key decisions related to water, such as: Which water source should the community use? Which source has the best-quality water and is the most sustainable, their voices are rarely heard. This is despite the fact that in most parts of Maharashtra it is the women who spend an average of more than three hours a day fetching water from as far as three kilometres away.

In the irrigation sector, we found a complete absence of women. Women are involved in agriculture and irrigation activities, but not in any related decision-making. They are on the managing committees, but they are not aware of what they should or could be doing there.

We talked to almost 200 women as part of the decentralization study. Everywhere, women knew a lot about farming and irrigation, and were enthusiastic about taking part in decision-making. However, they did not know how to go about it. Women need to understand what kind of role they can play and how their knowledge can make a difference in how water is managed. The quotas are not



SUTAPA MAJUNDAR

Seema Kulkarni addresses a meeting of villagers in Bahe, Maharashtra.

meaningful if women are not equipped in any way to participate effectively.

### **Building Critical Awareness**

The decentralization reforms and our study of them paved the way for the next step — an action research project now getting underway which will be funded by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. We will work with about 300 women in 10 Water User Associations in villages near Pune. The main goals of the year-long initiative will be to demystify all the water legislation and present it in a way that the villagers can understand. We will develop manuals, short videos and other training materials that will help women understand the current water governance system so they can participate in it fully.

We also see this as an opportunity to build critical awareness among women. We do not want them just to function within the system; we want them to voice their concerns, to speak out about their needs, and to articulate their ideas about how the water sector can become truly equitable.

The argument is often advanced these days that although decentralization has tried to encourage democratic participation, communities are not willing to take part in the process. It is argued that community-run schemes have failed, so it is time to move toward privatization or private-public partnerships.

We feel that not enough time, energy, and funds have been devoted to helping community models succeed. What is pre-

venting communities from working together to sustain and manage their resource base? Our studies show that numerous complex issues arise in the management of any kind of facility, be it related to water, sanitation or health. Let us really analyze those constraints, and give the community model a chance, before moving on to another model. ❧

**Kelly Haggart** is a writer with the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa. In the 1990s, she edited *Panoscope*, a magazine on development and environment published by Panos London, and *WDM in Action*, a publication of the UK campaign group World Development Movement. She also taught journalism in China. She may be reached at [khaggart@idrc.ca](mailto:khaggart@idrc.ca)

# Women Working on the Water Front

By Kelly Haggart

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BELOW, SEEMA KULKARNI REFLECTS ON A RECENT SURVEY SHE HELPED COORDINATE OF FEMALE PROFESSIONALS EMPLOYED IN THE WATER SECTOR IN SOUTH ASIA. THE RESEARCHERS IN BANGLADESH, INDIA, NEPAL, PAKISTAN, AND SRI LANKA FOUND THAT, IN MOST CASES, WOMEN HELD ABOUT 5% OF TECHNICAL JOBS IN GOVERNMENT WATER DEPARTMENTS.

The idea behind the survey was to look at the composition and organizational culture of the water bureaucracy in South Asia, and the constraints women face to be part of it. For a start, few women opt to study civil engineering, hydrology, or geology. The association of "hard sciences" with men is still strong, and the social aspects related to water are not considered "water knowledge." This in itself determines the composition of the bureaucracy, which tends to be made up of male civil engineers who are hard-core believers in hard facts.

The study was an eye-opener in many ways, and the findings were clear. Very few women work as engineers in South Asian water departments. Most are in administrative jobs. Those women who do work as engineers are low down in the hierarchy. In Maharashtra, for example, we found only two or three women in high-level roles. The situation could change to some extent, at least in Maharashtra, where a quota has recently been introduced stipulating that 30% of new government hires should be women.

However, the internal culture of the water sector is not conducive to women entering it or functioning effectively within it. Forget about daycare centers in the office – even basic amenities, such as a toilet, were lacking for women in most of these water departments.

## Social Side of Water

The point is that water knowledge should not be seen as revolving only around engineering – there is a social side as well. We would like to see more social scientists and a far more multidisciplinary team coming into this sector. However, unless the understanding of what constitutes water knowledge is expanded, it is difficult for the other disciplines to begin playing an important role. We did find several women social scientists in the water sector, but they were working on contract on the fringes of the bureaucracy, and not in the mainstream.

The convenient labelling of women as homemakers extends to their professional life and determines what kinds of tasks they will be given in the office. Many of these women engineers would like to make site visits, to implement water and irrigation projects, but they are told: "You need to get home on time and take care of your children. So don't worry, we will take on your responsibilities. We'll go to the sites." This effectively eliminates women from key decision-making, even though they are equally qualified engineers. They are then blamed for this absence: "You people don't like to travel and go out into the field, so you're not contributing."

In the interviews, the women said categorically: "We would be able to function in the workplace much more effectively if our work at home was shared." In short, it is going to be difficult for women to function effectively in the workplace unless the domestic division of labour is challenged as well.

"THE SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN WATER PROFESSIONALS IN SOUTH ASIA" WAS COORDINATED BY SOPPECOM ([WWW.SOPPECOM.ORG](http://WWW.SOPPECOM.ORG)). THE SURVEY WAS SUPPORTED BY SACIWATERS, A CONSORTIUM THAT WORKS TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS IN THE WATER SECTOR IN SOUTH ASIA THROUGH EDUCATION, ACTION RESEARCH, AND ADVOCACY ([WWW.SACIWATERS.ORG](http://WWW.SACIWATERS.ORG)).



# Women's household water management in Mylai Balaji Nagar, Chennai, India

Prabha Khosla

In the south of Chennai, India, lies Mylai Balaji Nagar, a resettlement colony of about 10,000 low-income residents. In 1995, 2700 families of mostly pavement dwellers were evicted from Mylapore (Central) Chennai and resettled on a coastal wetland in the southern periphery of the city. They were evicted to make way for the construction of a railway station and left on the Pallikaranai wetland without any services or infrastructure. Each family was allocated a plot measuring 15 x 18 ft and their belongings were trucked and dumped on the wetland. The forced eviction of slum and pavement dwellers from towns and cities is an ongoing process and managed by the Slum Clearance Board, an agency of the Tamil Nadu State government. Once people are evicted, the provision of services to them becomes the responsibility of the municipal government where they are resettled. For the newly evicted pavement dwellers from Mylapore, the Pallikaranai *panchayat* (town council) became their new local government.

The land, and in this case, the wetland, continues to be owned by the State government and residents are given a 'licence' to live there. However, this does not prevent many of the resettled slum and pavement dwellers from selling their rights to the land and either moving back to the city or to another area. Buying and selling of the 'licence' to reside in Mylai Balaji (MB) Nagar is a common occurrence.

In the early years of the resettlement, access to water was not a problem; however, today, there is a severe problem of both water quantity and quality. The supply of water via standpipes and water tankers is sporadic, arrives without warning, and sometimes not for 5-10 days. The Pallikaranai panchayat pumps water from a well in the nearby Lake Narrayamapuram

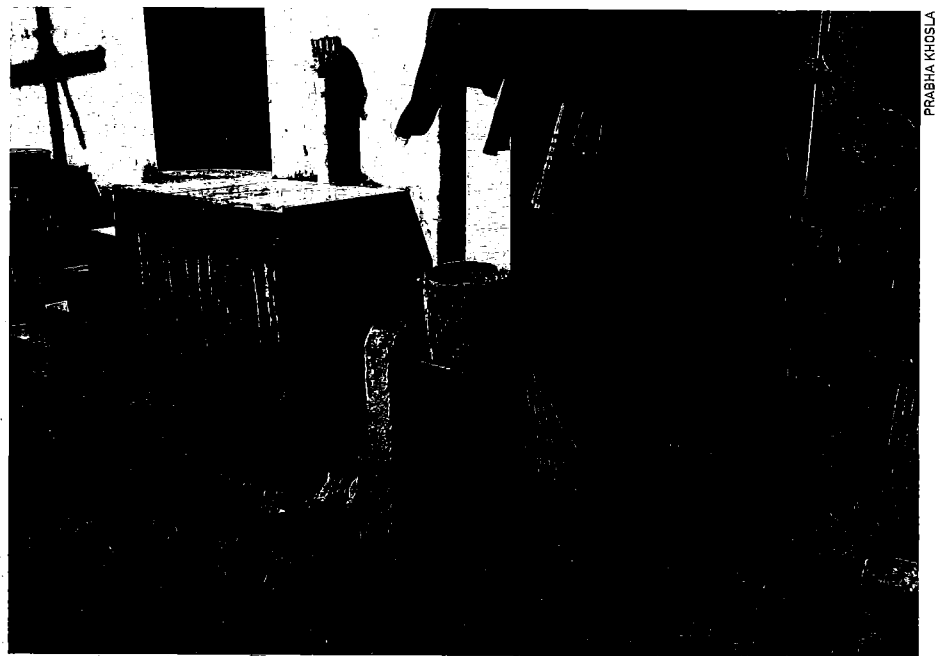
into a piped water system and if there is insufficient water, then water tankers distribute water to residents. The limited water supply is also a reflection of the reality of Chennai as a whole, which is heavily dependent on groundwater extraction and does not have sufficient water to satisfy the demands of a metropolitan region of 7.5 million (2007) inhabitants.

For the women of Mylai Balaji (MB) Nagar and their families, the lack of sufficient and safe water is a constant problem and occupies much of their time and energy as does the management of waste water. The interviews with Parameswari and Mannammai below provide a snapshot of the very difficult reality of the women in MB Nagar as well as many other slums and informal settlements in urban India — a snapshot of how poor urban women manage household water when they have very precarious access to it.

## Parameswari

Parameswari is 28 years old and lives in a two-story house with her husband, two sons, aged five and seven, a brother, her parents and her grandmother. She and her family have been living in MB Nagar since 1999. They are not from the original community that was evicted from Mylapore. They bought their rights to the land from a family who was re-settled here. Parameswari's husband is a construction worker and her mother is a cleaner at the local school. Parameswari makes about Rs. 2000/month from her sewing. (1US\$ =Rs. 45) She obtained a loan from her Self-Help Women's Group — Kalki (a micro-credit system common in India), so that she could build the additional floor of the house.

When the family first moved to MB Nagar they used to get water daily via water tankers sent by the town council. Over the years, standpipes were installed



Standpipe in MB Nagar

and with the increasing density of the settlement, as well as other factors, water supply was reduced to every other day, and then to twice a week. The water in the early years was clean and free of insects, which is not the case today. For about six months in the early years, water was only available at night, at midnight or later. This meant that the women could not sleep as they had to stay awake into the night for the water. They successfully lobbied the town *panchayat* to change this schedule. Today, residents get water once every 5-10 days depending on the season. In the dry season it is more difficult to get water from the standpipes and the town panchayat sends in water tankers. During the rest of the year, they get water via the standpipes, the water tankers, and they also purchase water from private water

families draw lots to determine the sequence in which they will collect water. Then they line up their pots. On average each woman is able to fill 20 pots of 12 litres each and they fill up all the large plastic containers they have in their homes. In total, her family uses 3 pots a day to bathe, drink and cook. She and her two sons bathe with 1 pot of water. They wash clothes every 2-3 days. Washing clothes utilizes about 8 pots of water. Parameswari and her mother are responsible for the provision of water for the family, including carrying the water upstairs. Parameswari's husband does not help with fetching water.

Parameswari feels that using the tanker water for drinking has not been too hazardous for her and her family. Only when the kids are sick with fever and diarrhea

says when they were first re-located to this wetland, there was no provision of water and they had to go elsewhere to fetch water in their pots. They complained about this and then the town panchayat started to send water tankers. They then had to take their pots to the water tanker and usually managed to get 4-5 pots of water. Each pot holds 12 litres. She says it has been difficult to get water for a few years now, but she cannot remember for how many years exactly. If there is water in the lake then they get water. She does not pay for any water from the *panchayat* and she thinks they pay Rs. 650/tanker. These days the water problem is worse because the water pipe is broken and they only get water once every 5-15 days. She says there is no schedule for when the water will come from either the standpipes or the water tankers. She says they know they will get water when they find out that Sector 1 got water that day. Then they wait around until the water comes through their standpipes. This can mean waiting for more than a day. She says when the water arrives people inform each other and that is how they find out it has come and so they go and get their pots and line-up.

In Mannammai's area, water usually comes for 2 hours and all the standpipes in the area get the water at the same time. Currently, the standpipe that Mannammai uses is shared by 10 households.

If there is sufficient water pressure then she and the women sharing the standpipe can fill 15-18 pots each. They have a random lottery system for deciding who gets to fill her pots first. If, for example, the water from the stand pipe stopped at number five last time around, then the next time the water comes they would begin with number 5. Mannammai has built a cement tank outside her house along the wall. Half of this tank is for potable water storage and the other half for waste water. When full, household waste water is dumped into the canals that demarcate the different sectors of MB Nagar. The potable water also includes rain water as Mannammai has connected a pipe from her roof to the tank. This water is used for cooking and washing clothes. Mannammai uses bleaching powder to ster-

**According to Parameswari, getting water even every other day would make a big difference to her life; then, she could get all her household responsibilities done early and be able to do other things. She would not have to wait for water the whole day.**

vendors in the slum. Parameswari says they do not pay for water provided by the town council; but she sometimes buys water from the private vendors. She pays Rs. 2.50 for a pot of 12 litres. She does not buy any bottled water for drinking and does not sterilize the water she collects. She keeps the tanker water for drinking and uses a plastic sieve to filter it. The water from the standpipes is used for washing clothes, utensils, as well as bathing. During the rainy season, most of the women harvest rain water, which they feel is the cleanest water they can get, aside from bottled water which some residents buy.

The standpipe in Parameswari's area is shared by 17 families. She says they have more people sharing the standpipe than in other sectors. In her area, the water in the standpipes often arrives in the morning between 6-8 am. Every time that the water arrives, the women of the 17

and the doctor tells her that the problem is with the water, does she boil water.

According to Parameswari, getting water even every other day would make a big difference to her life; then, she could get all her household responsibilities done early and be able to do other things. She would not have to wait for water the whole day.

#### **Mannammai**

Mannammai is 40 years old and has been living in MB Nagar for the last 15 years. She is one of the original inhabitants who were evicted from Mylapore. In 1995 she and her husband sold their plot and tried to buy other land elsewhere, but they could not find anything affordable. So, they came back and bought a plot from someone else. Mannammai lives with her husband who is a helper on a construction site. Her children are grown up, married, and live nearby. Mannammai

ilize the water. The water in the tank usually develops insects (larvae) within two days.

These canals are linked to the wetland and are one source of contamination of the wetland. (Even though this is a Ramsar Convention wetland and supposed to be protected as a bird sanctuary, it is also being contaminated by a solid waste dump, hospital waste from a neighbouring hospital and raw sewerage from a number of sources. Despite years of studies, protests by environmentalists and residents, government inquiries, etc., the wetland continues to be surrounded by controversy and a definite plan for its protection and management is still to be resolved and implemented.)

Mannammai buys drinking water in 20 litre bottles for Rs. 20/bottle. In her household they use about 15 bottles a month. It is only rarely that she will boil

everyday and does not have any health problems due to water-related issues. She would prefer to get tenure and pay all her taxes for water, electricity and land so that she can get better services rather than waste her entire day waiting for water from the stand pipes.

Wetlands are critical for numerous reasons including for flood control, purifying contaminated water and for replenishing ground water. The Pallikarantai wetland is invaluable for local flora and fauna, for protection from storm surges, and for ground water recharge. The ongoing encroachment of both the wetland and the Lake will further increase water insecurity. A 'solution' for a regular, safe, and affordable water supply and for the protection of the wetland is not on the immediate agenda in MB Nagar and Chennai.

Limited access to safe water for drink-

urban residents around the world. Growing urbanization and population densities, inadequate management of the natural environment and liquid and solid wastes, and inequity in water distribution will further deepen water insecurity. City living is going to continue to challenge women's creativity in water saving strategies.

The research that forms the basis of this article was undertaken for a collaborative research project between the University of Guelph, Canada, and the Indian Institute of Technology (Madras) India, and funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Thanks for interpretation to Francis Chellapan. ☸

**Prabha Khosla** is an urban planner. She works on urban sustainability, urban environments, democratizing local governance, water and sanitation, equality and equity in municipal issues, and training and capacity building. She can be reached at [prabhakhosla@gmail.com](mailto:prabhakhosla@gmail.com)



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# In the Field

## “The Water Front” Documentary: Water Politics From a Feminist Perspective

Liz Miller

A few years ago, I began working on a documentary film project, “The Water Front”, to bring the controversial issue of water privatization to the larger public. I, like many others, was waking up to the realization that climate change, water privatization, and resource management are not simply the concerns of environmentalists or urban planners but are quickly becoming the defining issues of our times. I had previous experience using documentary media as a tool for advocacy and was interested to explore water politics from a feminist perspective. By profiling female protagonists impacted by water privatization I wanted to explore the discrepancy between the theory and practice of water privatization, give voice to women and marginalized communities adversely affected, and bear witness to the ways communities are responding with inspiring models of participatory democracy.

### The Origins of “The Water Front”

In 2001 at a feminist conference in Latin America, I heard a Bolivian woman speak about a water struggle that had left her entire neighborhood without water. She was not talking about water shortages caused by drought but about a scarcity caused by a series of political decisions over what many of us believe is a shared common resource. Water scarcity caused by economic and cultural oppression has been acknowledged in the 2006 Human Development Report on Water of the United Nations Development Programme, which rejects the view that a global water crisis is simply about a shortage of a water supply. “The roots of the crisis in water can be traced to poverty, inequality and unequal power relationships as well as flawed water management policies that exacerbate

scarcity” (Human Development Report, 2006, p. 5). Making evident the connections between environmental concerns and larger systems of oppression such as institutional sexism or racism is also key to the environmental justice movement and seemed a particularly important perspective to embrace in a film representing contemporary water politics. Environmental justice as a social movement emerged in the 1980’s and has grown rapidly in the United States and internationally in response to environmental burdens shouldered by racial minorities, women, economically disadvantaged communities, and developing nations. A key advocacy component of the environmental justice movement is a demand for more participation in decision-making around environmental concerns]. The Bolivian woman’s testimony moved me to want to make a film about the intersection of gender, race, class, and water and I traveled to cities in Africa, Latin America, and across North America to find a story to anchor the issue. The story that stopped me in my tracks was a crisis playing out in Highland Park, Michigan, a city on the verge of turning its water system over to private management.

Highland Park is a small post-industrial city with a predominately African American population and a soulful past, known by many as the birthplace of Henry Ford’s assembly line and neighbor to Michael Moore’s post-industrial hometown Flint, Michigan. I visited Highland Park in 2002 after learning that residents were receiving water bills as high as \$10,000 and that almost half of the city had experienced a water shut off in their home. Here was a city located next to the largest fresh water supply in the world, and residents were without water. The setting was



Single mothers head a high number of homes in Highland Park.

ideal to explore how a scarcity defined by politics and power relations was being played out in a North American context.

As a filmmaker, I have made it a priority to represent not only the complexity of a given crisis but also the creative response to a situation. Central to my decision to tell the Highland Park story were the strong and diverse female protagonists I met on my first visit to the city. Vallory Johnson and her allies from Welfare Rights — Maureen Taylor and Marian Kramer — started their activism with the civil rights movement. At the peak of the car industry, they were labor organizers and when the industry left, they became welfare organizers. These seasoned residents now saw water as the civil rights issue of our times.

On this same visit, I met water worker Gloria Pogue, who was working non-stop managing a once glorious water plant. I also met the Emergency Financial Manager, who had been brought to Highland Park to find a solution to the city’s financial crisis and was introducing a set of controversial new water policies including increased water rates, new strict penalties for unpaid bills, and plans to privatize the water plant. Ramona Pearson, a corporate accountant by profession,

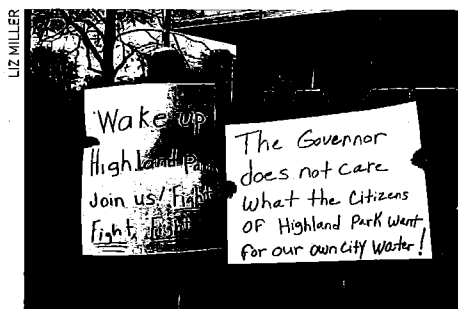
agreed to share her perspective on the situation and introduced me to her immediate team, which included Jan Lazar. After meeting these strong women leaders representing the very different responses to the crisis, I realized Highland Park was the place to tell a North American story about water, gender, democracy, and difficult decisions. Through the portrait of this small city, I hoped to shed light on a complicated situation and raise some key questions relevant to Highland Park residents and to residents around the world: Who is responsible for managing water in a household or a community? Are their experiences and needs taken into account when implementing changes in water policies? What does private investment in a water system really mean for residents, for water workers, for a community? Is water privatization a sustainable solution? What are the alternatives?

Telling the story using these very different female protagonists would permit me to show the complexity of water politics but navigating the tensions and conflicts proved challenging. What was particularly important was to present the structural issues behind the crisis and avoid framing the conflict around familiar tropes of victims and villains. I hoped instead to present women with different agendas making difficult decisions over the future of a public resource.

### Ethical Considerations

Making a film is complicated when filming women and individuals with unequal access to resources and power because of the different motivations and risks involved. For example, some residents were eager to share their experiences and to encounter an empathetic ear. Others hoped that the film would resolve their situation or become a means to help residents in similar circumstances. Most women were reluctant to speak because of the shame they felt regarding their financial difficulties or because in the state of Michigan, if a person's water is shut-off, that home is considered condemned and residents can subsequently lose custody of minor children to local welfare authorities. Gloria Pogue at the water plant was con-

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Vallery Johnson and Marian Kramer in front of City Hall, Highland Park, Michigan.

cerned that by sharing her opinions about the Financial Manager's privatization plans she might lose her job. The Financial Manager, Ramona Pearson wanted acknowledgement for the challenges she faced in attempting to remedy problems that had been accumulating for years such as outdated facilities and poor management. I had a responsibility to present her position with accuracy and respect despite the unpopularity of the measures she was taking. I wanted to provide a balanced perspective, but in this particular crisis, the long-term residents and the workers were in far more precarious situations than the management team. An additional concern was that, like the corporate consultants who had been sent in, I was an outsider to the community despite the fact that I had grown up in Baltimore, a city that shares many of the larger economic issues confronting Highland Park.

Making "The Water Front" was often like walking a tightrope as I attempted to balance different and sometimes competing ethical concerns. On the one hand, I had personally assumed the responsibility of making a documentary that would contribute to ongoing international debates regarding gender, water privatization and

environmental justice. I hoped the film would be a useful advocacy tool for organizers and communities facing similar situations. I felt a responsibility to future audiences who would want to understand the "full-story" through a wide range of perspectives on the situation. I had a professional responsibility to adhere to the standards of documentary practice, which are by no means uniform, but for me are grounded in accuracy, a respect for the individuals involved, and the ability to structure a coherent narrative. Finally, I had a responsibility to each of the subjects who had agreed to be in the film, despite my own pre-existing personal and political convictions regarding privatization and environmental justice. For example, I did not necessarily agree with the strategies employed by the managers and I did not see myself as a neutral observer to the unfolding crisis. That said, the problems the city was facing were also structural and I wanted to fairly represent their respective challenges [I have organized my concerns on a model developed by editors, Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby in the introduction to their new book, *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*. In the book, they break down the concerns into four categories: 1. Responsibility to self; 2. Responsibility to the profession; 3. Responsibility to audience; and 4. Responsibility to subjects].

Most importantly, as a filmmaker with the goal of fostering dialogue, I wanted to be sure I did not further exacerbate existing gaps in communication between the workers, residents, community organizers, and corporate managers. My challenge was to avoid fueling the conflict, which can sometimes make for good storytelling

but rarely contributes to dialogue or problem solving.

### Connecting the Film to a Movement

I followed this story for several years because I wanted to represent the full cycle of a community's response to the threat of privatization. Crisis circumstances are easier to represent than the often slow and tedious work of coming up with alternatives. *Welfare Rights*, the volunteer advocacy group that supports individuals in crisis is featured prominently in the film. They not only helped individuals during water shut offs, but in consultation with a public utilities lawyer, they created an alternative to the privatization proposal. Their alternative, the Water Affordability Plan is featured in the film and on the website ([waterfrontmovie.com](http://waterfrontmovie.com)) and has become a model for other cities dealing with low-income residents and underfunded facilities. In addition, while the filming eventually ended, *Welfare Rights* has tirelessly continued to implement a range of creative and strategic responses to the water crisis in Highland Park. A recent initiative was to gather additional video testimony from Detroit and Highland Park residents experiencing outrageous water bills and water shut offs. In collaboration with students from the University of Michigan, they compiled these testimonies and organized a *Truth Commission for Water Rights*. They then created a report and a set of recommendations that was sent to the United Nations. *Welfare Rights* plans to repeat commissions in various places around the United States in their work to defend affordable water as a human right. The film has helped to raise awareness internationally about the work of *Welfare Rights* and helped the group secure the prestigious, *Purpose Prize*, a financial prize, which acknowledges individuals over the age of 65 who are making change in their communities. It was also important to connect the film to national organizing efforts and in collaboration with Food and Water Watch, the film traveled to over forty cities across North America to instigate discussion on policy changes to protect the right to water. The most significant award

the film has received to date is the "Community Empowerment Award" issued by The National Community Reinvestment Coalition at their annual conference, which brings together organizations from around the United States to discuss the future of American Cities.

The award confirmed the importance of strategic collaborations between a film and a community and has illustrated the critical role women play in defending the right to affordable water. Highland Park foreshadows the challenges that cities around the world are facing and brings into focus the discrepancy between those making policies and those living the consequences. ❧

**Liz Miller** is a documentary maker, inter-media artist, and a professor in the Communication Studies program at Concordia University in Montreal. Miller has developed documentary/inter-media projects with women, refugee youth, senior citizens and a wide range of human rights organizations internationally. Miller is currently on the board of the International Association of Women in Television and Radio and one of the co-founders of the Concordia Documentary Centre. Her films including *Novela*, *Novela and The Water Front* have been exhibited around the world and have been used to influence policy and educational initiatives. *Mapping Memories* is her newest collaborative new media project and can be found at <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/refugeeyouth/>.

#### Further Resources:

The film website and DVD feature interviews with women working on issues of water and gender. Vivienne Bennett, co-author of **Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America** discusses possible solutions for the water crisis. There are also featured interviews with water advocates like Maude Barlow. See [www.waterfrontmovie.com](http://www.waterfrontmovie.com) or contact Bullfrog Films at [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com).

Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty, and the global water crisis. United Nations Development Programme.

Ruby, Jay, Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, ed., **Image Ethics in the Digital Age**.

## Dynamic Women Can Make a Difference



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**Pacific Flow**

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water has a syntax i am still learning  
a middle voice pivots where it is porous

foraminifera punctuate ocean floors  
salmon streams double as human and bear lifelines

an underlying platform marine reclaims its own  
from trough to crest hypersea rolls through meme

tidal rhythm sings convoluta roscoffensis  
silica circuits iodine invokes thyroid

saltiness grows over eons plankton provide half our oxygen  
what we cannot see matters as kin

fever speeds us up churns soluble toxins, insoluble plastics  
strikes gulls spikes trawls

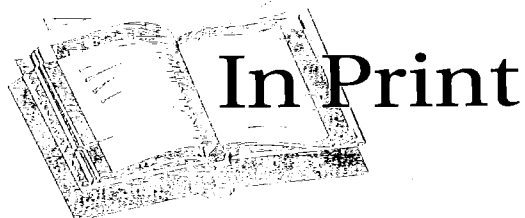
choppy waves warn hazardous passages  
abound from city sewage

mess amasses dissonant grammar  
wail overfished bluefins tune

benthic beholds watches and weights  
learning curves gurgles to the surface

dedicated to **The Sea Around Us** by Rachel Carson

Rita Wong is the author of *sybillunrest* (co-written with Larissa Lai), *forage*, and *monkeypuzzle*. She has received the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop Emerging Writer Award and the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Wong teaches at Emily Carr University of Art and Design and is currently researching the poetics of water.



## In Print

**New Books and Staff Picks from the Toronto Women's Bookstore**  
[www.womensbookstore.com/new.html](http://www.womensbookstore.com/new.html)

**Aqua Shock: The Water Crisis in America**  
Susan J. Marks, 2009.

**Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water**  
Maude Barlow, 2009.

**Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water**  
Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, 2005.

**Bottlemania: How Water Went on Sale and Why We Bought It**  
Elizabeth Royte, 2009.

**Dry Spring: The Coming Water Crisis of North America**  
Chris Wood, 2008.

**To the Last Drop: A Novel of Water, Oppression and Rebellion**  
Andrew Wice, 2008.

**Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What To Do About It**  
Robert Glennon, 2009.

**Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization**  
Steven Solomon, 2010.

**Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource**  
Marq de Villiers, 2001.

**Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit**  
Vandana Shiva, 2002.

**When Rivers Run Dry: Water — The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century**  
Fred Pearce, 2007.

## Journals and Magazines

### Water Front Magazine

Stockholm Water Front is a quarterly, English-language magazine that spreads knowledge on important water and water-related issues. Stockholm Water Front presents a mix of popular scientific information and news reporting about the activities of the Stockholm International Water Institute, [www.siw.org/waterfront](http://www.siw.org/waterfront).

### Water Alternatives

An interdisciplinary journal on water, politics and development. The Special Issue — WCD+10: Revisiting the Large Dam Controversy is available online. This Special Issue will also come out as a book to be printed and distributed by UNEP. The book will be released at the Stockholm World Water Week on 7 September 2010. [www.water-alternatives.org](http://www.water-alternatives.org).

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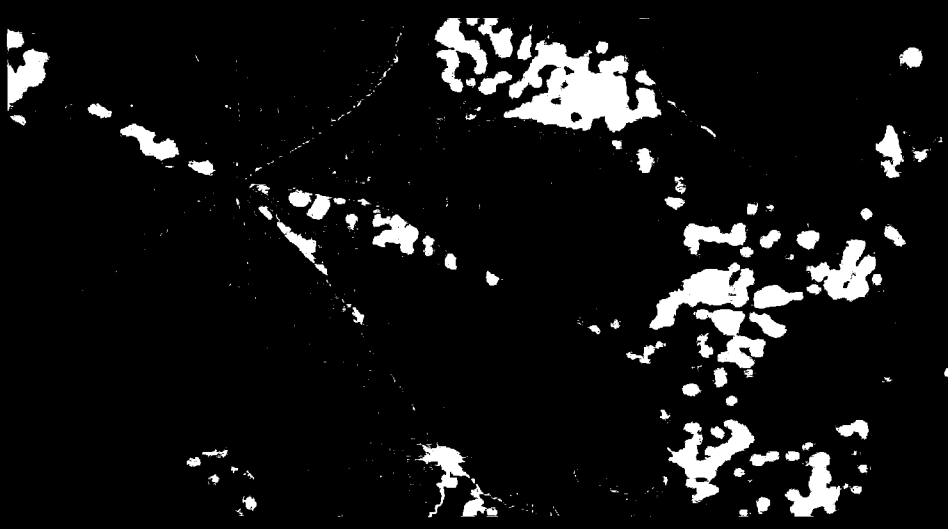


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- Job Postings Daily
- National & Regional E-mail Lists
- Calendar
- Networking Resources

# WE Resources

## Web Resources

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### ORGANIZATIONS, MOVEMENTS AND RESOURCES

#### Blue Planet Project

A global initiative working with partners around the world to achieve the goal of water justice now.  
[www.blueplanetproject.net](http://www.blueplanetproject.net)

#### Canadian Water Resources Association

The Canadian Water Resources Association promotes effective management of Canada's water resources by stimulating public recognition, awareness and understanding.  
[www.cwra.org](http://www.cwra.org)

#### Council of Canadians — Water Campaign

The Council of Canadians' water campaign is calling for a national water policy that protects Canada's water from bulk exports and privatization.  
[www.canadians.org/water](http://www.canadians.org/water)

#### Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW)

The Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW) is an independent group of water experts from across Canada that encourages government action to protect our critical fresh water resources.  
[www.flowcanada.org](http://www.flowcanada.org)

#### Global Water Partnership

The Global Water Partnership supports the sustainable development and management of water resources at all levels.  
[www.gwpforum.org](http://www.gwpforum.org)

#### Global Women's Water Initiative

The Global Women's Water Initiative is a joint initiative that equips local African women leaders with technology training, business skills, networking support, and seed funding to launch income-generating water service projects across Africa.  
[www.africanwomenandwater.org](http://www.africanwomenandwater.org)

#### National Geographic Magazine: Water Pressure

Step into the world of writers and photographers as they tell you about the best, worst, and quirkiest places and adventures they encountered.  
[www.ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0209/feature1/](http://www.ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0209/feature1/)

#### National Network on Environments and Women's Health — Women and Water

The National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH) is focused on creating strategies for effective change through an understanding of relevant policy issues related to the health of all women in Canada. Over the past year the National Network on Environments

and Women's Health (NNEWH) has been working on a variety of projects related to women and water.  
[www.womenandwater.ca](http://www.womenandwater.ca)

#### On the Commons — Water

On the Commons (formerly Tomales Bay Institute) is a network of citizens and organizations exploring new ways to achieve social justice, environmental harmony and democratic participation at all levels of society.  
[www.onthecommons.org](http://www.onthecommons.org)

#### Think Outside the Bottle

Think Outside the Bottle is a campaign working to promote, protect and ensure public funding for our public water systems.  
[www.stopcorporateabuse.org/water-campaign](http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/water-campaign)

#### UNESCO — Water

The UNESCO Water Portal's objective is to improve access to information on freshwater on the web. The site serves as a thematic entry point to the current UNESCO and UNESCO-led programmes on freshwater. It also provides a platform for sharing and browsing websites of other water-related organizations, government bodies and NGOs through the water links and events databases.  
[www.unesco.org/water](http://www.unesco.org/water)

#### UN Water

UN-Water strengthens coordination and coherence among UN entities dealing with issues related to all aspects of freshwater and sanitation.  
[www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)

#### Women for Water Partnership

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) is a worldwide strategic alliance of local, national and international women's organisations and networks, active in the areas of sustainable development, water & sanitation, poverty and gender. WfWP's common focus is on women's social and economic development through fulfilling basic water and sanitation needs.  
[www.womenforwater.org](http://www.womenforwater.org)

#### World Water Day

The international observance of World Water Day is an initiative that grew out of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro.  
[www.worldwaterday.org](http://www.worldwaterday.org)

#### International Rivers

International Rivers has been working for over 20 years to protect rivers and defend the rights of communities that depend on them.  
[www.internationalrivers.org](http://www.internationalrivers.org)

#### Water Integrity Network

Promoting anti-corruption solutions in water, sanitation and water resources management worldwide.  
[www.waterintegritynetwork.net](http://www.waterintegritynetwork.net)



#### Artist Statement

I obtained my Master's degree (MFA) in Print Media from the University of Concordia in 2000. I am presently teaching drawing at the University of Manitoba.

For ten years, I was an artist and a member of the board of directors at Open Studio, a print co-operative in Toronto, and, for two years, a member of the board of directors at Studio XX, a feminist co-operative of media artists. I am presently an artist member at Martha Street Studio in Winnipeg.

I have participated in the "Month of Printmaking" in Québec. I have shown my prints in several group shows, including shows at the Galerie Graff and the Stewart Hall Museum in 2006. In June 2006, my work was included in the Biennale de l'Art et le Papier VII in Ottawa, organized by the Galerie Jean-Claude Bergeron, where it was awarded "Le prix d'excellence". [A catalogue of the exhibition is available through the Galerie Jean-Claude Bergeron.] In 2009, I exhibited my work at the Harcourt House in Edmonton and as part of the "Revolver" exhibition at the Gallery 111 at the University of Manitoba. In addition to showing throughout Canada (in Alberta, Ontario, Québec, Newfoundland and Manitoba), I have exhibited my work in Tokyo, New York and Seattle.

My work is included in numerous collections, including those of the National Bank of Canada and Loto-Québec.

Recently, I completed an artist residency in Denmark and made photogravure prints for "Ephemeras". It is a series of works that looks at the visual "paths", "patterns" and "gestures" found in daily ritual. The series continues an engagement with psychological states using absurdity to highlight the underlying mechanics. I have been focusing on patterns.

In general, my work comments upon and reinterprets society's views. I have an interest in issues of aging, gender roles and community. Looking for discrepancies within my work is a key to understanding its meaning. I have an illustration business as well as a contemporary art practice. Please see [www.karenhibbard.com](http://www.karenhibbard.com)

**Karen Hibbard**

Name of piece is "webthematique". The 3 women in this image are appropriated from the French artist Maurice Denis's painting done at the turn of the century. He loved to paint bathers at the beach. I modified the bathers in Photoshop and placed them in an abstract landscape with some Japanese pattern for texture. The western artist was influenced by eastern art at this time. 'Momo' was not only a visual artist but also a designer and sometimes made borders of flat floral patterns around his paintings. For the WEI Magazine's issue about Women and Water, I added a tidal wave appropriated from a traditional Japanese print. This wave is meant to symbolize the impending issue of water as critical and the bathers represent our blasé state in regards to this imminent crisis.

Featured photographer **Allan Lissner**



Standing a few meters away from her home in Benguet province, Philippines, Trixie looks down at the tailings pond of the Victoria Gold Mine where toxic waste from the mining process is dumped at a rate of 1,500 to 2,500 metric tons per day. Many mine sites are located in the mountains that act as watersheds for the surrounding river systems, which pose serious threats to those living downstream from the mines. Trixie's father, Peter, worked at the Victoria Gold Mine for seventeen years until the workers went on strike in 2005 to demand better working conditions. Management refused to meet their demands and fired the 19 union leaders behind the strike, including Peter. With Peter unable to find work the burden of supporting the family now falls on the shoulders of his wife Lilia, Trixie's mother. Lilia has no formal education so her prospects are limited. The only option available to her is to work abroad as one of the millions of Filipino domestic servants around the world. Trixie is left with an unemployed father, a mother who may be forced to leave the family and with the land her indigenous ancestors thrived on for generations contaminated — all for someone else's treasure.