

## **TANZANIA GENDER NETWORKING PROGRAMME (TGNP)**

**WATER IS A PUBLIC GOOD, NOT A PRIVATE COMMODITY FOR SALE TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER!**

**IN CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WATER DAY**

The government of Hon Jakaya Kikwete has reconfirmed its commitment to the provision of water to all women and men of Tanzania. Increasing access to safe and clean water for women and men has been incorporated into the goals of MKUKUTA, Millennium Development goals and Vision 2025. At the same time, there is in real life a growing gap in access to safe and clean water between the rich and the poor, and between people living in rural areas and those living in towns. This gap is fueled by the privatization policies and user fees policies which were imposed on our government by the World Bank, IMF and a set of bilateral donors, beginning in the mid-1980s.

Water is now treated as a private commodity for sale to the highest bidder, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s under President Mwalimu Nyerere, water was understood to be a right for all Tanzanians, rich and poor, black and white, male and female. All efforts were taken to increase access for all, and to promote equity, so as to overcome decades of inequality and injustice that were cornerstones of official government policy and practice in the colonial days.

The positive steps taken by the present government to commit itself to increased access to safe and clean water for all Tanzanians must be acknowledged. These steps include the importance given to water in MKUKUTA targets, and the commitment by the then Ministry concerned in the National Budget of 2005/06 to increase the share of resources going to the district level. Attention has been placed on the need to reduce the time it takes to collect water, which has special importance for women and children who are most often responsible for providing water.

However, the government has made no explicit commitment to relieve women and children – and men – of the slave-like work of head portering to carry water from water sites to homes or other locations. The entire society appears complacent about the failure to provide all families with piped water within their compounds, or as close to them as possible. Why the complacency? We believe a major reason is the existence of apparently docile, unpaid labour in the form of women and children who provide the head portering services within their families without any form of remuneration. Their work in toting water from distant water sites to their homes is a basic subsidy to government, the economy, the community as well as their families.

Is it wise for the business sector and the government to assume that women and children will continue to provide unpaid water portering in this way? More important, is it ethical and just?

The water situation has been severely worsened by the HIV/AIDS crisis, which increases the demand for safe and clean water for consumption, sanitation and basic hygiene. Drought has also increased water scarcity. The water crisis, however, has been especially worsened as a result of privatization and the withdrawal of the government from its earlier commitment to provide a strong public water system in both urban and rural areas.

Instead, various programmes are in place to shift the burden from the government to communities, families and individuals.

There is certainly a role for communities and individuals to help maintain public water systems – it is in the people’s own interests to control and manage water on their own behalf. However, this is not what is in fact happening. Instead, water is in danger of being sold off to large scale foreign private corporations, in the case of Dar es Salaam, or to the more wealthy local companies and families with the means to finance deep water wells. An increasing number of people are forced to pay for water from their own neighbours’ wells, or from young traders or hired workers who peddle water on behalf of water merchants. The cost has risen from 20/ a bucket to 500/ or more. Who can afford such costs? Certainly not most women and men in poor families.

Although toting water for families is considered to be the work of women and children, when it comes to toting water for pay, young men monopolise the work! Whether working on their own behalf as self-employed water traders, or employed by more wealthy water merchants, young men benefit from the existing water crisis. At the same time, the amount of income they earn is miniscule, compared to the profits that the ‘owners’ of the private water wells acquire from the sale of water to the merchants. Far worse is the profits which water merchants and small traders reap from selling water from public water sites!

Gender and water activists have joined together in a campaign against water privatization and for water rights for all. We propose the following:

- 1) water privatization policy be reviewed by government, donors and civil society, in the light of the present water crisis in Dar es Salaam and other urban areas;
- 2) the strategy of user fees for water in rural areas, where the largest proportion of the poor live, be revisited by all actors;
- 3) resources be increased to the water sector, with assurances that the resources reach the district and village level, and benefit the end user, namely each woman, man and child;
- 4) monitoring mechanisms be supported, including community tracking of resources and water delivery, so as to reduce corruption and increase accountability and transparency within the sector;
- 5) participation of civil society organizations strengthened in policy/budget formulation, implementation and monitoring, including tracking both service delivery and advocacy organizations;
- 6) water management systems at the local level to be in the hands of community groups, civil society organizations, District Councilors, and Parliamentarians, working together with the relevant Ministry of Water, and not in the hands of private companies; and

- 7) a public debate to be carried out about water in the media which centres on such questions as who owns and controls water? Who provides water at different levels? Who benefits?