



**MALE CHAMPIONS
FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**



International
Women's Day



GWSP
GLOBAL WATER
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EQUAL
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Workshop Summary

March 18, 2025

Policies and Strategies for Retaining Women in Water Jobs



HOSTED BY
WORLD BANK GROUP
Water

Workshop Summary: Policies and Strategies for Retaining Women in Water Jobs



WATER ROUND TABLES

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING WOMEN IN WATER JOBS

 Tuesday
 March 18, 2025

 90 minutes
 09:00 Washington DC | 14:00 Lagos
 15:00 Johannesburg | 16:00 Nairobi








Co-organized by the Equal Aqua Platform and the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA), the workshop aimed to provide water institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with an opportunity to explore and exchange knowledge on barriers and potential solutions to retaining women in the water workforce. Attended by 80 participants, representing water institutions from English-speaking SSA, it also sought to equip CIWA's Male Champions for Women's Empowerment, with the knowledge and tools to support their efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace.

[Anders Jagerskog](#), Program Manager for CIWA, delivered opening remarks, emphasizing the underrepresentation of women in the water sector. He highlighted the benefits of equal representation, including improved organizational outcomes, innovation, and customer satisfaction. He also stressed the importance of creating female-friendly workplaces to retain women. He highlighted the specific role that men can play in championing these efforts in a male-dominated sector. He connected this to the rationale for CIWA to establish the Male Champions for Women's Empowerment as a strategic way to work directly with men to use their power and influence to effect positive change for women within the transboundary water context.

This was followed by a presentation by [Talajeh Livani](#), World Bank Social Development Specialist and Equal Aqua Task Team Leader. She shared some statistics on women's work in Sub-Saharan African, comparing this to the global data. She also described the Equal Aqua career development framework and the main barriers that women face in entering, staying, and growing in their water jobs. [Donald Kasongi](#), former Secretary General of the Nile Basin Discourse, shared the objectives and activities of the CIWA's Male Champions for Women's Empowerment initiative. Stressing the critical need to engage men in the promotion of women's empowerment, he clarified that CIWA's Male Champions are motivated by a desire to support and promote gender equality in their institutions including by taking steps to promote female-friendly workplaces.

Subsequently, participants were divided into breakout rooms to share experiences and discuss effective strategies and interventions for creating women- and family-friendly workplaces. Following the breakout groups which were facilitated by representatives from the World Bank Equal Aqua, Utility of the Future, and NewIBNET programs), rapporteurs, represented by Male Champions from CIWA's Male Champions for Women's Empowerment shared the main strategies discussed in each of the three groups. To conclude this section, [Ellen Hagerman](#), Senior Gender and Social Inclusion Expert for the CIWA Program, presented a series of concrete steps and solutions to support women's retention in the water workplace, focusing on three main areas discussed in the breakout groups.

1. **Women-Friendly Policies:** These include zero-tolerance policies on sexual harassment, inclusive hiring practices, and access to specialized services. Challenges such as resistance to change and budget constraints can be mitigated by gaining leadership buy-in and demonstrating long-term benefits, providing staff training on policy expectations and investing in safety infrastructure. To be effective, policies need to clearly define gender-sensitive behaviour, communicate clear procedures, provide support resources and monitor and report on progress.
2. **Measures to create respectful work environments:** Actions to implement improvements in the workspace and organizational culture included training targeted to leadership on how to create respectful environments, establishment of confidential reporting mechanisms, education on conscious use of gender-sensitive language, and training to develop strategies to identify and address gender biases in the workplace.
3. **Family-friendly policies and practices:** Implementing family-friendly policies and practices enables staff to balance their work commitments with their family responsibilities. It can include parental leave, childcare services, lactation rooms at the workplace, flexible work schedules, all of which require the commitment of senior management to ensure their sustainability.

The session included a Q&A segment facilitated by [Sarah Keener](#), World Bank Senior Social Development Specialist, where participants had the opportunity to share viewpoints and ask questions for a deeper understanding of the challenges and potential solutions.

Finally, [Francis Ghesquiere](#), Manager for the World Bank Water Unit in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, delivered closing remarks, emphasizing the importance of fostering a conducive work environment for both women and men in water institutions. He highlighted the need for continued dialogue and collaboration on this important agenda and thanked participants for their contributions.

This session was part of the World Bank Water Department Roundtable Series, a joint initiative developed by Equal Aqua, New IBNET and Utility of the Future programs. The series offers learning and knowledge exchange opportunities for water and sanitation operators, their associations, other water institutions, academics, researchers, and development practitioners.