



WATER ACTION DECADE

2018 - 2028

WOMEN WATER FORUM

**At the High-level International Conference on the International Decade for Action on
“Water for Sustainable Development” 2018–2028**

10 June 2024, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Outcome document

Preamble: The Women Water Forum serves as a platform for women activists, practitioners in water management, gender and right-to-water experts, the expert community, and State and international development actors to present and discuss women-led practices and innovative solutions. It seeks to accelerate and gender-sensitize the implementation of internationally agreed water-related goals and targets as part of sustainable development and peace strategies at local, national and regional levels. It also aims to strengthen women’s engagement in water-related diplomacy, dialogues, and processes at all levels, as well as to support partnerships, advocacy and networking actions by women activists, leaders and experts to foster the implementation of the goals and targets of the Water Action Decade.

During the 2024 Women Water Forum, **120** partners from 17 countries and different sectors – including women diplomats, activists, scientists and water sector professionals – gathered alongside representatives from State agencies, grass-roots organizations and development partners. They shared their views and experiences on empowering women in leadership in water diplomacy and decision-making platforms to contribute to human security from a gender equality perspective and to strengthen the resilience of societies to crises. At the Forum, partners underlined the need for gender-centered solutions and gender-responsive financing to ensure transformative changes for all by leaving no one behind.

Outcome statement

Building on the outcomes of the previous Women Water Forums since 2013 and the collective wisdom and commitments of the numerous participants and their constituencies, and

Highlighting that using the full potential of women and girls benefits our societies and our planet,

Participants shared the following concerns:

- ongoing wars and conflicts, polarized politics, a continuing global economic crisis and the increasing impacts of a changing climate are destabilizing peace and security for all societies;
- heightened risk of water crisis as a potential trigger of disputes and conflicts;
- increased water insecurity because of conflicts, climate change and man-made and natural disasters are having negative impacts, especially on marginalized and vulnerable segments of society;
- continuing underrepresentation of women in political decision-making at various levels – due to traditional gender roles, limited access to resources and unsupportive policies – which undermines progress towards shared and effective transboundary water management, and thus towards sustainable development;
- lack of space for women’s agency and contribution to solutions building, including the diverse perspectives of women’s activists, informed by their unique experiences, knowledge, priorities and needs; *and*
- ongoing shrinking of safe spaces for civil society organizations and new barriers for their operations.

Having recognized that:

- while the water crisis is global, the best way to address water challenges is situation-specific, and very much a social matter,
- water problems require solutions based on inclusion, collaboration and the close coordination of all efforts,
- there is no one solution that fits all, but the benefits of renewed multilateral cooperation and partnership to implement the 2030 Agenda and push for a peace cooperation are extremely high,
- there is mounting consensus on the need to ensure that local water action is gender-sensitive and women-inclusive, but there still is a big gap between these strategic intentions and the reality on the ground,

- a gender-transformative approach in water management should consider changing power dynamics by challenging traditional gender roles and norms,
- women’s empowerment in water governance and diplomacy is fundamental and needs to be ensured by promoting their equal rights, leadership and decision-making roles, building their capacities, providing opportunities for networking and skills development, advocating for gender-responsive legal and policy reforms, and creating equal economic opportunities,
- engaging women water diplomats is both a strategic and smart way to ensure that problem-solving is making the best and most efficient use of available resources,
- the immense scope and complexity of decentralizing water action to the lowest appropriate level, and tailoring it to the diverse sociocultural, economic and environmental circumstances, requires science- and evidence-based solutions, bringing together innovative technologies with traditional knowledge and considering the gender realities on the ground,
- inclusivity ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, which helps keep our problem-solving comprehensive and effective, equitable and sustainable. We can approach resilience only if we ensure that anyone and everyone that is capable of making a difference has the opportunity to do so,
- women’s professional networking fosters inclusive water governance and increasing women’s participation in water negotiations, by empowering women to assume leadership roles, ensures gender mainstreaming and capacity-building for efficient water governance in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, SDG 5 on gender equality and women’s leadership and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) commitments,
- gender-diverse and responsive institutions perform better financially and in service-delivery and respond better to customer needs.

Underlining the high importance of:

- sufficient and fast-tracked implementation of commitments under the BPfA – the foundational global agreement on women’s rights made almost 30 years ago – and calling on all governments to “ensure the availability of, and universal access to, safe drinking water and sanitation and put in place effective public distribution systems as soon as possible”, *and*
- [the UN Secretary-General’s New Agenda for Peace](#) as a road map to sustainable peace, recognizing climate, water, peace and security as political priorities.

We call for increased collaboration based on:

- recognition of the benefits of equitable water and sanitation for a wide range of policy goals, such as those in the BPfA and the SDGs,
- application of water diplomacy to prevent new conflicts from arising and ensure that women in all their diversity equally and meaningfully participate at all levels of decision-making, including on themes of conflict resolution, peace and security,
- support for women's participation, which is a key element to enhance women's agency that requires identifying and addressing discriminatory structures, social norms and gender stereotypes that are the root causes of gender inequalities and create barriers to women's meaningful participation and leadership,
- recognition of women water diplomats as mentors and role models for young women seeking to influence global water policy and budgets,
- recognition of the important contributions of women in science and their full incorporation in water security processes.

We ask Member States and development partners to address the following priorities:

- to strengthen policies that address the unique risks and needs of various social groups, using intersectional and intergenerational approaches for effective and sustainable solutions,
- to remove existing barriers and ensure sufficient funding and capacity-building support for grass-roots women's organizations to enhance their contributions to water security and governance, peacebuilding and climate resilience,
- to introduce special measures, including quotas, to promote more women in leadership positions at all levels in the water sector, with specialized support for women from excluded groups to enable them to effectively engage in decision-making.

Looking at SDG 17 means of implementation through a gender and water lens, and taking into consideration the urgent need to strengthen and tailor the means of implementation to the lowest appropriate level, we strongly recommend the following:

- **On knowledge-sharing and cooperation**, we need women's access to science, technology and innovation to promote awareness and the exchange of knowledge on the cryosphere, hydrology and climate change in relation to sustainable development; and invest in the production of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, integrating gender data in national statistical planning and recognizing the importance of local and Indigenous knowledge.
- **On science, technology and innovation capacity**, we need to develop scientific research as the basis for achieving the SDGs (and engage more women scientists in

this process); invest in science, including long-term research on the melting of glaciers and possible threats to their disappearance; support the capacities of least-developed countries; introduce affirmative action measures to attract girls to STEM fields; and engage youth about thinking and devising innovative solutions to emerging water and development challenges.

- **On capacity-development**, we need to support the employment of female staff (to attract, recruit, retain and promote women) in regional- and local-level water institutions; provide training opportunities tailored to women's professional advancement in water governance, including technical, leadership and management skills; include men and boys in gender-transformative programmes to challenge gender norms, promote equality and change power dynamics, relationships and community norms to support gender justice in water management; invest in attracting and recruiting more women in water sector institutions, particularly at regional/local levels, and particularly youth; and invest in internship programmes at provincial and local levels and in tackling negative gender norms through advocacy campaigns using positive women role models.
- **On financing**, we need to ensure gender-responsive public investments such as gender-sensitive water infrastructure; make clear distinctions between grants and loans, enhance flexibility in funding mechanisms to adapt to changing circumstances, and improve transparency to support women's and girls' needs in crisis and post-crisis settings; ensure a dedicated and substantial budget for the empowerment of women and support to the work of local women's groups, both in national development budgets and through official development assistance; invest in introducing gender strategies and policies in regional and local institutions; replicate practices of the gender bonds as a solution for direct financing towards credible strategies, programmes, and policies that tackle gender inequality; and deploy resources to local governments for the joint development of local action plans, including the means to facilitate the participation of women and other marginalized groups.
- **On partnerships**, we need to create conditions in public and private sectors for attracting young women and men as water professionals, scientists and practitioners; promote collaboration among peacebuilding practitioners to develop integrated definitions and theories of change; and creating comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the gender-water-climate-security nexus.

We urge shifting from recognition to practical actions and commitments, including:

- making all commitments of the Water Action Decade meet the UN-suggested game-changing approach by ensuring the effective, action-oriented, gender-sensitive, inclusive and integrated voluntary actions needed for a successful implementation of SDG 6 and beyond;
- ensuring the mandatory inclusion of women in all negotiation processes related to disputes over national resources management, including water management, and climate change to increase the likelihood of durable peace accords and sustained peace and prosperity following conflict;
- institutionalizing women water diplomats with a space at the negotiation table;
- building on evidence that water, peacebuilding and private sector efforts are more successful with women in leadership, contribute to building the agency, bargaining power of individual women worldwide and ensuring social and behavioural change to confront harmful gender norms; and
- ensuring the full and equal participation of women's civil society in dialogues and decision-making processes, including through the provision of spaces within international and national forums where agreements and strategies are prepared. It is of primary importance that such processes are informed by the realities on the ground.

We request that the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and UN Water, as well as the Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands as co-hosts for 2023 UN Water Conference - the first UN water conference organized in nearly 50 years - lead a comprehensive, results-oriented review of progress on the implementation of all agreed actions at the Dushanbe Water Process from 2018, applying a gender lens to these findings, and publicly share the results of this review.

We thank the Governments of Kazakhstan and France for their initiative announced at COP28: the One Water Summit, a solutions incubator to prepare for the UN Water Forum in 2026.

We believe that these actions will contribute to shifting the agreed recommendations for gender-responsive solutions to the water crisis towards more practical actions and demonstrate their results for further and wider replication