

# Women, Water Security, and Peacebuilding in the Arab Region







## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy brief is based on the discussion during the Symposium on Women and Water Security for Peacebuilding in the Arab Region, held in Beirut, Lebanon on May 9 - 10, 2018. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) organized the symposium in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN- ESCWA) and the Pacific Water Research Centre (PWRC) of Simon Fraser University, Canada. The symposium participants included civil society representatives, researchers, experts, governmental and non-governmental practitioners. Their discussions aimed to explore strategies, policies, frameworks, and programs in support of Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, 6, and 16.

**A full report of the symposium is available at:**

[sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/  
documents/20691KSymposium\\_Meeting\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20691KSymposium_Meeting_Report.pdf)

[sustainabledevelopment.un.org/womenandwatersecurity](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/womenandwatersecurity)

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## KEY MESSAGES

**Water security solutions must account for women as a heterogeneous group.** This diversity should be reflected in the creation of critical social support structures for women such as health facilities and water-related educational and employment programs. The strengthening of water management and provisioning of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WaSH) services must account for the needs of both displaced and resident women in an area.

**Enhanced capacity building can equip women to act as agents of change in the water security and peacebuilding realm.** The research indicates that impacts of water insecurity and inhumane living conditions are reflected differently in terms of genders. Compared to men, women commonly have less decision-making power regarding access to, distribution, ownership, and purchase of water resources. Given their predominant role in household water management, women can become game changers when provided the right skill set.

**Years of conflict in the Arab region have led to the destruction of infrastructure and the contamination of water resources.** As a result, there is immense human suffering, loss of human dignity, and exacerbated water insecurity for poor and vulnerable populations. Forced displacement has led to a complex puzzle of critical issues. However, informed strategies and solutions are available to address these challenges and to improve living conditions for millions of residents. Enhanced capacity building can equip women to act as agents of change in the water security and peacebuilding realm.



### Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a unique opportunity to tackle women's water security challenges

The SDG framework intersects with food security (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), universal water security (SDG 6), peace and justice (SDG 16), and sustainable settlements (SDG 11). Each of these areas is relevant to finding short- and long-term solutions to the challenges faced by women who are refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs).

# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS OVERVIEW



Humanitarian assistance must clearly chart a path for transition from emergency response to long-term sustainable solutions for WaSH facilities for displaced women and girls.

## REGIONAL LEVEL:

- The League of Arab States' Committee on Women should establish a dedicated Task Force that is led by women and focuses on the specific challenges. This Task Force will pertain to water insecurity in conflict zones to supplement National Women's Machineries (NWMs) in gender mainstreaming policy, and to guide technical and financial support.
- The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (1995) should be the basis for continued action by organizations operating at the regional level.

## NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:

- Educational and training initiatives for women in water and science-based programs must be further strengthened to position women as policy-makers and diplomats and contribute to building sustainable and equitable water governance systems in the Arab region.
- Governments must ensure that women are offered opportunities to serve as lead diplomats in water conflicts and are actively engaged in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. This approach is in accordance with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda endorsed by the UN Security Council.
- Gender equality strategies must address the gendered nature of water security in each state, including women's roles, at all levels, in water-related management.
- Governmental institutions must foster a social environment that is favorable towards women in decision-making and leadership roles.
- Water is a gendered security issue and must be considered when states draft their UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs), in consultation with NWMs, civil society, and impacted groups (i.e., displaced and refugee women).

- Economic opportunities must be created for women and girls that promote water security and overcome social or legal barriers to access financial resources, including credit or collateral assets (i.e., land or water resources).
- Health services must be responsive to waterborne diseases and the mental well-being of women and girls residing in refugee camps and informal settlements.
- Dysfunction and corruption in water institutions must be eliminated, and transparency and accountability should be increased within management, especially in times of conflict.
- Enhanced integrated management of water resources requires greater investments in water infrastructure that is gender-sensitive.
- Increase support for the collection of gender-disaggregated data for water and sanitation issues to assist in monitoring and developing goals related to peacekeeping and gender equality.

## COMMUNITIES:

- Communities must be empowered to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) for displaced women and girls, particularly when associated with access to WaSH services and facilities.
- Community members must develop water-user associations requiring women's participation to ensure a gendered perspective is integrated into water-related management decisions.
- Women must be given the opportunity and training to lead community patrols for camps and settlements to protect against SGBV and monitor water access points.
- There must be greater opportunities at the local level for women to assume non-traditional roles within water stewardship.

## INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- In times of government instability or occupation, UN agencies and other international organizations must provide immediate relief and aid to vulnerable groups and facilitate coordination between international, regional, and national players.
- Obligatory gender sensitivity training of relief workers can go a long way in improving the safety and security of women in refugee camps and informal settlements.
- The provision of WaSH facilities in refugee camps must cater to the specific needs of women and girls and ensure personal security and dignity.

### ENHANCING AWARENESS OF NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN IN DISPLACED POPULATIONS

The mass movements of people within the Arab region have resulted in inconsistencies in the levels of awareness and education in WaSH and water conservation practices. To address some of these concerns, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in Jordan has created water-related educational programs and awareness projects operating in both refugee and resident communities. The RSCN works to integrate water issues into the national curricula and engages children in WaSH-related eco-games, mobile applications, workshops and education on water efficiency and sustainable technologies. Workshops that target women are also conducted to increase awareness of water issues in Jordan, and to provide education on sustainable water management and hygiene practices.

***Royal Society for the Conservation  
of Nature (RSCN), Jordan***



## GRASPING THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF THE CHALLENGE

**Forced displacement in the Arab region has caused immense human suffering, loss of human dignity, and exacerbated water insecurity for poor and vulnerable populations.** Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees are fleeing their homelands as a result of conflict, violence, persecution, and human rights violations.

As shown in Figure 1, as of 2017, there were more than 13 million refugees and 16 million IDPs<sup>1</sup> in the Arab region due to ongoing and recent conflict and occupation in several Arab states, including Syria, Libya, Yemen, State of Palestine, and Iraq. Women and girls are impacted by conflict in significantly gendered ways and comprise a large number of refugees and IDPs in the Arab region, including more than threequarters of Syrian refugees.<sup>2</sup>

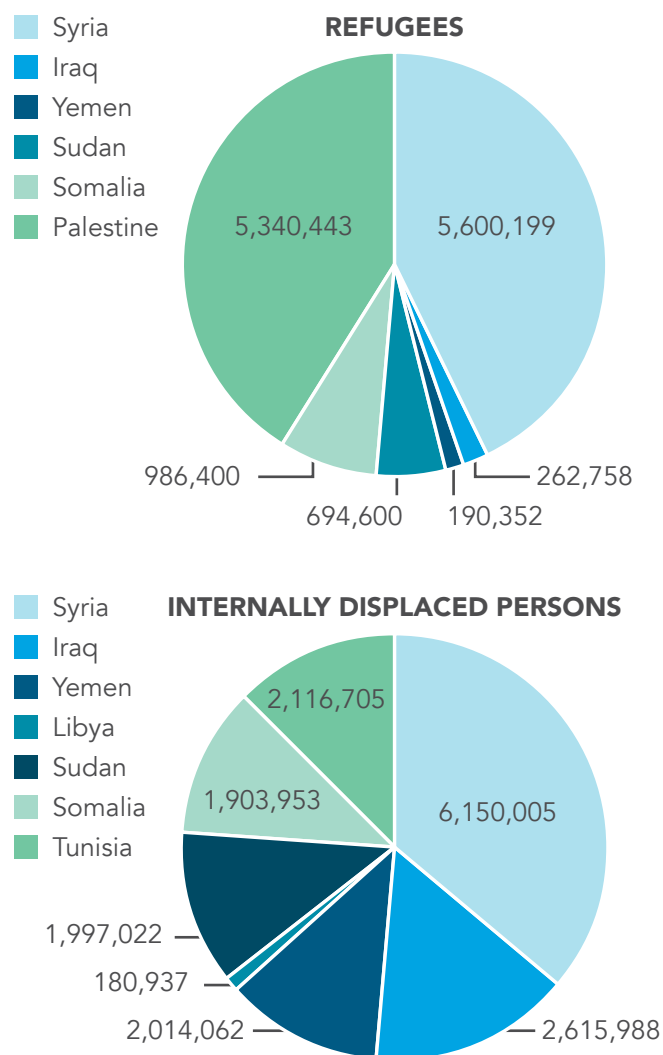
**Existing gender-based water insecurity, triggered by pre-existing social and legislative barriers, has negative impacts for resident women.**

Resident women experience greater barriers in obtaining ownership of land and water resources or access to credit and collateral financial assistance. Progress in overcoming some of these barriers has been achieved over the past decade in several Arab states that have increased support for women's entrepreneurship by establishing financial facilities to support women's groups.<sup>3</sup>

**During times of conflict, gender-based water insecurity is exacerbated for displaced women.**

Refugee or IDP women experience major barriers in accessing basic services, essential to their health and well-being. For example, women-headed households experience significant roadblocks in accessing health, education, and employment services; financial burdens further limit their ability to purchase water. These households are reported to experience high poverty levels in the Arab region and as a result are often dependent on national governments and local communities to assist in providing economic assistance and support.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) by State of Origin (2017\*)**



**Refugees Source:** Yemen – October 2017, available from <http://data.unhcr.org/yemen/regional.php>; Iraq – December 2017, available from <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20171227%20UNHCR%20Iraq%20Flash%20Update.pdf>; Sudan & Somalia – December 2017, available from <http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>; UNRWA in figures as of 1 January 2017, available from [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_in\\_figures\\_2017\\_english.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_in_figures_2017_english.pdf); \*Syria – July 2018, available from [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions);

**IDPs Source:** Authors' calculations based on data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistical Online Population database, available from [www.unhcr.org/pages/4a013eb06.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a013eb06.html)

**Scarce water resources combined with inadequate WaSH facilities result in an increased burden and risk for women and girls to collect, treat, and store water for household purposes.<sup>5</sup>**

In some instances, female health and personal hygiene may be compromised because of the potential exposure to sexual threats and violence when attempting to access WaSH facilities. Women and girls can also be exposed to significant health risks when collecting and treating water resources which, in some regions, are contaminated with chemicals or untreated sewage.

**Extreme water scarcity can be a roadblock to meeting the human right to water, forcing refugee families to purchase expensive water from private vendors.**

In 2015, approximately 51 million people living in the Arab region were without access to a basic drinking water service, with a vast majority (73%) living in rural areas. The cost of purchasing water from private companies increases the financial burden on residents which are looking to meet their basic needs. For example, in the Mafraq region of Jordan, where the Zaatari refugee camp is located, purchasing water can cost up to 30% of a family's income, and the rationed water supply results in additional costs for pumping. This situation is a challenge for cash-strapped, female-headed households.

**Conflict in the Arab region has led to destruction of infrastructure and contamination of water resources, resulting in inhumane living conditions for women and girls.**

This lack of infrastructure has created adverse health outcomes for displaced women and children. Iraq is an example where chronic conflict has severely polluted water sources and depleted the state's financial and human resources, resulting in the spread of cholera and typhoid. Consequently, one out of eight children in Iraq, many of them displaced from their homes, are affected by water-related diseases. A 2018 World Bank report identified a total of 1,488 facilities in 31 of the most damaged cities and reported that 1,359 of these were completely destroyed; WaSH sector damage in Iraq is estimated at US \$1.4 billion.<sup>6</sup> In Syria, the civil conflict has resulted in similar physical damage to water and sanitation infrastructure. A 2017 World Bank study for Syria found that close to two-thirds of the water treatment plants and 50% of pumping stations were damaged or destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

**IMPACT OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN**



The Israeli occupation has an adverse impact on water resources in the occupied Palestinian territory, degrading the lives, dignity, and humanity of the Palestinian population, and disproportionately impacting the health of women and children. Palestinians are prevented from preserving or developing water infrastructure through inequitable water-sharing agreements with Israel which deny control over and access to their water resources. In the Gaza Strip, Area C of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, the deprivation of Palestinians access to water and other WaSH services has created major health and environmental challenges, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases (notably diarrhea) and placing greater financial stress on families to purchase expensive drinking water from private vendors.<sup>8</sup>

**Compared to men, women commonly have less decision-making power regarding access to, distribution, ownership, and purchasing of water resources, which is inverse to their role in household water management.**

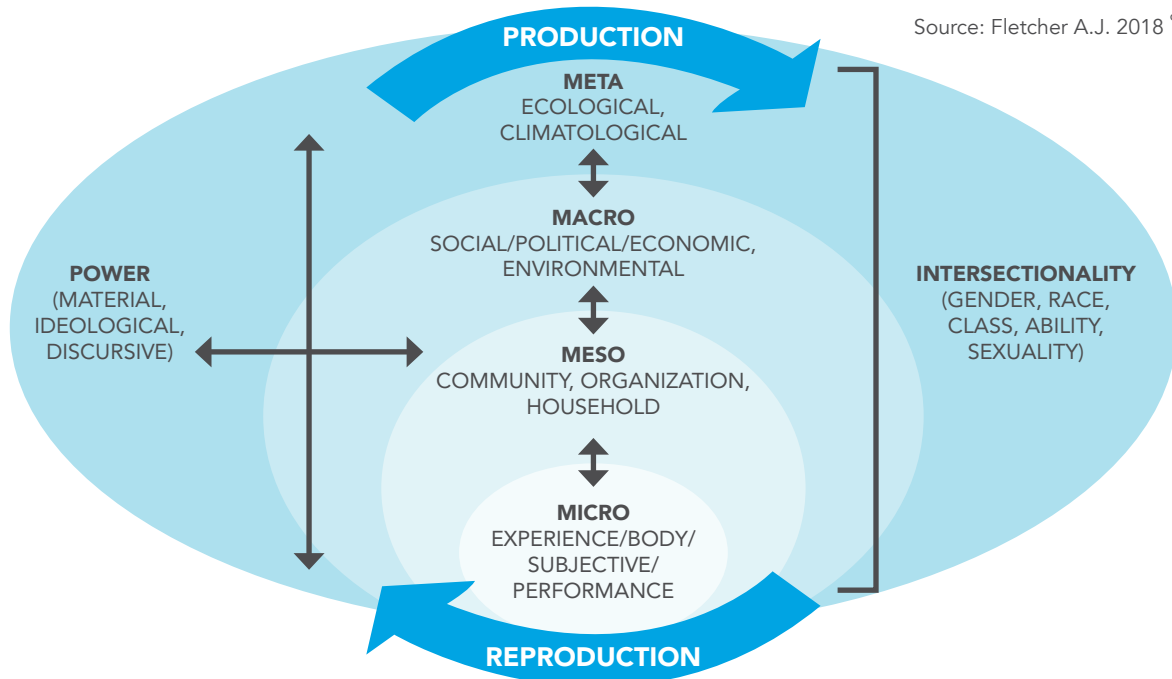
Women and girls are primarily responsible for household water-related tasks, and therefore are most familiar with the local water quality and quantity supplies—a situation that also exists in refugee camps and informal settlements. The importance of traditional knowledge for water and agriculture practices specific to a region are highlighted in times of famine and drought, as women are often key agents in protecting and securing water resources. However, social and cultural traditions in the region have typically excluded women from meaningful participation in water-related management processes in both private and public spaces; this can be especially true for rural areas. Despite this imbalance in decision-making, there is increasing support for initiatives that promote water-related training and education to women and girls.

## WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

**Women are a heterogenous group, and this diversity should be reflected in the creation of critical social support structures for women such as health facilities and water-related educational and employment programs.**

The social structures and processes pertaining to water management and WaSH service provisions must be viewed through a perspective that incorporates social identities and inequalities that impact water management, access, and use. It is important to use a conceptual framework that prevents oversimplification of the water-gender intersection. Such a framework, as shown in *Figure 2*, connects different scales of operation: meta (influence of ecology and climate change on water resources), macro (social, political, economic, and environmental factors operating at societal or national scale), meso (interactions at community or household level), and micro (an individual's experience of water security). Such framing can help identify the roles women can play at each level and identify ways of accounting for differences based on race, class, and physical ability, among others.

**Figure 2: Research Framework for Gender in Environmental Crisis and Conflict**





**Strengthening of water management and provisioning of WaSH services must consider the needs of both displaced and resident women in an area.**

It is important to recognize that water-related challenges exist for both displaced and resident women, underpinned by increasing regional water scarcity and other institutional and infrastructure deficits. However, these two broad groups of women have different needs, priorities, and challenges in accessing water resources. Resident female populations, despite their hospitality and generosity, may also experience heightened challenges in accessing safe and adequate WaSH resources that impact their safety and health. Thus, any intervention must consider both the needs of the displaced as well as the host population.

**Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Arab region provides a unique opportunity for tackling short and long-term challenges faced by women, and particularly women who are refugees or IDPs.**

The SDGs offer a universal, comprehensive, ambitious, and complex framework through which gender equality and the water security of populations that are forcibly displaced can be directly addressed. The obvious intersection and joint implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 6 on universal water security can be achieved. Further benefits can also be drawn by achieving reductions in poverty (SDG 1), increasing overall food security (SDG 2), improving health outcomes for women and their children (SDG 3), enhancing education and training opportunities for women (SDG 4), striving for sustainable consumption patterns in displaced populations (SDG 11), and creating institutions that foster engagement of women in promoting peace and justice in conflict and post-conflict situations (SDG 16).

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

**A dedicated Task Force that is led by women and focused on the specific challenges pertaining to water insecurity in conflict zones should be established by the League of Arab States to supplement national women's machineries in gender mainstreaming policy, and to guide technical and financial support.**

This proposed Task Force would discuss and propose critical gender-water related projects in the region and improve coordination and communication between Arab States' National Women's Machineries (NWMs). It could also partner with international and UN organizations, particularly UN Women, to increase public awareness campaigns and initiatives and facilitate mobilization of financial resources. The Task Force could be financed by the existing Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development and the Arab Monetary Fund, which should support initiatives of gender-empowerment and equality.

**The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should be the basis for continued action by organizations operating at the regional level.**

The Arab region has ratified and committed to international frameworks that support gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) which aims to foster partnerships based on equality between women and men. Through this framework, governments in the region are obliged to uphold their responsibilities to implement mechanisms that increase women's participation in decision-making and leadership roles, among other concerns, and to report on their progress to the international community. Members of the League of Arab States must strengthen capacity-building and training initiatives for women in order to increase women's leadership and engagement in water-related decision processes as well as civic and political participation.

Economic opportunities must be created for women that promote water security and overcome social or legal barriers to accessing financial resources.

## GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGIES IN THE ARAB REGION



### **Jordanian National Action Plan UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2018-2021). JONAP Strategic Goal 4:**

“Foster a community culture that recognizes gender-specific needs, the importance of gender equality and the role of women (including young women) in peace and security.”

**The Iraq National Development Plan (NDP) (2013-2017)**, includes measures to address the challenges to equitable access to water and sanitation resources, and provides gender targets (6-3) to increase women’s political and economic participation.

### **Yemen’s National Strategy for Women Development (2006-2025):**

Strategic Issue III works to “enhance women independency and economic empowerment and active participation in economic and environmental decision-making” (3-1-2) through gender mainstreaming initiatives that adopt programs to support and train women for roles relating to sustainable development and management of natural resources.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

**Educational and training initiatives for women in water and science-based programs must be further strengthened to position women as policy-makers and diplomats and contribute to building sustainable and equitable water governance systems in the Arab region.**

Promoting water-related and science-based education and training programs for women and girls provides opportunities for proactive inclusion of women in decision-making and implementation processes. Support for these capacity enhancements must be provided at a macro-scale, with national governments actively involved. National governments should urgently dedicate some of their capacity development resources for specifically supporting women’s education and training programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other water-related courses.

**Gender equality strategies must address the gendered nature of water security in each state, including women’s roles, at all levels, in water-related management.**

A national framework to guide gender-related strategies, especially in times of conflict or instability, is essential in increasing coordination between governmental bodies, institutions, and civil society. Gender equality strategies must acknowledge women’s disproportionate role in water resources and provide goals directly related to these challenges. These strategies must also be developed in collaboration with various other groups, including NWMs, civil society, as well as displaced and refugee women. Stories of successes and failures should be shared with other Arab states, to promote the creation and development of these documents.

**Governmental institutions must foster a social environment that is favorable towards women**

in decision-making and leadership roles. In several Arab states, national strategies have implemented gender-mainstreaming policies to support opportunities for women in leadership roles. Governments must increase recognition and enforcement for these strategies to encourage women’s access to and opportunities within leadership. For example, the Jordanian National Action Plan (JONAP) on UNSCR 1325 provides a set of goals which recognizes women’s important role in building and maintaining peace by strengthening educational institutions and school curricula to promote a community culture that fosters women’s participation in



peacekeeping processes. These types of strategies must be recognized and developed in other states to highlight the importance of gender equality and the important role of women in decision-making and leadership roles.

**Water is a gendered security issue and must be considered when states draft their UNSCR 1325 NAPs, in consultation with NWMs, civil society, and impacted groups (i.e., displaced and refugee women).** Arab states must recognize the differentiated gendered impacts on water resources and strengthen water security for women within National Action Plans (NAPs). Currently, NAPs exist only in Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan; numerous other Arab states are undergoing development of draft NAPs. States must ensure there is an adequate allocation of funds to implement existing NAPs and build capacity development for women and girls in related water resource projects.

**Health services must be responsive to waterborne diseases and the mental well-being of women and girls residing in refugee camps and informal settlements.** Poor access to WaSH facilities results in physiological and psychological health problems for displaced women. National governments must provide a gender-sensitive national water and sanitation framework and regulation, particularly within refugee camps and informal settings, to improve the health and well-being of individuals.

**Dysfunction and corruption in water institutions must be eliminated, coupled with increase in transparency and accountability within management, especially in times of conflict.** Institutional dysfunction in water governance systems can occur at different levels (micro to meta, see Figure 2) impacting various social groups differently. Furthermore, public services and financial resources may be managed inefficiently. National governments can initiate steps to decentralize water resources governance to local communities through the creation of water user associations, committees, and public forums in efforts to increase accountability and transparency in governance of water resources and systems.

#### WATER WISE WOMEN (WWW) PROGRAM IN JORDAN



In Jordan, the Water Wise Women (WWW) program, which was developed with the government and local communities, provides economic opportunities for women by training them as plumbers while also increasing awareness and education of water conservation and technical skills. The WWW program has given women and girls the ability to participate in a non-traditional field of employment and strengthens the region's water governance by enhancing education in water conservation strategies and technical skills. The project has been successful in gaining acceptance from the community, overcoming barriers and gender role limitations and increasing women's voice in decision-making.

#### EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WATER DIPLOMACY BY MAPPING THE CHALLENGES IN PALESTINE, LEBANON, AND JORDAN

A recent study identified the importance of understanding and overcoming the stigmas, and the needed capacity building associated with women in decision-making and leadership roles in the Arab region. Achieving this transition means enhancing women's civic and political participation, and specializing in a combination of traditionally male-dominated fields related to water diplomacy. It is equally important to promote women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding and to engage them in conflict prevention.

**Economic opportunities must be created for women that promote water security and overcome social or legal barriers to accessing financial resources, including credit or collateral assets (i.e., land or water resources).**

Providing women training and education, particularly in agricultural skills, can enhance social and managerial practices by changing gender roles in a community. By establishing training programs, women have the opportunity to increase their knowledge and status, embrace leadership and decision-making roles, and increase sustainability and conservation of water resources in communities.

### **GENDER-SENSITIVE IRRIGATION INFRASTRUCTURE CASE STUDY**

In the Fayoum governorate of Egypt, water management initiatives for women led to the design of programs that considered the region's cultural, social, and religious ties to water in the community and trained women for a wide-range of water-related leadership and decision-making opportunities. Women were also provided training and education in agricultural skills, and the program increased female literacy rates, and enhanced social and managerial practices. The project provided numerous benefits to the region, including: a behavioral change to the community of women's new role in leadership, enhanced dignity for women by increasing their knowledge and status, and increased harvest and conserved water resources. Ensuring economic opportunities are designed specifically for women, such as micro-credit, loans and water-related training programs, may allow women to engage in traditionally male-dominated fields.

**Enhanced integrated management of water resources requires greater investments in water infrastructure that is gender-sensitive.**

Large-scale forced migration has led to severe infrastructure challenges and resource shortages in the host communities. In the Arab region, 84% of water is used for agricultural purposes, far above the world average of 70%.<sup>10</sup> Better water management, therefore, requires increased efficiency of water usage, either through deployment of advanced irrigation infrastructure or reducing water wastage in existing irrigation systems. In accordance with the 1992 Dublin Principles, national governments must invest in training and education for women, as they represent almost one third of the agricultural labor force and are increasingly involved in non-traditional roles and responsibilities.

**Women must lead peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes relating to water and environmental resources, as per the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.**

The WPS agenda is based on the United Nations Security Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) which calls for meaningful participation of women in peace-building processes and leadership roles and acknowledges the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women. Aligned with the WPS agenda, national governments must design and implement strategies that recognize the impact that armed conflict has on women related to water resources and security.

**National governments must increase support for the collection of gender-disaggregated data for water and sanitation issues to monitor progress towards gender equality goals and to ensure that specific needs and concerns for women and girls are understood and incorporated into strategies and projects.**

Governments must ensure adequate financial and human resources are provided to collect gender-disaggregated data for related WaSH issues. It is also important for governments to increase awareness through campaigns and within training programs to highlight the important role that women play within water management.



**Governments must focus on capacity-building for women to ensure they are offered opportunities to serve as lead diplomats in water conflicts and are actively engaged in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.** The most recent resolution adopted within the WPS agenda, UNSCR 2242 (2015), asserts the importance of increasing awareness and providing funding for gender-specific programs as well as capacity-building projects. Governments must allocate resources for gender-specific programs and capacity-building projects targeting water-related projects.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES

**Communities must address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) associated with access to WaSH services and facilities.** The WPS agenda acknowledges the impact armed conflict has on instances of SGBV against women and girls and calls for leadership to provide multisectoral services to affected women and to intervene to end these occurrences. Social stigmas surrounding SGBV discourage displaced women and girls from openly discussing these adverse encounters, and many are unaware of outside supportive resources available to them. It is therefore essential that strategies developed for each community incorporate a gender perspective for WaSH infrastructure and services, and that they identify the concerns and priorities of those impacted or vulnerable.

**Communities must develop water user associations requiring women's participation to ensure a gendered perspective is integrated into water-related management decisions.** Communities must ensure that Water User Associations (WUAs) provide opportunities for women, such as gender quotas, to participate in decision-making for water resource use and allocation. To facilitate women into positions in a WUAs, it is essential that communities provide free or low-cost education and training for women in water-related programs, such as irrigation and agriculture. Communities

must also highlight the valuable role women have in water management due to their responsibilities in water-related household activities and their increasing representation in the agriculture sector.

**Women must have the opportunity and training to lead community patrols for camps and settlements to protect against SGBV and monitor water access points.** Communities must recognize the important role women play as leaders and promote women into higher decision-making roles. Communities must direct adequate financial and human resources towards training women for leadership positions for community patrols in efforts to combat SGBV and monitor water access points. To promote women into high levels of leadership, stories of women in these positions must be highlighted and shared through various media, including social media networks.

### TARGETED CAPACITY BUILDING PROMOTES DIGNITY AND RESPECT FOR DISPLACED WOMEN IN LEBANON

Mercy Corps is a global humanitarian organization, working with refugee populations living in informal settlements in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. Mercy Corps integrated a gender perspective into WaSH infrastructure designs and built internal capacity within the community to increase safety and promote gender equality in the area. They invested in programs and projects for training and education in hygiene, health, and leadership. These initiatives were available to both men and women and resulted in women taking leadership positions that changed the community's perception of women working outside of the house.

**There must be greater opportunities at a local level for women to assume non-traditional roles within water stewardship.**

Communities must increase funding and strengthen partnerships with international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to create opportunities for women to engage in leadership and scientific roles for water stewardship. Communities play an important role in providing education and training for women and girls that align with the cultural and social norms and traditions of the region. To promote awareness of women's important role in water management, local campaigns must be implemented through media (including social media) and highlighted by community leaders.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

**In times of government instability or occupation, UN agencies and other international organizations must provide immediate relief and aid to vulnerable groups and facilitate coordination between international, regional, and national players.**

Numerous international and UN agencies are working on the ground, often in refugee camps and informal settlements, to provide or improve the quality of basic services, such as water, food, clothing, and shelter, as well as work to build capacity through WaSH related programs, toolkits, educational projects, and leadership programs. These organizations also utilize their online presence to produce resources that are shared between other organizations, governments, and international bodies to increase coordination and communication.

**More needs to be done to enhance gender sensitivity training of relief workers, further improving the safety and security of women in refugee camps.**

Relief workers are the first to interact with and empower displaced women in refugee camps or informal settlements. It is, therefore, essential that they bring adequate gender sensitivity training to the job. For example, they need

to recognize that shared toilets can expose women to physical or sexual violence and have resulted in some women neglecting their own personal hygiene or health to avoid those risks.

**The provision of WaSH facilities in refugee camps must cater to the specific needs of women and ensure personal security and dignity.**

Crowding conditions as well as a shortage of basic services have contributed to serious security issues for displaced women and girls, including reports of violence, abuse, and harassment. Deployment of dedicated WaSH facilities that are designed for women and offer a measure of personal security must be a central pillar of planning for refugee camps and informal settlements. Poor maintenance of WaSH infrastructure, such as septic tanks, has led to the contamination of groundwater and surface water resources in many Arab states. These facilities need to be regularly emptied; however, refugees and IDPs are not always able to pay for these services. Provisioning of adequate financial support can help expand the existing facilities and alleviate problems related to crowding.

**Humanitarian and development professionals must clearly chart a path for transitioning from emergency response to long-term sustainable solutions for WaSH facilities for displaced women.**

Emergency responses in the Arab region have been designed to provide immediate relief to reduce suffering and loss of life in the short term. Long-term rehabilitation, however, requires a different approach that must be multi-dimensional, proactive, culturally sensitive, and address the long-term needs of vulnerable populations. Capacity building is central to the latter approach, and as noted earlier, must tie into water and health-related education and training for women. Many mechanisms can be invoked in refugee-camp settings, including, workshops, mentoring sessions, training courses, and hands-on learning, among other activities that promote long-term water security.



## INCLUSION OF WOMEN INTO PEACEMAKING AND PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES IN YEMEN



Cooperation for shared water resources is essential—especially during times of conflict and unrest—and the inclusion of women into peacemaking and peacebuilding processes strengthens a community's ability to respond to and mitigate internal challenges. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Yemen partnered with local women to resolve a 15-year-old water-related dispute between two villages. The water in conflict led to *de facto* ruling where it was understood from both villages that men could not touch the water in the reservoir. As such, the local women stepped in, established a water users' association, and worked together to facilitate dialogue and consultation between the two villages. The two villages were able to agree on sharing of well water resources which later was able to serve 7,000 people. FAO provided the managerial resources and training to women which allowed them to actively take on roles to rehabilitate the wells and to manage finances.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Calculations based on <http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>
- 2 <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/568f98f84.pdf> (UNHCR, 2015); <http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/women-peace-security-institutions-war-arab-english.pdf>
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- 4 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2283ESCWA\\_Women%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region\\_Beijing20.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2283ESCWA_Women%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region_Beijing20.pdf), pg. 51
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