Special Event on reducing inequalities and implementing human rights

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**Title of session**: Special Event on reducing inequalities and implementing human rights

**Number of attendees**: more than 100

**Date and Location:** March 23rd, Conference Room 2, UN HQ

1. **Objective(s) of session**:

The overall objective was to demonstrate to member states and decision-makers the importance of prioritising the reduction of inequalities to achieve SDG6 and other SDGs through inclusive collaboration, implementing human rights-based approaches, integrated water resources, and community-based governance and management.

**2- Key point(s)**:

*Current problem.*

Indigenous people make up 5% of the world's population but they protect more than 80% of the world’s resources and biodiversity.

*Potential consequences and impacts.*

Natural disasters are due to mismanagement and not including indigenous in decision making

*Importance of the topic.*

High importance at a different level.

*Synergies and trade-offs with other topics.*

Synergies with women and youth right

**3- Key Challenges:**

*What are the knowledge gaps identified during the discussion?*

* Billions of people don’t have safe drinking water and sanitation and the existing data is not accurate.
* Lack of sustainable governance and coalition
* Resistance of many states to recognize rights of indigenous people

**4- Key recommendations/solutions presented (key actions to address the problem)**:

* More initiatives, partnerships to defend the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to water
* Solutions to water challenges should be people-oriented rather than profit-based
* Assessment tools and methodologies, multi-stakeholder alliances and partnerships, and building trust between different stakeholders are good examples and practices to reduce inequalities.

**5- Quotes from speakers**:

*“…governments have been denied public decision space to make regulations to benefit the people, international institutions promote privatisation as sustainable ; it is not possible to make profit and service the public good, and private sector is made to make profit”-* **Meera Karunananthan**, The Blue planet Project

*“Inequality is no longer bound to the rich-poor divide. If you don't fix inequality for social reason, than solve it for economic reasons.”-* **Aziza Akhmouch** (on behalf of the OECD Water Governance Initiative)

*“Get resources to communities to dismantle the architecture of inequalities, decolonize aid”-* **Alana potter**- Ending poverty

*“It is about consultation not consent. Consent, before making indigenous displaced’’*

*“Assembly of first nation is committed that no first nation will be left behind”*

*“Training for indigenous women is essential”*

*“..I appeal to government to “show us the support through Actions not Speeches”*

**6- Notes from the speakers’ talk**:

**Session 1**:

* Opened by Indigenous Anishinaabe representation singing the indigenous water song
* Inequalities between and outside the states are growing. The Secretary general has called for renewed social contact and anchor rights. Meaning people need to be placed in the centre of the design and implementation of plans. Economics and governance need to be taken into consideration.
* High commission on human rights has been calling for the service of human rights
* Speakers from Africa, Mexico, Bolivia, Columbia, Uganda and Slovenia gave their statements

**Session 2**: identifying current solutions: upscaling positive solutions for clear bold commitment in the water action agenda.

* Changing the ways we communicate in the UN system, more representation.
* The use of analytical tools such as score-cards to assess legislative gaps and disparities for vulnerable groups (individuals who have difficulties in exercising their rights to drinking water and sanitation).
* Private sector should engage in conversations with indigenous communities about solutions to water challenges
* The UN and governments should support management methods beyond the public-private sector debate: management by organised communities in rural, peri-urban areas that are based on solidarity and not commercialization or economic benefit
* Communities call for sanctions for companies that go against the right of indigenous peoples due to their unlawful activities

**Session 3**: examples of good practices in reducing inequalities and implementing human rights.

* Inequality cuts across different services and should be put at the top of administration agenda;
* Water governance initiative at OECD advises governments to offer:
  + Clarity on how inputs from consultations are being used
  + Representation of different stakeholders
  + Different level of engagements, doesn’t always mean co-deciding with different groups, it can be building trust, facilitating the discussion
* Unesco world water assessment programs - engaged in conversation with local people to discuss on methodologies on reporting - (toolbox developed with indicators, including questionnaires for practitioners to analyse)
* Call for meaningful engagement of the youth, no to tokenism
* Promoting holistic approach in partnerships for implementation and scaling

**Session 4:**

* Session 4 focused on How cooperation enables gaps and reduces inequalities, and what new is needed for the cooperation
* UN special rapporteur on drinking water reports Gender inequalities, decision-making inequalities, and power distribution inequalities exist. If we have not resolved the issue of inequalities the water actions will not take place. Self-government over territories for indigenous people needs to be at the forefront of the agenda.
* Reps from Salvador, the Philippines, Portugal, Malawi, and The Netherlands presented their approaches to partnership growth.
* All agreed on a requirement for a holistic approach to solving indigenous and climate challenges.

**7- Relevant stakeholders and organisations present or mentioned**:

* **Organisers:** Women for Water Partnership, AquaFed, FILAC, African Youth Parliament for Water, UN OHCHR, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, International Indian Treaty Council, representing the Indigenous Peoples Coalition
* **Panellists:** First nations Canada, Blue planet project, European Union, OECD, Ending poverty, People’s Water Forum, UNESCO- WWAP, World Youth

Parliament for Water, Coordination of Indigenous Peoples of Central America

* Member states: Bolivia, Colombia, Slovenia, Portugal, Malawi, Netherlands, Korea,

**8- Innovative ideas and/or approaches from the session**

* Both scientific and indigenous knowledge are key to solving water and sanitation challenges; indigenous knowledge is important and does not need to be validated by the scientific community.

**9- How do the session outcomes impact the Water Action Agenda? How to translate the discussion into commitments and actions?**

The OECD water governance initiative is a good example of governments empowerment to impact on the Water Action Agenda. The reference to scorecards for assessments of inequalities to be adopted by different countries was also a concrete action towards the water action agenda.

**11- How does this session relate water to other SDGs?**

Reducing inequalities SDG 10, SDG 1, end of poverty

Partnerships SDG 17

**12- Short personal analysis of the session.**

Although there were some success stories about data collection and monitoring tools, the session remained poor in commitments and actions. Local communities and indigenous people called for people-oriented solutions versus privatisation and commercialization in reducing inequalities. It was clear that more discussions and accountability mechanisms are needed between the private sector and local communities.