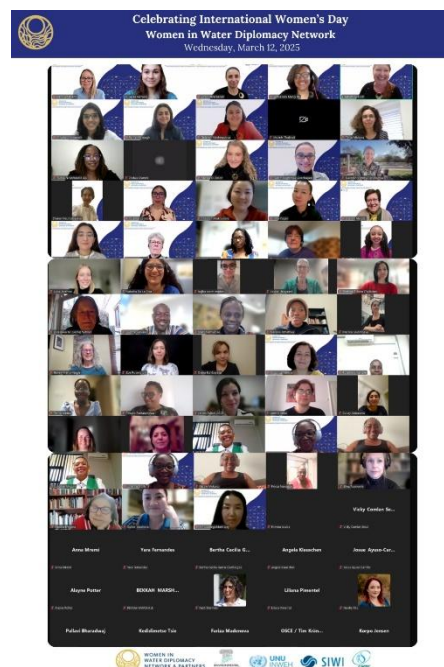


Women in Water Diplomacy Network After Action Report: International Women's Day Network Event¹

Wednesday, March 12, 2025 | 15:00-17:00 CET | Online

[The Women in Water Diplomacy Network \(WWDN\)](#) is a community of practice comprised of both formal and informal women water diplomats, decision-makers, and experts, representing a wealth of collective experience and expertise with focus on shared waters in some of the most water insecure and conflict sensitive regions of the world. Originating in the Nile Basin in 2017, the Network is now a global community of women water leaders, and male champions supporting gender equality, working collectively to **strengthen women's leadership in transboundary water decision making** with support from a global coalition of partners and members in the Nile, Central Asia-Afghanistan, Southern Africa, North America, the South Caucasus and elsewhere. The Women in Water Diplomacy Network is guided by our Global Strategy, '[A Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security](#),' and our Global Leadership Council with support and partnership from many partners.

On March 12, 2025, The Women in Water Diplomacy Network (WWDN) and its partners hosted a special online event in recognition of International Women's Day 2025. The event served as a platform to introduce the Network's newly established **Global Leadership Council** and engage the global Network community in a discussion on women-led water diplomacy. The event also highlighted the Network's expansion and impact since its inception in the Nile Basin in 2017, now spanning Central Asia-Afghanistan, North America, the South Caucasus, Southern Africa, and beyond. The live online session was attended by more than one hundred Network members including representatives from governmental water agencies, international organizations, academia, and civil society. The session provided a dynamic exchange of insights on women's leadership in water diplomacy and put focus on new opportunities for engagement in the Network's ongoing initiatives. Participating speakers spoke to key challenges and opportunities covering a range of intersectional issues including gender inclusion, Indigenous knowledge systems, intergenerational mentorship, and global water diplomacy challenges, with many also sharing reflections on their personal and professional journeys within the water sector. The full online session recording and other resources are available here: <https://www.eli.org/events/women-water-diplomacy-network-celebrating-international-womens-day>.



¹ This Women in Water Diplomacy Network After Action Report was prepared by Elizabeth A. Koch, Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network.

The session began with a brief introduction to the Women in Water Diplomacy Network from **Elizabeth A. Koch**, Process Support Team Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and **Sogol Jafarzadeh**, UN and Government Relations Coordinator & Gender and Capacity Building Focal Point for Africa, UNU-INWEH and Process Support Team member. Following a warm tribute to the members of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Nile Leadership Council, each of the new members of the Network's Global Leadership Council was introduced to the broader Network community.

The introduction was followed by an impassioned address from Global Leadership Council Members **Dr. Zodwa Dlamini**, **Dr. Yolanda López-Maldonado** and **Dr. Tahani Sileet**. Dr. Zodwa Dlamini began the address emphasizing the importance of mentorship and resilience and the commitment of the Global Leadership Council members to support the Network community and members. Dr. Zodwa reflected on the transformative journey of the Network, sharing, *'from the very beginning it was our express intention to empower women, provide them with messages of hope and resilience with full understanding of the possible challenges and resistance some would encounter.'* Dr. Dlamini encouraged all participants to elevate their engagement in the Network, *'As members your voices will be heard and respected. You will all assist in shaping our agenda.'* Dr. Tahani Sileet then provided further background on the development of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network since its first meeting in 2017 in Uganda, highlight the diversity of networking, peer-to-peer learning and global policy engagements the Network has led in Africa, the Americas, Asia and elsewhere. Dr. Yolanda López-Maldonado then highlighted the critical role of Indigenous knowledge in water diplomacy and the urgent need for more inclusive governance frameworks. She emphasized the Global Leadership Council's commitment to creating a space for Indigenous women and Indigenous water experts to share their expertise, lead discussions and actively participate in shaping the future of water diplomacy.



Introducing the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Global Leadership Council



Following the inspiring keynote, Network members **Dr. Karin Sjöstrand**, Senior Editor, Nature Water and **Bethlehem Mengistu**, Global Coordinator, Agenda for Change artfully facilitated a conversation with participating members of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Global Leadership Council drawing inspiration from Bethlehem and Elizabeth's recently published article in Nature Water entitled, ['Evolving principles of women-led water diplomacy.'](#) Some discussion highlights are below but all are encouraged to view the full recorded discussion.

- **Yodit Balcha** opened the panel by addressing the stagnation in gender equality trends and the importance of maintaining momentum in women's leadership. She remarked: *'Quite a lot has changed in recent years based on political will, both at the country level or even at the regional level or at the global level. Support for women's involvement or women's inclusion has been always changing back and forth - high and low, high and low. Nowadays it's mainly low, and I feel like one of the challenges is that there is no sustainability ... for us it has always been the informal networks like the Women in Water Diplomacy Network that has been empowering women to continue in their leadership or in their involvement in the water sector.'*

- **Maria Amakali** spoke about breaking gender barriers in transboundary water negotiations, reflecting on her personal journey: *'My journey into the water sector has definitely been one of resilience, determination, and as you said, we have broken many barriers. I used to be the only women at the negotiation table but now we are growing slowly.'* Maria, encouraged the Network to *'continue to push for gender responsive policies and ensure that commitments to gender equality are not only made but implemented.'* Adding, *'We need to be seen; representation matters a lot. As we always say, there is room for more than one woman at the table.'*
- **Ambika Vishwanath** emphasized the value of the Network in supporting the agency of women water diplomats, noting the need to focus attention on training and capacity building for women and the next generation, while also providing support to both women and men to unlearn deeply engrained patriarchal norms.
- **Dr. Tahani Sileet** spoke to her personal career journey *'sometimes in your life you have a stop for personal reasons because you are doing something that nobody else can do.... It is very important that you are determined to have a comeback.'* Tahani reflected on the positive influence of male-leaders who have supported her professional growth and exposure, reflecting, *'in most of our countries, exposure is key because sometimes we are shy to express ourselves and this reflects automatically in our practice... self-confidence initiates from knowledge.'*
- **Foman Forough** shared her deeply personal experience of displacement and how the Network supported her professional and personal transitions: *'Before the fall of Kabul I was the Director General of the Kabul River Basin, the first woman to hold such a position in Afghanistan. My goal was clear, to transform society by ensuring that women had a voice in water resources management because after all, water is not just technical issue it is a matter of equality, security and peace...Leaving my country, my work, my everything I had built, was one of the most painful experiences of my life. During this difficult time, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network become my anchor, connecting me to my field, my profession, and most important to a community that reminded me I was not alone. Through each of the Network's educational programs, I found not only a way to continue my work but also the courage to rebuild my life. This Network was not only a professional network but became my new family.'*
- Reflecting on the Network's mission in Central Asia, **Gulzhan Makhmudova** elevated the Network's ability and role in sharing knowledge, promoting best practices, facilitating cross regional exchange and elevating the voice of women leaderships.
- **Prisca Nandede** emphasized the value of interdisciplinary approaches, urging broader engagement of social sciences, community perspectives, and local knowledge in water dialogues and negotiations, reminding the participants that *'everything we do is people-centered...unless the communities come on board there is no way we are going to succeed.'*
- **Dr. Zhanar Naurozbayeva** highlighted the role of research cooperation in strengthening gender equity in water diplomacy, sharing that collaboration is more important than ever as science is moving very quickly. Dr Naurozbayeva emphasized the myriad different pathways and approaches which could support the Network to increase its influence and contributions through research.
- **Dr. Sharon Megdal** discussed the importance of giving each other generously of our time – to share knowledge, encouragement, experience. Discussing the Network's launch in North America, Dr. Megdal highlighted the wealth of diverse expertise but the Network's need for financial resources to help move towards actions.



- **Dr. Yolanda López-Maldonado** highlighted many of the specific barriers faced by Indigenous women and the unique value that Indigenous knowledge brings to shaping improved water and climate decision making.
- **Suray Charyyeva** reflected on the key role of mentorship within the Network community to support intergenerational knowledge exchange and encouraged all Network members to consider how they can contribute to support the mission and programming.
- **Tumaini Mwamyalla** emphasized the role of listening – understanding and learning from each other through listening. Sharing, ‘in our positions, let us try as best we can to raise up other women and bring them to the table.’

The session was closed by Bethlehem with thanks to all of our co-convening partners and participants!