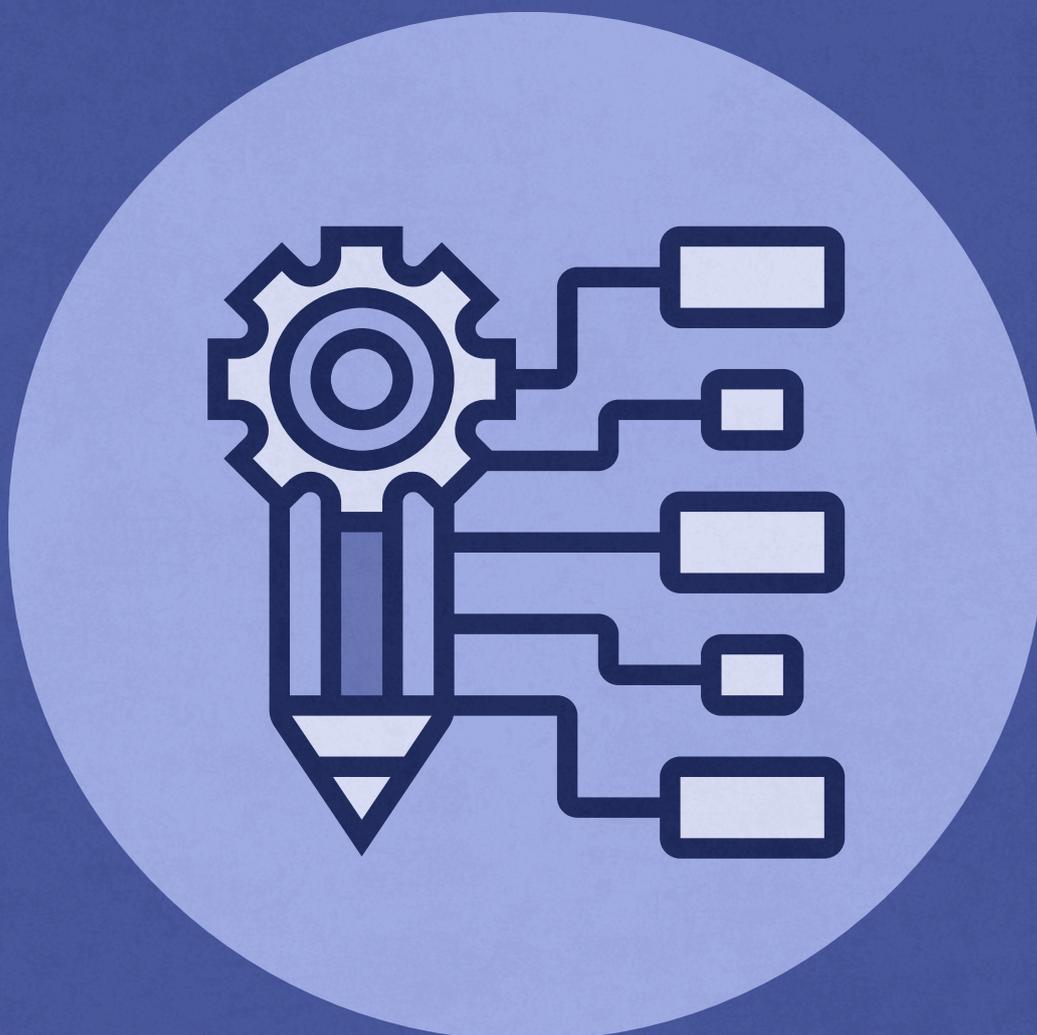




**MALE CHAMPIONS**  
FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



# Action Plan

Male Champions for Women's Empowerment in  
Transboundary Water Management in Sub-Saharan Africa

# MCWE Action Plan

## About the Male Champions for Women's Empowerment

As part of its commitment to advancing gender equality within the transboundary water context, the Cooperation for International Waters in Africa (CIWA) believes the challenges that women face in the water sector are linked to deep-rooted patriarchal norms including male domination. This limits women's voices and participation in decision making and program development and implementation. For CIWA, women's empowerment within a transformational framework requires the promotion of gender equality at all levels and sectors of influence. It involves a shift in gender relations by engaging with all stakeholders, some of whom may be resistant to changing social norms, and by identifying opportunities to transform power relationships that can limit women's empowerment and equal participation.

Because men are often the key stakeholders, influencers, and decision makers in water institutions and local organizations, CIWA established the Male Champions for Women's Empowerment (MCWE)<sup>1</sup> in 2023 to work directly with men in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to identify ways to apply their power and influence to overcome gender inequalities and effect positive change for women working in water resources management. As a collective platform, the MCWE seeks to facilitate actions that Male Champions can take to promote women's empowerment at the continental, regional, national, and local levels within the transboundary water sphere. The MCWE will work with Male Champions individually and collectively through a variety of actions (listed below) to advance women's empowerment within the institutional and program context of transboundary water resources management.

### The MCWE focuses on facilitating the efforts of Male Champions to:

- Identify concrete ways to shift cultural norms that reinforce the perception that water resources management is solely a male domain,
- Address barriers that women face to participating in transboundary water management,
- Advance individual and institutional commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), and
- Catalyze efforts to individually and collectively tackle gender inequalities.

## The Male Champions for Women's Empowerment Action Plan

CIWA developed the MCWE Action Plan in consultation with Male Champions to guide their efforts to promote equal opportunities for women's empowerment by enabling them to find concrete ways to address obstacles to women's representation and participation in the transboundary water sphere.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Male Champions for Women's Empowerment was previously named the Male Champions Forum.

## Goal

The MCWE works with Male Champions to increase support for gender equality and women's empowerment in transboundary water institutions and programs in SSA to improve outcomes associated with the sustainable and equitable management of transboundary water resources.

## Objectives

Engage Male Champions to individually and collectively take actions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in transboundary water institutions and programs in SSA. Specific objectives include:

1. Increase awareness about the critical role that men can play in championing gender equality in the transboundary water context,
2. Identify actions and initiatives that Male Champions can take to advance gender equality in transboundary institutions, and
3. Facilitate opportunities for Male Champions to take individual and collective actions to create opportunities for women to play a greater role in transboundary water institutions and projects including as leaders and decision makers.

## Actions include:

Work with Male Champions to enable them to act individually and collectively through their roles in transboundary water programs and institutions to:

### Short Term

- Promote the merits and importance of women's equal participation and empowerment,
- Increase awareness about the key role men can play in championing gender equality,
- Undertake actions and organize initiatives to advance women's empowerment,
- Mobilize other stakeholders to champion GEWE, and
- Document and share experiences about the lessons learned, actions, and results of the MCWE.

### Long Term

- Secure commitments from key decision makers to address gender inequalities,
- Increase the number of women participating in decision making in transboundary basins,
- Facilitate the creation of conditions to enable women to participate as equals, and
- Improve gender relations and attitudes about women's role in transboundary water fora.

## Key Considerations

At an MCWE meeting held in Maseru, Lesotho in October 2024, Male Champions identified the following considerations as part of a review of possible actions that the MCWE could take:

**Operating at Multiple Levels:** Male Champions underscored that institutional problems around gender inequality often start at the national level and that, therefore, they need to identify existing national policies and commitments to gender equality, encourage the development of new ones, and consider how to hold relevant national ministries and institutions accountable for improving women's participation and empowerment. This is critical to enabling the MCWE and CIWA to be effective in promoting gender equality at the regional river basin level.

**Minimizing Attrition:** Ensuring that a core group of Male Champions remains active and engaged with the MCWE is key to success. While recruitment should be open to multiple levels within an organization, it is important to consider the profile of candidates to join the initiative. This includes recognizing that water resources staff, particularly those at the senior level, often have multiple commitments that can limit their ability to participate on a regular basis. In addition, while it is key that applicants have, or previously had, direct involvement with institutions linked to the transboundary water sector, applicants from diverse backgrounds including academia, the private sector, and civil society should be considered as potential MCWE candidates.

**Addressing Sustainability:** The men currently participating in the MCWE raised concerns about the sustainability of the initiative including challenges with the recruitment and retention of Male Champions. They recommended that they and CIWA review the issue of sustainability with the possibility of developing a sustainability plan.

**Capturing Women's Perspectives:** MCWE actions should build upon evidence gathered from women about what they need and believe are appropriate actions that men should take. CIWA and the Male Champions should organize consultations and learning events and review relevant literature to track, monitor, and document what women say are the barriers they face and support they need from men in the workplace.

## Actions: Short and Long Term

The following are individual and collective actions that Male Champions agreed should be taken over the short and long term. Indicators are noted in red and are documented in a separate results framework.

### Short-term actions:

**Recruitment of New Male Champions:** Male Champions will take steps to recruit other men to join the initiative by hosting their own learning events and participating in collective events organized by CIWA and the MCWE.

- Number of new Male Champions recruited from river basin organizations, regional institutions, and more broadly

**Communications about the MCWE:** CIWA will work with the Male Champions to develop a communications campaign to more effectively inform key audiences about the MCWE and the actions it is taking. Suggestions include writing articles about the MCWE and developing communications materials targeted to prospective Male Champions, particularly through social media, which document the experiences of Male Champions in dealing with challenges and responding with solutions.

- Number of social media postings about the MCWE
- Number of communications documents developed to promote the MCWE

**Development of a Group Pledge:** CIWA will develop a group pledge in consultation with the Male Champions. The group pledge will be posted along with the individual pledges on the MCWE page on the CIWA website to hold Male Champions accountable for their collective commitments to promoting women's empowerment by undertaking concrete actions.

- Group pledge developed by Male Champions

**Organization of Special Events:** CIWA and Male Champions will organize annual special activities such as learning events to raise awareness, engage external stakeholders with the MCWE, and share information that is relevant and useful for the men to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

- Number of special events hosted by the MCWE
- Number of men and women who participate in MCWE special events

**Promotion of the MCWE:** Male Champions will identify meetings that are appropriate for them to participate in as speakers about the MCWE to promote the initiative. They will also look for other opportunities such as hosting side events about the MCWE at conferences, drafting documents, and sharing social media posts.

- Number of speaking engagements where Male Champions have referenced or promoted the MCWE
- Number of side events about the MCWE organized by Male Champions
- Number of public references to the MCWE linked to promotional efforts of Male Champions

**Capacity Building of Male Champions:** Male Champions need to have sufficient understanding of, and capacity to, promote gender equality and women's empowerment to play their role effectively. CIWA will provide online training and work with Male Champions to identify other learning events to enable them to effectively promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

- Number of online courses or learning events offered to the MCWE
- Number of male and female participants in online courses or learning events

## Long-term actions

**Conduct research to capture women's perspectives:** It is important to ensure that the basis for the interventions of Male Champions draws upon sound evidence that reflects the perspectives of women regarding the challenges they face and the responses they need to create more equitable working conditions, institutions, and programs. CIWA will conduct primary and secondary research to gather data and assess the roles women play, the challenges and gaps

they face in becoming leaders and decision makers, and the appropriate strategies and roles that Male Champions can adopt and play.

- Number of documents or information pieces developed that capture the perspectives of women on the challenges they face and responses that Male Champions can adopt to promote women's empowerment and overcome gender inequalities

**Identification of Partnerships:** Partnering with organizations and programs such as the Women in Water Diplomacy Network (WWDN) and Equal Aqua offer positive ways to gather the perspectives of women, reach a broader audience, and expand the scope and breadth of the MCWE. CIWA will work with Male Champions to identify and explore partnerships that the MCWE could establish. Consideration will need to be given to the level of engagement and management of expectations with potential partners.

- Number of partnerships identified and established with the MCWE

**Networking and Alliance Building:** Male Champions will look for opportunities for networking and alliance building over the longer term (subject to available financial and technical resources).

- Number of networks and alliances developed

**Creation of Practical Platforms:** CIWA will consider creating platforms such as Communities of Practice to facilitate the exchange of ideas about the role men can play to address gender inequalities and to empower women.

- Number of platforms for the MCWE created