

## Women and Deliberative Water Management in Brazil

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In January 2005, as part of the Sister Watersheds project, we visited a poor neighbourhood in São Paulo where informally built houses pushed up against a dirty watercourse carrying raw sewage from a big housing block up the hill.<sup>2</sup> The stream bed was littered with plastic bags, food waste, tin cans and other garbage. Bridges over the stream, some of them quite wide, were in places topped by a porch or entire room. When we asked the women who came out to greet us about this stream, they said they were concerned about children playing there, and that every time it rained the filthy water flooded into their houses. They asked: 'Why do we have to cover it over ourselves, and pay for the cement and beams? Why doesn't the government come to build a covered channel, as it should?' They saw the stream as an open sewer, which needed to be enclosed to protect them and their families from the dirty water. And yet, across the street from the stream was a house with a big metal gate decorated with a lovely painted mural of an idyllic lake with a waterfall, swimming swans, green grass and trees all around. The contrast between the idealised vision of nature depicted in the mural and the reality of the polluted stream could not be starker. Clearly, people in that Brazilian community imagined water as a source of peace, pleasure, health, and beauty - yet in their own surroundings water was nothing but a hazard.

In this paper we consider some gender aspects of the evolution of water management in Brazil. In our work on women and water, we have been inspired by ecofeminist philosophy and the concept of 'feminist

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented to the symposium on Ecofeminist Perspectives in Ecological Economics at the United States Society for Ecological Economics conference, New York, 23-27 June 2007. A related paper, 'A Bucket of Water and Daily Bread,' is forthcoming in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Comments from the Gender and Politics Working Group at York University are gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup>We were tracing the Pirajussara Creek upstream from where it empties into the Pinheiros River on the campus of the University of São Paulo, in a visit to the areas where our partners in the Sister Watersheds project are doing community-based environmental education work, led by the Ecoar Institute for Citizenship. Sister Watersheds is an educational and research exchange project linking universities and NGOs, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency through the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Its purpose is to develop innovative ways of broadening effective public involvement in water basin committees in São Paulo State. The exchange also includes environmental education initiatives in the watershed around York University in Toronto, Canada.

transformative leadership' as developed by Brazilian activists. This paper calls attention to the political under-participation of poor and racialised women in Brazil's new national system for water management, and it looks at what changes might facilitate women's involvement in watershed management.

Now as in the past and as in many other countries, water-related problems in Brazil most seriously affect the underprivileged, whose water problems take several forms: first, people living in informal and irregular settlements often do not have access to clean water and sewer services. Second, floods and rainfall-induced landslides can cause residents of informal settlements to lose their houses, belongings, and sometimes even their lives. Third, the health of people in poor communities is most affected by pollution in the rivers and streams that they must draw on.

As traditionally ascribed gender roles make poor women the main caregivers and cleaners for society at large, they are the ones most concerned by this complex of interrelated water problems. In fact, United Nations surveys report that throughout the world, whatever the details of water access, technology, or gendered labour, water has a different meaning for women than for men.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Brazil, almost one-third of employed women are domestic workers, for whom water is an important tool, input, and determinant of work conditions.<sup>4</sup> This is so, despite the fact that women have higher average levels of education than men.<sup>5</sup> But poverty notwithstanding, Brazilian homes headed by women

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations (2003) *International Year of Freshwater 2003*: [www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=2543&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2543&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) (accessed 18 June 2007).

United Nations (2005) *Women 2000 and Beyond: Published to Promote the Goals of the Beijing Declaration and the Programme for Action. Women and Water*. Division for the Advancement of Women. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, February: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Feb05.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Feb05.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Hildete Pereira de Melo (2005) *Gênero e Pobreza no Brasil: Relatório Final do Projeto 'Governabilidade Democrática de Gênero em América Latina y el Caribe'*. Brasília: Convênio Comissão Econômica para América Latina e Caribe (CEPAL) e Secretaria Especial de Políticas para as Mulheres (SPM).

<sup>5</sup> Women's salaries average only 70 per cent of men's, so it is not surprising that homes headed by women are poorer than those headed by men. The situation is worse when race is considered. Thus, in 2000, Black or Brown women received only 51 per cent of the average income of White women. The government statistical agency uses the Portuguese word 'pardo', here translated as 'Brown' meaning the colour of people with African, Indigenous, and/or White descendents. On the complexities of race in Brazil, see: Gislene Aparecida Dos Santos (2006) 'Identidade e Multiculturalismo: Em Busca de Conceitos que Fundamentem Políticas para a População Afrodescendente'. Unpublished; Ricardo Franklin Ferreira (2004), *Afro-descendente, uma Identidade em Construção*. Sao Paulo / Rio de Janeiro: Pallas/EDUC/FAPESP.

have better access to clean water than homes headed by men.<sup>6</sup> The same is true for sanitation services and public waste collection. The Brazilian national statistical agency concludes that 'a possible explanation for why households headed by women have better sanitation conditions is the fact that women are more careful in relation to aspects that relate to conditions of health and hygiene of the family'.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, access to clean water is not the only water-related problem for poor women and men. In the biggest cities of southeastern Brazil, where new informal settlements are constantly appearing, slum houses are often built too close to streams or too high on slopes - land that is undesirable and risky. Floods and landslides caused by rain, tree cutting, and general environmental degradation, compounded by inadequate water infrastructure, are regular events. Every year, mostly in summer when rains are heaviest, the newspapers are full of images of people who have lost everything they own, or even loved ones. The water from heavy rains often mixes with water from open sewers or polluted rivers, bringing additional health problems and cleanup work, especially for mothers. But, according to Monica Porto, a professor at the University of São Paulo, 'What has been constantly disregarded when political decisions related to water are to be taken is the country's poor, who have no access to safe water, and who have high infant mortality rates, and a very weak and usually unheard voice in asking for change'.<sup>8</sup> At present, poor women's role in water management is very limited. Does the feminist movement offer hope of advancing their political agency?

### **Feminism, democracy, and NGOs**

Full political participation is central to the feminist agenda in Brazil, as elsewhere. Jacqueline Pitanguy writes that initially, during the dark days of dictatorial government in the 1960s-70s, civil society in Brazil was organized around 'survival and resistance' where people 'in political terms had no sex, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation'.<sup>9</sup> Around the mid 1970s-80s, the feminist movement appeared in Brazil as a political force fighting for the visibility of women and simultaneously working 'to

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<sup>6</sup>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2006) 'As mulheres como alvo das políticas públicas brasileiras,' p.3: [www.ibge.gov.br/home/presidencia/noticias/noticia\\_visualiza.php?id\\_noticia=605&id\\_pagina=1](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/presidencia/noticias/noticia_visualiza.php?id_noticia=605&id_pagina=1) (accessed 10 June 2006).

<sup>7</sup> According to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2006), p. 3, 82 per cent of homes headed by women have direct waste collection, whereas for households headed by men the figure is 72 per cent.

<sup>8</sup> Monica Porto (2000) 'Women and Water Resources Research in Brazil' in Cecilia Tortajada (ed.) *Women and Water Management: The Latin American Experience*. Oxford University Press, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Pitanguy (2002) 'Bridging the Local and the Global: Feminism in Brazil and the International Human Rights Agenda', *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 805-820. Special Issue: The Status of Women in the Developing World, p. 807.

re-establish democracy and to widen the democratic agenda beyond classical civil and political rights to include gender inequality as a central democratic theme'.<sup>10</sup> Between 1975 and 1978, during the political *abertura*, the politics of gender discrimination was raised in many different spaces, and the first explicitly feminist organization, the Brazilian Women's Center, was created in Rio de Janeiro.

A second phase of the feminist movement in Brazil took place in the 1980s during the national transition to democracy. In 1985, the country had the chance to vote directly for a civilian president and for a new Congress, which was in charge of writing the democratic constitution of Brazil. This was a time of incredible growth in social movements and Black, gay, landless, indigenous, and ecological, as well as feminist groups, were all expanding the definitions of citizenship, democracy, equality, and participation - movements influencing the constitution, launched in 1988. This period saw ambitious feminist public action strategies where the goal was to penetrate state power and use it to implement large-scale change affecting legislation and public policies. The National Council for Women's Rights (CNDM), a federal body reporting directly to the President of Brazil, was created by Congress in 1985.<sup>11</sup> Also in 1985, the state of São Paulo established the first Police Stations for the Defense of Women (DDM).<sup>12</sup> These were designed to create a supportive environment for women where they could make complaints about sexual and domestic violence, encountering an almost exclusively female police staff. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 incorporated many feminist proposals regarding labour and social rights, social security, family life, reproductive rights, and domestic violence.<sup>13</sup>

However, political scientist Mala Htun notes that while Brazil has had more policy changes advancing women's rights than any other country in Latin America, it has the lowest levels of representation in national politics. If Brazilian women are advancing in other areas, why not in politics? Htun considers that Brazil's women's quota law, electoral rules, and clientelistic political parties are all partly to blame.<sup>14</sup> In 1996, Brazil approved a quota law to the effect that 'parties must reserve a minimum of 30 per cent and a maximum of 70 per cent of slots for candidates of one sex'.<sup>15</sup> The problem is that the law requires that 30 per cent of slots be reserved for women, but it does not demand that parties actually fill these slots. And even if congressional seats are occupied by women, what

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<sup>10</sup> Pitanguy (2002), p. 807.

<sup>11</sup> Pitanguy (2002), p. 810.

<sup>12</sup> As of May 2006, there are more than 300 such *Delegacias de Defesa da Mulher* all over Brazil; but some commentators believe they have become a way to sideline women's issues even for law enforcement, a sort of 'police station kitchen'.

<sup>13</sup> Pitanguy (2002), p. 811.

<sup>14</sup> Mala Htun (2002) 'Puzzles of Women's Rights in Brazil', *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 733-751. Special Issue: The Status of Women in the Developing World.

<sup>15</sup> Htun (2002), p. 734.

is to ensure that the interests of poor or racialised women are effectively expressed? This question highlights the shortcomings of representative democratic politics and class, race, and gender based barriers to women's effective political participation.<sup>16</sup>

A third phase of the Brazilian feminist movement began in the 1990s, when

... the feminist agenda in Brazil was carried forward ... mainly by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The significant role played by women's NGOs in the national arena and the efficacy of the advocacy strategies developed by regional and international networks and coalitions of NGOs characterize this third moment.<sup>17</sup>

At the time of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazilian feminism also took an ecological turn, as middle and upper-class women interested in ecofeminism began networking internationally, while also making opportunities for indigenous and working class women to speak out about their realities.<sup>18</sup> The international NGO Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), convened by former US Congresswoman Bella Abzug, mobilised women from the global North and South to come together in Brazil and speak out about environment and health matters and about the problem of getting women's voices heard in the political arena. Today, many of the people working through NGOs in Brazil are middle-class and well educated. For example, in the Embú neighbourhood, whose stream pollution was described at the beginning of this chapter, the Ecoar Institute for Citizenship and the Sister Watersheds project organise environmental education meetings for lower-class women, who have demands for sewer construction and enclosure of the polluted stream on health grounds.<sup>19</sup> NGOs provide meeting points for

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<sup>16</sup> See the extensive discussion in Jane Mansbridge (1999) 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 628-57.

<sup>17</sup> Pitanguy (2002), p. 811.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Inacia d'Avila and Naumi de Vasconcelos (eds.) (1993) *Ecologia, Feminismo, Desenvolvimento*. Rio de Janeiro: EICOS (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicossociologia de Comunidades e Ecologia Social), Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Série Documenta EICOS, 1a fase.

<sup>19</sup> Another program involving poor women is the Programa Um Milhão de Cisternas (P1MC), or One Million Cisterns, coordinated by the Articulação do Semi-Árido, is a coalition of some 750 civil society organizations, Catholic and Evangelical churches, rural and urban workers' unions and federations, community associations, social movements, national and international cooperation organizations, public and private institutions - across eleven Brazilian states. This program provides training and material for families to build and maintain cisterns cooperatively in semi-arid regions. The selection criteria for the program prioritise poor women, and many women in northeastern Brazil are being trained in cistern construction techniques. See P1MC (2003) '*Programa um Milhão de*

intersecting interests and problems such as gender, environment, poverty, race, and health.<sup>20</sup> As Brazilian ecofeminist Regina di Ciommo writes: 'The participation of women in NGOs connected in networks gives them the experience (and the challenge) of working in a non-hierarchical way'.<sup>21</sup> The informal and supportive structures characteristic of NGOs allow people of different backgrounds to share information and work together across gender, race, and class lines more effectively than highly-structured and formalistic business or government committees do. Moreover, trans-national and lateral networking of women across borders - as exemplified by both the Sister Watersheds project and the earlier WEDO initiative - is a way of destabilising the vertical power structures within capitalist patriarchal nation states.

### **Ecofeminism and transformative leadership**

Our reading of these issues is based on the ecofeminist principle that there is an integral material link or 'connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women'. Moreover, as UK ecofeminist Mary Mellor goes on to say, 'Humanity is not just reliant on its physical environment, but the natural world, including humanity, should be seen as an interconnected

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*Cisternas*'. *Universia* online newsletter, November 1, 2003, [www.universia.com.br/html/materia/materia\\_dibg.html](http://www.universia.com.br/html/materia/materia_dibg.html). See also, on women cistern-builders ('cisterneiras') in Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte State: [www.semarh.rn.gov.br/detalhe.asp?IdPublicacao=4505](http://www.semarh.rn.gov.br/detalhe.asp?IdPublicacao=4505) (accessed 6 June 2007) and "Mulheres mostram que não é preciso força bruta para construir cisternas," *Tribuna do Norte*, Mossoró, Brazil, May 17, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Vanessa Campagnac (2006) 'As organizações não-governamentais (ONGs) e o mercado de trabalho'. *Rede de Informações para o Terceiro Setor (RITS)*: [www.rits.org.br/estudos\\_teste/ce\\_testes/ce\\_paraler2.cfm](http://www.rits.org.br/estudos_teste/ce_testes/ce_paraler2.cfm) (accessed 30 May 2006); Gwyn Kirk (1997) 'Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice: Bridges Across Gender, Race, and Class', *Frontiers*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2-20; Salete Silva (2000) 'Avanço Lento: Participação feminina na política brasileira é pequena e cresce com muita timidez'. *Revista Problemas Brasileiras* No. 341, Sept./Oct: [www.sescsp.org.br/sesc/revistas\\_sesc/pb/artigo.cfm?Edicao\\_Id=87&breadcrumb=1&Artigo\\_ID=927&IDCategoria=1090&reftype=1](http://www.sescsp.org.br/sesc/revistas_sesc/pb/artigo.cfm?Edicao_Id=87&breadcrumb=1&Artigo_ID=927&IDCategoria=1090&reftype=1) (accessed 30 May 2006); Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead (2004) 'Introduction: Repositioning Feminisms in Gender and Development', *IDS Bulletin*. Vol. 35, No. 4, 1-10; Sonia Alvarez (1999) 'Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom''. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 181-209.

<sup>21</sup> Regina di Ciommo (1999) *Ecofeminismo e Educação Ambiental*. São Paulo: Editorial Cone Sul / Editora UNIUBE, p. 15; Regina di Ciommo (2005) 'Ser Rede: Vida Pessoal e Participação Política nas Redes Ecofeministas'. *MultiCiência: Revista Interdisciplinar dos Núcleos e Centros da Unicamp. A Linguagem da Ciência*, No.4, Maio 2005. English version, 'Being a Network: Personal Life and Political Participation Within Ecofeminist Networks': [www.multiciencia.unicamp.br/rede\\_2\\_4\\_i.htm](http://www.multiciencia.unicamp.br/rede_2_4_i.htm) (accessed 29 May 2006).

and interdependent whole'.<sup>22</sup> Vandana Shiva spells out this understanding in her analysis of global water politics and we see it as a vital basis for political action.<sup>23</sup> When there is a flood in a big *favela* in São Paulo, a number of environmental and social justice problems are interconnected: climate change, structural adjustment, global financial inequities and debt, inadequate technocratically designed urban infrastructure, unplanned urbanization, erosion of hillsides, channelisation and enclosure of rivers. But the fact is that in Brazil as elsewhere, poor women's problems are not a public priority. On the contrary, lower-class and racialised women are forced to bear the brunt of water-related problems created by the whole economy. As Shiva observes, this pattern has a long history under capitalist patriarchal colonisation.

But economies and social institutions are also subject to destabilisation and change.<sup>24</sup> We contend that the best way to construct successful movements is to begin locally, rely on democratic pluralism, and take advantage of opportunities to help shape new forms of governance.<sup>25</sup> In this instance, we explore the locally transformative potential of new deliberative structures ushered in by the Brazilian government's new water laws. At the same time, social change through 'feminist transformative leadership' is described by Brazilian ecofeminist leader Moema Viezzer as much more than putting women in positions of power. Rather, it is

... transformative in the sense that it challenges the existing structures of power; it is inclusive, in the sense that it takes into account the needs, interests and points of view of the majority of the marginalized and poor in society; it is integral, in the sense that it attends to all forms of social injustice ... Feminist transformative leadership can be exercised, advanced or defended by women and men, young or old.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Mellor (1997) *Feminism and Ecology*. Cambridge: Polity, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Vandana Shiva (2002) *Water Wars*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

<sup>24</sup> See Anthony Bebbington (2000) 'Re-encountering Development: Livelihood Transitions and Place Transformations in the Andes.' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 495-520, p. 514.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Smith (2003) *Deliberative Democracy and the Environment*. London: Routledge. pp. 128-130; Graham Smith (2004) 'Liberal Democracy and the Shaping of Environmentally Enlightened Citizens', in Marcel Wissenburg (ed), *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism*. London: Routledge.

<sup>26</sup> Moema Viezzer (2001) 'Feminist Transformative Leadership: A Learning Experience with Peasant and Gatherer Women in Brazil'. Paper presented at the Fifth Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture and Keynote Address for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Transformative Learning. Women's Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, p. 11.

Addressing interconnected water problems successfully requires the leadership and participation of those whose knowledge is locally informed and specific to the experience of their gender, race, and class positions. As ecofeminists argue, it is this groundedness that best equips them to understand these problems in all their complexity. Does this transformative vision get to be expressed in practice?

In international sustainable development circles, the current approach to water management is to engage civil society by establishing watershed committees with substantial public involvement, as well as support from various levels of government. In principle, this means that water users collectively can help decide about allocation, infrastructure, and regulation at the watershed level.<sup>27</sup> The assumption is that watershed committees supplement and strengthen democratically elected government bodies by emphasising local environmental conditions.<sup>28</sup> These grounded community based deliberations should allow people jointly to reach more sustainable solutions to complex ecological problems than is possible otherwise. In the social sciences, 'empirical backing is beginning to emerge for the theoretical claims made for the transformative and educative power of democratic deliberation'.<sup>29</sup> The approach has strong theoretical justification and potential in bioregional, ecological, and political terms, and it is being implemented in a growing number of countries worldwide.<sup>30</sup>

Since 1997, Brazil has had one of the most participatory water management regimes in the world.<sup>31</sup> It has established watershed

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<sup>27</sup> Hinchcliffe, Fiona, John Thompson, Jules N. Pretty, Irene Guijt, and Parmesh Shah (1999) *Fertile Ground: The Impacts of Participatory Watershed Management*. London: Earthscan/IT Publications; Patricia E. Perkins (2004) 'Participation and Watershed Management: Experiences From Brazil'. Paper presented at a Round Table on 'Ideology, Democracy and Governance for Sustainable Development' organized by Professor Peter Söderbaum at the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) Conference, Montreal, Canada, 10-14 July.

<sup>28</sup> Mansbridge (1999).

<sup>29</sup> Smith (2004), p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO (2003) World Water Report. Chapter 1 – The World Water Crises: [www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/index.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/index.shtml) (accessed 10 June 2006). Chapter 4. The Natural Water Cycle: [www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/index.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/index.shtml) (accessed 10 June 2006). See also: Smith (2003), Shiva (2002), Perkins (2004).

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Keck and Rebecca Abers (2004) 'Running Water: Participatory Management in Brazil', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 29-34; Agência Nacional das Aguas. 2006. The Evolution of Water Resources Management in Brazil: [www.ana.gov.br/ingles/Portais/06-General\\_Aspects.html#3](http://www.ana.gov.br/ingles/Portais/06-General_Aspects.html#3) (accessed 29 May 2006); Ministério do Meio Ambiente (2005) *Documento de Introdução: Plano Nacional de recursos Hídricos - Iniciado um processo de*



committees composed of representatives from government agencies and civil society representatives, and poor women can, in principle, sit as representatives on the watershed committee for the river close to their houses. As members of the committee, they can help decide 'how to manage water and its allocation, new development projects, pollution abatement and control restrictions, indeed all subjects dealing with water use'.<sup>32</sup> They can use their knowledge of the seriousness and interlinked nature of water-related problems to seek solutions, working with government officials and other water users.

### **Democratic deliberation in practice**

To some degree, women are present at all levels of the Brazilian water management system. The National Council of Water Resources, for instance, which is a consultative and deliberative body representing water users, government and civil society, coordinates federal, state, and regional planning and arbitrates conflicts. It is chaired by the Federal Environment Minister, currently Marina da Silva, and includes a seat for the Special Secretary for Women's Policies.<sup>33</sup> The Council's approval of the National Water Plan in 2006 notes the importance of gender differences in its Base Reference Document. However, at this point in time, women make up only 20 per cent or less of the membership of all watershed committees studied.<sup>34</sup> This under-representation of women reveals that

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*debate nacional*. Brasília: Ministry of the Environment: [www.pnrh.cnrh-srh.gov.br/](http://www.pnrh.cnrh-srh.gov.br/) (accessed 29 May 2006); Rebecca Anders and Karina Dino Jorge (2005) 'Decentralização da Gestão da Água. Por que os Comitês de Bacias estão sendo criados?' *Ambiente e Sociedade*. Vol. 8, No. 2, 99-124; World Wildlife Fund-WWF (2006) *Successes: Brazil Approves National Water Plan*. 8 February 2006: [www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/what\\_we\\_do/freshwater/news/successes/index.cfm?uNewsID=60120](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/what_we_do/freshwater/news/successes/index.cfm?uNewsID=60120) (accessed 29 May 2006); Ramy Hanna (2005) *Democracy, Citizenship and Civil Society Participation in Watershed Management: The Case of the Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiai Watershed Committee (CBH-PCJ), São Paulo State, Brazil*. MES Major Paper, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University.

<sup>32</sup> Monica Porto (1998) 'The Brazilian Water Law: A New Level of Participation and Decision Making', *Water Resources Development*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 175-182, p. 177.

<sup>33</sup> Even in the progressive Labour Party government in Brazil, there are only four women ministers, and they are in the less powerful social and environmental areas. The four are: Nilceia Freire (Women's Policies), Matilde Ribeiro (Policy for the Promotion of Racial Equality), Dilma Rouseff ('Casa Civil' or Domestic Affairs), and Marina Silva (Environment). Chile, under President Michelle Bachelet, is the only Latin American country to have 50 per cent women in the national cabinet.

<sup>34</sup> Mariana Sell and Ninon Machado (2005) 'Gênero na Gestão de Águas no Brasil'. Paper presented at the Encontro Ibero-Americano por uma Nova Cultura da Água, Fortaleza, Brazil, 9/12/2005. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Ipanema; Andrea Moraes and Patricia E. Perkins (2007) 'A Bucket of

the current system, while intended to be 'participatory', is not democratically inclusive in practice. In part, this problem results from the fact that water management committees are more technical and specialised than other government bodies, and thus harder for grassroots women to enter. Water in Brazil has historically been linked with energy and hydroelectric dams - a subject area for the engineering profession still dominated by men. Although the new Water Law emphasizes that water management involves multidisciplinary questions, changing the culture of water management will take time.<sup>35</sup>

As an expert on Brazilian water management, Porto maintains that women's participation as educated professionals in the water sector is growing very fast and, in consequence, gender equity is not a problem. In her view, the need for a sufficient number of trained and competent professionals is more important than gender balance *per se*.<sup>36</sup> Porto believes that successful implementation of the Water Law in Brazil depends on the ability of the watershed committees to: (a) use a transdisciplinary approach, (b) raise awareness about water issues among the public and policy makers, (c) educate the population, (d) prepare communities to participate, and (e) build technical capacity.<sup>37</sup>

However, while the participation of women in water management as professionals may be increasing, there remain serious class and race barriers to the active participation in these management structures of poor and racialized women, whose daily work, and often family income, depends on water. These barriers are evident in:

- the times and location of meetings
- lack of childcare or transport subsidies
- the open prejudice of some committee members
- internalised oppression
- lack of education
- limited time for participation

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Water and Daily Bread', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, forthcoming.

<sup>35</sup> Christine van Wijk-Sijbesma (1998) *Gender and Water Resources Management, Water Supply and Sanitation: Roles and Realities Revisited*. The Hague: International Water and Sanitation Centre; Patricia E. Perkins (2005) 'Public Participation and Ecological Valuation: Inclusive = Radical'. Paper presented at the Capitalism Nature Socialism Conference, York University, Toronto, Ontario, 22-24 July; Cap-Net Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resources Management (2006) *Why Gender Matters: A Tutorial for Water Managers*. Multimedia CD and booklet. Cap-Net International network for Capacity Building in Integrated Water Resources Management, Delft, Netherlands.

<sup>36</sup> Porto (2000), p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Porto (2000).

frustrating bureaucracies  
technocratic language in reports and minutes  
and the near-absence of organised constituency groups for local  
political representation on water questions.

All of these matters differentially affect poor women of colour.

Since Brazil's water management structure now has a ten-year history, it is timely to document the nature and direction of community contributions to water policy. One preliminary study of the participation of civil society representatives on watershed committees - women and men - notes a difference in the capacity of government and civil society representatives to follow the technical aspects of committee work.<sup>38</sup> This results in the domination of citizen voices by government voices. But the study also points to real advances in the mutual education of committee members and the general public. This involves an exchange, with grassroots members learning about technological questions, on the one hand, and government agencies learning about gender based problems, on the other. It indicates that practicalities such as committee meeting times and locations, the need for transportation subsidies and administrative backup for civil society representatives, and the diverse interests of civil society groups, all complicate the ability of local representatives to participate equally alongside government officials. Documenting the practical disadvantages faced by grassroots participants in the deliberative process, allows them to be addressed as part of the implementation process for participatory management structures. In this respect, ecofeminist research and feminist transformative leadership have important roles to play.

The needs of poor women represent ecofeminist claims related to basic survival, and indeed, the Brazilian Federal Government has begun to take note of women's claims for more voice on ecological issues. Especially in rural areas, the country has seen a rise in social policies that include poor women of colour as beneficiaries.<sup>39</sup> Many new feminist voices are emerging in Brazil. Women in the *quilombo* movement of separate Black communities, feminist activists within the landless workers' movement (MST), poor women struggling for reproductive rights and

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<sup>38</sup> Marcia Chandra (2004) *Participation and Watershed Management: Experiences from Brazil*. Toronto: York University, MES Major Paper. [www.baciasirmas.org.br/english/doc/article03.pdf](http://www.baciasirmas.org.br/english/doc/article03.pdf) (accessed 6 June 2007).

<sup>39</sup> The national program *Fome Zero*, or Zero Hunger, for example, gives poor families the equivalent of US\$30 dollars a month to buy food. The money is given first to women in each household, which is a big change from earlier federal policies. See Walter Belik and Mauro Del Grossi (2003) 'O programa Fome Zero no Contexto das Políticas Sociais no Brasil'. Paper presented at the XLI Congress of SOBER. Juiz de Fora, Brasil. 30 de Julho. [www.fomezero.gov.br](http://www.fomezero.gov.br) (accessed 1 June 2007).

health care in the era of HIV/AIDS, and others whose basic needs remain unmet as Brazil moves from 'developing' to 'newly-industrialised country,' are all part of this growing diversity of Brazilian feminisms. While the established movement works to advance its transformative agenda based in democratic politics and efforts to advance women's political rights and leadership, the basic needs agenda of lower-class Brazilian feminists is also surging forward. As the political forces of liberal feminism and ecofeminism converge in advancing their objectives, NGOs like WEDO and Ecoar are instruments of this convergence.

The history and strength of feminist NGOs in Brazil, formed as they were in struggles against the military dictatorship, suggest that movement organising will overcome practical and political barriers faced by poor and racialised women. Commonalities among people - especially around environmental issues like water - have the potential to deepen political understanding and create new alliances as the global ecological crisis deepens. Brazil is already leading the way in such alliance building, for example with participatory municipal budgeting, Local Agenda 21 initiatives, and at the transnational level the World Social Forum. In the words of ecofeminist theologian Ivone Gebara:

In Latin America we want to be part of a national and international movement for the globalization of social justice ... A new national and international order is our goal. An ecofeminism as an echo of feminism takes this as its goal without forgetting the special commitment for all women, without forgetting the importance of local education for a better world for everybody. It is the first time in our history that international civil society is uniting to form a new social and political order. It is the first time that together we are asking for a new qualitative daily life. In this perspective there is a new hope for all of us.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ivone Gebara (2003) 'Ecofeminism: A Latin American Perspective', *Cross Currents*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 93-103, p. 97.