

# Imagine carrying water every day. Every day.



S/F I  
WAT-GLD

Connecting women  
to water and sanitation projects

**INSTRAW**



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# The vital connection

She is a familiar sight in the developing world: trekking across grassy plains or muddy marshes, going up and down steep hills, crowding a street corner in dusty squatters' settlements or squalid urban ghettos. And every day at dawn, noon or dusk, she is lugging pails, jugs or plastic bottles containing the precious liquid: water. Over half of the people in the developing world lack pure drinking water. In the 20th century, remarkably enough, about three quarters of the world's population have no sanitation facilities. These two most basic needs, drinking water and sanitation, are crucial in the fight to reduce mortality, morbidity and poverty. This is why the United Nations declared the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD, 1981-1990), with a simple goal: *Clean water and adequate sanitation for all by the year 2000*. Women, the main carriers, users and managers of water in the developing world, bear the brunt of not having access to pure water and rudimentary sanitation facilities. Among these, to mention just two consequences: the many hours and physical energy spent lugging heavy water pots daily; and the unbearable toll in human health. According to World Health Organization estimates, water-borne diseases, such as diarrhoea, malaria, cholera and the guinea worm, kill about 25 million people each year; most are children under five and women. Because women's domestic responsibilities put them in daily contact with contaminated water, they are more prone to those deadly diseases.

For all these reasons, women take water supply and sanitation (WSS) issues to heart. But it took many years of research to prove what was obvious, that women want and need to be connected directly to water and sanitation activities, and many years of activism and awareness to bring the proof to light. Finally, in the second half of

the IDWSSD, women are perceived as a key element in raising the success rates of WSS projects and programmes. In three fields — research, training and information — INSTRAW has been an important part of the international effort to strengthen the connection between women, water supply and sanitation. The Institute campaigns resolutely in global, regional and national fora to involve women centrally in all phases of WSS activities. Among other things, INSTRAW has sponsored WSS seminars and meetings (Cairo, 1984; Nairobi, 1985; Addis Ababa, 1986; Kenya and Ethiopia, 1987; Somalia and Sudan, 1988), and has published articles, books and a select annotated bibliography. Wherever possible, INSTRAW representatives raise the issue of women as central actors in both the social dynamics and the technical aspects of WSS systems.

INSTRAW is now making a unique contribution to strengthen this vital connection: a multimedia training package of modules called *Women, water supply and sanitation*, jointly produced with the International Centre for Advanced Technical and Vocational Training (ILO/Turin). Today, in both developed and developing countries, these training modules are creating awareness that women should be connected to water and sanitation programmes and projects: not only women as users or as health educator/hygienists, as they were earlier perceived, but women as managers and technicians, as hydrologists and agriculturists, and as community leaders in water and sanitation schemes.

The IDWSSD seeks that pure water and adequate sanitation do not remain an elusive promise for millions of people in the developing world, but becomes a tangible reality during this decade. To achieve this objective, women are needed.

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INSTRAW is a member of the Steering Committee for Co-operative Action on the IDWSSD and of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Women and the IDWSSD.

\* INSTRAW publications on this subject:

— Women and the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, INSTRAW/UNICEF, Santo Domingo, 1985, pp. 59 (English).

— Women and Water Supply and Sanitation, INSTRAW, Santo Domingo, 1984, pp. 29 (E).

— Women and the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade Bibliography, INSTRAW, Santo Domingo, 1985, pp. 24 (E).

— Proceedings of the Interregional Seminar on Women and the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, Cairo 1984, INSTRAW, Santo Domingo, 1987, pp. 306 (E).