



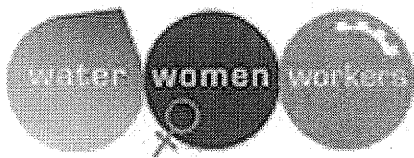
## Women, Water and Workers in Southern Africa

Survey of attitudes of women trade unionists in the Public Sector in Southern Africa, 30 July 2008

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Drawing water from the dry river bed, Ngolotshe, Zululand, South Africa.



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## Introduction

The Southern African Public Service International Conference, *Women, Water and Workers*, provided the opportunity to weigh up the attitudes of women in the public sector in Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rodrigues/Mauritius, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, facing the challenge of delivery to those without access to water services and improving services where these exist.

Africa is the continent which experiences the greatest proportional incidence of death from water related diseases. More than one and a half million children die from water related diseases each year, most of them within Africa. Diarrhoeal disease, the second leading cause of child death worldwide, is caused by environmental factors -- dirty water and lack of sanitation. But despite its dangers, diarrhoea remains a largely overlooked crisis, falling low on the health priority lists of many leaders both within Africa and the global health community. To what extent can trade union action provide a remedy?

According to international bodies maintaining the statistics, Africa is also the continent which is making slowest progress towards meeting the MDG in water and sanitation. According to the WHO and UNICEF report *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation Special Focus on Sanitation* (2008) accelerated progress is needed especially in sub-Saharan Africa, home to more than a third of those using unimproved drinking water sources.

In sanitation Sub-Saharan Africa has recorded the least progress, with use of improved sanitation increasing from 26 per cent in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2006. More than half a billion people living in sub-Saharan Africa have no access to improved sanitation.

Although these are immense challenges, there are also indications of change. There has been progress in safe water which has seen coverage increase from 49 per cent in 1990 to 58 per cent in 2006, involving an additional 207 million Africans. This progress, however, is not sufficient to put Sub-Saharan Africa's MDG on target. On the basis of the existing rate of progress, the HSRC has made a preliminary estimate that (if current demographic trends remain constant) it will take another 45 years or to 2035 for the continent as a whole to achieve the MDG.

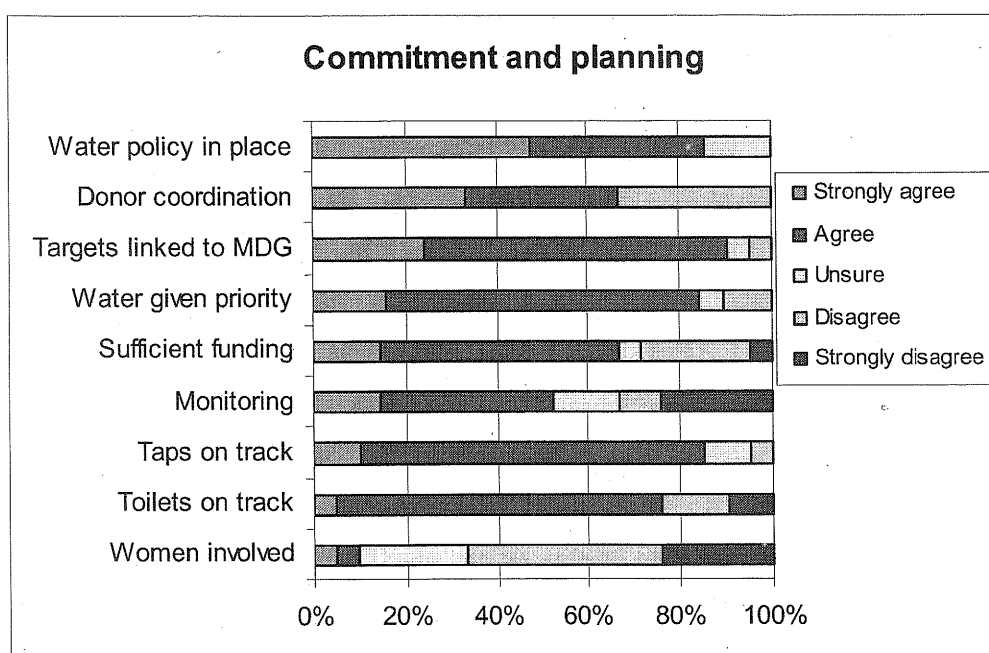
For all these reasons the Conference gave an excellent opportunity to African women public sector trade unionists focus on the key issues and to highlight ways in which trade union action can contribute to meeting the challenge of free basic services for all. A questionnaire (attached below) was completed by all 21 participants from 11 countries and formed part of the assessment of conclusions of the HSRC's presentation on progress in water services in Africa, the involvement of children in collecting water, and union participation in improving planning and delivery.

The results are presented in a simple format: under sets of strategic questions from policy to union action to achieve change.

## 1. Are African countries committed to making the change?

A set of 9 questions probe the readiness of African governments to deliver safe water and improved sanitation. The respondents regarded the indications of greatest commitment as:

- The establishment of policy to deliver water;
- Sufficient coordination among donors;
- Linking national targets for delivery to MDG;
- Giving sufficient priority to delivery in Poverty Reduction Strategies.



The most problematic areas identified by respondents are

- The involvement of women in water planning
- Achieving sanitation delivery ("toilets on track");
- Getting water delivery ("taps on track") on target; and
- Effective monitoring of progress towards MDG.

Taken as a whole the respondents appear broadly confident that delivery of safe water and improved sanitation is broadly on track; although only a minority *strongly* support this view.

From responses to the questions on commitment and planning an index was created with the highest score (100%) representing the most positive responses to all questions.

The analysis of responses provided the table below give a reading of the levels of commitment as assessed by country participants on their own governments.

Index of government commitment to delivery

Country	Index of commitment
Malawi	86%
Namibia	83%
Mauritius	83%
Botswana	81%
Zimbabwe	75%
Angola	72%
Mozambique	67%
South Africa	66%
Zambia	60%
Swaziland	44%
Rodrigues/Mauritius	28%

The data shows a wide variance between countries with Malawi being assessed as having a high level and Rodrigues/Mauritius as a low level of commitment.

Further analysis of the data indicates that Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi and Botswana are considered to be most likely to meet the MDG; Namibia , Rodrigues/Mauritius and Angola was less likely to meet MDG, and Swaziland the least likely to meet the MDG in water and sanitation.

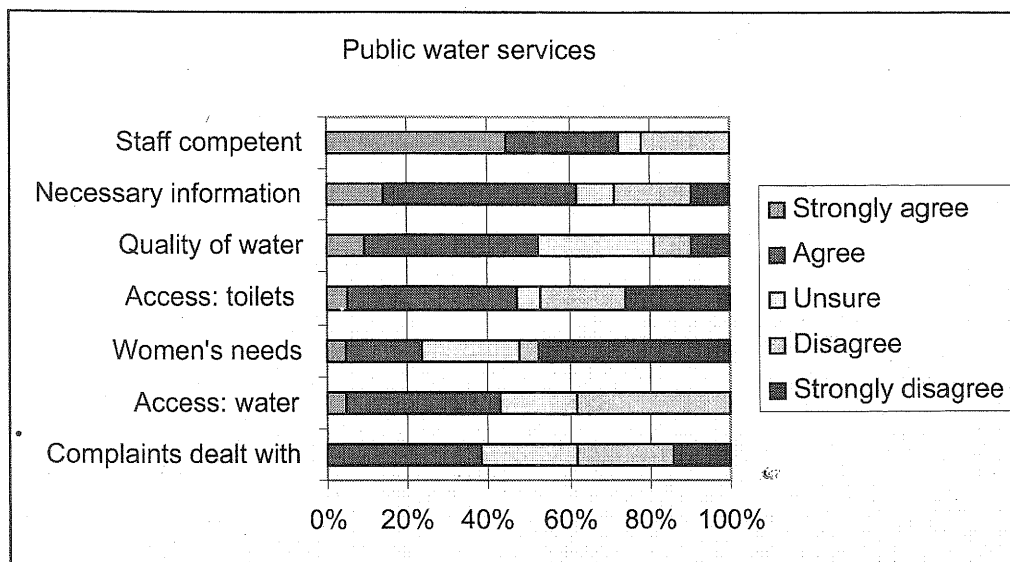
## 2. Quality of public sector delivery

Responses to questions on public water services provide an assessment by public sector workers of the state of the sector.

The following were the positive assessments of the sector:

- The competence and commitment of public sector water workers;
- The necessary information about services; and
- The quality of water.

Respondents were less confident about access to safe water and improved sanitation; some 22% strongly dissatisfied with delivery of improved sanitation.



The least positive responses were made in relation to:

- Complaints getting a positive response; and
- Women's needs being taken into account.

As in the case of assessment of government commitment, an index of water public service has been created with the highest score (100%) representing the most positive responses to all questions. The analysis of responses provided the table below give a reading of the levels of assessment of water public service by country participants on their own service.

Index of water public service

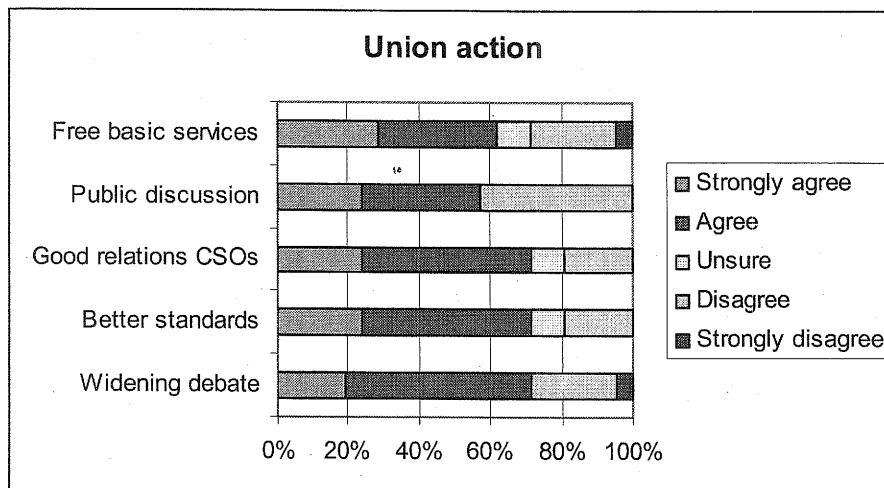
Country	Index of water public service
Botswana	75%
Mauritius	75%
Angola	61%
Zambia	61%
Zimbabwe	55%
Namibia	46%
Mozambique	46%
South Africa	46%
Swaziland	39%
Malawi	29%
Rodrigues/Mauritius	7%

Among the 11 countries, Botswana and Mauritius are regarded as having a high quality service; Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as having a fairly good quality service; Mozambique, South Africa, and Swaziland as having a lower quality service; and Malawi and Rodrigues/Mauritius as having a poor water public service.

### 3. Are unions taking effective action?

Questions relating to effective union action were put to participants in the Conference. The quality of union action on most issues had a positive response, in particular for unions:

- Actively supporting free basic services in water and sanitation.
- Involvement in public debate to meet MDG commitments.



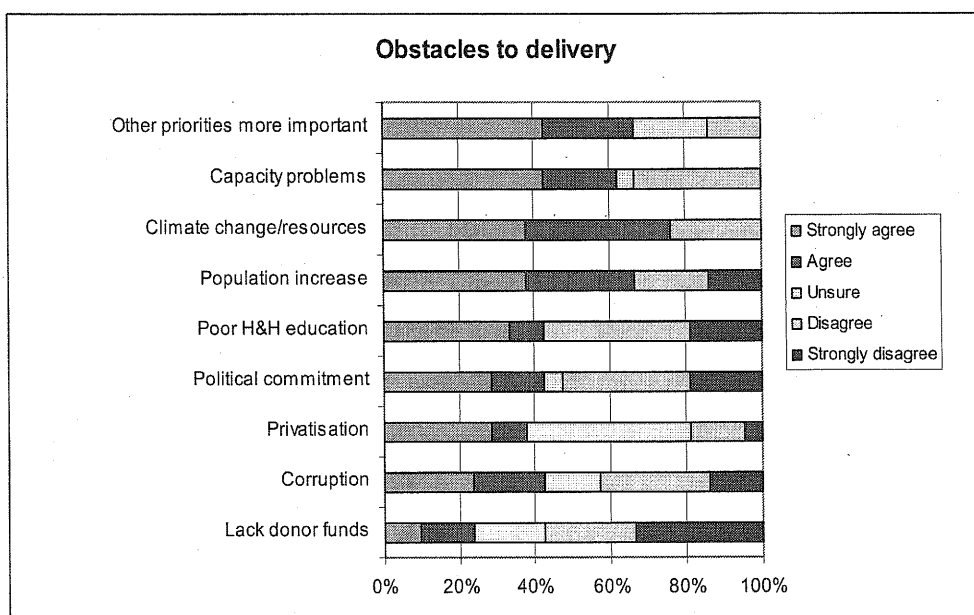
Although most responses were positive, respondent felt unions were least active in:

- Developing good relations with CSOs to achieve improved water delivery;
- Actively widening space for public discussion of social goals and MDGs; and
- Helping set better standards in water service delivery.

#### 4. What are the key obstacles to progress?

There were 9 questions posed in relation to key obstacles to progress in delivery of water and sanitation. The most important obstacles were identified as follows:

- Other priorities rather than water being given preference
- Capacity problems with insufficient engineers, planners, etc;
- Climate change and insufficient water resources; and
- Population increase.



The least important obstacles were regarded as:

- A lack of donor funds;
- Corruption in government,
- Privatisation in the water sector,
- Insufficient political commitment, and
- Poor health and hygiene education.

#### 5. Conclusions

Although it might have been expected that public sector trade unionists would show a uniform state of mind, the responses to a number of questions show a considerable range of opinion. A common feature of the responses of these women participants in the Conference is that the needs of women are not adequately taken into account and public complaints not receiving an adequate response.



In relation to government commitment and planning the respondents give an overall positive assessment. Policy, monitoring, targets, progress towards taps and toilets, funding, etc, are generally considered positively. In relation to the data provided by international monitoring bodies many of these assessments seem too generous as Sub-Saharan Africa is assessed as not being on track to meet the MDGs particularly in rural areas.

Specifically in relation to MDG targets most countries are regarded by respondents as on track to meet their commitments; those which were assessed as not on track are Namibia (sanitation), Rodrigues/Mauritius (both water and sanitation), and Swaziland (both water and sanitation). The gap between the assessment of monitoring bodies and those of participants in the Conference may represent the need for more information, engagement and detailed discussion of the all the elements leading to improved water services delivery.

Although there is a range of opinion in questions relating to public sector water service delivery and generally these public sector participants make a positive appraisal, a sizeable minority disagree that the sector is providing adequate access to toilets, is meeting women's needs, is dealing with complaints and is providing adequate quality of water.

Participants make a fairly positive appraisal of the existing levels of union action in improving standards and widening public discussion, but the fairly critical assessment of government monitoring of water services (on page 2) may show an area in which trade unions could be more actively involved. Certainly there appears an opening for more active engagement if trade unions can be well prepared with an independent appraisal of the possibility of improving public services and delivery on the issues critically assessed in this survey.

Finally it appears there is considerable debate about the relationship of privatisation to delivery; less than half the respondents regard privatisation as an important obstacle to delivery. Possibly respondents see privatisation as more of a threat to well established services in urban areas than in the rural communities which are most in need of delivery. This certainly needs further discussion among trade unionists to assess the challenge posed by the private sector in the water sector.

## Questionnaire on water service delivery in Africa

### Political commitment, funding and planning:

- 1 Is there a clear national water services policy?
- 2 Are your government's targets in water delivery in line with the MDG target?
- 3 If your country is involved in a PRS (IMF/WB Poverty Reduction Strategy) is water and sanitation a priority?
- 4 Is sufficient funding in place to meet water and sanitation targets?
- 5 Women are involved in water planning.
- 6 Are donors coordinating their support to water services (including sanitation)?
- 7 Is your government on track to meet the water MDG?
- 8 Is your government on track to meet the sanitation MDG?
- 9 Is there effective monitoring of progress?

### Quality of water services

- 10 Staff are competent and committed in the water sector.
- 11 Satisfied with access to public water services.
- 12 Satisfied with public funding for family toilets.
- 13 Satisfied with the quality of water in public services.
- 14 Provided with the necessary information about services.
- 15 Complaints get a positive response.
- 16 Women's needs are taken into account.

### Union action to improve water services

- 17 Involved in the public discussion and negotiations in the water sector to meet MDG commitments?
- 18 Widening the space for negotiations about social goals and MDGs.
- 19 Helping set better standards in water service delivery.
- 20 Actively supporting free basic services in water and sanitation.
- 21 Developing good relations with citizen and CSO groups for improved water delivery.

### Obstacles to delivery

- 22 A lack of donor funds.
- 23 Corruption in government.
- 24 The increase in population.
- 25 Privatisation in the water sector.
- 26 Climate change and insufficient water resources.
- 27 Capacity problems (not enough engineers, planners, etc)
- 28 Government not politically committed.
- 29 Not enough public education in health and hygiene.
- 30 Other priorities more important, such as HIV/AIDS.