

# Ulrike Kelm

is the Chair of the

## Women in Water and Sanitation Network

(DON'T!)

**WASTE  
WATER**

We all heard the terrible numbers highlighted by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals campaigns.

Billions of people without proper water or sanitation.

When you're living in a first-world country, you sometimes forget the human consequences and the feeling behind those statistics.

Yet, it wasn't always that obvious:

When you don't need to think about water, everything is probably fine...

... but as soon as you have to think about it, you know that things are not doing well.

It's just one generation away. We live in pure luxury and health, whereas our parents and grandparents experienced the absolute opposite!

Now for the sake of today's deep dive, let's do an exercise. Let's switch the words "water" and "women."



(DON'T!)

# WASTE WATER

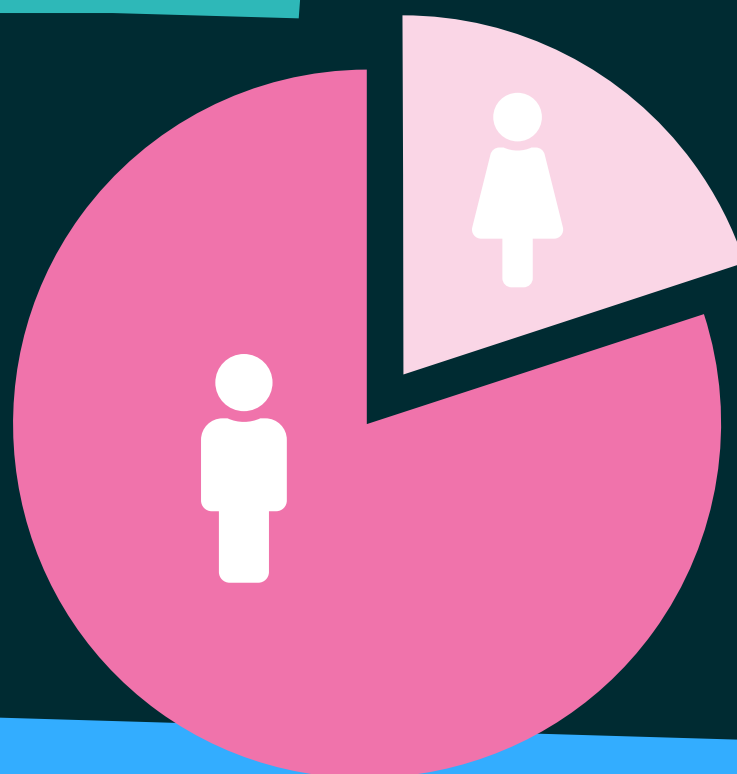
As a male water professional, have you ever needed to think about being a male? 83% of the water sector being male, statistics would answer with a 'no'.

83%

But if you're a female water professional, the story is very different.

17%

We grew up on certain patterns that separate boys and girls. When I was working in Mexico, for instance, the communications department I was in featured a vast majority of women. But in all the other departments, they were very rare exceptions!



This 83/17 rate between man and woman thus hides another truth: the uneven repartition of genders among departments almost builds segregation in the workforce.

And the problem with patterns is that they tend to repeat themselves.

(DON'T!)

**WASTE  
WATER**

We always stick to what we know and what we know best!

So how do we break patterns?  
First, with role models.



You need to bring visibility to brilliant women. Think, for example, of the conference panels: you don't want all your panelists to be white males. If you show capable women, terrific professionals instead, you might even influence society!



**That is actually what the Woman in Water and Sanitation Network (WWSN) aims to push: give female water professionals the visibility they deserve. Make them heard.**



(DON'T!)

# WASTE WATER

**But beyond, shall regulation also help with breaking those patterns?**

When you see that 23% of utilities' engineers and managers are female on average, that also means that some utilities don't have any woman in those positions! To get rid of old ideas, you need strong incentives to change company cultures.



**And what better incentive than national laws, constitutions, or labor laws?**

**The next crucial element to improve the gender (and thus talent) balance is to leverage our human nature to be social animals. And therefore to enforce networking.**



As a female water professional, you might feel lonely. There's something missing in your work environment, so it's helpful if you can find some support from your peers.





(DON'T!)

**WASTE WATER**

The WWSN brings women with very different backgrounds and experiences together.



Elderly professionals can tank on new influences, passion, vision, or enthusiasm from the younger ones. At the same time, younger ones reach career advice, inspiration, or role models in that same process!

## In a nutshell

This is how change happens.  
As a combination of:

### Lighthouses and Pioneers

the role models

### Societal Will

by law or within company policies

### Support

networking, 'sharing' being the best 'having.'



That's how, in a generation, we will forget about gender and just see water professionals as water professionals.

And leveraging the entire talent pool is an integral part of success in fulfilling the UN sustainable development goals.

**Let's be the generation it takes for change to happen!**



There is much more in this week's interview with Ulrike. Check it out on [dww.show](http://dww.show)!