



# WATER ACTION DECADE

2018 - 2028

**HIGH LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON THE  
INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION “WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”  
2018-2028**

**20-22 June 2018, Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

***WOMEN WATER FORUM: Bridging Voices to Actions***  
*Pre-conference event, 19 June 2018, Dushanbe Plaza*

**Preamble:** *In June 2015 in Dushanbe at the previous international water conference high expectations to states to **STEP It UP** by taking very practical and urgent actions to ensure that their citizens live a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature and to implement a clear roadmap for turning gender equality promises for water management and use into action were raised. The principle of equity, perhaps more than any technical recommendation, carries with it the promise of a more water-secure world for all<sup>1</sup>. Equity does not only refer to sharing benefits and having access to sufficient and safe water for domestic and productive uses. It also implies sharing the responsibility for the sustainable use and management of water resources. The reality, however, is that those who are affected most, generally have the least opportunity to influence how water resources are used and managed.*

*During the previous Decade “Water for Life” 2005 – 2015, which had a specific objective to further women’s meaningful engagement in water-related development efforts, It has been recognised that women’s close involvement brings multiple benefits. Including women in the design and planning stages leads to creating local ownership and correctly addressing community needs, to building sustainable solutions and using indigenous*

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<sup>1</sup> World Water Development Report 2015

*knowledge to prevent expensive mistakes. Involving women in project implementation make them more likely to reach intended beneficiaries. Engaging women who were previously marginalized from decision making brings clarity and energy to projects. While strides forward have been made, and gender equality has increased in the water sector, significant gender disparities remain. Social inclusion, in particular of Women as an important stakeholder group in water governance at all levels, is a corner stone of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM – Dublin Principle 3), but in general has seen limited progress over the past 25 years.*

In the Women Water Forum on 19 June 2018, representatives from women’s civil society in all its diversity, from the grassroots to professional women’s organizations, scientists, farmers, gender activists, indigenous women, and different interest groups gathered with representatives from governments, water specialists and development partners to jointly discuss women’s agency as key contributors to the provision, management and safeguarding of water and to illustrate the importance for women’s empowerment and their inclusion in water governance at all levels. We are fully confident that this would allow for determination of women’s priority challenges and actions areas for the Water Action Decade till 2028. We need to apply women’s knowledge and expertise to bring about transformative changes in regard of ensuring water for all, without discrimination and exclusion. In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the meeting addressed the interface of SDG5 – on gender equality and women’s empowerment – and the water goal, SDG6, not only limiting ourselves to Women and WASH, but in particular addressing target 6. 5 on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the underlying Dublin Principles 2 and 3.

There is no one solution that fits all, as gender roles are context and history specific and they change over time. The knowledge base required to determine the water and gender connection is important to enable the creation of bespoke approaches that prioritize action.

Institutional leadership alone will not change the reality on the ground. Women’s civil society plays a key role to ensure that bottom-up meets top-down. Women’s

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organisations, especially those uniting the social capital of the grassroots, have the ability to bridge governments and the society they serve; and are essential partners in multi-stakeholder partnerships that address water use, provision and management challenges at local and regional levels. River Basin organizations and committees are an entry point for inclusion of women's voices in decision-making and planning.

The changes we need to achieve are along 3 action areas:

1. **LEADERSHIP** of relevant institutions in the water realm to make gender equality and inclusion of Women a corner stone of their policies and programmes. This includes to deploy sufficient resources – human and financial – to achieve these goals
2. **GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION ANALYSIS** for informed decision-making and bespoke solutions
3. **PARTICIPATION**: the key entry points to address the inclusion of women's voices in multi-level water governance and the measures needed to create the enabling environment and overcoming the barriers for women to be active partners.

**We urge** policy makers and implementers at all levels to recognize and apply their practical actions and commitments. More specifically:

#### ***On Leadership:***

- **Leadership on gender equality** by water governance institutions has to be translated into sufficient funding to implement gender equality goals for water management. Gender responsive planning around central and local budgets needs to be applied with focus on improved access to water and sanitation with a bottom up approach;
- Addressing gender commitments in the intersectoral coordination and cooperation on water use and management;
- Overcoming gender discriminatory practices and norms which create barriers for women's engagement, contribution and ownership in regard of water resources to secure bridging the gender divide in water supply and sanitation and water

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resources management. Considering cultural context in identifying hidden examples of gender inequality.

### ***On gender and social inclusion analysis:***

- Water management decisions have to be informed by gender and social inclusion analysis and by specific knowledge of women and girls, men and boys;
- Reliable and timely produced and applied data that are gender disaggregated and cover other required disaggregation are important for development, monitoring and assessment of water related policies, and for developing bespoke programs and projects. In particular, data on the use of water services need to be used for monitoring whether water services from a wider range of sources are equitably allocated, safely managed, and assessment of the collective burden for households without water on the premises is key. The consistent inclusion of questions pertaining to time spent on water collection, along with information on the household member who usually performs the task, could help improve the global picture of gender roles in water collection and treatment.

### ***On participation:***

- ***Gender responsible water governance*** is essential to eliminate inequalities and support the most vulnerable people. ***Left no one behind*** principle has to be applied as a mandatory requirement for policy and decision making on water use and management. The rights of excluded groups – refugees, disabled women and other groups – have to be particularly addressed in water and sanitation policies;
- Social accountability mechanisms should be made gender responsive;
- Effective partnerships are instrumental in promoting water-gender-development nexus and sustained closing of the gender divide during the implementation of the International Decade for Action Water for Sustainable Development. Financing of SDGs, particularly SDG6, will require considerable public and private funding. Entrepreneurs should be capable to adopt business models, which are based on water and energy saving technologies and carefully consider sustainability concerns to increase their chance to get access to investments.

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- The implementation of projects on the ground is key to demonstrating benefits of the involvement of women at all levels of water management, specifically at the decision-making level. One of such benefits, is an enhanced level of ownership and commitment from of the entire community. Traditional agricultural water programs have targeted mostly males or farms. A number of course-correcting measures are available to enhance income and reduce efforts for women in agriculture, the most water-intensive economic sector. These measures should particularly target women farmers to ensure gender inclusion, e.g. by investing directly to increase individual and institutional capacities or provide support to access to resources;
- Improving awareness and education by a) investing in education on water management at the earliest stages of school to provide continuity and opportunity for nationalization of SDGs; and b) awareness raising activities that are inclusive such as the illiterate populations which will require more accessible communication channels and tools. These plans must provide detail on how to engage with the hard to reach groups and provide further facilitation of local self help groups and local led solutions.
- Promoting women in science, water engineers and provide funds for further research, structured career pathways and scholarships. Science must be central to water policies and thus women scientists must be represented from local to high level events. Women scientists need to be included into Water Action Decade to contribute to awareness, practical actions and monitoring and assessment of the progress of the Decade implementation.

**We urge** States and international community to ensure their practical actions in frame of the International Decade and SDGs enforcement meet the following requirements:

- *Women are recognized as key agents of change in ensuring implementation of interlinked SDGs goals;*
- *No one left behind – access to water should be ensured for all disadvantaged and less protected people (especially refugees, disabled, HIV positive, etc.);*

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- *Women's unpaid and care work in the water sector should be recognized and redistributed;*
- *Strong women-inclusive multi-stakeholder partnership and communication are supported and facilitated as a key precondition for successful implementation of SDGs;*
- *Gender Roadmaps in water sector are applied for water sector reforms at the national, regional and global levels;*
- *Investing in women and gender equality means investment in the future generation with access to water and improved wellbeing;*
- *Elimination of gender inequality in education and science in water and energy sectors.*

**We stress** that effective and inclusive partnerships are instrumental in promoting water-gender-development nexus and sustained closing of the gender divide during the implementation of the International Decade for Action Water for Sustainable Development. **We advocate** for public-private partnerships that can efficiently close resource gaps and do not neglect and exclude gender perspectives of water management.

**We suggest** States to develop a roadmap that links SDG 5 and SDG 6 and to ensure its implementation during the Water Decade with active engagement of civil society, women activists and leaders at all levels.

**We call** on States to introduce special measures to promote more women in leadership positions at all levels in the water sector and for specialized support for women from excluded groups to enable them to effectively engage in decision making. **We urge** States to take actions for much stronger engagement of women in decision-making in the water sector. Women need to be equally represented on water related dialogues and platforms, WASH committees, service providers and water user associations.

**We call** on international development partners to mainstream gender dimension in their strategic documents and make sure that gender-inequality reducing actions are proactively considered in their ODA implementation.

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***We re-call*** on the need for dedicated Women for Water Funds as called for during the High-level Water Conferences in Dushanbe in 2013 and 2015. Sufficient resources should be made available for innovative initiatives aimed to support states to address gender perspectives of water management, to support technology, training and education to optimize work load associated with water, and to strengthen women’s civil society to engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships as equal partners. These initiatives require partnership with private sector, SDG 17, as well as incentivization for example tax code revision. ***We welcome and suggest to upscale*** a Water for Women Fund established by Australia for the Asia-Pacific region not limiting to WASH’s focus.

As in 2015 Women Water Forum, ***we urge*** for full implementation by the Member States of their commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women as stated by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and suggested by gender related SDGs targets. ***We suggest*** all States report on results of practical enforcement of BPfA in a frame of its 25 anniversary in 2020. ***We request*** the Government of Tajikistan hosting the international water conferences in a frame of the International Water Decade to devote the next conference to a comprehensive results oriented review of a progress of implementation of all agreed actions at 2018 conference.

**Turning these promises into action holds the potential to transform the lives of women and girls all over the world and for the benefits reverberate across society.**