

Women and Water: On the frontline of climate change

A Joint Statement for COP27



The world cannot wait. Progress on SDG 6 is much too slow. In the last two decades access to safe drinking water in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, has increased by only 13% and progress on safe sanitation access is still slower at close to 7% ([WHO/UNICEF, 2022](#)). Long-standing water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) inequalities are now further exacerbated by climate change. We must address water insecurity and WASH inequalities to adapt and reduce the impacts of climate change now.

Climate change is not equally felt across populations with the most vulnerable being disproportionately affected. We already see the impacts in headlines every day. The most vulnerable people and communities must have their voices heard in both locally led decision making and global climate finance dialogues to ensure inclusion and build resilience to extreme weather events and slow onset changes in water resources impacting daily life.

Women are often depicted as victims of climate induced water insecurity, yet they are also proactive adaptation actors ([Caretta et al, 2022](#)). It is essential we collectively address the profoundly gendered coping responses and adaptation mechanisms to climate change and ensure water security and WASH are prioritized in gender transformative climate finance and response mechanisms.

We call upon decision-makers at all levels to prioritize five action areas to ensure gender transformative climate finance includes water, sanitation, and hygiene as ‘low regrets’ adaptation measures to confront climate change:

- I. The data and evidence are clear:** Progress on SDG 6 must be accelerated beyond the current rate to achieve targets by 2030 and to prevent climate change from inhibiting future progress. The case for adequate gender responsive climate finance to meet the foundational WASH and water security is clear: the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa estimates the gap in regional WASH infrastructure investment to be over US\$22 billion/year ([ICA, 2018](#)). More and better gender disaggregated data is needed to further demonstrate the realities across gender, WASH, and climate and to inform priorities of finance and resource allocations.

II. Voice and leadership of women is essential: The critical role of women as stewards of water and proactive adaptation actors must be encompassed at all levels of decision-making, local to global, to ensure no one is left behind. It is critical for women, particularly Indigenous women, to have a voice in platforms of power, to elevate women's expertise and presence on the frontline of water security and climate change as a pathway to inform gender-responsive infrastructure, skills development, and training, and improving access to climate information.

III. Bridge the gap of locally led water security with global climate finance dialogue: WASH, water security and climate change are experienced differently by women on the frontlines collecting water each day from those making national or global level decisions for climate finance priorities. Participative and cooperative engagement across all levels, however complex, is critical to prioritize resources for WASH and water security as low regrets adaptation measures. Cooperation and support must be enhanced so that Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) articulate clear alignment of national and local water security and WASH needs to strengthen the case for gender transformative financing, informed by a comprehensive WASH and water security agenda, evidence, and women's leadership.

IV. Prioritize WASH and water security in gender transformative financing: Both donors and recipients must prioritize quality and quantity of financing sources for WASH and water security that integrate perspectives and potential impacts of women as stakeholders, workers, and end users to achieve productivity and inclusive growth. Accelerated efforts are needed to quantify women's representation, articulate the return on investment, and determine how funding can best reach women and their communities on the frontlines of climate change for long-term, sustained management of essential WASH services in a water secure environment.

V. Breaking down silos: Multisectoral and multistakeholder approaches are required to build political support for gender transformative WASH and water security as part of climate adaptation across health, food security, agriculture, biodiversity, industry and more. Civil society engagement and cooperation must lead the way. It's time to move beyond business as usual, leave behind outdated, pre-existing biases, siloed sectors, and gender imbalances to create a movement for WASH and water security as an imperative towards gender equality and climate justice.

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