

INCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT

# Laying the Bedrock of Transformation

## Women in Water Diplomacy Network 2013-2021

The story so far; how the Network came to be and how it has developed through the years.





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The Women in Water Diplomacy Network second forum in Ethiopia, December 2018.  
Image by E.Yaari.

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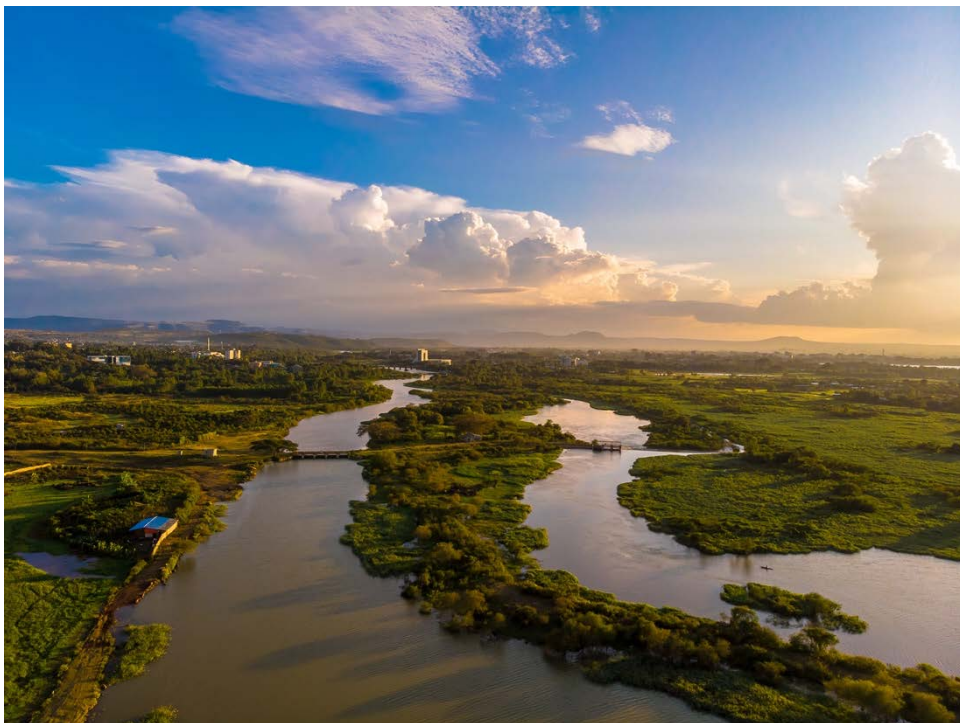
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The second Women in Water Diplomacy Network Forum in Ethiopia, Dec 2018. Image by E.Yaari.

## Executive Summary

Transboundary water cooperation processes are not gender neutral. They are informed by the experience and knowledge of the people, perspectives and lived experience of those in the discussion and around the decision-making table. When those discussions are not reflective of the societies they serve or the intellectual resources available - opportunities can be missed entirely or not leveraged sufficiently. Worse, a lack of inclusion in water governance processes can cause harm – often to societies’ most vulnerable members – and spark conflict relapse at various scales or have unforeseen and unexpected impacts.



The headwaters of the Blue Nile, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. Image by Bahirdar Dronning / Shutterstock.

## Building the case for targeted engagement: Inception Phase 2013-2017

SIWI's focus on the role of women in water diplomacy in recent years is not without context. In large part thanks to core and programme support provided from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), SIWI has built-up expertise, capacities and institutional focus on gender equality in water governance processes.

As a cross cutting issue at SIWI since 2013, all SIWI staff and programmes have received training and support to increase focus on gender equality - to consider the impact of gender equality on programmes as well as the programme's impact on gender equality. The 2013 research paper authored by SIWI's Anton Earle together with the University of Victoria's Susan Bazilli entitled '[A gendered critique of transboundary water management](#),' published in the Feminist Review, is often cited as the key baseline for understanding gendered impacts on transboundary water cooperation processes with particular focus on Africa. The key empirical finding from that paper was that transboundary water cooperation processes have profound implications for issues of equity, participation and sustainability. Further, SIWI's Transboundary Water Cooperation Department, and the Shared Waters Partnership (SWP) programme delivered by the Department, have long had an explicit focus on inclusive decision making with an emphasis on [gender equality in line with SIWI's strategy](#). Transboundary Water Cooperation team member Elizabeth A. Yaari, served as SIWI's Gender Focal Point from 2016-2018 further supporting the elevation of the theme in the Department's engagements.

Since 2014, the [UNESCO Category II International Centre for Water Cooperation \(ICWC\)](#), has been hosted by SIWI, led at the time by Dr Therese Sjömander Magnusson. The ICWC in 2016, under the management of Dr Marian J. Neal, began a dialogue with the editors of the Journal of Hydrology to develop a Special Issue on Water Diplomacy. This Special Issue was designed to include research articles by leading experts and partner institutions which would focus on the intersectional issues of gender equality, women's leadership and water cooperation, and other key themes in water diplomacy. To support this process, the ICWC's Dr Marian Neal developed an event programme, and in conjunction with SIWI and the German UNESCO Category II International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change, convened the *International Symposium on Water Diplomacy* in November 2016 in Stockholm. The symposium brought together more than fifty water diplomacy experts, academics, practitioners and other informal actors, including journalists and civil society groups, to discuss key issues in the field of

water diplomacy. With a focused session on the role of women in water diplomacy decision-making processes, and invited presentations from leading experts including Sweden's Jan Eliasson (then Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations), Margaretha Wahlström (UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Swedish MFA, Network of Women Mediators), Lesha Witmer (Women For Water Partnership), Natasha Carmi (then of the Palestinian Negotiations Affairs Department) and Mey AL Sayegh (then a journalist for "Aljournhouria") further attention was brought to this important intersection.

Following the Symposium, discussions and developing research tracks would later produce several important articles. Oregon State's Professor Lynette de Silva, Tulane University's Dr Jennifer C. Veilleux, and SIWT's Dr Marian J. Neal took an important stride in making visible the linkages between women's participation and transboundary water governance in their article '*The Role of Women in Transboundary Water Dispute Resolution*' included in the book, [Water Security Across the Gender Divide](#) released in 2018. The [Journal of Hydrology's Special Issue on Water Diplomacy](#), released in 2019 and edited by SIWT's Dr Martina Klimes, included an opening Editorial Article, co-authored by SIWT's Dr Klimes, David Michel, Elizabeth A. Yaari and Dr Phillia Restiani entitled '*Water diplomacy: The intersect of science, policy and practice*' with strong focus on inclusive processes, and '*Empowering women in water diplomacy: a basic mapping of the challenges in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan*' by Natasha Carmi, Mey Alsayegh and Maysoun Zoubi focused on barriers to women's advancement in the transboundary water field in the MENA region.

**'Increasing womens' participation and influence in water governance processes is critical to improve services, reduce inequalities, and mitigate conflicts. Addressing the embedded inequalities requires an enhanced awareness and understanding of the underlying power dynamics and structural barriers that reinforce gender inequalities.'**

Excerpt from Klimes, Martina; Michel, David; Yaari, Elizabeth; Restiani, Phillia. 2019. *Water diplomacy: The intersect of science, policy and practice*. In Journal of Hydrology Special Issue Water Diplomacy.

With key understandings of opportunities to address gender inequalities and support women's leadership in transboundary water governance, as well as new requests for focused support to women water diplomates from Nile Basin representatives, SIWT's SWP convened the **pilot woman in water diplomacy expert Forum in Uganda in October 2017**. This week-long pilot workshop put focus on the role of women

leaders at various decision-making levels related to water diplomacy, peace, and security broadly. During the pilot Forum, thematic focus was placed on the principles of international law applicable to the non-navigational uses of transboundary watercourses, lessons learned from other basin's experience, as well as training on different approaches and techniques to address water conflicts and cooperation processes with a focus on negotiation process, its elements and techniques.

Throughout the workshop, participants were exposed to invaluable shared experiences from the assembled participants including senior diplomats with years of direct experience in transboundary water negotiations. This initial workshop included twenty four participants representing Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries in charge of water resources, as well as Members of Parliament and representatives of the civil society and academia. All Nile basin countries were represented in this initial gathering apart from Eritrea who was invited but not able to send participants. The Forum included sessions led by expert facilitators from SIWI, as well as partners from the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), UNESCO IHP and the Women for Water Partnership Network.



The pilot Woman in Water Diplomacy Network Forum in Uganda, Oct 2017. Images by SIWI.

Building in large part on the momentum of this first encounter and requests for further engagement from the assembled representatives, **the Women in Water Diplomacy Network was born** with initial commitments of support from Sweden through Sida's support to SIWI's SWP programme and co-support from SWP Steering Committee members including the United States Department of State, the Government of the Netherlands, the Government of Norway, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

**‘Thank you for organizing this workshop. We should make sure it does not end here!’**

Anne Babinga, Deputy Head Regional Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uganda.

# Women in Water Diplomacy Network: Development Phase 2018-2021

## Development during 2018

In December 2018 the second Forum of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network was convened in Ethiopia supported by SIWI's Shared Waters Partnership (SWP) programme. The second Forum focused on engagement of participants that had an active current role in Nile Basin related negotiations and transboundary water management issues in their countries or at Nile Basin level. Representatives were therefore largely representatives from Ministries of Water and Foreign Affairs, in addition to some representatives of academic and technical institutions that are engaged in Nile negotiations. Twenty participants representing Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda attended the 2018 Forum. Participants from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania were invited but unable to obtain travel clearance to attend.

The Forum included sessions led by expert facilitators from SIWI, the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), IHE Delft and NBI (ENTRO) on themes of transboundary water management; water diplomacy; international water law; fostering change and creating change agents; women as water leaders: styles and types of leadership; gender and water governance; history, legal agreements and current context of the Nile Basin; negotiations skills; and strategic communications for women water professionals. In addition, there was a full-day Role Play exercise in which all participants were able to practice their water diplomacy skills, understand the roles of various stakeholders in transboundary negotiations, and work on technical issues similar to those present in the Nile Basin.



The second Women in Water Diplomacy Network Forum in Ethiopia, Dec 2018. Images by E. Yaari.



Already in this meeting seeds and opportunities to share experience both in the basin and beyond were being nurtured with one participant remarking, *‘Follow up activities are needed, and we should participate in World Water Week. That way we will meet other women from other basins, not only the Nile, and it will give us other perspectives and knowledge. The idea with water is that we think outside our box, see different perspectives.’*

Moreover, while young professionals from the basin were well represented at the 2018 Forum (about 25% were under 35), participants identified the prioritized need for outreach and engagement of young professionals into the Network’s engagements. Participants also stressed the need to engage male colleagues as champions of gender equality and women’s leadership and the need for assistance in developing strategic communications and awareness raising campaigns at the local and national levels. Additional priorities included support for policy and regulatory change to facilitate gender equality in the workplace and in academia; creation of mentorship programs for women and girls at various levels; and expanded networking, learning and experience sharing opportunities beyond the Nile Basin. The Network’s very active WhatsApp chat group was also launched as the primary communications channel for ongoing dialogue and relationship building across borders.

**‘I want to contribute to raise women’s awareness and have them involved in decision making about water issues. It is a national security issue to have the whole of society engaged in water decision making processes.’**

Workshop participant, Dec 2018

## **Development during 2019**

Drawing on the lessons learned from the first two Women in Water Diplomacy Forums, ELI’s Jessica Troell and SIWI’s Elizabeth A. Yaari released the **ICWC policy brief** *‘[Tapping our Potential: Women’s Water Leadership in the Nile Basin](#)’* in July 2019. This policy brief brought together key resources relevant to the intersection of gender equality and water resource management, and shared experience and recommendations from the Network’s engagements with associated policy recommendations. The policy brief indicated that *‘the persistent failure to include women equitably in political decision-making processes at the transboundary level undermines progress towards cooperative and sustainable management and development of internationally shared river basins and aquifers, as well as between jurisdictions in the same country. Women have differentiated knowledge that is vital*

*to sustainable resource management, as well as differing responsibilities, priorities, and needs around water use and management. Enabling women to have a meaningful voice in decision-making therefore provides an opportunity to include their distinctive knowledge, diverse perspectives and experiences to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of relevant water issues and challenges and to identify a broader set of equitable solutions to those challenges.'*



POLICY PAPER

## Tapping our Potential: Women's Water Leadership in the Nile Basin

Women Have a Critical Role to Play in Inclusive and Effective Transboundary Water Governance

ICWC policy brief, published July 2019. Image by E. Yaari.

During the August 2019 World Water Week the Women in Water Diplomacy Network was well-represented with three of the Network's senior leaders participating in a variety of events and engagements – including opportunities to meet with the Stockholm Water Prize Laureate, Dr Jackie King from South Africa and Stockholm Junior Water Prize national prize winners from Africa and beyond (*pictured*). Belaynesh Birru, then Director for the Environment and Climate Change Directorate at the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy of Ethiopia joined Theresa Khakasa Wasike, Director of Administration in the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation in Kenya, and Dr Muna Musnad, UNESCO Chair in Water Resources at Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan – mentoring young water professionals throughout the World Water Week and providing valuable reporting back as part of the Week's Closing Plenary.



Belaynesh Birru with Dr Jackie King (left, image by E.Yaari) and the African Stockholm Junior Water Prize national prize winners (right, image by Jonas Borg), at the 2019 World Water Week.

## Development during 2020

In January 2020, SIWI convened the third Women in Water Diplomacy Network Forum in Kenya supported by SIWI's SWP programme. This third Forum brought together twenty-two women water professionals from across the Nile Basin to not only build technical capacity of an expanding number of women water diplomats in the Nile, but also to expand the network of women water leaders and ensure a strong basis for ongoing peer-to-peer mentoring, learning, and support among the attendees. Participants were again primarily official representatives of Ministries of Water, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant line ministries engaged in transboundary water management in the Nile. A concerted effort was made to engage both senior and mid-career professionals from the relevant ministries. Basin states represented included Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Participants from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea were invited but were unable to attend the workshop. Time for knowledge sharing was provided for throughout the Forum to enable the participants to learn from each other as much as possible, as well as strengthen relationships across basin countries. The Forum included sessions led by expert facilitators from SIWI and the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) on themes of international and basin-specific water law; human rights-based approaches to water diplomacy; understanding donors and accessing finance; leadership skills building; social and psychological aspects of conflict resolution; climate change and transboundary water governance; and strategic communications. In addition, the Forum included participant-led sessions on a variety of topics focusing on each basin country, a facilitated group discussion on opportunities for joint actions to strengthen basin cooperation, and teambuilding exercises.



The third WWDN Forum in Kenya, Jan 2020

‘This set of meetings has been critical in raising awareness of the participants of the need for increasing women in water diplomacy and the tools for doing so.’

Workshop participant, Jan 2020

During the third Forum in Kenya the assembled women water leaders of the Nile basin states released a unique ‘Joint Statement’ in support of enhanced inclusive transboundary water cooperation. The 2020 Network Joint Statement, complementing high level processes ongoing in the Basin, called attention to the importance of inclusive water governance across the Nile and stressed the *‘urgency of action to address our shared water and climate challenges.’*

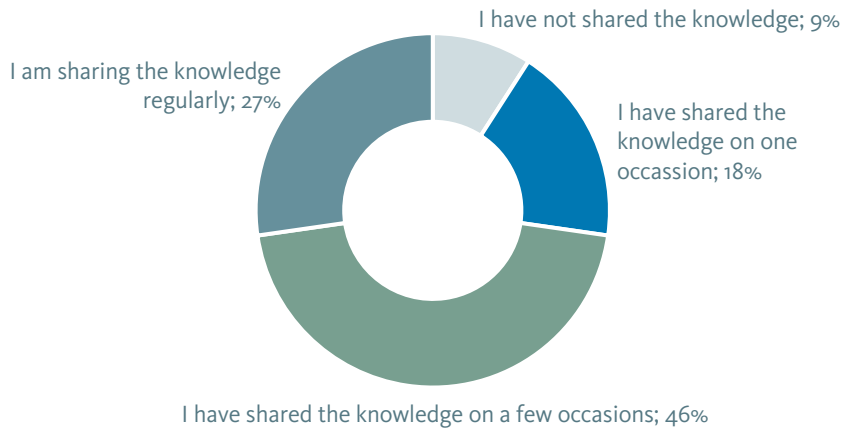
‘We call upon our fellow decision makers to leverage all available skills, experience, and leadership to improve cooperation across the Basin and achieve our shared goals of sustainable water management and development.’

Excerpt from the 2020 Network Joint Statement

Not long after the third Women in Water Diplomacy Forum, alongside all other aspects of our global society, **the Network was forced to dramatically adapt and evolve in the context of a global pandemic** and the resulting limitations for continued face to face Network engagement. The SWP programme adopted a strategy of **enhanced monitoring and evaluation, enhanced communications, and online adaptation** across all its engagement areas – including the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Lessons learned in adapting water diplomacy processes to online and hybrid dialogue platforms, including from the Women in Water Diplomacy Network, were published by ICWC experts Elizabeth A. Yaari and Dr Martina Klimes in the Wilson Center’s New Security Beat ‘[Digital Water Diplomacy: Keeping Water Dialogues Afloat](#)’ (April 2020), and Rural 21: The International Journal for Rural Development ‘[Water – a shared resource requiring inclusive water diplomacy](#)’ (March 2020).

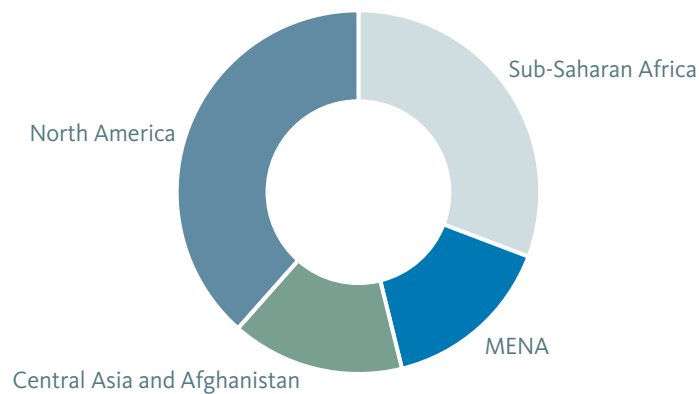
To better understand the needs and priorities of the Network members in this turbulent period, **SIWI undertook an internal assessment of the Women in Water Diplomacy in the Nile Network in April 2020** to capture aggregate outcomes and feed into the Network’s ongoing engagement strategy. The results of this three-year assessment built directly on the annual workshop assessments and contributed to the design of ongoing activities. Specifically, Network water professionals voiced their interest in expanding activities and linking to other related initiatives in Africa and globally, continuing capacity building, and enhancing inter-basin learning, national coordination, and inter-generational knowledge exchange. Moreover, responses indicated that member’s ongoing engagement in the Women in Water Diplomacy Network is relevant and applicable to their professional work. Nearly all respondents indicating that they were using knowledge gained from their participation in network activities, with more than half indicating that they use the information ‘regularly.’ Moreover, **a near complete plurality of respondents indicated that the Women in Water Diplomacy Network contributes to improved transboundary water cooperation at the country level; at the sub basin level; and at the basin level.** This three-year internal assessment further validated several of the prioritized actions including the need for continued capacity building, enhancing coordination of relevant Ministries at the national level, leveraging sub-basin cooperation

opportunities, and learning from experiences in other basins. The results of the assessment were integrated into the design of the network’s engagement strategy.



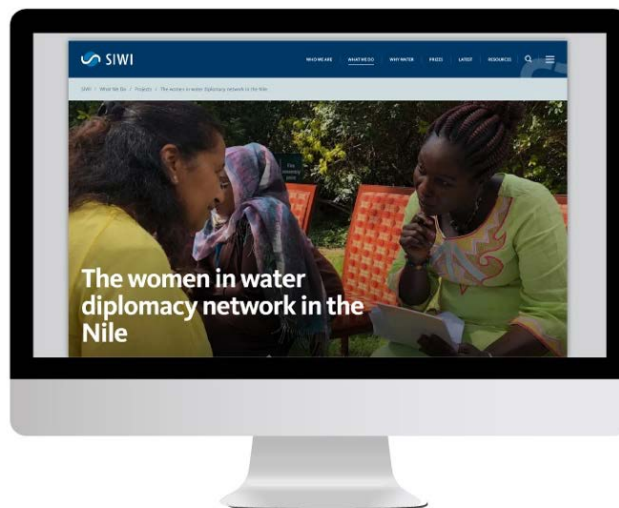
How participant knowledge, gained from engagement within the Women in Water Diplomacy Network, was shared with colleagues and professional networks, April 2020.

To better support online adaptation and to maintain momentum throughout engagements in the Nile, as well as other regions including the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Central Asia & Afghanistan, **SWP initiated an online webinar series for basin partners in April 2020**. The SWP online experience exchange webinars featured key practitioners, researchers, decision makers and experts from a variety of different transboundary basins addressing trends and key topics in water diplomacy. On **June 15, 2020 SWP hosted its second webinar** in this series with focus on enhancing inter-ministerial coordination for improved transboundary cooperation. Women in Water Diplomacy Network member and Head of External Cooperation in the Nile Water Sector, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation in Egypt, Dr. Tahani Sileet shared insights as a panelist in the webinar alongside Dr Asadullah Meelad, National Transboundary Water Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan. The webinar series succeeded in attracting participants from a variety of basins – enabling cross basin knowledge and experience exchange.



June 15, 2020 webinar participant distribution by region.

Without the ability to meet regularly, enhancing communications was key to maintain momentum in the Network. In August 2020, SIWI released the [first issue of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network Newsletter](#). The network newsletter aimed to provide network members and other stakeholders with key information, announcements, opportunities for further engagement, as well as timely updates from network members. In parallel, SIWI launched the **Women in Water Diplomacy Network webpage** sharing information about the network, short biographies of network members, key resources, and knowledge products.

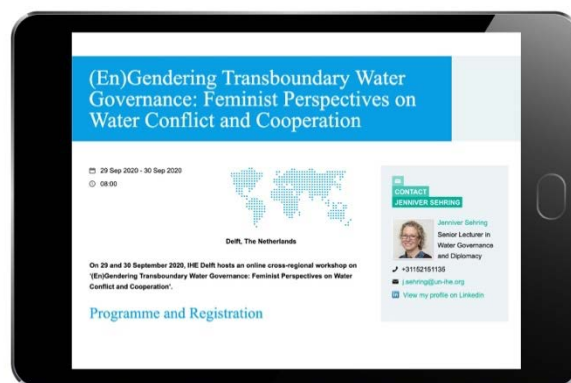


Homepage of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile.

**At the invitation of IHE Delft, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network had the opportunity to share experience during the September 29-30, 2020 online conference ‘(En)Gendering Transboundary Water Governance.’**

The workshop brought together researchers and practitioners to shed light on the often-hidden gender dynamics of water conflict and cooperation at transboundary level and on the implicit assumptions that guide research as well as policies. SIWI hosted the session *‘Experiences of the Women in Water Diplomacy in the Nile’* which included a brief introduction to the Network by Elizabeth A. Yaari followed by a panel discussion including

Network members’  
 Ambassador Nadia Gefoun  
 (Sudan) and Yodit Balcha  
 (Ethiopia), moderated by  
 SIWI’s Alexandra Said. The  
 session was an opportunity to  
 discuss the significance of all  
 female networks, as well as the  
 challenges and opportunities  
 faced by women as decision-  
 makers in the Nile Basin.



(En)Gendering Transboundary Water Governance webinar

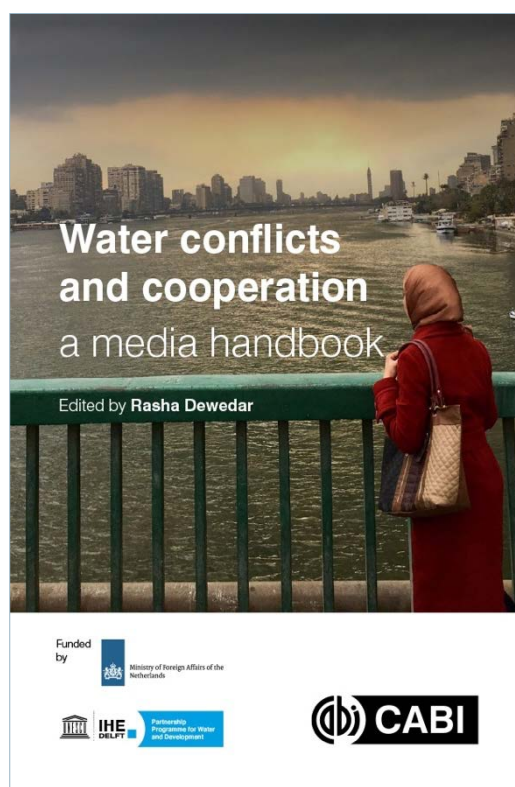
Ambassador Gefoun (Sudan) voiced *‘Power is taken, not given. You must not sit and wait for people to come and give you something, you have to fight for it!’*, urging women to take up space in leadership positions. Yodit Balcha (Ethiopia) expressed her views that, although there are still many obstacles to women’s equal participation, *‘there are many promising developments that pave the way for a more effective role of women in decision-making’*, indicating a change in societal perceptions on who is *‘fit’* for leadership and high-level decision-making.

As part of SIWI’s ongoing research into the barriers and opportunities to enhance women’s roles in water diplomacy processes, SIWI’s Alexandra Said and Dr Phillia Restiani developed a baseline study, with Dr Jenniver Sehring and Rozemarijn ter Horst from IHE Delft, to get a better understanding of the role gender plays in decision-making in transboundary water management of the Nile Basin. The objective was to investigate similarities and differences in the gendered perceptions of women’s roles in water diplomacy through comparison of three basins from three continents. The focus basins included the Chu-Talas Basin in Central Asia conducted by Dr Jenniver Sehring, the Rhine Basin conducted by Rozemarijn ter Horst and the Nile Basin conducted by Alexandra Said. Initial findings from this research were presented during a second session at the during the IHE Delft (En)Gendering Transboundary Water Governance conference. During the session, Alexandra Said shared insights from a series of in-depth interviews with Nile Basin stakeholders focused on barriers to women’s participation around the decision-making table in Nile Basin negotiations. This included how the experts experience gender as a factor in transboundary water management, as well as which factors enable women to reach high-level decision-making positions. The findings will be published in *‘The Role of Gender in the Transboundary Water Management of the Nile Basin’* in the book **Gender dynamics in transboundary water governance: Feminist Perspectives on Water Conflict and Cooperation** edited by Dr Jenniver Sehring, Rozemarijn ter Horst and Dr Margreet Zwarteveen (to be released in 2022).

**On December 7, 2020, the SWP programme in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) hosted a digital experience exchange on ‘participating in and facilitating dialogue and decision-making processes’ between the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile and the regional women mediators networks the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) and Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC).** The purpose of the exchange was to create an opportunity for these networks to meet and to learn from each other through shared experiences. The meeting was initiated as response to the Women in Water Diplomacy’s request for experience exchange with mediators from the Swedish Women’s Mediation Network. The meeting gathered twenty-seven women with experience in dialogue and decision-making processes as mediators, negotiators or civil servants. The participants came from a number of countries, including Egypt, Kenya, Norway, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. SIWI’s Elizabeth A. Yaari and FBA’s Anna Möller-Loswick opened the meeting by

introducing the Women in Water Diplomacy in the Nile Network and the Swedish Women's Mediation Network. This was followed by opening reflections from Ambassador Nadia Gefoun, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sudan, and an opening response by Ambassador Charlotta Sparre, Director of at Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa. Thereafter, participants took part in small group discussions on the main challenges faced in dialogue- and decision-making processes in their respective contexts and key lessons learned; mechanisms for women's participation in these processes; and differences between state-led vs. civil society-led networks. Discussion groups were chaired by Nile Network members Gladys Wekesa, the Director of Transboundary Water Resources in the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation in Kenya; Jacqueline Nyirakamana, Transboundary Water Resources Initiative Specialist at Rwanda's Ministry of Environment and then Chair of the Nile Basin Initiative's Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC); and Swedish Ambassador Helena Gröndahl Rietz respectively.

In December 2020, SIWI's Alexandra Said co-authored a new article highlighting the important role that media plays in shedding light on the lack of inclusion of women in water diplomacy processes. The article, '*Reporting on Water Diplomacy: Does Gender Matter*' was co-authored with IHE Delft's Dr Jenniver Sehring and Rozemarijn ter Horst and published in the open access ebook [Water Conflicts and Cooperation: A Media Handbook](#) edited by Rasha Dewedar and coordinated by [SciDev.Net](#) under the Open Water Diplomacy Lab project. The Handbook was designed for journalists and other professionals working on science communication in the field of water, peace, and cooperation and draws upon the experience of journalists active in [SIWI's Eastern Nile Journalist Network](#). A [special podcast featuring Alexandra Said](#) focused on the importance of gender in transboundary water governance was also released by SciDev.Net.

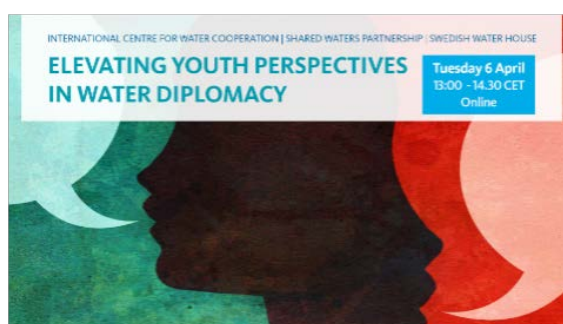
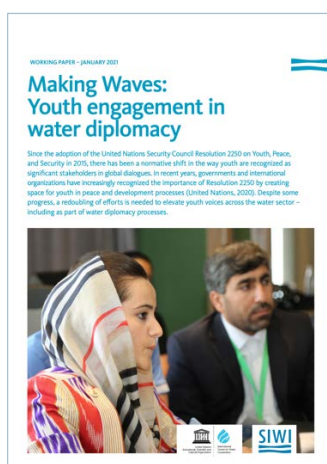




## Development during 2021

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network kicked off 2021 with a Network Townhall meeting on International Women's Day on March 8, 2021 and the second edition of the Network Newsletter (see [March 2021 Network Newsletter](#)). The International Women's Day Network Townhall served as an opportunity to share updates, input into upcoming Network activities and meet the new members and the SIWI Process Support Team. The Network was keen to continue the tradition of getting together on this important day for the global community in years to come.

On April 6, 2021, SIWI's International Centre for Water Cooperation hosted a webinar together with the release of a new report '[Making Waves: Youth Engagement in Water Diplomacy](#)' by Viktor Sundman, Isabelle Dadvar and Elizabeth A. Yaari and featuring several case studies focused on young professional engagement in water diplomacy processes in the Nile, the Middle East, and Central Asia and Afghanistan. Yodit Balcha, Senior Climate Change Adaptation Advisor at the Ministry of Water, Irrigation, and Energy in Ethiopia represented the Women in Water Diplomacy Network as keynote speaker during the webinar which explored the benefits and opportunities of inclusive transboundary governance with a focus on youth perspectives.



Youth Engagement in Water Diplomacy report and webinar, from April 2021.

**‘The Women in Water Diplomacy Network provides women with a space where we can learn and share experience about water governance and transboundary cooperation issues. It is very empowering to be part of this Network.’**

Yodit Balcha, on the key role of networking for professional development.

In May 2021 members and representatives of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile were invited by the [Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Centre for Peace Mediation \(CPM\)](#) to engage in an experience exchange session with the CPM supported Finnish Water Diplomacy Network and the Finnish members of the Nordic Women Mediator Network. This activity was requested following the valuable exchange between the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile and the [Nordic Women Mediator's Network](#) convened in December 2020. The engagement and experience exchange enabled practical knowledge exchange around the intersection of water diplomacy, gender equality, and women's leadership in decision making with a focus on fragile or conflict sensitive regions, elevating lessons learned and opportunities for engagement. The meeting was attended by more than forty participants including Finnish diplomats largely supporting states in the Nile Basin, the Mekong Basin, and other fragile contexts including Afghanistan, as well as experts and development practitioners invited by the CPM in addition to representatives and members of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile. This event was envisioned as a starting point for ongoing experience exchange, dialogue, and collaboration with the CPM and other expert networks related to water diplomacy and mediation.

'To get ahead and to innovate in our work, professionals and experts need to be surrounded by a network of supporters for inspiration and sharing. This is an important value of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile Basin. We derive energy and support from each other since each member comes from different technical backgrounds, bringing different traditions, perspectives and social norms. This Network, from my perspective, offers social support and friendship, and provides opportunity of mutual benefits that can in itself be empowering. Opportunities to build long-term professional connections and strategic engagements with other regional and international networks such as Centre for Peace Mediation, the Nordic Women Mediators and Finnish Water Diplomacy Network, offers women water diplomacy professionals important support and confidence particular in the fields of negotiations, communications, and decision making, all of which contribute to career success.'

Nile Network member Dr Muna Musnad, Water Chair, UNESCO, reflecting on the experience exchange session.

In June 2021, SIWI, together with the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#) and the [Regional Environment Centre for Central Asia \(CAREC\)](#), launched a new regional Network in Central Asia and Afghanistan, that draws, in part, from the experience and lessons learned of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile Network. This new collaboration will enable experience exchange and peer to peer learning between members of the Nile Network and the new Central Asia-Afghanistan Network.



Certificate of Membership for the new Central Asia and Afghanistan Network.

Later in June 2021, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile convened two back-to-back online experience exchange and joint learning opportunities for members and supporters. The events were designed to respond to specific requests from members for advanced training and discussion on key themes in water diplomacy including disinformation, information influence and communication resilience, and third-party involvement in water diplomacy processes respectively. The two-day event was attended by approximately twenty Network members including participating representatives from Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, and Rwanda, including several first-time participants. Additionally, the online workshop sessions were joined by leading experts, diplomats, and former and current officials including representatives from Eswatini, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Finland, Austria, and Sweden. For the first time in the history of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile, several male experts were intentionally engaged in the workshop as part of the network's strategy to join forces with male champions of gender equality and women's leadership in its activities. Each day of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network Workshop series was designed to make space for informal dialogue and discussion amongst participants, advance network activities and engagements, elevate a key idea or topic, engage in two-way learning around the idea or topic, and assess joint learning through M&E.

Drawing in large part on experience with supporting the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile since 2017, SIWI's Elizabeth A. Yaari joined Kerry Schneider as part of the 2021 Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) Jury for the 2021 Nile Media Awards - bringing focus to women's leadership and gender equality in Nile regional journalism. To that aim, SIWI provided targeted support to the new 'Best Entry from a Female Journalist' award category and mainstreamed input through the development and inclusion of award criteria for all categories which highlighted understanding that the presence of women and men as subjects of the media is a matter of social recognition, status and power. SIWI and all the partners of the Nile Media Awards were thrilled with the huge increase in submissions from female journalists covering key topics such as climate change impacts, oil politics, geopolitics, human security and public health. The final award ceremony was held in a hybrid configuration in Ethiopia. SIWI congratulates all of the winners - with a special congratulations to Egyptian journalist Rehab Abdalmohsen for her double award for both the Best Digital Entry and Best Entry from a Female Journalist 'for her article entitled ['Ethiopia dam filling impact 'limited' – if no drought'](#) originally published in July 2020.



Rehab Abdalmohsen during the Nile Media Awards ceremony. Image by NBI / Elizabeth Agiro.

SIWI and the SIWI hosted UNESCO Category II International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC) were pleased to join the 2021 Cairo Water Week and share in promoting the numerous events showcasing members of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network at the October 2021 Cairo Water Week on [social media platforms](#). Dr Martina Klimes (SIWI) spoke during the [Opening Plenary](#), whilst other network members presented sessions. Prof. Karima Attia, Professor emeritus at the Nile Research Institute and Former Director of the Water Resources Research Institute in Egypt, shared her new research during the session '[Impact of Increased Flash Flood Frequency and Their Corresponding Sedimentation on The Water Supply Intakes](#)'. Dr Tahani Sileet, Head of the Central Department for External



Prof. Karima Attia at Cairo Water Week.

Cooperation in the Nile Water Sector, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation in Egypt, shared her experience and knowledge related to the Nile Basin wide VICMED project as part of the '[VICMED Project Feasibility Study \(Phase 2\) Donors' Round Table MWRI](#)' session. Dr Muna Musnad, UNESCO Water Chair at Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan and ICWC Board Member, shared her research findings and recommendations in the SIWI co-convened session '[Just Climate Adaptation for Resilience in Agriculture and Food Security in a Transboundary Perspective](#).'



E-banner for the co-hosted food security Cairo World Water Week event.

**On October 20, 2021, SIWI convened a Network Skills Building Workshop for the members of the Network.** This event was conceived as a follow-up to the advanced training and discussion held on disinformation, information influence and communication resilience in June 2021. Furthermore, the workshop responded to specific requests from Network members to be equipped to effectively engage on social media platforms with focus on LinkedIn for professional networking and knowledge exchange. This Network event was made possible through the partnership and engagement of SIWI's Communication team experts Cécile Pillon Hue, Hawra Daoud, and Radhika Gupta who were able to provide tailored background and guidance on how Network members could utilize online professional networking sites to elevate and share their experience and expertise in water diplomacy.

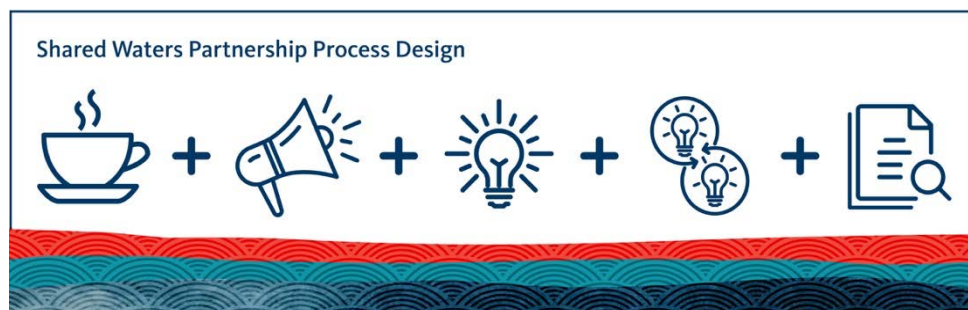


Screenshot from the LinkedIn for professional networking workshop.

The skills building session was attended by Network members, with representatives from, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda, as well as supporters from South Africa and Eswatini. While this activity was originally

conceived to have particular appeal to the young professionals in the Network – the SIWI process support team was pleased with the broad turnout of some of the Network’s most senior representatives as well.

This Women in Water Diplomacy Network Skills Building Workshop followed the SWP dialogue process design. Beginning with a half hour of informal discussion and check-ins for Network members; followed by Network announcements; information session; dialogues and experience exchange; and monitoring and evaluation. Differing from most activities in the Women in Water Diplomacy Network engagement to date, this session was not held under the Chatham House Rule and it was recorded to enable participants who were unable to attend live due to schedule conflicts or the inability to stream live video due to data/energy restrictions.



Shared Waters Partnership Process Design, by Elizabeth A. Yaari 2020.

**In September 2021, SIWI launched the new Network Leadership Council initiative** to continue efforts towards a co-design approach with members in strategy and engagement design, implementation, monitoring, and representation. Network members had the chance to comment on the Council’s concept and share feedback in a survey as well as informally in the Network WhatsApp group and in dialogues with SIWI. The initiative received strong support from the members in the post engagement assessment, and details regarding the size and composition of the Council were developed. The members indicated in the consultation process a preference for a Council made up of 5-6 members from Nile Basin states and 1-2 members from outside the Basin, in addition to the SIWI support team. Following an open call for self-nominations across the Network and collection of expressions of interest from Network Members in alignment with the criteria communicated to the members in the concept note, **the first Women in Water Diplomacy Network Council was identified and announced to the entire Network in November 2021** to include:

- **Yodit Balcha**, Senior Climate Change Adaptation Advisor at the Ministry of Water and Energy (Ethiopia)

- **Jacqueline Nyirakamana**, Chair of the Nile -Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Member, Transboundary Water Resources Cooperation Specialist, Ministry of Environment (Rwanda)
- **Theresa Khakasa Wasike**, Director of Administration, Ministry of Water (Kenya)
- **Dr Tahani Sileet**, Head of the Central Department for External Cooperation in the Nile Water Sector, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (Egypt)
- **Tumaini Mwamyalla**, National Desk/ Focal Officer for the Nile Basin Initiative, Ministry of Water (Tanzania)
- **Dr Muna Musnad**, UNESCO Chair in Water Resources-Omdurman Islamic University, International Center for Water Cooperation (ICWC) Board Member (Sudan)
- **Dr Zodwa Dlamini**, Independent Consultant and Former Chief Delegate and Permanent Representative on the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission (South Africa)
- **Nompumelelo Ntshalintshali-Motsa**, Africa Region Coordinator for the Sanitation and Water for All, hosted by AMCOW (Eswatini) in addition to members of the SIWI process support team.



The eight members of the new Network Leadership Council.

With this milestone launch of the Leadership Council, SIWI convened [the first Council meeting December 2021 and launched the Women in Water Diplomacy Nile and Beyond Global Strategy](#) with a consultation event hosted by the Embassy of Sweden in South Africa.

Since its inception, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network has continued to evolve and take shape. In parallel, representatives of other basin communities have turned to SIWI and the Network for advice and experience exchange as well as

inspiration for their own processes focused on the intersection of gender equality, women's leadership and transboundary water/resource management. The SIWI-OSCE-CAREC Women, Water Management and Conflict Prevention process in Central Asia and Afghanistan was launched in 2021 with direct inspiration from the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and SIWI has long supported dialogue with similar process in other regions. Further requests, inquiries and dialogues have been carried out with a number of other African basin or country representatives interested in exploring opportunities to develop a community of practice for women water diplomates in their regions/basins drawing upon the experience of the Network's development. [The Women in Water Diplomacy: Nile and Beyond Global Strategy](#) aims to both continue to support of women water diplomats in the Nile as well as develop new communities of practice beyond the Nile with initial focus on Africa. Consultations and partnership dialogue opportunities are planned throughout 2022 beginning with the second partnership consultation meeting on International Women's Day and the launch of the new 'Women in Water Diplomacy: Nile and Beyond' strategy with partners at the August 2022 World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden.





## Thank you and acknowledgements

SIWI is grateful to the many amazing participants, members and supporters who have enriched all of the engagements of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network to date. Further thanks are due to the many outstanding former SIWI staff members who have played a role in the inception, development and evolution of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and who contributed to the many important engagements undertaken to date as described in this report including **Dr Therese Sjömander Magnusson**, **Dr Marian J. Neal**, **Alexandra Said**, and **Maria Vink**. As well as our Shared Waters Partnership teammates **Kerry Schneider** and **Dr Martina Klimes** and our current Women in Water Diplomacy Process support team including **Elizabeth A. Yaari**, **Julienne Ndjiki**, **Katie Goldie-Ryder**, **Xanani Baloyi**, **Kasonde Mulenga** and **Anton Earle**.

We would also like to thank our key partners including the Environmental Law Institute's **Jessica Troell** and IHE Delft's **Dr Jenniver Sehring** for their early and long-lasting partnership in these engagements. As well as OSCE's **Sogol Jafarzadeh** and **Saule Ospanova** for their leadership in the development of the Women in Water Management Network in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Women in Water Diplomacy Network membership is for life!

## Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

SIWI's Shared Water Partnership programme was founded in 2010 as a platform to improve cooperation over shared waters in regions where water is, or may become, a source of conflict or where water can serve as a catalyst for peace. The overall objective of the SWP is peaceful cooperation between basin states sharing transboundary water sources. The SWP is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the United States, the Netherlands and UNDP. For more information on the Shared Waters Partnership programme please visit: <https://www.siw.org/what-we-do/shared-waters-partnership/>

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network has been a core engagement of the Shared Waters Partnership programme since 2017 with focus on the Nile Basin. The Network serves as a community of practice, promoting and supporting women's participation in high-level water diplomacy processes. For more information about the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and the new Women in Water Diplomacy Nile and Beyond Strategy please visit: <https://siwi.org/swp-women-in-water-diplomacy-network/>

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