

**Women  
for Water  
Partnership**

# WITH WOMEN BETTER RESULTS IN WATER MANAGEMENT



**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH


# With Women Better Results in Water Management

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Their stories are the backbone of this publication, and their efforts are highly appreciated.



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# About Women for Water Partnership

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) is a unique organisation of twenty-eight women's organisations and networks, uniting women in leadership. All member organisations are rooted in society and are active in the areas of water, sanitation, sustainable development, and women's participation. WfWP positions women as active leaders, partners, experts, and agents of change in water. WfWP links day-to-day practice to policy at national and international levels and vice-versa and contributes to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (specifically goals 5 and 6) with a focus on women and universal access to water for all, for all uses.

[www.womenforwater.org](http://www.womenforwater.org)



5 GENDER EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Photo Kates, member of Women for Water Partnership

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. State of Affairs</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Global general data	13
2.2 Power and decision-making	14
2.3 Legal obstacles	16
2.4 Water sector	17
2.5 International conventions, principles, and declarations	20
2.6 Conclusions	21
<b>3. More women: better performance</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1 Women in decision-making roles	22
3.2 What about the water sector?	23
3.3 Conclusions	26
<b>4. Women included by design</b>	<b>27</b>
4.1 Involvement of women	29
4.2 Women-only projects	32
4.3 Systemic inclusion of women	42
4.4 Conclusions	51
<b>5. Bottlenecks, Drivers, Enablers, Guidelines</b>	<b>53</b>
5.1 Bottlenecks	53
5.2 Drivers and enablers	54
5.3 Guidelines and strategies	55
5.4 Conclusions	57
<b>References/Literature</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Annex 1: Definitions</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Annex 2: Main outcomes desk study 2018 women and water governance</b>	<b>62</b>



Photo Women for Water Partnership

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# Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfWA	African Water Association
Aquafed	International Federation of Private Water Operators
AWHHE	Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung/German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EU	European Union
GGRETA	Groundwater Resources Governance in Transboundary Aquifers UNESCO-IHP
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
GWA	Gender Water Alliance
HR	Human Resource
IDRC Canada	International Development Research Centre
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LWB	Lilongwe Water Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for European Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Q&A	Questions and Answers
RUWASA	Rural Water Supply Agency (Tanzania)
SaciWATERS	South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIWI	Stockholm Water Institute
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TWG	Tegemeo Women Group
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations for Education, Science and Culture
UNICEF	United Nations Organisation for Children
UN Water	Interagency United Nations coordinating UN's work on Water and Sanitation
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WfWP	Women for Water Partnership
WSSCC	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council
WWAP	World Water Assessment Programme (UNESCO)
WWQA	World Water Quality Alliance

# Executive Summary

Measurement of the impact of higher numbers of women is somewhat uncharted territory in the water sector. However, in some corners of the private sector, it is common to measure the impact of women in decision-making positions and results show this leads not only to better company performance, but also has positive effects on the surroundings of a company. In a quest to find information about the relationship between women's involvement in decision-making and results, Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) undertook a study that focused on the following key questions:

- What are the results when more women are involved in decision-making processes about water?
- What are good practices?
- What are the main drivers, enabling factors, and the bottlenecks?
- What are effective strategies?

This study was funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The study consists of desk research and a presentation and analysis of thirteen case studies covering private water operators, governmental water agencies, community groups, national and international NGOs, and research institutes in several parts of the globe, including India, Tanzania, Great Britain, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Armenia, India, the Nile Basin, Malawi, Jordan, Madagascar, and Africa. The practices described in the case studies vary from access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, to

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water awareness, water quality, the fight against pollution, irrigation, research in the field of climate and water, to transboundary water management and the complete water sector within a country. In short, a wide range of practices covering SDG 6 and water-related targets implemented by different types of organisations in varied settings of the world.

To provide context to the current situation in the water sector, the publication begins with a brief overview of the number of women working in a variety of sectors, including the water sector. Data, particularly regarding the water sector is scarce. The primary conclusion is that inequality in the workforce and workplace between women and men is persistent: In 2020, less than 50% of women were in paid work, compared to 76% of men. In terms of leadership or decision-making positions, in general, the number of women is around 28%. In larger companies, female CEOs are rare (7.4%). In parliament the number is slowly increasing to 25% whilst in local governments 36% of women are participating. In the water sector, particularly when compared to other 'technical' sectors, fewer women are working, only 17% and in utilities on average 23% of women are working in managerial positions. Reasons for these differences are for example existing stereotypes, legal barriers, and limited numbers of women in STEM fields. Women do not enter the sector easily and they also leave the sector earlier compared to men. The work in the sector is often perceived as 'unsuitable' for women: too technical, too dirty, too dangerous, or too heavy.

Is the water sector different from other sectors? Yes and no. In many countries, women are responsible for water and have therefore gained significant knowledge in the field of water management. This knowledge is insufficiently utilised in the professional water sector. It is as such, a hidden source of 'capacity', a source of knowledge often not available in other sectors. On the other hand, the water sector is like other



'technical' sectors in that it is difficult to recruit women and keep them on board. In all sectors, including the water sector, special efforts are required to increase the involvement of women.

Concerning the relationship between women and results, studies by McKinsey & Company and others, show there to be a strong correlation between the presence of women in top management positions and better performance. Companies with higher numbers of women in leadership teams can be seen to outperform those with fewer women, often by 30%. Additionally, it is found that women are as ambitious as men but are less confident in promoting themselves. Therefore, women require a supportive environment to feel they can succeed. The few studies that have taken place in the water sector show similar findings. When women are involved in (decision-making) processes, projects are more effective and sustainable. For example, a study by Deloitte on women in urban water management found that when women in India, were trained and licensed as hand pump mechanics, this resulted in better maintenance and fewer breakdowns, due in part to customers finding female mechanics more accessible and responsive. A study by IUCN concluded that women's involvement benefits go beyond water issues, including higher incomes, higher attention to social and environmental issues and increased empowerment of women participating in other areas, such as local elections.

The thirteen cases investigated in this study show a comparable pattern. The performance within and beyond the water sector improved with the increased involvement of women. Examples include: barriers for tariff setting have been resolved and the willingness to pay improved; better services to customers; increased access to clean water; improved maintenance; efficiency of irrigation projects has increased (less water usage); less pollution; safe sanitation; better health; more nutritious food; more women and girls empowered; better access to education and skills training; higher attention to climate change, environmental and social issues; change in the



Photo Women for Water Partnership

composition of staff (more women on board); safer workspaces; better economic opportunities (jobs, own businesses). It was striking to experience how difficult it is to relate inputs to results achieved and to see that most of these results are described in qualitative terms. Gender-responsive budgeting<sup>1</sup> and different practices for recording decisions and actions might help to fill the gap.

The cases, or good practices, have been divided into three categories indicating the main differences in approaches:

- Involvement of women, meaning that women are involved in the implementation of a project and/or activity and not deliberately in decision-making processes.
- Women-only projects are projects which have been designed, implemented, and controlled by women and women have fully taken part in all phases of the decision-making processes.
- Systemic inclusion of women, meaning that deliberate and systematic actions have been taken and/or planned to involve women in all levels of an organisation including decision-making processes to change the system.

In each category, the performance increased. In terms of approaches, particularly in the category of 'women-only projects', listening to the women involved to better understand them and their needs was essential, not only at the start of the project but during implementation. With increased listening and communication, changes were able to be made throughout the process, less conventional methods were used, and risks were taken to reach the objectives. In the category, 'systemic inclusion of women' commitment at the top of an organisation proves essential. Additionally, clear targets are key, as is having a picture of the composition of the staff at different levels of an organisation. In 'women-only projects' and 'the systemic inclusion of women' many measures have been taken to involve women in all stages of a project, or at all levels of an organisation, including in the decision-making processes. The whole system is being adapted to facilitate the inclusion of women.

There are many bottlenecks evident for women and girls to be included in (decision-making processes) in the water sector, such as the influence of stereotypes and cultural norms (often unconsciously). These biases practiced by both women and men perpetuate the narrative of what women can and cannot do. Furthermore, laws may prevent participation, worldwide on average women have 75% of the legal rights of men. Occupational segregation and a small number of female graduates at different educational levels in STEM areas, lack of facilities, appropriate equipment, and sexual violence. These bottlenecks need to be addressed to realise the ambition of increasing the participation of women.

Drivers to include more women differ across organisations and are often a combination of moral reasons such as equality between men and women, as well as the demonstrated improvement of performance, and the qualities of women such as the ability to communicate and manage funds. Next, declarations and

conventions for example the Dublin Principles emphasising women's central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water, might play a role. However, implementation is happening at a very slow pace.

Enablers are manifold such as the commitment of the top (executive) level within organisations. Supportive laws and policies act as enabling factors, as do specific budgets that engage, attract, train, women and carry out specific activities to retain women coupled with changes in HR policy and procedures. Moreover, altering mindsets and addressing unconscious biases is key. Creating the right environment and conditions for women to participate might include appropriate clothing and equipment, bathroom facilities, breastfeeding rooms, or childcare, together with access to ICT and transport. Consideration must be given to the presence of family responsibilities including caring for the elderly. The appointment of gender experts to support the implementation of a gender strategy and action plan, clear objectives and targets, and the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive budgeting are also crucial.

Women's movements play a role in the call to end female injustice or inequalities, for example the ME-TOO movement, motivating organisations to take steps to analyse and/or change the situation and narrative.

The lessons of the literature review, the experiences of the members of WfWP and the thirteen case studies, lead to the following five guidelines to stimulate and facilitate the inclusion of more women in decision-making processes in the water sector:

1. Analyse a situation to understand how many men and women are involved, how and where, what are the issues of the women in a specific context (women are not one group, but heterogenous), what are the stereotypes at play,

and how much resources are available for men and women. It is not a one-time action. During all phases it remains important to continue to listen to women to identify problems and design solutions.

2. Translate the analysis into a plan with clear objectives, measurable targets, and a sound budget: a 40-40 balance between men and women is such a target, leaving 20% free. Involve men and especially women in drafting a plan and in the decision-making process around the plan and the budget.

3. Make sure the top level is committed, remains committed and that their messages are consistent. Do not leave other layers of management behind and develop clear accountability mechanisms. Moreover, organise support for the implementors to be able to translate policy into practice for example by introducing focal points, ambassadors or help desks and training.

4. Create the conditions for women to be included and remain included, such as by changing HR policies and regulations, organising leadership courses or mentor programmes to encourage women to apply for decision-making positions, giving access to women for vocational training or accepting and certifying already acquired skills. Moreover, by addressing stereotypes and unconscious bias regularly to change mindsets, by ensuring that there are facilities for women such as toilets, appropriate equipment and clothing, breastfeeding spaces, access to ICT and transport, by taking action against sexual violence.

5. To keep abreast with the developments, develop a monitoring system which provides both quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data. Analyse the data regularly to enable learning and introduce necessary adaptations to plan and budget. Next, gender-responsive

budgeting helps to gain more insights between inputs and results.

These guidelines are interconnected and reinforce each other.

**Inclusion of women needs special efforts: when doing this, better results are guaranteed!**

Photo Soroptimist International, member of Women for Water Partnership



# 1. Introduction

Companies with the highest percentage of women in management are, on average, 47% more profitable than those with the lowest<sup>2</sup>, and have a 55% difference in operating results<sup>3</sup>.

Women and men participating equally in the economy could add a further US\$ 28 trillion to global annual gross domestic product<sup>4</sup>.

A higher share of women on bank boards<sup>5</sup> leads to greater financial resilience and a higher share of women on boards of banking-supervision agencies is associated with greater bank stability.

Leadership styles more frequently used by women are the most effective in addressing the global challenges of the future and critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>6</sup>.

These are some striking results of studies, mainly of the private sector to the impact of having more women in decision-making processes. One can conclude that diversity matters in terms of performance, the planet and society.

What about the water sector? It has been three decades since the world recognised women's crucial role in water issues. At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, it was agreed that "women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water" the Dublin principles. What happened afterwards? What are the results when more women are involved in decision-making processes? And what are good practices of women's involvement at different levels of governance (national, basin, local) in the water sector? What are the main drivers and enabling factors to increase the involvement of women in water governance? And what are effective strategies?

Women for Water Partnership tried to find answers to these questions. In 2018 a preparatory study (desk research) was done together with OECD providing an impression of women's involvement in water related decision-making of which the main conclusions are presented in Annex 2.

The current study builds upon the desk research and presents practices of women's involvement in the water sector. For that purpose, eighteen organisations have been approached. They have been selected according to the following criteria: different continents, governmental and non-governmental organisations at different levels, private sector organisations and donor organisations all covering different fields of the water sector. Thirteen organisations responded positively and represent the desired variety with one exception: donor organisations did not respond. The respondents filled in a survey with open questions and additional information was obtained by interviews and email exchange. Based on this information thirteen case studies have been composed with an emphasis on approaches that work, as well as the drivers and enabling factors to include women. Another part of the research is a literature review to establish a global view on the involvement of women in (water) governance processes, also looking beyond the water sector itself. To capture the most recent insights and experiences, information from public sources is used mainly from 2014 onwards. Older publications are looked at in case they are perceived as key documents for this study. Both the literature review and the case studies are the backbone of this publication, culminating in a set of guidelines to include women as partners, experts, and agents of change in the water sector.

This publication starts with a brief overview of what we know about the number of women working in other sectors as well as the water sector (chapter 2). In chapter 3 a summary is given of the literature review done partly beyond the water sector, but mainly within the water sector. Thirteen practices of different corners of the water world and of different types of organisations about what happens when women are being included by design are presented in chapter 4. The literature review and the case studies are the foundation for the last chapter (5) about bottlenecks, drivers, enablers, and guidelines to include more women in water governance processes.

## 2. State of Affairs

There is a lack of data regarding the number of women and men working in the water sector, the positions of women, and the number of women in decision-making processes or leadership roles. In this chapter a more general picture of women in the workforce (2.1) and in influential roles (2.2) will be sketched, to get an impression of the situation worldwide. Legal obstacles are mentioned in paragraph 2.3 and in 2.4 we describe the situation in the water sector. The chapter ends with relevant conventions highlighting the participation of women (2.5) as well as conclusions (2.6).

### 2.1 Global general data

- In 2020, less than 50% of women have a paid job, compared to 76% of men<sup>7</sup>.
- Women hold 28% of managerial positions in 2019<sup>8</sup>.
- 18% of enterprises surveyed had a female Chief Executive Officer in 2020<sup>9</sup>.
- Among Fortune 500 corporations 7.4% or 37 Chief Executive Officers were women<sup>10</sup>.
- Women represent around 25% of national parliamentarians worldwide, marking a slow increase from 11.3%<sup>11</sup> since 1995.
- Women's presence in local governmental bodies is higher than in national parliaments: on the 1st of January 2020 worldwide, women held 36% of the elected seats<sup>12</sup>.
- Women bear 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care and domestic work globally, which undermines their prospects in education and in the labour market<sup>13</sup>.
- In informal employment the ratio between men and women is 63% versus 58%<sup>14</sup>.
- Women comprise less than 33% of all researchers globally<sup>15</sup>.
- In renewable energy, women make up 32%<sup>16</sup>.
- Women position less than 17%<sup>17</sup> of the paid jobs in the water sector.

These figures give a general impression of the proportion of men and women in the formal labour market in different sectors. There are differences in women's access to the labour market across countries: The gap in participation rates is narrowing in developing and developed countries but continues to widen in emerging countries, where it stands at 30.5% in 2018<sup>18</sup>. The public sector remains a larger employer for women than the private sector: globally, women represent 46% of the public sector workforce compared to 33% in the private sector<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, in many countries, the public sector is the largest employer. In fifty-five high and upper-middle-income countries women even outnumber men in the public sector. This is largely caused by the fact that the education workforce consists of 64% women and the health sector accounts for 70%.

Worldwide, employment in the informal economy is higher in men than women at 63% to 58% respectively. However, the rates of informal working differ by region, particularly in low-income countries with women making up 92% of informal workers compared to 87% of men<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, women make essential contributions to the agriculture sector which is often informal.

Additionally, it is striking to notice that the number of women in the renewable energy sector (32%) is nearly twice as high compared to the water sector (17%), while both sectors are perceived as 'technical' where normally fewer women are employed than men. In both sectors, the number includes administrative positions. The number in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, also called STEM positions, is 28% in the renewable energy sector. That number is unknown in the water sector. It is difficult to find an explanation for the differences between the two sectors, however, the renewable energy sector might be more popular because of its

huge challenges related to climate change. In general, women are more inclined to search for jobs in which environmental and societal issues play an important role, as discovered in research into women in politics or women leadership in the private sector. However, there may be other reasons: the water sector is an old sector and has many traditions often less favourable to women, whereas the renewable energy sector is rather new. Next, the voluntary work done by women and by NGOs is not calculated in the water sector. The figures in renewable energy do not incorporate mining, with the estimated number of women in the global mining workforce between 8 and 17%<sup>21</sup>, whereas the abstraction of water is included in the calculations of the water sector.

It is also noted that women's significant progress in education has not resulted in comparable progress in their position at work. The unequal distribution of unpaid care and household work between women and men is at play, coupled with discriminatory laws and practices as well as stereotypes and social norms.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the picture has become even bleaker since many women worked in sub-sectors hardest hit by Covid-19 and the lockdown measures, including those in paid domestic work and the retail trade. Women's employment fell by 4.2% globally compared with 3% for men in 2020<sup>22</sup>. The pandemic has reinforced gender inequalities at home and in labour markets.

## **2.2 Power and decision-making**

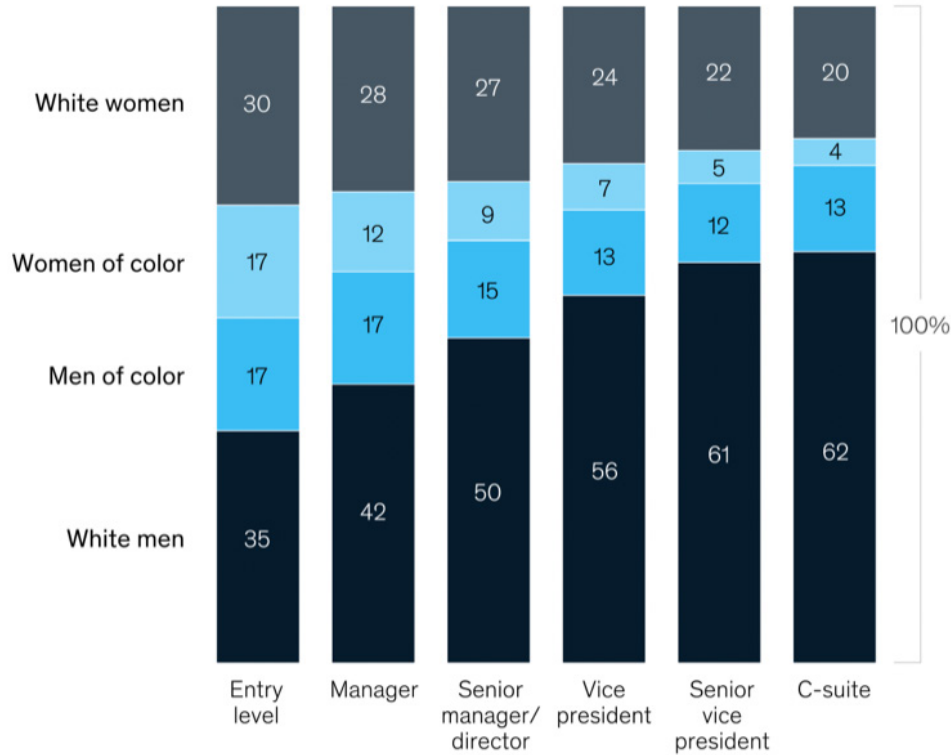
In the political arena, women's representation in parliament in most countries and regions has more than doubled from 12% in 1995 to 25% in 2020, whilst the number of female ministers has quadrupled and stands at 22%. At this pace

gender parity in ministerial positions will be reached by 2077<sup>23</sup>, however, fourteen countries have cabinets with 50% or more positions held by women. Increasingly, women are seen to lead ministries in non-social sectors such as defence, environment, employment, and trade/industry. The use of temporary measures such as gender quotas has raised the participation of women in national decision-making bodies in many countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, quotas increased women's representation in politics. In Latin America, gender quotas, coupled with quotas targeting indigenous groups, have increased the representation of traditionally marginalised groups. Yet, despite the demonstrated impact, less than half of countries around the world have some form of legislated quota in place.

In local government bodies, there are more women active: data from 133 countries in 2019 show that 36% of members elected are women, more than in parliament. The share of women municipal mayors was 15% in 2019, much lower than the number of municipal councillors.<sup>24</sup> Also here, quotas led to better results.

The downside of more women participating in the labour market is the increase of gender-based violence, also in the political realm. A 2016 survey of female politicians from 39 countries found that 82% had experienced psychological violence, with 44% facing violent threats<sup>25</sup>.

Representation by corporate role, by gender and race, 2021, % of employees



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
 Source: *Women in the Workplace 2021*, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, 2021



In the private sector, the proportion of women in managerial positions remains low as well, at only 28% in 2019, despite the positive correlation between performance of a company and the number of women in decision-making positions. This figure has changed very little over the past decennia. Women are promoted at far lower rates than men and women of colour continue to lose ground at every step of the pipeline<sup>26</sup>. Women are under-represented in senior and middle management positions; the percentage remains far below 50%<sup>27</sup>. At global level, less than a third of senior and middle management positions are held by women. Women CEO's or top managers are rare: only 20% and for coloured women only

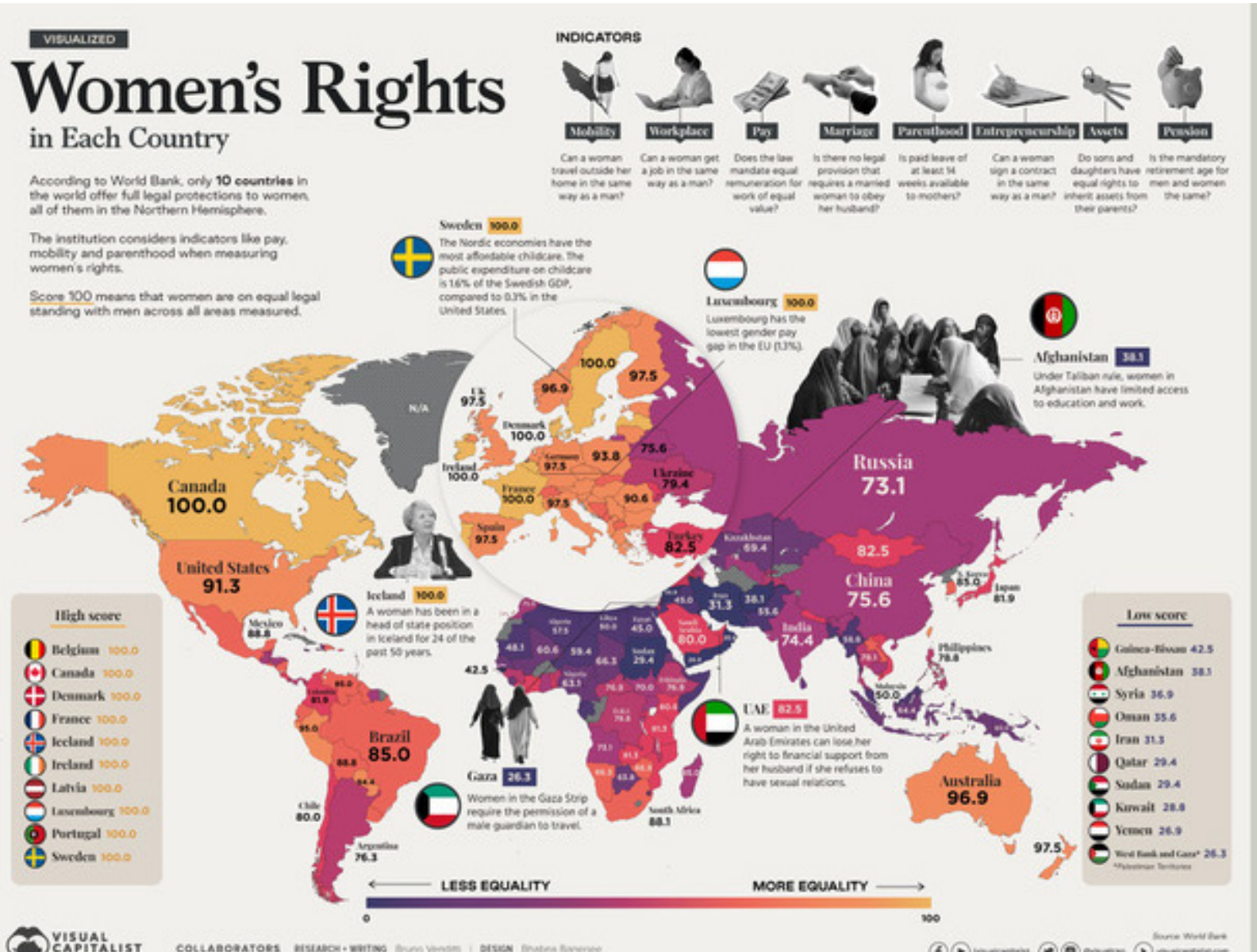
4%. The bigger the enterprise, the lower the number of women at the top: 7.4 % amongst the Fortune 500 companies<sup>28</sup>.

While few women make it to the top, those who do get there faster than men: women managers and leaders are almost one year younger than men. This difference in age decreases as the national income increases. Female managers are also more likely to have a higher level of education than male managers and often need higher qualifications to even be hired for these positions. Globally, 44.3 % of female managers have an advanced university degree compared to 38.3 % of male managers<sup>29</sup>.

## 2.3 Legal obstacles

According to a study of the World Bank in 190 countries about Women, Business, and the Law in 2021<sup>30</sup> discriminatory laws across the world threaten employment, entrepreneurship, and equal opportunity and do not support working women. Worldwide on average women have 75% of the legal rights of men. Gender equality in the law is associated with better results such as more empowered women.

Around one hundred countries have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs, for example in mining. Around twenty-six countries have restrictions on women working in the water sector. Out of these more than 50% prohibit women from working in sewers and 20% do not allow women to work as plumbers. In 33% of these countries, women are not allowed to work in water-related jobs at night. Next, some countries have specific laws prohibiting women to work in jobs requiring soaking the body in dirty water or in cold water operations during their menstrual period.



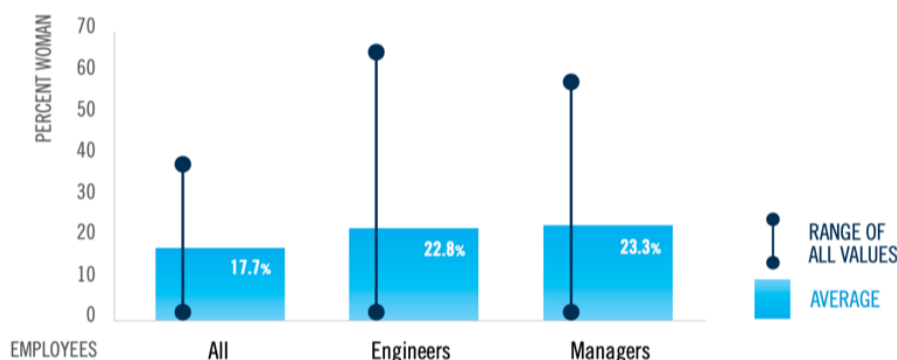


## 2.4 Water sector

In the water sector, less than 17% of the employees are women<sup>31</sup>. This number comprises all jobs in the water sector as well as all kinds of organisations such as water agencies, local water management institutions, and national or transboundary water bodies. The number is lower for technical experts, managers, regulators, and policymakers. That number is not exactly known, but studies show that the water sector employs a far higher number of men than women, especially in technical fields.

In the case of the water utilities, according to an interesting study by the World Bank<sup>32</sup>, only 20% of the new hires were female. In this same study of the World Bank on sixty-four utilities in twenty-eight countries, the percentage of women stands at 18%, however, there were many differences between the utilities surveyed. For example, on average 23% of engineers and managers in a utility are female, 32% of the utilities had no female engineers and 12% had no female managers.

**FIGURE ES.1: AVERAGE SHARE OF EMPLOYEES IN A WATER UTILITY THAT ARE WOMEN, 2018–19**



Source: World Bank Utility Survey 2018–19.

Notes: Responses to the World Bank Utility Survey (N = 64 water and sanitation utilities in 28 economies). Bars show the utility average, and lines show the range of all values. Engineers are defined as licensed engineers working in the utility. Managers are employees in leadership positions and decision-making roles and can comprise upper-, middle-, and lower-level management.

In Jordan a study was carried out to the number of women and men working in the water sector with the following results:

- Women employees constitute around 11% of the total employees in the water sector. By excluding the number of men working in the third job category (for example bill collectors, treatment plant operators, plumbers, especially in remote areas), the percentage of women reaches 44.8%, which is higher than the number of working women in Jordan (17%).
- In leadership and supervision positions 37% are women.
- 39% of the women have a first university degree and above, compared to only 15% of men. 76% of men are working in the more technical jobs, holding less than a secondary degree or vocational training.
- More than 50% of women experienced that the working hours are not suitable for working women, due to family and social commitments.
- 33% think that the available facilities (prayer room, bathroom) are inadequate.
- 72% believe that their career responsibilities fit their abilities, academic and practical qualifications.
- Water sector entities are characterised by masculinity due to the nature of field work and tasks requiring physical efforts.
- 43.7% of the women disagree that they have equal training opportunities, especially for training requiring travelling and accommodation outside Jordan.
- 45% of the women believe that men develop faster in their professions than women amongst others due to lesser skills development opportunities.
- 49% of the men believe that women have moderate ability to perform the same duties of men with the same degree of efficiency.
- 53.6% of the men think that women must develop their skills and abilities to reach senior and leadership positions.
- Women's leadership patterns is perceived as women's emotional nature and influence of external and personal factors.
- Less women are recruited to work in the water sector due to the unconventional role of women in field work and technical jobs

Based on these data the government developed a programme to improve the position of women in the water sector. You can read more about this programme in chapter 4.

*Source: Gender Study on the Women Status Working in the Water Sector. Women Studies Unit Ministry of Water and Irrigation 2018*

As stated in par 2.3 there are legal barriers preventing women from working in the water sector. There are also other constraints such as the low number of women graduating in STEM fields, but even with such training stereotypes and norms, the lack of female role models prevents women from entering the water sector. Next, the work in the sector is perceived as too technical, too dirty, too dangerous, and too heavy; all perceptions standing in the way of attracting women. Also, recruitment procedures are not counteracting these 'images' of the sector, on the contrary. Hiring processes are often biased or use discriminatory language in job postings and are not focused on and adapted to recruiting women.

Once having entered the sector, many women leave the sector especially those in technical positions such as engineers: in utilities female engineers worked 5.8 years in a company and male engineers 8.5 years. For managers there is a similar trend: women were 8.6 years in their position and men 10.6 years<sup>33</sup>. On top of this, data indicate that many women starting to work in STEM-related fields leave within the first year. The reasons why women are leaving vary from a feeling of isolation in a male-dominated environment, lack of facilities such as toilets or changing rooms, perceived problems in field-related functions, lack of adequate equipment, a culture of overwork (24/7 commitment) making it difficult to combine the work with caring responsibilities. Moreover, sexual harassment might occur more in fields dominated by men, such as the water sector, blocking women to enter or remain in the sector.

How different is the situation beyond the professional water sector: In many countries, women and girls are responsible for fetching clean drinking water for the family and taking care of waste or wastewater. Survey data for twenty-five sub-Saharan countries indicate that women spend sixteen million hours a day collecting water: Sixteen million hours not spent

on other activities such as education or income generation. Furthermore, women play a prominent role in the productive use and management of water for activities including agriculture, forestry, and fishing. All these tasks are unpaid, meaning that the contribution is not visible and often not recognised. So, beyond the professional water sector, many women are involved in water issues and performing important roles in achieving equitable access to water for all and for all uses. Nevertheless, they are less involved in decision-making processes about water management. Involvement in decision-making bodies is linked to water rights. Water rights are often allocated based on formal land rights, and most women do not possess rights over the land.

The fact that in many countries women are responsible for water and have gained knowledge in the field of water management makes the water sector different from other sectors. However, this knowledge is insufficiently valued in the professional water sector. It is a hidden source of capacity and a blind spot. The water sector could deliberately use this knowledge base in the services they are providing, for example, by certifying and accepting previously acquired competencies and skills, or by offering vocational training based on the experiences of women to attract more qualified women. Such a source of knowledge is not available in other sectors. Moreover, there is an immense shortage of skilled workers in the water sector<sup>34</sup> to reach SDG 6 and water-related targets. The inclusion of more women could contribute to meeting the demand for professionals. This hidden source of knowledge is a golden opportunity for the sector.

On the other hand, the water sector is not different from many other sectors, because in all sectors especially 'technical' sectors, it is difficult to recruit women and keep them on board. In all sectors, including the water sector, special efforts are needed to increase the involvement of women. In every context, a specific set of measures is required to change the situation. Lessons from

other sectors are relevant for the water sector, for example, providing special facilities such as toilets or appropriate clothing, addressing stereotypes, or offering training or mentorship programmes, and adapting HR policies.

## **2.5 International conventions, principles, and declarations**

The following international agreements are important for women's inclusive governance in the water sector. Already back in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) underlined that discrimination against women "is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and humanity". Next to CEDAW, there are two relevant ground-breaking international agreements:

1. The Dublin Principles agreed upon during the International Conference on Water and the Environment in 1992 with a special focus on women in principle 3: "Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water".

2. The Beijing Platform for Action 1995 with a special chapter (IV G) about women in power and decision-making with two special strategic goals:

- Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.



In 2010 the United Nations officially declared access to safe drinking water and sanitation to be a human right<sup>35</sup>. The declaration calls for the promotion of the full and equal participation of women as agents of change in water-related decision-making. Moreover, Aquafed and WfWP<sup>36</sup>, in their report to OHCHR, shed light on the relationship between gender equality and the human right to water and sanitation: The more service provision diverges from full compliance, the greater become the inequalities between women and men. Women suffer more because of their biological needs, role in domestic life, and the taboos and cultural biases common in all societies. The only sustainable way to ensure gender equality, and to tackle discrimination and eliminate abuses, is to achieve the total satisfaction of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation for everyone, everywhere and always.

Today these international agreements are still highly relevant, and many international declarations made thereafter have similar contents, all emphasising the need for more participation of women in decision-making processes. Implementation of these agreements by countries is lagging as stated by UN Women in their contribution to OHCHR on effective implementation of the right to participation in public affairs in February 2018<sup>37</sup>. The analysis of UNESCO-WWAP about gender in the water sector comes to the same conclusion<sup>38</sup>. Targets set by Member States to achieve gender balance in leadership and decision-making positions have not been met, and progress is slow.

In the 1990s many countries developed policies to reach more equality between the sexes. Also, the implementation of these policies is slow, next to the fact that they are often unknown and outdated.

## 2.6 Conclusions

- Inequality in the workforce and workplace between women and men remains

widespread, despite the increase in performance when more women are involved.

- In the water sector, there are even fewer women working compared to other sectors due to stereotypes, norms, legal barriers, and fewer women in STEM fields. Women do not enter the sector easily and they also leave the sector earlier compared to men.
- In terms of leadership or decision-making positions, in general, the number of women is around 28%. In big companies, female CEOs are rare (7.4%), in parliament the number is slowly increasing to 25% and in local governments, 36% of women are participating. In the water sector, these numbers are not known, except for utilities where on average 23% of women are working in managerial positions.
- Measures such as gender quotas raised the participation of women in national decision-making bodies in many countries for example in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Despite the demonstrated impact, less than half of countries around the world have some form of legislated quota in place.
- In many countries, women are responsible for water issues in the household as well as for productive use. Despite this fact, women are often excluded from decision-making processes about water and their knowledge and experience are not recognised.
- The water sector is different from other sectors when considering the enormous amount of voluntary work of women to provide for water in the household. The knowledge and experiences gained are a hidden source of capacity for the water sector. The water sector is not different in terms of the challenges faced to increase the number of women.
- There are a number of international declarations stating the importance of women's inclusion in decision-making processes, also specifically for the water sector, however the implementation of these agreements is very slow.

# 3. More women: better performance

Chapter 2 gave a picture of the number of women working in the water sector and in decision-making positions. This chapter focuses on the results of women's involvement in decision-making processes, beginning with a general overview in 3.1, followed by an impression of the situation in the water sector (3.2) and conclusions (3.3). Research on this issue in the water sector specifically is scarce.

## 3.1 Women in decision-making roles

Particularly in the private sector, research has been done on women in leadership positions. Examples are given below.

In 2018, WomenRising2030<sup>39</sup> did an extensive study on the impact of women's leadership in companies concluding that when more women are in corporate decision-making positions, the companies benefit as well as the society, and the environment. This is illustrated by several examples including a study of more than 1,500 global corporations observing that companies with a higher number of women on the board offer more goods and services to communities with limited or no access to financial products. These organisations also tend to prioritise environmental issues and are likely to invest in renewable energy, low-carbon products, and energy efficiency: sustainability is important. Furthermore, women are achieving higher profitability and setting clear policies against corruption stimulating ethical practices. There is growing evidence that companies with more women in high-level management positions are better able to focus on longer-term growth goals as opposed to short-term profit. Research shows that women leaders are better skilled at reaching decisions that benefit all stakeholders' interests and increase the capacity of a company to innovate. Moreover, companies with women board members are more likely to offer employees better working conditions, stronger benefits, and try to help vulnerable communities along their supply chain. It is not

without merit that UN Women, UN Global Compact, and international women's organisations endorsed the women empowerment principles<sup>40</sup>. More than 5,000 companies around the world have committed to implement these principles and amplify, concretely and ambitiously, their goals of gender equality.

Studies by McKinsey & Company show that companies with greater gender diversity in their leadership teams outperform those with less—often by as much as 30%. They found that companies with the highest percentage of women in executive committees delivered better performance than those with all-male executives: They exceeded all-male executives by 41% in a return on equity and by 56% in operating results. So, a strong correlation was found between the presence of women in company top management and better performance. It was also found that women are as ambitious as men but less confident that they can succeed. Therefore, women need a supportive environment to feel they can succeed. The following elements are important for a supportive environment: CEO commitment, programmes for women's leadership development, addressing unconscious bias as well as perceptions regarding life balance and leadership skills in working processes and mindsets, designing inclusive recruitment and promotion processes, creating a pool of women with potential, and the close monitoring of key indicators.

Forbes<sup>41</sup> analysed 600 business decisions made by 200 different business teams in a wide variety of companies over two years. The research shows a direct link between inclusive decision-making and better business performance:

- Inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87% of the time.
- Teams that follow an inclusive process make decisions twice as fast with 50% less meetings.
- Decisions made and executed by diverse teams delivered 60% better results.

A study carried out by IMF<sup>42</sup> found that a higher share of women on bank boards is associated with greater financial resilience and that a higher share of women on boards of banking-supervision agencies is associated with greater bank stability. The FAO calculated that if women have the same access to productive resources as men, yields increase by 20–30%, nutrition improves and hunger reduces by up to 17%.

According to UN Women<sup>43</sup> there is evidence that women's leadership in political decision-making processes improves the quality of the decisions. Women work across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses such as the elimination of gender-based violence or gender equality laws. At the local level women's inclusion in decision-making bodies makes a difference. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India uncovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was

62% higher than in those with men-led councils. In Norway, a direct relationship was found between the presence of women in municipal councils and the availability of childcare. In conflict-affected areas, the participation of women brings credibility to peace processes and negotiations.

### 3.2 What about the water sector?

In 2014 the Asian Development Bank (ADB)<sup>44</sup> concluded that there is a gender gap in water management leadership at all levels of government— national, municipal, and local— and it encompasses water utilities, water supply and irrigation community governance groups. Women are rarely involved in decisions relating to water policies and strategies, water resource management, or tariff setting and technology choices. They are missing in key areas of water-related decision-making. Yet, according to UN Water, involving women can increase the effectiveness of water projects six or seven-fold.

Photo NetWwater, member of Women for Water Partnership



There are only a few examples of research conducted to the results of women's participation in water policy processes. A study by Deloitte<sup>45</sup> on women in urban water management shows that in India, women were trained and licensed as hand pump mechanics, resulting in better maintenance and fewer breakdowns, because customers find female mechanics more accessible and responsive. Many of these women understand that a broken hand pump means that girls and women must travel greater distances to collect water, thus losing productive time and increasing risks to their personal safety. In Malawi, water committees composed mainly of women monitor the condition of the water pipes that lie along the footpaths they use several times a day, reporting water leakages and the need for repairs. Women in Indonesia offered technical solutions to problems in the existing water system, at the same time challenging beliefs that women lack technical skills. Their solutions became the basis for a complete modification of the water system, and they subsequently became active participants in the management of the community's water systems.

Another example is the study of IUCN, WfWP and others "Women as change-makers in the governance of shared waters"<sup>46</sup>, with several cases about the inclusion of women in formal and informal transboundary governance processes. One of the main conclusions is that women play a prominent role in the productive use and management of land and water. Women make daily decisions about how they withdraw, allocate, save, protect, and reuse water for their family as well as for productive uses such as agriculture or fishery. In these roles women are driving innovations by introducing cooperative solutions in formal and informal fora. For example, on the border between Guinea and Liberia fisherwomen from each country have worked together to design a timetable with alternating fishing days and hours, to provide better opportunities for communities of

both countries. Furthermore, women are often involved in protecting the ecosystem. Women have gained a lot of knowledge and experience on water use and sharing water resources. Apart from the knowledge women have different ways and channels of sharing knowledge for example through their networks and spreading deeper into their communities. Where women are involved in water related decision making, benefits are higher incomes, higher attention to social and environmental issues and more empowered women participating in other realms, such as local elections. That women have more attention for environmental risks was also confirmed by a study<sup>47</sup> of OECD to gender equality related to SDG 6<sup>48</sup>, thus adding value to the governance of water infrastructure. Therefore, including women in budget decisions helps to orientate funding towards sustainable solutions.

ADB<sup>49</sup> concluded that water projects designed and implemented with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those without. It was based, for example, on a study by the World Bank and the International Red Cross (IRC) on community water and sanitation projects in 88 communities. The main finding is that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable. A further study by the Inter-agency Task Force on Gender and Water shows that when women are trained to contribute to asset management there is greater sustainability of assets due to improved operation and maintenance. Similarly, some ADB supported projects designed to increase women's decision-making in community-based organisations (CBOs), such as water user associations, farmer groups, self-help groups, and sanitation committees, have led to improvements in community water infrastructure, water supply, and sanitation, but also showed the difficulties of changing persistent norms and stereotypes regarding women's leadership capacities. At local government level, in India, one-third of



seats on gram panchayat (village councils) are reserved for women. This has led to more investments in drinking water infrastructure and better availability of public goods. The benefits of women’s participation and involvement in water sector projects are slowly being recognised. Participation, however, is only the first step. The next, and more critical step to close the gap in water leadership and outcomes, is women’s leadership in the sector.

Since 2013, UNESCO implements the project ‘Governance of Groundwater Resources in Transboundary Aquifers’ (GGRETA). In Central America and Southern Africa gender analysis and trainings were conducted using a methodology developed by UNESCO-WWAP. In the case of the Stampriet aquifer, shared by Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, the project supports a gender approach for institutionalised cooperation. A Multi Country Cooperation Mechanism (MCCM), was created and established in the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM), including the appointment of national gender focal points. The MCCM is tasked with data-gathering and provision of advice for science-based decision-making towards the management and protection of the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System. Obtained results have been useful for the formulation of informed decisions on water resource management, use and access to water.

SaciWATERS published an exploratory exposition about the Brahmaputra River in 2018<sup>50</sup>. It reveals that in the context of transboundary water management the connection between those who govern water and those that are governed is not adequately made. In Bhutan, involvement of women in a dialogue platform yields far better results than having only men. Given women’s deep understanding about the river and other natural resources, they know better than men and their inputs are crucial.

### Levels of participation

1. Sharing information	Information
2. Seeking advice	Consultation
3. Pursuing common objectives	Collaboration
4. Systematically combining decision-making, resources and actions	Full participation

Another example is an external evaluation<sup>51</sup> of a water and sanitation project initiated and implemented by Tegemeo Women Group (TWG), in Tanzania. It is a community demand driven initiative supported by WfWP. The evaluation revealed the project delivered water to 1900 people in a technical sustainable way and realised an enormous boost in basic hygiene knowledge by training 30 community volunteers, resulting in no cholera outbreak during the last three years. Ground-breaking work was achieved with the introduction of the payment of fees for water, which was not at all a custom in the rural areas of Tanzania in that era. The capacity of the water user committees strongly developed with all stakeholders actively involved. The main success factors for the project were the commitment and persistence of Tegemeo Women Group, the willingness of the community and the demand driven way of designing and implementing of the project.

An older study providing evidence that inclusion of women in water projects makes a difference is the one of UNICEF, GWA, Norwegian Government and WSSCC<sup>52</sup>. In 2006, it is already concluded that putting women at the centre of WASH leads to better service provision, such as:

- Better technical design and planning based on stakeholder consultation.

- Better accountability and transparency.
- Sustainable safe services.
- Better maintenance.
- More efficient awareness raising about hygiene.
- More empowered women and women's groups.
- Greater privacy and dignity.
- More replication of efforts and benefits.

Putting women at the centre leads to an improvement in the status of women, recognition of their skills and knowledge, a more powerful voice, increased confidence, and challenging gender-stereotypes.

Photo Soroptimist International, member of Women for Water Partnership

### 3.3 Conclusions

- When more women are in corporate decision-making positions, their companies perform better (30%) and add benefits to the society and the environment.
- In the water sector there are few studies to the relationship between women in decision making roles and results.
- When women are involved in decision-making processes in the water sector, projects are more effective and sustainable.
- As a result of their role as manager of household water, women have valuable insights in the design, operation, and maintenance of water systems and beyond.



# 4. Women included by design

In this chapter, thirteen cases are presented by different organisations in various areas of the world regarding the inclusion of women in water and what this entails. The cases have been divided into three categories of different approaches:

- Involvement of women, meaning that women are involved in the implementation of a project and/or activity, and not deliberately in decision-making processes. These cases are presented in 4.1.
- Women-only projects are projects are designed, implemented, and controlled by women, and women have fully taken part in all phases of the decision-making processes. These cases are presented in 4.2.
- Systemic inclusion of women, meaning that deliberate and systematic actions have been taken and/or planned to involve women in all levels of an organisation including decision-making processes to change the system. These cases are presented in 4.3.

In all cases the performance was a reason to include more women and in all cases the performance improved and increased. Unfortunately, exact figures and data are lacking to make sound comparisons between the different approaches, however in every case an interesting mix of choices is made regarding the inclusion of women. Main conclusions are presented per case description and in paragraph 4.4 overall conclusions are drawn.

Organisation	Case area	Case topic	Case country
Involvement of women			
Aquafed/Veolia International association of private water operators	Nagpur	Access to water services	India
Rural Water Supply Agency (RUWASA) Government	Same	Rehabilitation and extension water infrastructure	Tanzania
Great Torrington Water Forum/University of Exeter Community group	Great Torrington, Devon	Water Awareness	Great Britain

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Case area</b>	<b>Case topic</b>	<b>Case country</b>
<b>Women-only projects</b>			
Mujeres Unidas en Defensa del Agua/ IUCN Local network/ International NGO	Lake Titicaca	Water quality, pollution of the lake and its shores	Bolivia
Earth Forever NGO	Stara Zagora	WASH, empowerment of youth WASH professionals	Bulgaria
AWHHE NGO	Ararat, Armavir, Shirak and Yerevan	Drinking water and irrigation	Armenia
SaciWATERS Research Institute based in India	Asia	Female leadership programme 'Climate and Water' at 4 universities	India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh
SIWI International NGO	Nile Basin	Women water leaders in transboundary water cooperation in conflict sensitive areas	Nile Basin
<b>Systemic inclusion of women</b>			
AfWA Association of water utilities and operators	AfWA	Gender mainstreaming	Africa
SUEZ International Group of companies Water, Waste	SUEZ	Diversity policy	World
Lilongwe Water Board / World Bank Government/ World Bank	Lilongwe	Gender mainstreaming	Malawi
Women's Studies Ministry of Water and Irrigation Government	Jordan	Promoting gender equality in the water sector	Jordan
Care Madagascar NGO	6 regions, 250 communities	Gender and social inclusion in WASH	Madagascar



Photo Website Veolia Nagpur India

#### 4.1 Involvement of women

##### *Aquafeds<sup>53</sup> member Veolia in Nagpur, India*

That women are responsible for water issues at home was the main reason for Veolia in India to involve them. However, the challenge for Orange City Water (OCW), a company set up by Veolia to provide access to continuous and safe water for all in Nagpur, was to convince women users to take the authorised water connection at their doorstep and to pay the water bill regularly. The population of Nagpur is 3 million and this includes at least 950,000 people in slums. Water bill payments and the myths about the water tariffs were reasons why many households initially resisted the idea, despite the many health, social, cultural, and economic benefits gained from a reliable water supply.

Culturally and in slum areas especially, fetching water is usually the responsibility of the women and girls of the family. Women must walk to and queue up at public standposts and water tankers, where water quality is not guaranteed, and they only operate during fixed hours of the day. Moreover, women risk being confronted with high prices and sextortion. Therefore, the strategy of OCW is to communicate, educate, collaborate, and support women and introduce them to the multiple values of water to their lives. Communication by women made it easier to remove any doubts customers might have,

and explain the benefits of access to safe water, resulting in fewer refusals to pay and smoother operations.

A Social Welfare Team was created to better understand the women users. Lack of accessible water prevented the women from earning money and learning new skills and training. A budget was therefore set aside for community-based education and training schemes, to help women to find work at their request. OCW joined with a local NGO to set up a training centre for beauty parlour courses. These have been so successful that they are now run online. Another partnership was set up with an NGO to provide computer training which helped the younger, more literate women. An education centre was established for children attending government schools who cannot afford extra private tuition. This was aimed particularly at children aged 15 and 16 who take major national exams. The connection between education and water was encouraging for women, particularly as their children's education is a huge source of pride for them. Connecting to the public supply meant less time queuing and fetching water and more time for other activities. Moreover, water has a social value among women in Nagpur. Since having a water connection, women have more time for religious and cultural practices, and more social harmony. Many women have become 'water friends' and nowadays advocate for reliable and safe water.

In conclusion, women were critical to reach the objective of 24/7 access to safe water for all. By involving women, the resistance to pay for water decreased. Special efforts were needed to gain the commitment of women. A Social Welfare Team was set up to get to know the women and understand their issues, beyond their water needs. A network of volunteers on the ground was created for any issues they might have such as water management, complaints regarding water leakages, and theft. Educational facilities were established that created goodwill among the society.

### **Rural Water Supply Agency (RUWASA)<sup>54</sup>**

In a totally different environment, in Same District in Tanzania women were also involved in water issues because of their responsibility for water at their households. The Rural Water Supply Agency (RUWASA) is a governmental agency responsible for Rural Water Supply in Tanzania. According to the Water Act No.12 of 2019, there shall be at least one woman on the board of RUWASA. The Agency implemented the Kihurio Water project consisting of rehabilitation and extension of rural infrastructure to ensure 24 hours of water service to Kihurio ward inhabitants (budget 93,909 euro and no special budget for women). The project reduces the large burden of the majority of Kihurio women, who struggle for a whole day to collect water. The project involved ward and village leaders as well as community members (male and female). The community was involved in project design, and implementation for the purpose of creating a sense of ownership. Furthermore, community members played a role in trench excavation for payment. This work is performed by men due to the hardship of this work.

Good governance regulations stipulate equal representation of men and women in meetings.

Photo website RUWASA



The attendance of women is high, around 60%, when the topic is water or health. Women participated in decisions about the plan and the budget, provided ideas about the implementation of the project and helped to suggest a sustainability mechanism. Women also suggested best practices to run the project, to propose appropriate water charges, to settle disputes and to supervise project executives. Women are honest about the resources of the project and the collection of water revenues improved due to the efforts of the women. Most women lack the confidence to take on leadership positions, therefore a training programme in leadership skills for water committee members was offered in the project area together with Same District Council.

The performance of the project improved dramatically through involving women in supervision activities. The same counts for the efficiency and the sustainability of the project. Better sustainability mechanisms were designed, such as establishing water users' committees to enable the community to manage water projects. A similar situation has occurred in the project of Tegemeo Women Group described in chapter 3.2. In Same District there are five water users' committees led by women and they perform well. The six water users' committees led by men were revoked, and leaders appeared for the court due to corruption.

Amina Ally is the village chair of Chome village, she was re-elected in 2019, because villagers appreciated her efforts in the development of the village. She managed a water project in 2017, which is still running. She says that community participation and transparency are key factors for success. The community prefers women's leadership due to their punctuality and honesty. In the quarterly village meetings, she always asks the water committee to present a report, and village revenue and expenditure are also presented in these meetings. Amina Ally believes that people must know how the money is being generated and used to avoid disputes.

The involvement of women is embedded in the Water Act of 2019 in which the importance of women is acknowledged, and conditions have been set. In 2002 a water policy was introduced and one of the objectives of the policy was to mainstream women's issues in water projects. In 1992 a women in development policy was announced focusing on the recognition and appreciation of activities of women.

In conclusion, women took part in every step of the implementation of the project, which led to better performance. The water users' committees headed by women resulted in better sustainability mechanisms such as the collection of water revenues for operation and maintenance. Apart from leadership training, there were no special measures taken to include women. The involvement of women is embedded in the law and policies.

***Great Torrington Water Forum<sup>55</sup>, Exeter University, United Kingdom***

The Centre for Water Systems (CWS), at the University of Exeter and South West Water (SWW), has been meeting regularly with the community of Great Torrington in Devon, to create a Local Water Forum. It is part of the EU funded Fiware4Water project.

A Local Water Forum is a group of people from a village, town or city who want to participate in actions which will contribute to solving water-related problems, who are concerned about the future of the planet and want to do something about it at local level. The World Water Quality Alliance of UNEP<sup>56</sup> provides a platform for these kinds of groups and organisations. The Great Torrington Water Forum is an interesting mix of people from different parts of the community. Amongst them are confident and educated women. It is observed that they either do not have children, or the children are grown up.

## How much water does Great Torrington use in a month?



Picture website Torrington Water Forum

The Forum has a core group consisting of six core members of whom three are women. The women include a PhD student in agriculture, a teacher, and a retired woman. The group is supported by a facilitator of Exeter University who facilitates the sessions, ensuring that all voices are heard, and finds a budget for the activities.

There were no special measures taken to involve women, however the initiative was advertised as widely as possible. According to the facilitator Kate Baker, "women are 50% of the community and therefore need to be involved in these initiatives. It's important to ensure that water forums reflect the community through a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. In modern day UK many households are still managed by women and have a good understanding of water and therefore need to be central to the discussions. Diverse groups are more likely to be innovative and have creative ideas linking to on-going projects in town".

The forum meets online as it started during the Covid-19 pandemic in January 2021. The

community members pick the meeting times and days, which change depending on the season. Generally, meetings take place in the evening time due to work commitments during the day, although this does vary. Some people do not attend meetings because of lack of time however, they are involved in activities. One of the activities was designing a list of 'quick fixes' to demonstrate how people can reduce water usage.

"It is easier to start a group or forum than to sustain one since time is a bottleneck", says Kate Baker. Furthermore, it is important to look at the power dynamics when informal groups are working with universities or water companies, as well as raising the question of how the time of the volunteers is being appreciated. Are they providing 'free labour' for organisations and is this taken for granted?

In conclusion, women are taking part in the decision-making processes of the Forum. Important conditions for sustaining the group are to have an experienced facilitator to ensure people feel welcome and included, having a budget to carry out activities, and to make sure tasks are shared by everyone, and it is not the women who are burdened.

#### **4.2 Women-only projects**

##### ***IUCN- Mujeres Unidas en Defensa del Agua in Bolivia***

IUCN's BRIDGE<sup>57</sup> project and Agua Sustentable, a local NGO, have worked for more than ten years with indigenous women leaders to enforce better water management in the Titicaca-Desaguadero-Popó-Copaise Hydrological System (TDPS), shared between Bolivia and Peru. Lake Titicaca has been experiencing a constant recession in its water level, pollution, and loss of biodiversity. The women became aware of water pollution and how it affected their daily life and decided to take action to restore and protect their Sacred Lake.

The network is known as 'Mujeres Unidas en Defensa del Agua' (Women United in Defence of Water) and involves 20 indigenous women from different municipalities around Lake Titicaca, though more people do participate in specific planned actions. They are a key stakeholder and influence the integrated water management policies at Lake Titicaca by implementing citizen science through monitoring the quality of surface water, and leading freshwater ecosystem restoration campaigns on the shores of the Lake.

Indigenous women in rural areas have great knowledge about water and natural resources, but they often lack opportunities to access formal education and to participate in decision-making processes. Their knowledge and experiences are not always recognised.

Photo of IUCN





Through a series of dialogues and training, motivated groups of indigenous women have learned more about water governance processes, transboundary cooperation, water monitoring, women's leadership, and key environmental issues, such as ecosystem degradation and climate change.

The women have been trained to use standardised water quality monitoring equipment, and drones to gather data at different sides of the Lake. The data are incorporated in the municipal data systems to improve water management decisions. It helps that some women are councillors of local governments and leaders of their indigenous groups. They advocate directly for the decontamination of the lake at local level, and even during bi-national forums.

Moreover, the group is campaigning for cleaning the shores of the Lake, and these campaigns are effective, and well received by the local communities. Several mayors congratulated them on their efforts, recognising them as opinion leaders. Local authorities do not consider environmental issues a priority and the personnel of municipalities change with every change of government. To keep the issue on the agenda, advocacy actions must be continued. 'Mujeres Unidas en Defensa del Agua' does not have resources to continue their efforts and neither does the council. Therefore, the financial support from Agua Sustentable, IUCN, and other sources, is indispensable in enabling them to continue their activities and make a difference in the fight against pollution of Lake Titicaca.

In conclusion, working as a women's group is powerful, but training and long-term financial support are essential for success and the continuation of the group. By acknowledging the knowledge and experiences of the indigenous women on water and environmental issues, they are a force to reckon with. Women make a difference in fighting pollution and transboundary water management.

### ***Earth Forever<sup>58</sup>, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria***

Earth Forever is a Bulgarian non-governmental non-profit organisation mainly focusing on wastewater management and safe sanitation. Earth Forever initiated a project in rural communities, with inhabitants predominantly of Roma origin. These communities are characterised by low educated girls and young mothers dropping out of schools at the age of 12-14, permanently jobless elder women and poor retired persons (predominately women).

The objectives of the project were to increase access to safe water and sanitation, better hygiene and health, more nutritious food, and empowerment of young female WASH professionals. At the same time improving the position of women and girls as well as increasing awareness about the role of women and girls as leading actors in water, sanitation, and food

Photos Earth Forever



security. Many stakeholders were involved including community mayors, community information and cultural centres, schools, cooperatives, religious leaders, city councils, and a water supply and sanitation utility.

The project offers knowledge on EU sanitation-related regulations and vocational skills in alternative sanitation management and maintenance, raises awareness about handwashing, composting, wastewater treatment and safe reuse of resources, leadership training and coaching. With a budget of only 80,000 euro, many activities were carried out and many results were achieved. Public toilets and decentralised systems for wastewater treatment were built in two villages, toilets of a centre were fully renovated, and household toilets of lonely and elderly village women were repaired. Leakages were fixed in public and private facilities by the women who received vocational training, and more than 160 women and girls received vocational training about alternative sanitation, including legislative matters. Ninety women obtained skills to gain a job in the sanitation sector and were empowered to raise their voices in meetings. Awareness raising activities about handwashing reached over 1,000 persons. In addition, women were trained on their rights, and how to address the authorities responsible for the problems they face, and a further 120 women can now construct, manage, monitor, and market alternative sanitation.

Since the project was women-led, all decisions were taken by women, however, men were not excluded. There was one male village mayor involved and one male trainer. The reason the project is mainly directed at women is that women are usually driven by a concern for the health of their family members, and concern for the environment, water resources, climate change and healthy food patterns. When women are encouraged and facilitated to take part in

decision-making, the projects are more practical and fulfil the needs of the people.

According to Diana Iskreva, Executive Director of Earth Forever, women are naturally oriented to serve the less privileged in society. That is why the project was devoted to communities mainly consisting of Roma people, not an easy group to reach. Although a water and sanitation company serve both the cities and the rural areas, the rural and the Roma dominated neighbourhoods often receive very poor quality of drinking water and lack wastewater treatment services. Some Roma households do not have toilets at home.

The ways of working are different when women lead. Communities were directly approached rather than using intermediary organisations. Women mayors and grass-roots activists were coached in decision-making positions, and during project implementation phases. They were encouraged to speak in public, deliver PowerPoint presentations at events and conferences, speak openly about problems and their needs in front of decision-makers at local and national level, and to contact and speak openly with representatives of media about their violated rights.

Meeting times, events and campaigns were adapted to the schedules of women as workers, farmers, mothers, and housewives. Women had access to technical training, and role models were introduced. Special efforts were made to identify and encourage women who would be interested in participating and contributing to the activities. Communication styles were adapted to address women's issues and social media, and web-based platforms for learning were used. Sex-disaggregated data was collected for monitoring purposes, norms set such as not less than 50% women must be involved, and no fewer than 50% women must be included in decision-making processes.



Stoyka became a community- and media star. The street she lives in was fully destroyed by water erosion. Empowered by the campaign and training of rural women on citizens' rights, she managed to convince the local government to reconstruct the street. This happened in a village where no street was repaired during the past 30 years.

There were many barriers to overcome, however. There was a lack of understanding of the importance of the involvement of women in decision-making from the planning phase onward until implementation, and insufficient numbers of women professionals in water and sanitation and at high-level positions. There was limited understanding that girls need to be encouraged and treated adequately as young water professionals, and there was insufficient regulations and facilities for women's physical needs during menstruation, pregnancy, and motherhood. Stereotypes had to be countered during the implementation of the project, such as that women would not make efficient decision-makers, or excellent water professionals, while once trained, women are often become high achievers. Earth Forever encourages girls in high schools and young female engineers to start and continue a career in the water sector. In the case of the Roma, they are often treated unfairly and with prejudice. To tackle biases, a photo exhibition was organised to show a different picture of Roma women. Furthermore, it is difficult for Roma people to overcome their own cultural practices such as child marriages and ignoring education. Roma live in special neighbourhoods and take for granted that they do not have to pay for water and electricity services.

Finally, there is often a lack of funding for bottom-up women initiatives, however, Earth Forever succeeded in getting a budget of 80,000 euro for this project, achieving amazing results and gaining valuable support from volunteers.

#### **Do's**

- Always involve women from day one of the planning phase – professionals, activists; young and old.
- Listen to women – they might be too shy to repeat twice a delicate issue, but such an issue could be vital to the success or failure of the project.
- Take women's needs and concerns seriously even if you do not understand them fully.
- Encourage women to speak openly about their concerns.
- Take specific cultural phenomena seriously such as taboos, even if you have a different opinion.
- Empower women and encourage them constantly to participate, act, take decisions, including girls and older women.
- Address the need for long-term coaching and support; remember that in many cases women must fight stereotypes and even taboos in water and sanitation sector and services.

#### **Don'ts**

- Do not ignore the opinion of women – as professionals, pupils, mothers, housewives.
- Do not ignore the cultural acceptability of purely technical solutions.
- Do not underestimate the power of community stereotypes and norms that might turn the best technology into a disaster as far as maintenance and even as usage are concerned.

In conclusion, women were involved in the project from day one, in all phases, including decision-making processes. Ways of working were adapted to the possibilities, needs and time schedules of women and girls and women's concerns were listened to. Focussing on Roma women and girls meant risks were taken, as this is not an easy

group to reach. Unusual methods were developed to reach and understand the Roma community, and actions were taken to tackle prejudices and stereotypes such as the photo exhibition. A budget was available, and a lot of attention was given to empowerment processes and training and awareness raising. The results are telling.

***Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment: Enabling Women to Participate in Sustainable Water Management in Armenia***

The project 'Enabling Women to participate in sustainable water management' was implemented by the Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE)<sup>59</sup> in Ararat,

Photo AWHHE monitoring water canal Apaga, Armavir



Armavir and Shirak provinces, and the capital Yerevan, from January 2019 to April 2021 with a budget of USD 160,000. The project was funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF). The goal was to promote equitable access to drinking water, and efficient management of irrigation water resources in vulnerable communities.

Next to water, AWHHE focussed on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The cornerstone of the strategy was to work together with women leaders to provide knowledge and skills to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, to contribute to the environmentally sustainable development of their communities. The participation of women at all levels was instrumental in achieving the project objectives. The design of project activities was based on gender-sensitive assessments, such as the KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices), on the practices of rural women in water and sanitation. The monitoring system was based on sex-disaggregated data, and has specific indicators related to the inclusion of women.

AWHHE has considerable experience of working at local level, particularly with village communities. Local stakeholders are identified, capacitated, and supported; amongst them active women, such as farmers, schoolteachers, health workers and parents. The strategy of this project also incorporated elements of the concept 'male champions of change' to encourage men in water management decision-making, to use their individual and collective leadership to elevate gender equality.

A combined approach consisting of working from the top – for example policy discussions on tariffs, to the bottom – for example community-based communication, allowed them to better assess the needs of a community and provide tailor-made recommendations for policy improvements. It also contributes to the sustainability of the results at all levels.

Examples of project activities include an analysis of the existing drinking water tariffs in Armenia, and its impact on vulnerable and marginalised groups. This analysis was discussed and endorsed in a national workshop, initiating a national discussion on current drinking water tariffs for vulnerable populations in the frame of the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health. Over 80% of the participants represented women decision-makers of all levels, in addition to community activists. Women were trained in project design, and a contest of project ideas was organised with four winners selected. Training on the monitoring of water resources was organised and those trained facilitated 16 community dialogues on monitoring of community water resources in the four communities selected as winners of the contest.

Four pilots by winners of the contest were successfully implemented. All communities made valuable contributions in terms of labour and construction of additional meters of pipes with the use of community budget, a true sign of their commitment, and a significant factor for the success of the project. At the end of the pilots, a webinar was organised, which provided a good opportunity to share experiences by the trained women groups, including the encountered bottlenecks, and solutions needed to overcome the problems in each individual case.

Two major bottlenecks influenced the project – the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict situation over Nagorno-Karabakh. Almost all project staff contracted the virus with mild to moderate manifestations, and the communities were also affected. Due to this situation, the project operations were constrained, and many activities had to be conducted online.

The role of women in project implementation was key to success. Special efforts were made to ensure active participation of women in

project activities, at the same time contributing to fostering leadership. The training format was friendly, non-formal, with the PowerPoint presentations followed by Q&A sessions, group discussions, and presentations of group work by participants. Field monitoring activities were organised to create opportunities for more detailed discussions. And most importantly, when organising any activity with women farmers, it was important to respect their schedule of farming activities.

“The water in Berkanush canal used to dry up in mid-summer, and half of the trees went dry too because of the lack of water” said Ms. Serine Mkrtchyan, a farmer, and continues: “Now we have ploughed to sow such crops such as tomatoes, eggplants, etc. It was us, the women, who brought water – and new life – to the village, with support from donors!” Instead of an earthen ditch, the water is now flowing through an iron pipeline to irrigate 12 hectares of agricultural land covering the irrigation water needs of 30 farmer households. “Thanks to the irrigation pipeline, the farmers have set up plant nurseries, the value of land is also rising,” said Mr. Manvel Hayrapetyan, the mayor and one of the identified “male champions of change”. The trained women group continues to monitor the management of the water in the pipeline jointly with the community administration.

It is estimated that of the direct project beneficiaries over 80% were women. These include community water users (at least 50% women among about 1,000 water users in pilot communities); around 20% of 50 community officials; 100% mothers of trained children; 90% teachers; 10% of women among management of four Water Users Associations; 100% women in ten women’s groups targeted for community water management training; over 80% women involved in four pilot communities.

Upon completion of the project, UNDEF conducted an independent evaluation, which confirmed the positive results<sup>60</sup>.

In conclusion, women were included in all phases of the project and results showed better access to drinking water, and better management of irrigation water, leading to increased agricultural yields and more nutritious food. Gender sensitive assessments were carried out to get to know the practices of rural women, and to tailor the design of the project activities to the community and women. Special methods and measures were used to stimulate their participation, including field visits to better understand the problems faced. Furthermore, a budget was available, and a combined top and bottom approach added to the sustainability of the project, for example, tariff setting.

***South Asia Water Leadership Programme for Climate Change: South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies (SaciWATERS)<sup>61</sup> Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, India***

South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies (SaciWATERS) is a water policy research organisation, predominantly involved in interdisciplinary water research and education. The water sector in South Asia is dominated by men at all levels and there is a lack of women water professionals often leading to gender insensitive policies and practices and women are not typically consulted at any stage in the planning process.

Thus, to redeem the gender balance in the water sector there is a need to build women water professionals and leaders. The project, therefore, worked on the capacity development of women water engineering students at the master's level, aimed at developing a foundation for women climate change leaders, with a socially sensitive and inclusive understanding of water resource management and climate change. Thirty-six women were enrolled in master's level Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) programmes in Bangladesh, India, Nepal,



Photo Website SaciWaters

and Sri Lanka. Gender and social approaches are included in the research methods, and leadership skills are being developed. Internships are facilitated through collaborations with government, NGOs, and the private sector, and interdisciplinary research theses and articles are generated. A South-South learning network of alumni, including men, has been formed to create a broad base of leaders and professionals in the water sector, and a common curriculum developed about the way gender intersects with climate change and water insecurities. The project budget for this four-year (2017-2021) phase, was one million Canadian dollars, funded by IDRC Canada.

“Along with the technical aspect, I have researched women’s intersectionality impact and their gender mainstreaming in three communities of Khairahani Municipality of East Rapti watershed. This gender analysis helped me to understand that women are not a single entity, not a homogeneous group but it is a heterogeneous group, we should not define women’s impact in one group but there is a need to understand the impact within a different category for women. The research journey makes me more curious, and I want to explore more on the water sector and gender.” – SAWA Fellow, NEC, Batch 1

The activities of the project, range from research, capacity building, building peer networks, and creating platforms for wider exposure. Important axioms of the project are:

- Climate and water require a good understanding of social causes and differential social impacts in designing solutions, therefore a solely physical and technical understanding of the problems is not sufficient.
- Direct engagement with stakeholders and vulnerable affected communities builds a base for understanding social vulnerabilities and recognising context specific challenges.
- Exposure to the sector and market helps fellows to understand mechanics and trade-offs of ground impact and decision-making.

The project lead and coordinators were the key decision-makers in the project, together with SaciWATERS, and key enabling factors in gender inclusive design and implementation. Since leadership was the core focus, only women scholars were fostered given the lack of women leaders in the sector.

Barriers faced in the involvement of women included the challenge of networking with senior male professionals as equals for younger women coordinators. Women fellows regularly met delays in education and work timelines, due to responsibilities and burdens in their households, especially married fellows, and young mothers. Early marriage is quite common in all the South Asian countries and the common age of postgraduate education often overlaps with the ideal marriage age for many families. Women coordinators were empathetic to the social demands made of fellows in marriage and maternity. Additional time, support, and flexible timelines were provided to women who struggled with balancing these roles alongside their education. Support for childcare during international workshops was also provided. Women were encouraged to complete their

degrees and offered opportunities for furthering their development in the water sector.

A personal experience of a recent young woman director. "As a young female executive director of the organisation in a challenging national policy milieu for development funding, I have often had to be in a meeting and networking spaces with senior male professionals. In such environments, I have been taken less seriously by others due to my intersectional age-gender identity or felt patronised. I have had to spend significant amounts of additional time preparing for meetings to prove my worth and knowledge, which is not taken as a given. However, regarding the SAWA project, as a younger woman director and project lead, I felt more connected to fellows and found it easier to communicate. I could empathise with their generational and social concerns around professional development, personal aspirations, and search for mentorship and direction."

Field research with women scholars required some added considerations of security and mobility and led to transport provisions especially in remote rural contexts. For example, dressing 'appropriately' for the rural setting in the different countries in South Asia was advised for better acceptance of a community. Some local resource persons or networks were identified for support. These networks enabled initiation of the team into the villages and their settings, together with support on language and cultural barriers, and help to provide some infrastructure for bathrooms and resting spaces. The research and community engagement methods also involved training in how to ask questions; appropriate ways to approach the community with a sense of respect and sincerity; respecting the time and work burdens of women in the household; how to organise appointments and align these with daily time schedules of respondents; understanding the importance of engaging with women respondents in a safe and trusting space, as they often would not open up with the men of their household around; observing behavioural and cultural practices, and norms in the village, to ensure self-

conduct in such a way so as to not inconvenience the community.

Involving women in projects and institutions can tend to become tokenistic if the context is not understood and reflected upon. Therefore, the important lessons are that projects should incorporate engagement with stakeholders early in the project implementation, to understand the gender relations and stereotypes from which gendered vulnerabilities emerge. These can be context-specific and vary across cultures. Project designs should respond to contextual gender challenges rather than assume broad and generic development discourses around women's involvement. Furthermore, women must be considered as an intersectional social category rather than a homogenous group to be represented. Gender relations and vulnerabilities manifest differently across class, caste, religion, and age groups, and therefore, women's involvement must consider including women from across intersectional categories for true representation.

In conclusion, the project was a deliberate effort to increase the number of women and girls in the

often male dominated water and climate sector in future leadership roles. Special measures have been taken to attract and retain women on board beyond the usual methods. Tackling stereotypes, involving stakeholders well in time, and acknowledging the diversity between women are key elements for the success of this project.

### *Women in Water Diplomacy Network Nile Basin*

Since its launch in 2017, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network has contributed to building trust, and an enabling environment for cooperation in the Nile Basin. The Network is part of the Shared Waters Partnership, a programme of Stockholm Water Institute (SIWI)<sup>62</sup> which supports transboundary water cooperation in conflict-sensitive areas. The network consists of 50 women water professionals from various countries riparian to the Nile Basin<sup>63</sup>.

The main reasons for creating such a network are the important roles women have in conflict prevention, peace-building, and transboundary water cooperation. Research shows that with women's inclusion in peace-building processes

Photo Website SIWI





they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. Additionally, peace agreements signed by both women and men are more durable and have lower instances of conflict. Yet, between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators, and 5% of witnesses in all major peace processes. Moreover, research shows that the inclusion of women in transboundary water cooperation is pivotal for the sustainable management of shared waters. Next, women have knowledge that is vital to sustainable resource management and specific responsibilities, priorities, and needs around water use and management, both for household and productive purposes. However, they are not automatically included in decision-making processes at the transboundary level. To make a difference, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network was launched to enhance the collective capacity of women water leaders and to support their engagement in decision-making and peace-building processes in the Basin. The women of the network are senior and mid-career professionals from Ministries of Water, and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, together with other relevant line ministries from across the Nile Basin and women from regional bodies such as the Nile Basin Initiative. Some are involved in peace building, negotiations, or water diplomacy and government processes.

Through the Network, members can share experiences and lessons learned. Since its establishment, the Network has hosted annual workshops and regular online learning activities. In terms of results, the women have contributed to peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes, including transboundary water related processes. Through enhanced cooperation of the women, better understanding was created between neighbouring countries.

“The Network is getting stronger and stronger. For example, when I participated at the recent Renaissance Dam Negotiations I found out that we were very few women in the

three delegations, about four or five, but we had something in common because we are one group – a Network. If this continues it will be very good for the negotiations.”  
Ambassador Nadia Gefoun, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sudan

Women are involved in decisions to design the programme: it is a co-creation of the members of the network and the support team of SIWI. Recently a leadership council was set up to develop impactful strategies and institutionalise co-design approaches.

A special budget and a multidisciplinary team were established to support the Network. Suitable timeslots of meetings and workshops have been taken into consideration, and at the request of the participants, prayer times were avoided. A bottom-up approach is applied, focusing on co-creation of activities and strategies responding to the needs of the network members, and to the objectives. The sessions always start informally, so people can socialise and connect beyond the topic. This also strengthens the relationships between participants. The Chatham House Rule is applied in almost all activities to ensure that the women can speak out freely. The Network is managed daily through a WhatsApp group, so the women are continuously connected. Stereotypes are being discussed regularly. A special monitoring and evaluation system is used, and data are being collected to improve activities. The monitoring results are shared between the members of the Network. An effort is made to work as transparently as possible, which is key to building trust in such an environment.

In conclusion, a safe space, a special budget, a support team, and specific conditions are needed for the women to share their experiences and contribute to transboundary water management, and peace building processes.



9<sup>th</sup> WORLD WATER FORUM DAKAR 2022 :  
 WOMEN'S DIALOGUE IN WATER AND SANITATION  
 “Supporting Growth and Promoting Visibility  
 of Women WASH Professionals:  
 Key to Success of the Sector”

International Conference Center  
 Abdou DIOUF - Diamniadio - Senegal 20 March 9:00 am-1:00 pm



Photo Website AfWA

### 4.3 Systemic inclusion of women

#### *African Water Association (AfWA)*

The African Water Association<sup>64</sup> is an international association of professional operators and stakeholders in the potable water and sanitation sector in Africa. The platform stimulates knowledge sharing, it implements capacity development programmes, and it trains professionals through the African Water and Sanitation Academy (AWASA). AfWA is implementing a gender strategy.

The executive director, the director of finance, administration and strategy, and the monitoring, evaluation and learning manager, were involved in developing a gender strategy and action plans, as well as the professional women network in WASH. They were supported by an internal gender specialist.

The strategy has the following objectives:

- At the headquarters and the utilities, achieve 30% female representation at the various levels of governance by 2028.

- Develop a gender strategy to mainstream gender into the policies, operations, and programmes of AfWA by 2022, and the utilities by 2028.
- Create awareness and develop capacity on gender, and gender equality, of staff and members of AfWA governance bodies by 2025, and the utilities by 2028.
- Build the capacity of the women professional networks in WASH and empower the women to gain leadership positions.

The strategy was based on a gender analysis and currently a gender equality action plan is being implemented. Some activities of the action plan are organising webinars for capacity development of women professionals in WASH; training on gender by the Engendering Industries Programme; increasing the participation of women in training programmes, including Training of Trainers programmes; involving women in benchmark visits, audits, and the Scientific and Technical Council; encouraging women to participate in calls for grants and scholarships; female leadership training.

Challenges include attracting more women, especially for top management positions, and once the women are on board, retaining them. To address these issues, advertisements are being designed to attract women and are widely publicised using women networks and platforms, with fairs organised at secondary schools and colleges to encourage girls to choose careers in STEM fields. Internship programmes are also being developed and mentoring programmes for women aspiring to leadership positions. Underlying values, norms, and stereotypes are seen to be bottlenecks, but are being discussed during workshops. Members realise how we each have stereotypes and unconscious biases, and how some gender norms influence how we interact with each other in the workplace. Men are being involved in many processes as allies or champions on gender.

The website and the publications of AfWA were biased towards men and it was agreed to feature more women in future publications, showing more photographs of activities by women in the technical and engineering field. Sex-disaggregated data are being collected for example, about the number of staff applying new skills after six months of a training, the number of trainers trained, and the number of people made aware of WASH. A special indicator is the number of new national networks of professional women in the WASH sector. An analysis is being done of the number of women working in AfWA's utilities, the number of African women with increased skills on leadership and entrepreneurship, and the percentage of women in AfWA's governing bodies.

Although there is no specific budget for gender mainstreaming, there are some budget lines for gender-related activities such as financial support for women's professional networks for capacity development and participation in international conferences, such as the World Water Forum, the Faecal Sludge Management conference, and the AfWA congress.

The percentage of men and women participating in decision-making bodies is shown in the table below.

Decision-making body	% Men	% Women
The Executive Board	100 (18)	0
The Scientific and Technical Council	50 (7)	50 (7)
Senior Management	100 (3)	0
Regional Implementing Partners (REIPs)	50 (2)	50 (2)
Staff	61.5 (16)	38.5 (10)

Special efforts are being made to recruit a female director.

So far, the results of involving women in decision-making processes are that all available competencies are being mobilised to improve the performance of the sector: when women are committed, they do it, meaning that decisions are being implemented; women are more knowledgeable and sensitive to WASH issues leading to an increased productivity. At the same time, women are gaining confidence and a higher self-esteem leads to better performance as well.

In conclusion, support from the top is essential not only in drafting a strategy, but also for budget allocation, implementation, frequent monitoring, and learning. Awareness building and discussing stereotypes with staff is important to create the conditions for a positive working climate for women. In addition, leadership training, capacity development, knowledge sharing through professional networks as well as mentoring programmes are vital. Special efforts are needed to recruit and retain women. Finally, the involvement of men as allies or gender champions bears fruit.



Photo Website SUEZ

## SUEZ

SUEZ<sup>65</sup> is a group of companies providing access to essential environmental services by supplying high-quality water, recovering wastewater and waste. Since 2019 SUEZ has a diversity policy to include everyone, women or men, whatever their differences or preferences.

SUEZ Group promotes Inclusion and Diversity and agreed upon the following principles:

- Promoting an inclusive Culture: Every employee is different and valued.
- Increasing diversity and gender equality by setting targets: 25% women in the Group by 2022 and 23% women in management by 2023.

Historically most technical professions have been held by men and SUEZ is working for several years to increase the proportion of women at all levels of the company and to build a working environment that allows them to express their full potential.

To address this situation and implement the principles, there are action plans shared with all Group entities, consisting of:

- Actions to promote an inclusive culture such as the creation of a network of 300 'Inclusion and Diversity' Ambassadors, with the mission to disseminate SUEZ values and to share best practices. For example: they organise workshops to raise awareness of unconscious bias, they developed an e-learning course about stereotypes, discrimination for all Group employees. To change views about women in the workplace, there is a guide to fight sexism helping employees to understand different forms of sexism and their impact on hiring, career development and work organisation.
- The design of a roadmap to increase diversity and gender equality with targets for 2020:
  - SUEZ's Executive Committee has 4 women out of 11 members
  - 22.3% of the workforce are women
  - 25% of executives (Topex) are women

- 28.9% of management positions are held by women
- 44% of the 1,309 talents identified via the People Review process are women
- Attracting more candidates by adapting the recruitment procedures. The recruitment procedures have been adapted by paying special attention to job descriptions (non-sexist writing, encouraging women to apply for technical jobs etc); having at least one woman at the short list of final candidates; communicating about equal opportunities a campaign to increase women truck drivers. In 2020, 29.9% of new manager hires under permanent contracts were women.
- Creating a female friendly work environment by providing safety equipment that fit women and implementing an agreement on remote working; by developing the SUEZ women's network: in 2020 around 5.000 women were members of a network.
- Reducing wage gaps by analysing the gap between male and female managers. A three-year period is given to implement measures to correct the pay gaps between men and women.
- To accelerate careers of women, individual development programmes have been designed. The Group also pays close attention to women in the talent management process – 44% of talents are women. The number of women coached or mentored is increasing to open career opportunities for women.

The implementation of the plans has shown some results. SUEZ has 90,000 employees and from year to year, the proportion of women is increasing among managers (30%), and executives (36% of the executive committee). Further progress is a must, however the position of SUEZ in relation to the other major companies is encouraging. The value of diversity has been proved as a source of innovation, generating improved performance, and delivering more successful teams.

In conclusion, a systematic strategy and action plan with clear targets is used to transform the situation, including a change of culture, and very practical issues such as providing equipment that fits the needs of women, and adapting HR and recruitment policies. Addressing sexual harassment is also a must.

### *Lilongwe Water Board Malawi*

Lilongwe Water Board (LWB) is a statutory corporation established in 1995 with responsibility for water and sewerage services in Lilongwe City, Malawi<sup>66</sup>. It currently provides water services to about 70% of the city population. A gender assessment, consisting of amongst others, focussed group discussions conducted by the World Bank at Lilongwe Water Board, found that women are consistently under-represented, particularly in skilled occupations, and in managerial and leadership positions.

Photo Lilongwe Water Board 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan (p 14).



They additionally encounter inflexibilities in work schedules and work environments that do not cater to parenthood or other caregiving needs.

Barriers include:

- Women typically held low level positions, and disproportionately lacked access to jobs and employment opportunities; in fact, women made up only 15 % of the total workforce. The underrepresentation reflects social and cultural norms, including discriminatory gender norms such as those that stigmatise women as inadequate to study STEM related fields, or that technical programmes are better suited for men.
- Women were absent from managerial positions, with no women represented on the Board of Directors and in executive management. This is attributed to, among other factors, a lack of management and leadership skill building opportunities for women; as well as a lack of role models and career guidance to motivate girls and young women to join LWB.
- Additional institutional barriers were identified, such as, insufficient consideration and flexibility in the utility provisions that enable women to reconcile work and caregiving responsibilities. For example, because of the nature of the work, the staff is expected to work on both day and night shifts, which is challenging for (married) women.
- Absence of essential amenities such as separate toilets, adequate bathrooms for menstrual hygiene management, no space for nursing mothers, and no childcare facilities.

Based on the gender assessment and supported by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Project, LWB designed a comprehensive action plan consisting of the following elements:

- In March 2016, LWB developed a five-year (2016–2021), institutional development programme, with five objectives, one of

which targeted gender imbalance and underrepresentation, by investing in developing effective leaders at all levels of the utility. Human Resources (HR) policies were updated, and a gender and disability focal person was appointed to support and oversee the integration of gender in LWB programmes and plans. For example, an independent reporting system for harassment and gender-based violence was established including facilitating the orientation and training of staff on sexual harassment and abuse.

- To contribute to female empowerment and capacity development, the project invested \$8.5 million USD in institutional capacity, which also included gender-specific activities. For example, a mentorship and scholarship programme, in partnership with local universities, was designed. LWB partnered with Equal Aqua<sup>67</sup>, to develop technical and leadership skills, to participate in global meetings and share LWB's good practices.
- LWB incorporated gender budgeting into its annual budget and workplaces and shared a plan with all its service providers, to increase the women and youth employment rate. Women already working at LWB were encouraged to apply to higher positions.
- Working facilities were built, such as a childcare room with space for nursing of children under the age of five.

The results of these actions are encouraging. Spurred by increased encouragement for current female staff and interns to apply to higher positions, the LWB saw a four percent increase in female recruitment from 2019 to 2022. The number of female employees rose from 69 female staff to 104. Considering women were noticeably absent in senior management positions, with only one woman filling a senior management position in all five water boards of Malawi, the LWB appointed three female senior managers to supervise the departments of Human Resources,

Information Technology, and Finance. As a result of these coordinated efforts, the share of women in supervisory roles increased to 25%, translating to 26 female staff at the decision-making level. At the top of the organisation, the government of Malawi appointed two female fiduciaries to co-lead what used to be a male-dominated board of directors and two female members to chair two board committees. Further diversification of the workforce resulted in the first hire of a female contract manager – a role previously only seen filled by a male colleague.

In conclusion, with a concrete strategy and action plan based on a gender assessment, a budget was made available for a childcare room, training and mentoring programmes, gender budgeting, addressing sexual violence, and more. It is possible to achieve better representation of women and create a more inclusive work environment in a male-dominated sector.

#### ***Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Women's Studies Unit Jordan***

Water Scarcity is a serious challenge in Jordan and the imbalance between supply and demand is critical. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation<sup>68</sup> is responsible for protecting, developing, and managing the water resources. The role of women in the management of water resources is key in countries of extreme water scarcity. At the household level, women are most often the collectors, users, and managers of water, as well as farmers of rain fed crops. Due to these roles, women have considerable knowledge about water resources, including quality and reliability, restrictions, and storage. However, constraints such as lack of access to economic resources, lack of participation in decision-making processes, lack of awareness, social norms that act as barriers to women engaging in non-traditional 'feminine' work, and a lack of supportive legislation, hinder the effective



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participation of women in water management, and conservation. To investigate this, a study was carried out about women in the water sector<sup>69</sup>. Based on that study, an action plan was made with the objective of promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in internal systems and processes, as well as development programmes. It incorporates:

- Strengthening women's contribution to water sector institutions, especially in leadership roles, by making changes in resource allocation, strategic planning, policies, culture, human resources, staff capacity, leadership, management, accountability, and performance management. Promoting

gender balance in decision-making bodies, by including an equal number of men and women on steering committees, and the Board of Directors.

- Strengthening gender mainstreaming in sector plans, programmes, and activities, as a step to establishing a culture of addressing gender considerations in planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of projects. It helps to ensure an equal distribution of benefits, and avoids reproducing existing inequalities, resulting in stronger and more successful projects.
- Establishment of a gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation system. The system will produce and present the basic, personal, qualification, experience, ranking, remuneration, compensation, benefits, vacations, and other data disaggregated by gender, job category, and geographic location.
- Establishment of communications, outreach, training, and knowledge sharing mechanism to build a broad base of understanding about the importance of gender sensitive programming and to help create an organisational culture with changing attitudes and beliefs about women and men.

To support this process, Gender Focal Points were appointed to implement the Gender Policy Action Plan, in addition to liaising with the Finance department to ensure a sufficient budget for the activities of the Plan. Women face multiple challenges: they are often not allowed to engage in external training programmes, especially if they are outside Jordan. Therefore, they have fewer opportunities to reach senior leadership and supervisory positions; the balance between family responsibilities and job duties under long working hours and work pressure; the unconventional role of women in field work and technical jobs; lack of daycare nurseries and private facilities.

Effective strategies are to ensure that human resources policies enable women and contribute

to providing equal opportunities to women and men in appointment, promotion, participation in specialised committees, and administrative councils, job rights in relation to obtaining the same salary, financial rights, vacations, and others, next to training and capacity development programmes. An example of a result is that women have demonstrated a high level of performance in the management of irrigation projects and extension services. The involvement of women in managing small-scale irrigation projects has improved the efficiency of water use. Also, in the field of maintenance, improvements are visible through the work of female plumbers. A special vocational training programme was designed for the women, building their capacities in plumbing.

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In conclusion, results are already visible in the field of irrigation and maintenance. The lessons are similar to the case of the Lilongwe Water Board: analyse the situation by carrying out a gender assessment of the workplace, develop and implement a policy action plan, adapt the HR system, set a budget aside for implementing gender-specific actions such as leadership training, create a support system (Gender Focal Points), develop a monitoring system which includes gender-disaggregated data, address cultural beliefs about the role of men and women.

#### ***CARE: Rural Access to New Opportunities (RANO) in WASH<sup>70</sup> in Madagascar***

CARE Madagascar is the prime implementer of the RANO WASH Programme, with the objective to increase rural access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. The programme is funded by USAID for an amount of \$30 million for a period of five years, starting in June 2018.

The implementation is in six regions in Madagascar, covering 250 communities. Drivers for the inclusion of women were twofold: to reach quality in WASH services women and girls must be involved; gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment is the policy of USAID.

In Madagascar, 57% of the population does not have access to an improved water source, 40% defecate in the open, and 32% do not have facilities for hand washing with soap and water. More than 80% of schools do not have access to safe water or places for children to wash their hands. As in many societies, in Madagascar menstruation is a taboo, which is even reflected in the name for menstruation "fadim-bolana" and "fady" means "taboo". During menstruation, women and girls are considered 'unclean', and often do not go to school or do not participate in daily activities. Women and girls face a limited supply of sanitary napkins during menstruation.



At the start of the programme, a gender assessment was conducted with the objective to identify opportunities and points of entry for gender integration into all programme activities. This analysis highlighted five main insights:

- Women have less time than men due to expectations of running the household and working in the field. Women are expected to be flexible and clean, to work hard, and to respect men.
- Although violence and harassment are illegal, women fear retaliation if they contribute opinions on decisions. Moreover, distant water sources are a risk of gender-based violence for women and girls in many of these communities.
- Women are expected to remain silent; thus, major decisions regarding selling, purchasing, and constructing are made by men, as well as safety issues, and water management for agricultural work. More women attend community meetings about family health and WASH. At household level for less expensive items, such as spoons or cups, women make the decisions. Decision-making about family care falls more to the woman, but with prior consultation with the man.
- Women, girls, and people with disabilities, are the most disadvantaged.
- Social norms put women, especially those with little education, in a relationship of dependence, even submission, that prevents women from engaging in viable economic actions, and contributing to decision-making.
- The national policy on equality between women and men is obsolete and is currently being updated and implemented through a decree of application. The electoral law lacks incentives for the integration of women on electoral lists for leadership positions.

In relation to women's leadership: "Vehivavy, akoho vavy maneno". This is to judge women who dare to speak in public to express their ideas or to influence decisions. They are considered as singing chickens, which does not exist and is

impossible. This attitude influences women's participation in expressive and decision-making bodies, particularly in the governance of water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

Based on the analysis, a plan was made to reach and empower women. A budget was made available for specific activities for women and girls, such as training and sharing sessions, and for services and products specifically designed for women, such as easy access to water points, toilets, sanitary towels, sanitation, and hygiene services for young girls at schools. Women are deliberately involved in the decision-making processes of the programme: 30% of the members of consultation structures are women and young people, and they are encouraged to express their views and opinions during consultations and validation sessions for activities to be undertaken. It was observed that only 3-4 out of the 10 women present in meetings dared to express themselves, and 1-2 could defend their ideas. Examples of decisions include setting the time and place of the committee's meetings and determining the construction and maintenance activities of water points in the plan. Amongst the staffing at the RANO WASH programme at different levels, women express themselves freely.

Photo Care Madagascar

## Challenges faced by Female Leaders in WASH, and Proposed Solutions



"The woman chief fokontany of Anjirobaka in the commune of Manakambahiny Ouest is very dynamic. She dares to discuss with the 14 Fokontany chiefs in her commune, and is always ready for collaboration especially in the field of WASH. More than 10 villages in her Fokontany are currently self-proclaimed ODF". Said Sandrine, the area manager of SAF FJKM

The programme supported women in decision-making processes and positions by, amongst others:

- Popularisation of the rights and duties of women and girls related to water, sanitation, and hygiene.
- Advocacy targeted at mayors for the adoption of a gender balance in the composition of the executive committee, and gender balance in the different coordination structures.
- Specific recruitment approaches to encourage women to apply for leadership positions.
- Special training for women to raise their voices in meetings, such as public speaking and negotiation skills.
- Supporting men who are committed, sensitive, and ready to defend the causes of women and girls to become equal partners.
- Organising sessions for women leaders to share their experiences.

Moreover, special measures were taken to facilitate women to join such as:

- Creating special facilities such as toilettes, and sanitary pads, adapted to the local context; payment for the services of drinking water supply by instalments and/or during the harvest periods.
- Special workshops for women such as marketing and management training for female entrepreneurs.
- Mentoring/coaching programmes.
- Discussing norms and stereotypes as one of the root causes of discrimination.
- Adaptation of work processes such as the adoption of flexible working hours, allowing women to arrange their schedules to meet both their domestic obligations and the

demands of their economic, community, and political roles; appropriate means of transportation for women who need to make field visits to remote areas; organise training sessions closer to villages.

- Adoption of a non-discriminatory communication style.

A monitoring system was designed to include the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data, gender mapping studies, and research at different levels. For example, sharing sessions were held with women leaders to capture results, in addition to capturing women's feedback on the WASH services provided.

Results of involving women in decision-making processes are:

- The organisational performance improved. For example, sharing detailed information with women, led to timely and appropriate decisions.
- Women seek and advance innovative solutions because of their thorough understanding of water, sanitation, and hygiene issues.
- Women have an added value in terms of reporting and financial management, and are trusted, vigilant and firm.
- Women are more capable than men to work with communities, more firm in decision-making and therefore, the water management processes are more efficient and sustainable.
- For women themselves, influence and decision-making improve their knowledge, well-being, and networks; they become more self-confident and agents of change for social and health issues.

In conclusion, many results are achieved in the field of better access to water and sanitation facilities, as well as better hygiene. Moreover, women gained self-confidence and became agents of change. Ingredients for a successful approach are: adjusting the

gender mainstreaming strategy when needed, organising special support sessions with women leaders, collecting data and feedback regularly, setting aside a budget for specific activities for women and girls, and holding workshops and training to improve the skills of women and girls, discussing norms and stereotypes, advocating for gender equality with authorities at different levels, including supportive men, establishing and respecting procedures promoting women's involvement in activities and organisations, creating special facilities and conditions for women and girls

#### 4.4 Conclusions

- Thirteen cases have been divided into three categories indicating the main differences in approaches: involvement of women, women-only projects and systemic inclusion of women.
- In each category the performance increased. Examples of results are barriers for tariff setting have been resolved and the willingness to pay improved in the case of Veolia in India, RUWASA in Tanzania, Earth Forever in Bulgaria, AWHHE in Armenia, Care in Madagascar; access to clean water increased, maintenance improved, the efficiency of irrigation projects raised (Jordan and Armenia); less pollution in Lake Titicaca; safe sanitation (Madagascar, Bulgaria), better health; more nutritious food etcetera.
- Also, beyond water, results are achieved such as more women and girls empowered; better access to education and skills training; higher attention to climate change, environmental and social issues; change in the composition of staff (more women on board); safer workspaces; better economic opportunities (jobs, own businesses).
- It was striking to experience how difficult it is to relate inputs to results achieved. Several organisations mentioned that there is a budget available but not how much except for the women-only projects. It is also difficult to get information about the human resources needed to reach the objectives. In fact, the same counts for figures about results, it is obvious that many results have been achieved, but they are mainly described in qualitative terms such as women are more empowered or better access to clean water. Exact figures are lacking except for women-only projects. In organisations often the number of male and female employees is known or in case targets are being set, its progress is being monitored. However, changes in the performance of the organisation due to having more women on board is not being measured. The reasons for this lack of data are unknown to us and it needs probably different indicators.
- On a side note: it is important to be aware of the power dynamics when women or informal groups are working with companies or universities. Moreover, to raise the question how time of volunteers is being valued or are they providing 'free labour'? Once a manager said, "why would I pay women to do the work if they are already doing it for free"?
- In terms of approaches, particularly in the category of women-only projects, listening to the women concerned was essential to understand them, not only at the start of the project but during implementation. Because of this, changes could be made along the way and risks taken to reach the objectives. Sometimes it led to unconventional methods such as the photo exhibition of Roma women and girls to counter prejudices and stereotypes (Earth Forever) or finding new solutions for pregnant students at the South Asia Water Leadership Programme for Climate Change. Also, acknowledge that women are not a homogenous group.
- Working as a women's group or organisation is powerful and long-term financial support is essential for the success and continuation of the group or organisation. Direct financial support to these organisations is rare: less than 0.05% of ODA funding goes directly to

women's groups or organisations.<sup>71</sup>

- Seek support of men or identify male champions of change to achieve gender equality and support men who are committed, sensitive and ready to defend the causes of women and girls to become equal partners.
- In the category 'systemic inclusion of women' lasting commitment at the top of an organisation is essential to embark on a process to include more women and reach results. Also, clear target setting is important, and having a picture of the composition of the staff at the different levels of an organisation.
- In 'women-only projects' and 'the systemic inclusion of women' many measures have been taken to involve women in all stages of a project or all levels of an organisation including the decision-making processes, such as starting with a gender analysis to create a clear picture of the role of women and men in a specific context, training efforts to develop the capacity of women, setting a budget aside and defining clear targets, adapting human resources policies and procedures to attract and maintain women on board, creating support mechanism such as hiring gender experts or appointing gender focal points or ambassadors, stimulating the establishment of (informal) networks of women, discussing stereotypes and other bottlenecks, considering family responsibilities when involving women in a project, adapting communication styles and website (show more women in technical fields), creating conditions for women to join such as transport, appropriate clothing, equipment or bathrooms, access to ICT. The whole system needs adaptation to facilitate the inclusion of women. These are long-term processes of change.

**It is evident that inclusion of women needs special efforts: when doing this, better results are guaranteed!**



Photo Women for Water Partnership

# 5. Bottlenecks, Drivers, Enablers, Guidelines

Drivers (5.2) are important reasons to design and implement women’s inclusive activities in governance processes. That is also true for the water sector. Enablers facilitate the implementation while bottlenecks (5.1) need to be addressed to achieve lasting results. The drivers, enablers, and bottlenecks are based on the literature review and the cases presented in chapter 4. The same counts for the guidelines in 5.3 that are based on lessons learned from the private sector, the water sector, experiences of members of WfWP, and the thirteen case studies.

## 5.1 Bottlenecks

UNESCO<sup>72</sup> investigated the participation of women in jobs in the water sector and concluded that traditional gender roles, cultural norms and stereotypes, occupational segregation, and the small number of female graduates in STEM areas are reasons for a low number of women working in the water sector (17%). Amongst them are false perceptions that women lack managerial and technical skills. Moreover, sexual violence is a barrier for women to work in male dominated fields, both to enter or remain in the sector.

Gender norms determine attitudes and behaviours can be deeply rooted in individuals

and institutions. They are hard to change and lead to inequalities between girls and boys, men, and women.

Examples of different perceptions, often unconscious, are shown in the picture (left, below). Moreover, expressions of aggression, competitiveness, dominance, and decisiveness are perceived positively for men but negatively for women. Both norms and stereotypes have an impact on opportunities and career paths.

According to a study of the World Bank in 190 countries about Women, Business, and the Law in 2021<sup>73</sup> discriminatory laws around the world threaten employment, entrepreneurship, equal opportunity and do not support working women. Worldwide, on average women have 75% of the legal rights of men. In many countries there are legal barriers preventing women from working in the water sector, for example, field work is forbidden, and working during the night. Another factor is the lack of female role models and the perception that the work of the water sector is not suitable for women, which stands in the way of attracting women.

Similar bottlenecks or barriers are mentioned by the organisations presenting case studies. Stereotypes were discovered in the gender study on the status of women in the water sector of Jordan<sup>74</sup>. For example, half of the men believed that women have moderate ability to perform the same duties as men with the same degree of efficiency and that women’s leadership is characterised by women’s emotional nature. The staff of RUWASA in Tanzania mentioned women’s weakness in decision-making as a barrier, as well as women lacking the confidence to apply for various leadership positions. In Madagascar the socio-cultural environment is based on the supremacy of men and socio-cultural prejudices reinforce negative gender stereotypes and roles.



She is young, but unexperienced  
He is young, but promising

She seems to have expensive habits, what will she do with our money?  
He has an expensive car: he must be financially sound

She is careful, she doesn’t dare  
He is careful, he takes informed decisions

She is dominant and does not have social skills  
He is dominant, effective and competent



Several organisations mentioned that women must balance family responsibilities and job duties. In the case of SaciWATERS women fellows regularly faced delays in their education and work timelines due to their responsibilities and burdens of their households. Since early marriage is quite common in all the South Asian countries, married women, and fellows who were young mothers in particular encountered problems.

Next, there are weak policies and practices to meet the needs of women, such as a lack of day care nurseries and private facilities which act as barriers. Earth Forever discovered that women's needs, linked to their physiology, such as menstrual hygiene, pregnancy, and motherhood, are not being considered or insufficiently regulated. This was also mentioned by SaciWATERS, especially when field research had to be conducted, as were safety issues. Moreover, legal issues can be a constraint. For example, in Madagascar, a national policy on equality between women and men is obsolete. Earth Forever mentioned a lack of funding for bottom-up women initiatives and the women's group of Lake Titicaca had that same experience. Lack of a sufficient budget<sup>75</sup> is often a bottleneck particularly for women-only projects and women's organisations, therefore upscaling of good experiences remains a challenge. For many women, time is a constraint when the activities are not part of their main professional work, such as is the case with the women diplomacy network of the Nile Basin and the Great Torrington Water Forum.

Other types of barriers faced included the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in AWHHE almost all project staff fell ill due to the virus, and the same was true for the communities they were working with. Therefore, many activities were delayed or had to be conducted online. For SIWI's work with women in the Nile Basin, online connectivity was a challenge.

## 5.2 Drivers and enablers

The drivers differ across organisations. For instance, signing or ratifying an international convention can be a driver for one country, its politicians, enterprises, or NGOs to work on the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, was ratified or acceded by 189 countries by July 2015. Also, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) with a special chapter (IV G) regarding women in power and decision-making can be a driver to improve the position of women. For the water sector specifically, Principle 3 of the Dublin Principles, agreed upon during the International Conference on Water and the Environment in 1992, could be a source of inspiration: Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. On the other hand, these types of conventions or principles are often not implemented or practiced, and the water sector is not an exception.

For some companies a vision of equality between men and women at the top is considered a driving force. Couple this with the demonstrated benefits of women's involvement such as increased performance, improved relationships with customers, and increased attention to sustainability issues such as climate change. Also, characteristics of women play a role such as the ability of women to communicate, to manage funds and to deliver on what they promise. Additionally, there may be moral reasons such as equality, human rights, fairness, and justice, both as a principle and for public relations.

Regarding the case studies: for some organisations it is evident that women comprise 50% of a group (Great Torrington Water Forum). For others the role and participation of women at community level is crucial (AWHHE, Aquafed); in order to attain safe and more affordable

water and sanitation services, women must be involved (Earth Forever), and the same can be said for quality issues (Care). Another driver is the transformative role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, leading to more durable agreements and lower instances of conflict (SIWI). In fact, better performance is a driving force for the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making process.

Equality between men and women is an important value for several organisations (SIWI, Care, Earth Forever, AWHHE, IUCN, SaciWATERS, SUEZ). Compliance with legal regulations is considered a driver, as is the case in Tanzania where the Water Act of 2019 acknowledges the importance of women, and conditions are being set to make this happen (RUWASA). Similarly, policies set by a country or an organisation (RUWASA, Care, SaciWATERS, SIWI, AfWA, IUCN, Women's Studies Ministry of Water and Irrigation Jordan, World Bank, SUEZ), are reasons to involve more women.

Often a combination of the drivers mentioned above is an incentive or source of inspiration to gain more women on board and include them in decision-making processes.

In terms of enablers, commitment from the top (executive) team of a company, organisation, or country is important. This is confirmed by literature search and the cases. To close the gap between policy and practice it is important to engage and facilitate other management layers such as team leaders or leaders of departments, to implement the policies and action plans and achieve results.

Furthermore, supportive laws and policies are enabling factors as well as a specific budget to engage, attract, train women, and carry out specific activities to retain women. For individual women role models can be a source of inspiration.

Often outside knowledge and experiences can be eye-openers and leading to success. The same counts for the appointment of gender experts, or gender focal points to assist an organisation with

the implementation of an equality or diversity policy. Clear objectives and targets are enablers as well as the collection and the analysis of sex-disaggregated data.

Women's movements play a role to demand to end female injustice or inequalities such as for example the ME-TOO movement and are setting organisations in motion to analyse and/or change the situation.

### **5.3 Guidelines and strategies**

Lessons from the literature review, experiences of members of WfWP and the cases, are summarised in strategies to get more women on board. There is no reason to believe that the water sector differs in that sense from other sectors. Only that the situation in the water sector is even worse in terms of the number of women employed compared to other sectors (only 17%). Also, beyond employment in the sector, the knowledge and experience of women is often not recognised in decisions about design, budget, and implementation choices, when water projects and programmes are being executed. The contribution of women is often on a voluntary basis. This makes the water sector different from other sectors: many women are involved in water issues, especially at the household level and few women are employees in the water sector.

The strategies mentioned below are interconnected, reinforcing one another. The following actions facilitate the inclusion of women:

1. Analyse a situation to understand how many men and women are involved and where. What are the issues of the women in a specific context for example, early marriages in South Asia, a taboo on menstruation in Madagascar, inaccessible equipment for women, the importance of education Veolia India? Which stereotypes are at play, and how much resources are available for men and women and more? The aim is to understand a specific situation in terms of differences between men and women and to consider that women are

heterogeneous and part of different categories (age, education, living area, profession, religion etc.). It is not a one-time action, during all phases it remains important to be alert, to identify problems as well as solutions.

2. Translate the analysis into a plan with clear objectives, measurable targets, and a sound budget: a 40-40 balance between men and women at all levels and in decision-making processes is such a target, leaving 20% open. Involve managers, men and especially women in drafting a plan and ensure that the voices of women are being heard in the decision-making process and budgeting. The knowledge and experiences of (external) experts in designing the plan and the process, can improve the quality of the plan and its implementation. In the political realm and in some companies, quotas have shown increased women's representation.
3. Since the attitude of top management is such an important enabler and reaching equality between men and women is a long-term process, it is vital to ensure the top is and remains committed. This counts for country leaders as well as organisational leaders. The messages of the leaders should be clear and consistent. It is also important to inspire, involve and support other layers of management, because these managers are often the implementers and may face many different challenges. Develop clear accountability mechanisms. Moreover, organise support for the implementors for example by introducing gender focal points, ambassadors or help desks, offer training and identify male champions of change.
4. Create the conditions for women to be included and remain included, for example, look at favourable meeting times for women; adapt communication styles to address, recruit and promote women; design women friendly work processes; change HR-policies and regulations; organise

leadership courses to encourage women to apply for decision-making positions, other courses or mentor programmes to facilitate their careers or involvement in projects/organisations; address stereotypes and unconscious bias regularly to change mindsets of staff, for example, by designing e-courses or introducing ambassadors; show non-traditional pictures and stories of women and girls on websites; ensure that there are facilities for women such as toilets, appropriate equipment and clothing, breast feeding spaces as well as appropriate ICT devices and transport; encourage the establishment of (informal) networks for women to exchange experiences and support one another; take action against sexual violence; by listening to women and taking their concerns seriously.

5. To keep abreast with the developments, develop a monitoring system which provides both quantitative data and qualitative data sex-disaggregated, analyse the data regularly to enable learning and to introduce necessary adaptations to plan and budget. Do not forget to develop indicators to monitor changes in the performance of the organisation which can be attributed to having more women on board. Currently this type of data is often lacking, for example gender responsive budgeting helps to gain more insights between inputs and results.

Gender budgeting is a way for governments, companies, and non-governmental organisations to promote gender equality using administrative and fiscal policy. It involves understanding the differences in a budget's impact on men and women and subsequently creating policies to remedy inequalities. For more information look for example at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/rough-guide-to-gender-responsive-budgeting-620429/> or <https://www.gendereconomy.org/gender-budgeting-a-tool-for-achieving-equality/>



## 5.4 Conclusions

- Bottlenecks are many, such as stereotypes about what women can and cannot do, laws preventing full participation of women for example in the workplace, or ownership of land and access to water. These bottlenecks need to be addressed when trying to include more women in governance processes and employment in the water sector.
- Drivers differ per organisation and are often a combination of moral reasons such as equality between men and women as well as the expected improvement of the performance, qualities of women, as well as declarations and conventions.
- Enablers are manifold, but lasting commitment at the top is pivotal, next to proper facilities for women, adapting communication styles, appropriate meeting times, training and more.
- Five guidelines have been formulated to incorporate more women in decision-making processes in the water sector, varying from analysing a situation, drafting a plan with clear targets, and a budget, seeking commitment from the top and involving managers, creating appropriate conditions for women to join and stay on board, and monitoring the developments based on a system with sex-disaggregated data.

Photo IUCN



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# Annex 1: Definitions

We use OECD's definition of **water governance** as "the set of rules, practices and processes through which decisions for the management of water resources and services are taken and implemented, and decision-makers are held accountable." (OECD, 2017)<sup>1</sup>. We make a distinction between **water governance and water management**: "Management is about planning what is done (the means taken) in pursuit of objectives. Governance is about who decides what the objectives are and what to do to pursue them; how decision are taken, who holds power, authority and responsibility and who is (or should be) held accountable"<sup>2</sup>.

ODI<sup>3</sup> defines **decision-making power** as the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life – both private and public. Formal access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes is an important, if insufficient, condition for women to have decision-making power in the public domain. In fact, decision-making power is a composite of access, capabilities and actions that shape whether women have influence over the polity or decisions about their private life.

According to UNDP<sup>4</sup> to be **inclusive** is a core value of democratic governance, in terms of equal participation, equal treatment and equal rights before the law. This implies that all people – including poor people, women, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous people and disadvantaged groups – have the right to **participate meaningfully** in governance processes and influence decisions that affect them. It also means that governance institutions and policies are accessible, accountable and responsive to groups without sufficient voice, protecting their interests and providing diverse populations with equal opportunities and access to at least basic services (food, health care, drinking water, sanitation, education) as well as information and justice.

In addition, inclusiveness in governance<sup>5</sup> in the water sector has been defined by the OECD as "the extent to which engagement processes involve stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and take into account their needs, assets and perspectives into the design and implementation of water policies and projects" (OECD, 2015). In this study we focus on **inclusiveness of women**.

When referring to the **water sector**, we mean organisations – public or private – with core business in the field of water and sanitation, governance or management in water and sanitation and/or provide technology for this.

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# Annex 2: Main outcomes desk study 2018

## women and water governance

- Many publications state that there is a persistent gender gap in water management leadership at all levels of governance and it encompasses water utilities, water supply, irrigation governance groups, transboundary governance, hydropower processes etc. Women are rarely involved in decisions relating to water policies and strategies, water resource management, or tariff setting and technology choices. They are missing in key areas of water-related decision-making.
- In cases where women were involved in formal and informal decision making related to water, benefits have been achieved from increased policy attention to social and environmental benefits to improved economic outcomes for women and their families and women's empowerment in other realms, such as participation in local elections.
- Some private sector organisations outside the water sector investigated the results of their diversity policy. The impact of inclusion of women in decision making processes is significant: performance rates increase dramatically. Although the outcomes of a higher rate of women in decision making bodies are very positive, it does not go automatically. Special measures must be taken such as addressing stereotypes, unconscious bias and mindsets, perceptions regarding life balance and leadership skills, creating supporting environments for women, CEO commitment, close monitoring, special programmes for female leadership development, women friendly recruitment and promotion processes.
- In the field of projects and programmes gender mainstreaming remains a complicated business, it implies time and means (including expertise) to assess the gender situation in that respective context and systematically look through a gender lens at all other activities in a project: a systemic or holistic approach is necessary. Not only at project level, but in fact throughout the entire organisation. Commitment of the highest level of an organisation is a prerequisite and walking the talk a must. Integration in all planning and monitoring instruments is important while ensuring consistency. Only a few organisations have experience in measuring outcomes or even impact. Most organisations only measure number of women reached and that is insufficient to measure impact. Gender mainstreaming requires consistent and long-term engagement.
- Power differences and inequality are underlying themes resulting in less opportunities for women to participate in decision making processes. In cases of corruption in the water sector, women are disproportionately affected by a perverse form of corruption, namely 'sextortion' – abuse of power where the currency of the bribe is partly or wholly sexual favors.
- There are many tools available for gender inclusion in several phases of a project, such as mainstreaming gender in the project cycle, collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data etc, however contextualisation is needed. Yet, the perception of managers is that there are hardly any tools available, this might imply that there are also other reasons – like lack of priority or conflicting requirements – to pay sufficient attention to inclusion of women. It might also mean that tools are not easy to find.
- Many organisations stress the importance of sex disaggregated data, but only a few are collecting these type of data, mainly about access to water facilities, not about actual use of that facility. Data is also not being collected about women's inclusion in decision making processes.

# Women for Water Partnership



Photo NetWwater, member of Women for Water Partnership