

## **Naming and framing global environmental policy: construction processes in “Water for Life” campaigns**

Over the last 30 years, the reality of water has been quite alarming despite the vital importance of water for lives and for life. Water gradually became a major societal challenge for the States brought in particular, by the actions of the United Nations throughout major conferences since the first Earth World Summit in Stockholm in 1972. Ever since, the UNESCO, the UNEP or the UNDP actively advocated for the promotion of the water challenges. How did the complex and international issue have been named, framed and circulated? This is the objective of this paper: to analyze the international communication on the topic of water.

We will examine the construction and circulation of rhetoric built on major arguments brought through specific visual representations and repeated discourses around one central figure, the woman. Our approach is based on qualitative analysis through a symbolic, semiotic and rhetoric lecture and detailed examination of communication campaigns ran by international organizations such as the UN galaxy. Their campaigns framed the communication priorities and strategies of other societal stakeholders and organizations involved in water management and more largely, a general engagement for an environmental cause. They were promoted by associations, private company, public utilities, research centers, etc.

Our approach will consist in identifying the process of summarization, integration, synthesis of the complexity of this social, political and technical issue. As a transversal challenge and universal matter, the global orchestration around “Water for Life” intended to raise visibility and to bring intelligibility but also to structure a social and Medias agenda setting.

The specificity of the water issue calls for a particular communication. The density of the challenge and the multiplicity of involved targets suggest a work of mediation and simplification in order to bring a stronger understanding and broader circulation of key messages. The different modalities of exhibiting water related issues constitute a crucial dispute; this paper will focus on analyzing the major verbal principles and iconic representations of their processes.

Our corpus is constituted by campaigns ran at the international level from 2005, the year of the launch of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” until 2012. We based our work on the brochures, websites and communication campaigns of the major actors at the UN working on water issues (UN-Water, UNESCO, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, UN-Women, UNICEF) as well as funding agencies such as the World Bank, the French Development Agency; water international organizations (World Water Council, World Water Forum). We also gathered campaigns from various stakeholders who promoted water as a way to communicate their engagement towards protecting the environment (associations, private companies, Medias). A complementary discourse analysis discourse was conducted of the major official declarations released after international conferences on water management since 1972 until Rio+20 in June 2012. This analysis clearly sets out recurring and structuring discursive components:

- Identification of three major argumentative phrases widely asserted, repeated and disseminated on the specific slogans: “water, a source of life”; “water, a human right”; and “water, a promise for development”. These three thematic priorities structured the communication campaigns on water successively displayed and perceived as a vital force, a fundamental right and a vector of economic and social development.
- Identification of a central figure intractably bound to water: the woman.

In the setting of the textual messages and images over water, the process formed intelligibility and circulation of these challenges at the universal scale. We will analyze this discursive summarization, these semantic and iconic unites that are naming and framing “water” as a global issue in the communication agenda.

### **1. Water, a slogan for the humanity**

Water is life. This commonly accepted slogan is at the core of many communications on water. Water, the source of life, unites the world particularly in times of crisis and climate change. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Earth, including over seven billion humans, is facing a serious water crisis. In order to cope with these challenges, a global call has been instituted around a joint action to “save water, save people, save lives”. This unique slogan appears to join forces around a common objective: protecting one of the most vital and essential resource of our humanity. The many communication campaigns concretely illustrate this vital imperative that the Planet seems to share. They are constituted based on the communication guidelines of the UN galaxy playing a decisive role in setting institutional priorities, political wording and visual representations of the society and its reality. These campaigns are distinctly constructed around three key concepts: life, right and development.

#### *a) Water, for life and for all*

In 2005, the UNESCO launched the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" to put "greater focus on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programs in order to achieve internationally agreed upon water-related goals". The choice of this slogan is particularly relevant; it aims at pulling forces around a shared objective, a general understanding and agreement over water as the “universal source of life”. There is not a more common acceptance than water as a symbol of life. Water is at the origins of life, a man cannot survive without drinking water during 4 or 5 days, the human body is constituted by 70% of water... This common and shared vision of water has been clearly chosen by the UNESCO as a way to address the water crisis throughout this universal perception bounding men and women. This baseline was also a way to offer possibilities for each culture, country or organizations to adapt their communication to this common ground.

The logo chosen by the organization illustrates this intention. The logo depicts a water source coming out from two hands in action. Set on a river, the flow of water is dynamic along the written

slogan. Of blue color, the logo reflects a simple vision of water as the creator of life recalling the symbol of fecundity. When reading the guide made by the UNESCO, the objectives are clear, the slogan and logo must aggregate at a global level and the image has to embody universality in easily understandable and reproducible manner.



Figure 1: The logo "Water for Life"<sup>1</sup>

The main document published by the UN to prepare for the International Decade of Actions already suggested a concrete illustration of this symbol.

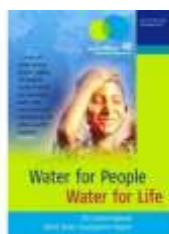


Figure 2: The link between water and life, a kid enjoying the pleasure of taking a shower<sup>2</sup>

The kid, symbol of youth and life, is covered with water in a vivid and colorful cover. His hand both conveys the idea of enjoying the pleasure of water and the idea of receiving the water from the sky or from the tap. In iconographic terms, the logo could also remind water as a gift from the sky, a holy blessing or reward brought by nature. At a first glance, the logo can suggest open hands receiving water from the sky, harvesting rain water.

This idea of water coming from the sky and giving life has been widely used in communication campaigns to symbolize life through a simple and universal gesture: collecting water to drink it from the hands.

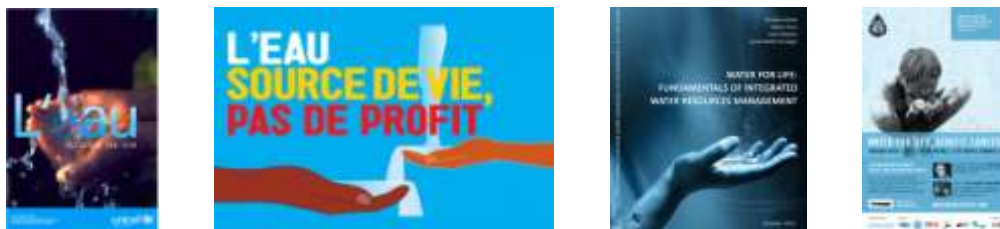


Figure 3: "Water for life", a similar image through various brochures: hands receiving a flow / drop of water<sup>3</sup>

Water as "a source of life" is for drinking but also understood as a pure liquid, transparent and flowing naturally. This representation is directly taken from the religious beliefs. Water is portrayed as a blessing from God in the three monotheist religions. When the rain comes from the sky, it conveys the blessing of the higher spiritual authority to those who are good prayers; water represents a benediction. This symbol also refers to water as being a natural resource given by

Mother Earth. In general, the related images will be a large blue quiet lake, a vivid freshwater flowing in a green land, inspiring and serene waterfalls... These images convey the symbol of purity, untouched nature. The idea of pure water for drinking is commonly used by the manufacturers of bottled water playing on the unconscious understanding of preserved water. The advertisements of mineral water are built on this invisible bond with the nature, the allegory of pure water. This representation brings back to the core of the mythology on water. It refers to the antique nymph or water hidden resource able to provide eternal life or eternal youth. It also embodies an ideal of purity and unreachable state of well being that men have long sought (BACHELARD: 1942).

A more symbolic image is the one of the drop. The drop is suggesting the “last drop” of water. It is a distinctive representation of the scarcity of water. Meanwhile, a drop is also a suggestion of fecundity that is usually the symbol of God in the Bible or the Koran. This drop brings fertility; it creates a direct relationship with the human sperm bringing life. In many images, the drop is associated to the slogan “water is life” instituting this link between water and the birth of life. Other close representations are using kids to embody “water is life”, or to picture water in the wild nature i.e. trees, grass...



Figure 4: “Water is life”, from the drop to kids and the environment<sup>4</sup>

A more contemporary representation introduces a tap with a child to accompany the action of drinking water using the same symbolic repertoire but introducing a key concept: water access.



Figure 5: Water access as a symbol of life: introducing the notion of water services. Same criteria are represented: a water flow comes from a tap with a human with open hands. Usually, pictures show kids<sup>5</sup>

With the tap, water can no longer be free; the notion of access is implied by the action of providing a pipe that brings water to people. With a kid, the image brings the idea of youth, life and also suggests the reality of diarrhea and water related diseases, the first cause of death among children less than 5 years. This image plays with the unconscious will to protect “your” children; it calls to the maternal or paternal instinct of the targeted public. It also embodies the innocent victim of the

non-access to water.

In this iconic representation, water will mean a service, water suppliers and providers, legislation... The visual shift reflects the one seen in the rhetoric of water discourse at the international level. Since the first Earth Summit in 1972, the international organizations and water professionals have been discussing the concept of “water access”. From the ones who fought for water as a free good (for instance, Vandana Shiva, Danielle Mitterrand, Maude Barlow...), the world community represented by the UN has slowly promoted water as a paying service. From this sacred water, gift from the nature, the water has become a rare resource that needs protection. Such preservation implies investments that cannot be funded by the States only. One considerable shift was introduced by Saudi Arabia in 1994 when they first introduced water tariffs (until then water was free).

Opposing to a strong religious belief and Islamic principle according to which water should remain free, the increasing cost of providing water to the population convinced the government to put a price to water. The decision also wanted to raise awareness on water scarcity by setting a paid water service. This political change is a symbol of a general transformation of approach towards water management and its value. Nonetheless, if this revolution brought the acceptance of ‘paying water’, water as a human right and vital resource should remain at a “reasonable price”. In this understanding, water remains a resource that needs to be accessible to all, even the poorer. Today, water remains one of the most visible factors of inequity and the pressures on its availability brings anxiety towards the future. If the vision water shifted, the concept of water as a source of life stayed the same: water as a life provider calls for a specific attention from the humanity. Water “needs saving”.

As such, the direct relationship between water and life implies a direct link between an engagement for water and an engagement for life, for the humanity. If water saves life, by saving water, the public will save lives as well. This aspect of “saving life” contributed to new series of slogans calling for the involvement of people from a humanitarian perspective to a more humoristic contribution. It is generally embodied through the figure of the drop or the drought, a symbolic unconscious force as previously studied. Water as a “rare resource” needs saving and immediate actions.



Figure 6: Save water... Save lives or drink champagne<sup>6</sup>

While calling to save water *for life*, the related issue is to protect water in the name of a universal and vital right. Linking water to life and to a human cause reminds that without water, men and women could not live. This brought discussions for the recognition of water as a human right. In 2005, when the UN launched the International Decade “Water for Life”, the right for water was

already implicit and defined in many international conferences' official statement. It participated to the constructive structure of the general discourse of "Water for Life".

*b. Water, a human right*

*"The Human Rights Council,*

Welcomes the recognition of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and the reaffirmation by the latter that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human."

Excluded from the Human Rights Declaration of December 10<sup>th</sup> 1948, the right to water is recognized in July 2010 by the UN and by the Human Rights Council in September 2010. This official recognition is the result of long going discussions and negotiations since 1972. It is indeed after the Stockholm Conference in 1972 that the idea of defining a right for environment was raised. With these debates, defining a right to water also became a cause for debate. It took almost 40 years to get the official recognition by the UN for such a right. However, the idea of a right to water was introduced in several international declarations and governments' recommendations. Between the 1948 Declaration and the various conventions on the rights of refugees (1951), children (1989), Women (1979), the disabled (2006), the right to water was logically implied internationally in 2000 by the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals.

"The right to water is the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses."

This definition is not included as such in the text of 2010. However, it is essential to understand what it means to grasp the concept of "the right to water". This phrase set up a conception of the right to water around three pillars:

- *Access to water*: Access to water seeks to ensure access to sufficient quantities of water per day defined. The quota was set at 40 liters of water per day per person, a minimum amount lower than the average amount consumed in industrialized countries as France (137 liters per day per person) or the USA (290 liters per day per person).
- *Quality of water*: the right to water also assumed ensuring a quality of water that represents no harm for the health of men and women who are consuming it. In France, drinking water is most controlled product responding to 54 different parameters of quality. Despite these standards, many consumers prefer bottled water. If a significant decrease in the number of consumed bottles of mineral water was observed in 2006 and 2007, the consumption of bottled water raised again in France. In 2010, the consumption was still counting for 5 billion liters of water, equivalent to 136 liters per person per year. In the USA, it was 34 billion of liters in 2007 which represents a less important consumption by the US citizens per year and per person i.e. 111 liters. It is important to point out that the consumption has doubled within the last 10 years in the USA. In industrialized countries,

the improvement of the quality of tap water didn't affect the rather negative image of tap water. If people tend to trust tap water (according to yearly surveys), they still won't drink it daily. As a result, the global consumption of bottled water keeps increasing every year.

- *Water pricing:* The price of water is at the heart of issues related to the right to water sparking the most debate between the conceptions of the right to water. The declaration of the right to water settled the by suggesting that water must be "affordable". In the meantime, the concept of "affordable" water can be rather blurred and differently understood. Many are arguing for an "affordable" water for all whatever their incomes, while others are arguing for a water tariff based on the income of the household. Others are defending tariffs based on the water consumption to penalize heavy consumers in particular; individuals having a pool at home...

Another important aspect later introduced to precise the scope of the right to water was acceptability. It suggests that water uses should be physically acceptable (color, odor...) and culturally acceptable (sensitive to gender, life-cycle and privacy requirements). In the different official declarations made by the UN, the right to water is clearly promoted as a human right.

"The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights".

Water as the "first" human right is a symbol of life, a symbol of equity... This right is a pre-requisite to satisfy any "basic" needs involving "life" itself. In this frame, the rhetoric clearly built the image of a right that needs citizen's mobilisation. As a human right and with the heritage of the historical establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to water is a fight for life. It supposes a militant engagement symbolising the protection of "life" and "Humanity". This discursive construction of the right to water is translated by different organisations into such visual representations.



Figure 7: The right to water, a human cause<sup>7</sup>

A hand calling for the demonstration, a symbol of equality, a human reaching one falling water drop... The right to water mobilizes around the inequities in front of water access. The last image is utilizing the UN image (see figure 2) to question "whose right to water?" asking who has access to water today? This campaign aimed at raising awareness of kids through educational tools designed for schools (UK campaign, association Worldaware). Water as a right has been a long case for mobilization counting many activists activities, associations or demonstrations worldwide. One of the most famous remains the demonstration of Cochabamba in Bolivia. In less than six months



between November 1999 and April 2000, the demonstrations from citizens forced the government to change of the water provider to an organization based on water committees driven by the population. In the name of the “right to water”, this episode opened the discussion over the importance of citizens’ participation in the management of water supply and distribution.

The recognition of the UN of a “right to water” ended a long debate for the recognition of water as a “human right”. Today, this official recognition didn’t yet, had an impact on national legislation. The declaration made by the UN and the Human Rights Council gave guidelines to the States but it also clearly stated that implementing the right to water remained a national prerogative.

*“The Human Right Council*

*Reaffirms that States have the primary responsibility to ensure the full realization of all human rights, and must take steps, nationally and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures in the implementation of their human rights obligations.”*

The uncertainty over what the right to water means, has led to abuses. Since the adoption of the right to water by the UN, the cases of appropriation of water resources for personal interests became more frequent. The involved parties usually explained their act of appropriation in the "name of the right to water" or as a “human right”. Another sign of alarm, the official declaration of Rio +20 ignored 40 years of discussions over the concept of transboundary water management by asserting the principle of respecting borders (Principle 122). The recent “right to water” and its implementation will concretely cope with the issue of its application at the local scale where many diverging interests are usually at stake between agriculture, industry, users... By remaining the prerogative of States, water will keep its image of being a source of wars, another very popular slogan and common accepted image.

All the experts working on the governance of water, water conflicts and its history will all contradict this idea of water being a source of war. Most of States in the world share water through water basins and rivers: the world counts 263 international rivers and 143 States have a shared river with one of their neighbors. Over the last centuries, the history of water has been a story of cooperation. With the climate changes, the question of the future collaboration among States represents a key anxiety well exploited by Medias and other sensationalism communication campaigns, in particular through movies or books.



Figure 8: Water wars... Water is source of tensions as a source of profits and business<sup>8</sup>

The mechanism of the communication is based on the fear of rarefaction of water resources (the



drop, the drought). With the threat of climate change and its impacts on water resources, water wars are depicted around image of drought, flooding (the three first images) or the idea of a violent conflict (a water reservoir transformed into a bomb). This rhetoric conceives the limited availability as a source of conflicts among States because water shall be a source of money and power. This image is related to the fundamental discourse of water as vital good that should remain “affordable”. The shift from “free water” to “paid water services” brought a new slogan. The organizations and experts in favor of the conception of water changed their communication to “water, source of life, not of profit” or “water shall remain public”. This argument is part of a broader debate on the management of water.



Figure 9: Water for profit, another cause for a human right<sup>9</sup>

Because water is life, a vital good, the resource cannot create profit; it cannot be managed by private interests. If water actually remains under the jurisdiction of the State and if the UN declaration ruled on this aspect by leaving the decision to the State, the argument is interesting in what it wants to convey. Because of its “life”, its “sacred” value, water shouldn’t be considered as any other natural resource implying a difference of treatment by the State... and by its communication. This rhetoric is directly based on the discourse of “Water for Life”. One interview with the responsible of the public research water institute in Roma when Italy voted against the privatization of water perfectly summarizes the basis of the discourse: “Water is life; privatizing water is like privatizing your mother...Of course, you are going to say no!” (Roberto Zocchi, LaboratoRI spa)

### c. Water, a promise for development

Promoting access to water is promoting access to the economic development. The many funding agencies built their discourse over this guiding principle. Their communication underlined positive, visible and easy impacts to advocate. When water access is developed, many changes will occur in the organization of the society. Here are some recognized impacts from getting water access:

- *Time allocation*: by providing a closer access to water, time is saved in particular for women who can spend more time for other types of tasks including access to education or developing a small business.
- *Health and physical conditions*: the closer access or access at the tap will better the general physical conditions (fewer constraints to carry water) but more specifically, will improve the health and lower the number of water-related diseases.
- *New economic resources*: with a domestic access, the water bill will decrease allowing the

household to get extra resources. Another indirect impact is the access to new job opportunities with the liberation from the water chores.

- *Access to public infrastructures and citizenship*: access to a tap or a drill will usually raise awareness on the notion of the public service. Since the citizens are contributing to paying their water access, they will develop a sense of responsibility that will bring them a higher sense of citizenship. This type of impacts is particularly relevant in urban areas where the targeted public is usually dwellers without legal status who become a “customer” of a service with access to water.
- *Quality of life*: with water access, the general way of life in the house will increase in terms of hygiene and cleanness of the private and public zones. If the links are still not direct, more and more, water access programs tend to develop a simultaneous sanitation access which improves the environment and public areas (mostly in urban areas).

Based on this positive image of impacts from water access, the different brochures develop a discourse based on the logic of “proving” and data reporting. The classic way to represent the positive outcomes of water access is a table of indicators showing both the progress and the complexity of the context. The data helps to measure the “development”. In 1992, Agenda 21 was the first to establish a grid of targets and indicators. They became global and international with the MDGs in 2000. This double objective of developing qualitative and quantitative data helps to get more financing resources as outlined in the Bonn Declaration (2001):

“There is a huge funding gap for infrastructure investment, maintenance, training and capacity building, research and production data in the field of water.”

Besides from indicators, monitoring tables, and statistics; case studies will also illustrate the concrete evidence of change. With a special focus on a limited area, the rhetoric will demonstrate the problems faced without water access and illustrate the everyday reality. Case studies are usually complemented by testimonies, another way to justify by giving the inputs from the users or from an expert. The value of the testimony is a classic in the field of communication. To involve an anonymous voice or an external expert strengthens the arguments of the advocated cause. The testimony of women embodies a reality in the eyes of the audience. It shows a benefit through an anonymous person whose life was changed; to involve an expert supports the argument by his knowledge and experience. These elements are relayed at the international stage to push States to act or raise their budget allocated to water programs.

In terms of visual identity, the rhetoric is usually also simple. The visual representations are funded on the same iconic construction: the suggestion of change. They will show on one side, a sick kid or children / women suffering while fetching water and on the other side, a healthy child on his way to school or a smiling woman at the drill or in her house, opening the tap.



Figure 10: water brings development... To women and children<sup>10</sup>

The cliché of representing development coming from water is widely accepted and the major organizations tend to recognize the superfluous repetitions of the links between water access and socio-economic development.

“Water is so essential to life that to describe it as a key to sustainable human development may be superfluous, a self-evident cliché. But, for millions in many parts of the world, water is anything but an assured means to survival and growth. It may even be a threat, its careful management a dire necessity. (...) This is why the World Bank Group regards water as a priority in its development strategy, and devotes between 16% and 11% of total project financing each year to water programs.”  
*World Bank, 2010*

The simplification of the communication is usually set into a commonly accepted of the women and the water access. It underlines the relationship between water, life and women... This bound reflects a simple reality but might as well confirms the importance of perceptions and cultural beliefs over water as a source of life.

## 2. Water, a figure of women

“This pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women’s specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programs, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.” Declaration of Dublin, 1992

In 1992, the Dublin conference defined four fundamental principles to better water management at the international scale. The third principle clearly recognized the role played by women in water management. Women are usually considered as the first water users: supply, storage, management, preservation from pollution, water quality... They hold many different functions to provide water to their household in particular, in African countries. The Dublin conference represents an achievement in putting an emphasis on the role played by women. Ever since, organizations have been promoting women’s roles through different approach including gender, integrated water resources management, water governance, the right to water, women’s empowerment... Despite these many activities, women’s conditions tend to progress slowly in water management: women can spend up to 5 hours daily to fetch the water, women can walk from 5 to 15 km per day collecting the water, women are the first victims of climate change, they are poorer and in a worst health state than men... The inequalities between men and women are clear, recognized at the international

level but remain unchanged. One of the key issues today is to bring concrete changes of women's conditions and many are putting hopes in communication...

Additionally to this recognition of their role, the communication on water is more genially connected to women. Many abundant symbolic representations display women when tackling water issues such as water access, water right or water scarcity. The unconscious rhetoric "Water for Life" builds an image of water profoundly connected to women as a guardian of life, a guardian of the environment or even, a promoter of sustainable development.

*a. The image of women at the water pumps...*

Over the last 20 years, it is particularly relevant to outline the importance of women being represented at the water pump, or at a well, or close to a water reservoir. Through this representation commonly observed on the ground, the different international organizations want to highlight an incredible source of inequity: women have to spend hours every day to fetch the water for their family and household. According to the UN-Women, women spent more than 40 billion hours in Sub-Saharan Africa only to bring back water to their house. It is all the more striking that the representations tend not to evolve throughout times and among the different brochures or official communication of the major international organizations as the UNESCO, UN-Water, etc.



*Figure 11: Women are carrying water with different types of containers from ancient to modern jars<sup>11</sup>*



*Figure 12: Girls and women carrying water and walking in rural areas<sup>12</sup>*

The contemporarily of the representation and its multiple visual repetition show how water and women have a predominant importance when representing their mutual links. It is actually related to a more symbolic heritage of women at the well. It also brings back women as water manager to a range of cultural and religious values including maternity, marriage, social life, social transmission or, purity and rituals. This strong tradition also brings other type of representations of women in the field. This type of image is mainly significant when tackling the issue of women, water and adaptation to climate change.



Figure 13: Women are represented in traditional tasks of carrying or managing natural resources<sup>13</sup>

More than the reality of the water chore, women are clearly link to water when covering water challenges. If women have been clearly identified as important players in water management in 1992, the links between women and the environment were already accepted during the Third United Nations Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985. The conference explicitly drew the linkages between sustainable development and women’s involvement and empowerment as well as gender equality and equity. The Agenda 21 and the declaration of Rio in 1992 included for the first time, a gender approach in particularly in the Chapter 24 on “Global action for women towards sustainable development”. The Chapter 18 on water resources, as a general text on integrated water resources management. It includes the full participation of the public, including “women, young people, indigenous populations and local utilities” (Objective 18.9, c). From this institutional recognition, a series of activities and publications have promoted the role of women in water management providing a vision of her skills and current contribution to the local economy and development.

Such a representation of a woman contributing to the creation of value remains traditional and related to the division of tasks within the household. With the water pump, a symbolic value is conveyed which is really, the woman at the well or at the fountain. In traditional perceptions, women are in charge of water because they carry life, they held the reproductive and educational role of the house. The image is also built on the religious representations of women at the water source where they usually meet their future husband or will give life. In the three monotheist books, many famous women have a link to the fountain as a symbol of their social life but for marriage purposes (Sephora, Rebecca) or as a symbol of giving birth (Agar, Myriam). The anthropological bound between women and water is the bottom of very strong beliefs over the values conveyed by water impacting directly its communication schemes and representations.

*b. Water and women, a common symbol of original life*

The UNEP organized in 2011 a contest on water scarcity. The aims were to conceive an advertisement that could raise awareness on the importance of water to the general public for the future European Commission campaign on climate change. This competition received more than 3,500 ads from 45 European countries. When observing the different proposed ads, the unconscious link between water and women appeared clearly. Many submitted ads pictured women or young girls in different representations (mermaid, beauty, mother...). The most interesting result was the number of ads directly linking water to the pregnancy or the fetus.





Figure 14: the representations of water is life, the pregnancy. A fetus in a drop, a dried belly due to water scarcity, a dying baby in a tub linked to the tap, a woman carrying a drop / a baby<sup>14</sup>

The winners of the contest are also revealing in terms of what is the general understanding of water scarcity by the public and even, the jury (represented by famous communication agencies, officials of the European Commission and the UN organisations).

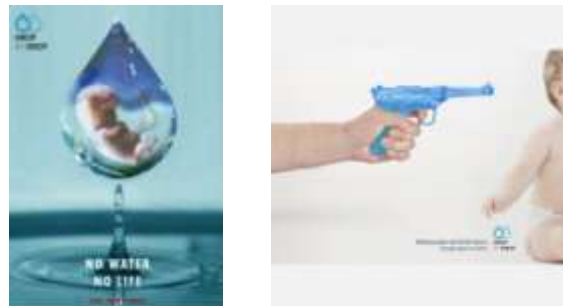


Figure 15: The winners of the competition: (1), the public choice ; (2), the jury's choice<sup>15</sup>

The choice of the public was an embryo in a drop with a double mouvement from the sky (the drop falling) and the water raising after touching the water flaque. This image obtained more than 11,000 votes showing how much water and the fetus are still a strong representation for the public. On the other side, the jury selected a picture representing a blue gun, allusion to water wars, pointing at a baby. The slogan announced that “wasting water will kill the future. Change begins at home”. As an aggressive message, the image conveys the symbol of life and war that needs to be fought at home... Where women are usually in charge of the suggested baby (his body is cut). The ad wants to address the public himself who is conveying the worst water habits...

The observation of communication campaigns points out a non-visible conception of water for life related to women. When adopting a gender approach to analyze this communication, the approach clearly reveal the non-visible ties between women, water and sustainable development within the society. This non-visible conception can be observed thanks to analysis of discourse or when comparing communication supports targeting the public. Whatever the type of organization (association, public entity, private company), there is a certain idea of communicating water built on a perception of customers' expectations to see “water, life and women”.

For instance, in a client magazine called “L'eau et vous” (You and water) distributed by a private water supplier group, the link between water and women is clearly visible. This magazine wants to help women in their daily relationships with water. A quantitative study of communication conducted with the communication managers of this company showed that the magazine wanted to help women using the same standards and codes of a feminine magazine.





Figure 16: Magazine for customers of a private water provider: women at the core of the communication and topics<sup>16</sup>

Looking at the visual aspect of the magazine, there is a strong representation of women and girls. Men are very few and advices are women oriented based on their primary preoccupations: health, beauty, sports, cuisine...According to the editor of the magazine, the content has been developed because “women are seeking for this kind of information”. To better communicate on its program, the company organized various forums or water city bars to target associations and families. In many cases, many households don’t know how to manage their water consumption. The communication managers noted that women buy bottled water to guarantee a certain comfort to their children. Many women have a strong unconscious relationship to water and hygiene. “Mothers asked us about water consumption but mostly about water quality. Even if their economic resources are limited, they will prefer to buy bottled water in order to guarantee comfort to their kids. When you asked them why, they will answer that it is a way to give what they can’t give otherwise, it’s like assuring their feeding function for them” observed Valérie Tordeur, communication manager for the company (HERVE-BAZIN: 2012).

In development aid programs, women are also perceived as important mediators. For participatory approaches, an important step to promote participation and adhesion is to contact key persons within the community. These persons will support the organising programme to better communicate messages to the community. For the social animators, it is particularly important to identify and to get the confidence of the influential men and women of the community. The traditional method is to set up resource persons’ profiles. In the case of men, resource persons are the local and political authority, the doctor, the institutor, the religious authority or the elders and other representative of the traditional authority... In the case of women, it is interesting to underline that women’s resource persons are the “wives” of men’s resource persons’ profiles. They are the “female version” of men’s typology. To these profiles, the midwife and young women or female students who are particularly involved in the community life, are usually added. This observation emphasize that women are seen as “repetitors”. Indeed, to select the wife of a resource person is another way to reach a male resource person. Women hold a double status; they are "repetitors" and influential persons. They remain in a traditional position of being “a wife” or responsible in the household. They are still categorized under their educative role (MOSER: 1993). If they hold a certain power, their role is defined around the traditional division of tasks based on the original division of sexes: women are in charge of education and men are in charge of providing to the family. This construction around a role depicts women under the traditional understanding of life bearer.

*c) Standardized communication for a global advocacy*

The declaration of Dublin in 1992 recognized the important role played by women for water resources. Such a term, “role”, has been chosen in the declaration of New Delhi in 1990 and in Bonn (International Conference on Freshwater, 2001). But the choice of term shifted slowly from “promoting equity of gender” in Marrakech (First World Water Forum 1997), “empowerment” in Johannesburg (Fourth World Earth Summit, 2002) and in La Haye (Second World Water Forum, 2000). In 2012, the Sixth World Water Forum called for “the non-discrimination and gender equality”. Such a progress is interesting. The experts in the international conferences slowly changed from a “traditional role played by women”, their “competence”, “participation”, “right” to “decision making”, “empowerment”, “representativeness”, and finally, “equality” or “climate justice” in Rio+20.

This evolution shows the complexity of first "qualifying" a change and second, to bring such a targeted change. If looking at the concept of “gender approach”, the same evolution of terms can be observed. Gender can be quoted as “an approach”, “a tool”, “a concept” or needs to be implemented through “integration”, “awareness campaigns”, “educational tools”, “guides” or “methods”. The paradox between on stable image of women carrying water and how to bring change to this situation highlights a more profound social complexity. Women are seen as traditional and passive, they have a “role” that needs to be changed and promoted. The wording show a form of lobby and advocacy that doesn’t fit with breaking an ancestral reality and practices.

These images of women being in the field, holding a traditional skill based on the repartition of tasks create the inequity that needs to be changed. If the image of women at the water pumps reflects the reality, there are also chosen to underline the natural link between women and the environment. The texts and declarations have been constructed on such a contradiction: tradition with water has given women their skills and competences (such as managing water, adapting to scarcity and climate change, adjusting their time for their family...); therefore the tradition must be changed in the name of inequity of chances etc. The stake is what will be then the competences and skills of women?

At a glance, the semiotic and discursive analysis of water and women could be sum-up as such: women are passive actors suffering an ancient repartition of tasks bringing them a competence both allowing them to take decision in the management of water resources and reducing them to stay at home... The "showed" role appears to contradict the desired change.

To understand such a construction of the image of women and water, it is important to remind the influence of gender and development theories. In the 70s, when E. Boserup published her work on the role of women, she wanted to put visibility on the economic contribution of women working for their household (at home, in the field, managing natural resources, etc.)

In sociology, a role represents the way a person should act in order to be integrated in their social group. In general, the role implies an expected behavior. With such a role, people are expected to act accordingly. If women are depicted in their role of fetching water, their role shall remain as

shown. The paradox of the discursive construction of ongoing communication over water and women is to show and name a reality that needs to be changed without showing or naming the desired change. The gender approach by advocating for a change that is not represented in image and largely inspired from a strong symbolic and traditional vision of women can't bring the desired change promoting condensed communication and stereotyped representations. For the rhetoric of "Water for Life", it underlines a similar construction: to show water life in the maternity represents a universal and indisputable bond of men and women conveying a tacit agreement to save water, life, the woman *a fortiori*, the mother.

### **3. Water, a model of communication, mediation and circulation**

From this analysis, we can identify particular forms of mediation and broadcasting on water challenges. This study reveals a communicational construction of water bringing its specificity as an environmental issue and as part of environmental communication. The communication processes contributed to raise awareness and to build international actions among the different stakeholders along a common joint rhetoric "Water for Life".

#### *a) Water, one simple flow of communication*

From the slogan "Water for Life", a process of selection and densification of the meaning of this belief slowly operated within the different UN organisations and later, at the global scale. It brought similar arguments, wording and phrases to specify the rhetoric of water. Around the idea of a cause, a human and vital good, the different organisations evolved with identical schemes of communication. This evolution around three main concepts converged to the unconscious but recognised bond between water and life, in particular, water, life and women. The figure of women clearly represented a joint agreement on portraying fundamental values of the human life. This value-based model offered possibilities to mobilise citizens and organisations together despite their conflicts of interest. The search for a system-wide and integrated communication brought a singularity to the rhetoric of water for a higher moral imperative. The values, the rights and the promises for a better economic and social development displayed a unity, an engagement. The discourse and circulation characteristics built a visual cohesion and same understanding of texts establishing a shared sense among both the UN organisations and the broader targeted public.

This common ground is co-built and shared through processes building mediation between the different actors (senders and targets). The mediating activities contributed to the summarization of the information and communication on water challenges. They proceed by simplification and abstraction using metaphors, allegories or metonymies. The construction of words and images put down roots for the rhetoric on "Water for Life". The sense brought by the creation of the common references brought an easier access to the complexity of water challenges. This simplification opened the debates around common, understandable and accessible disputes in both textual and

visual terms.

“Water for Life” acted as a sum-up. From this summarized nutshell of communication, all parties were able to directly categorise and understand its meaning. Behind this representation, the naming of a major global environmental policy could be fully appropriated, building a sense of unique solidarity as well as a unique sense of humanity. The forces of the communication processes promoted intelligibility in a very accessible shape, word and image. The community of understanding facilitated the dissemination of the rhetoric bringing strong arguments and easing the process of raising awareness. “Water for Life” campaigns constituted an incredible global collective memory and engaging cause.

b) *Water, a stable image for broader dissemination*

The second important aspect of these processes is the stabilisation of a common cause in a shared understanding of the issues. From this shared acceptance, the rhetoric on “Water for Life” concretely increased its potential for dissemination. Easy, clearly identified, attractive... the “Water for Life” acted as a formula, a marketing package, a slogan by itself. The different arguments and figures created a shared communication that have be repeated, translated and adapted, multiplied and amplified. The set of messages and images gathered around them very different types of organisations and stakeholders.

The water sector is known for its fragmentation. Water is both a local resource and a global challenge. Concretely, it contributed to the creation of multiple actors in the water sector at all different scales (local, regional, national, international, and global). The challenges for “Water for Life” campaigns were to create a unity in a sector with diverging interests. If the ambition of the UN when setting a communication on the value of water wanted to unify, the built rhetoric surpassed the objectives. The identification of the figure of women is the concretisation of this common ground and popular sharing.

The repeated image of women underlined the clear unconscious link and value put into the slogan “Water for Life”. From the cause, the communication was built on a strong symbolic belief that eased the process but also, the will to illustrate an engagement for the environment. From this image, it was easy to communicate and to repeat a global trend around a popular iconography. This image of women and water illustrated the constitution of a “topoi” at the international level, a rare illustration of a global communication dissemination process.

As part of a rhetoric process, the topoi for water established a cliché, a common discourse structuring an institutionalised communication for the environment, for water resources. The different lexis and terminologies from the different organisations, from private to public providers including activists or international organisations, *exceptionally* agreed on one representation of water. The campaigns “Water for Life” constituted a communication process aligning different characteristics of the environmental communication with the additional strength of engaging

humanity. Men and women, organisations, senders and targets are resembled on this strong link embodied in visual and discursive representations.

### c) *Water, an integrative rhetoric process*

The rhetoric potential of “Water for Life” was linked to the possibilities to absorb various constraints: its complexity was brought to its essence; the standardized and globalised requirements of Medias and communication tolls contributed to the development of shorter messages and representations; the cultural diversity summarized the image to “one” human being... The multiplication of Medias, campaigns, tools tend to bring fragmentation. They facilitate the development of short communication spots that are replicable for the print press, radio, TV shows, Internet or mobile phone. The communication nexus of “Water for Life” that we identified clearly open for numerous adaptations, repetitions, multiplications, dissemination of the rhetoric in a homogeneous representation applicable to all the communication devices and strategies. As an environmental discourse, the communication on “Water for Life” contributed to the general flow of raising awareness on ethics, responsibility, and engagement for the preservation of the Planet.

The rhetoric of “Water for Life” widened its communication scope by integrating social, political and economic challenges broadening the possibilities to aggregate and mobilise. As a “vital” resource, the rhetoric was bound to an inner comprehension of the targeted public and the senders of the messages. Water, as a slogan for humanity bringing all of us to *our mother* instituted a direct link to the preservation of the Mother Earth and *our* life. This simplistic statement supported the integration of all sorts of topics, all sorts of urgencies, all sorts of actors. The rhetoric of “Water for Life” constituted a strong integrative process to reach the most of the Humanity and the most of agreements to plead for its cause.

The integration of such a vital discourse suggests the importance to develop more abundant analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, on the specific discourse of “water”. The contribution of the “Water for Life” campaigns underlines the importance of developing communication approaches of the rhetoric of water.

## **Conclusion**

The processes of communication developed by the international community contributed to conceptualize coordinated and similar types of campaigns on “Water for Life”. Environmental communication is a communication characterized by its plasticity, its potential to adapt to the cultural contexts in order to defend the preservation of natural resources. As such, “Water for Life” campaigns complied with these characteristic showing a strong potential of communication and dissemination.

Based on a strong symbolic belief, the rhetoric on water allowed the deployment of a unity,

cohesion of sense and values. It contributed to a semantic and iconic resemblance opening for wider communication worldwide. Compared to climate change, the discourse on water is based on a positive alliance between man and woman. The connection with the figure of maternity makes the discourse difficult to contradict or to argue against its targets. It is also easy to understand to any public. The strength of the discourse seems to aggregate for a human *vital* common objective. The construction of the communication eased a process of naming, framing and understanding the stakes of water challenges at the global scale. It constituted a unique global framing of an environmental policy. The repetition of the arguments and figures established a clear and identified rhetoric. The constructive processes of “Water for Life” campaigns underlined the role of slogans, repeating messages and images, and massive dissemination throughout different types of tools as well as different organisations.

If the communication core of the rhetoric of water exploits a unique semantic, semiological and discursive constructs, the challenges of water remain unsolved. The common ground of water’s rhetoric allowed an appropriation of its arguments but might have constrained the necessary public disputes to bring changes at the local scale... a challenge to process and disseminate a communication of change.

## End notes

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[4] Mazhai Illam (NGO, 2012), “Water is life”, exhibition; Government of Monaco, (2010) illustration of a programme conducted in Kenya for access to basic services; Kentucky Waterways Alliance (2011), Poster for exhibition.

[5] Book cover (2004) “Water source of life, source of conflicts” / “L’eau, source de vie, source de conflits”; SELECTA (2009) utilising a picture of the UNICEF to illustrate a project on water in Gambia; L’éléphant bleu (car washing company), Campaign on sustainable development (2007) “Water, source of life” / “L’eau, source de vie”

[6] Ecofuture (2011), “Save water, save life”, free pictures at the disposal of the public; UNEP (2011), Drop by Drop competition “Save water, save lives”; advertising card (2010) designed for the purpose of greeting cards coaster, screensaver...

[7] Indian Social Action Forum (2011) “Water is a right” poster against privatisation; Delft University (2010) cover of the scientific publication “The right to water and water rights in a changing world”; Association Right to Water (2012) “Water is a Human Right”; Worldaware (2011) “Whose right to water”, educational tools.

[8] Movie “Water Wars” produced by Jim Burroughs, Suzanne Bauman, and Salik Subhan; Documentary (2008) “Blue Gold: World Water Wars” by Sam Bozzo; Book cover by Vandana Shiva “Water wars. Privatisation, pollution and profit”

[9] Different pictures of water demonstrations in South Africa, Bolivia, the USA.



[10] Youth Policy, a kid in the dirty water to illustrate the blockage of human rights after the failure of Rio+20 (2012); Water for Life (Dutch NGOs, 2012); Image of the Twitter page; Ministry of agriculture, water and forest of Namibia (2007), "the water bearer"; Australian Government, (2009), "The inspection of a water supply point", the access of water in Malawi.

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[12] UNESCO (2005) Brochure "Water for life"

[13] UNEP (2011), publication, "Women at the frontline of climate change", Women Watch (2009), fact sheet on "Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change"; the UNDP (2010), publication "Gender, Climate Change and Community-based adaptation"

[14] & [15] UNEP (2011), Drop by Drop Competition, [www.dropbydrop.eu/](http://www.dropbydrop.eu/)

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