

Female leaders ensure better access to water for African women

Women are at the centre of challenges faced in accessing clean water, but are often left out of decision-making processes

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) and its partners are implementing the Water, Climate, Development, and Gender Investments (WACDEP-G) support programme for the Continental African Water Investment Programme (AIP), the aim of which is to ensure gender equality is advanced in the preparation and management of Africa's climate resilient water infrastructure investments.

Communities living in disadvantaged situations

with high poverty prevalence in Africa are critically exposed to water challenges and the effects of climate change, with most of such impacts affecting women and girls, a challenge that the AIP WACDEP-G programme aims to address. As the world commemorates International Women's Day, we profile women leaders at GWP Southern Africa and the impact of their work with other development partners on women and girls.



Dr Nawa Mwale - GWP Zambia

In Zambia, as in most Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries, women are at the centre of challenges faced in accessing clean water, and yet the majority are left out of decision-making processes.

This is the problem Dr Nawa Mwale, Gender Advisor for GWP Zambia, has been working to help solve through the implementation of AIP WACDEP-G project. "My focus is to ensure that the work being supported take a gender-transformative approach in order to address the root causes of gender inequalities," says Mwale. In the course of her work, she has contributed to gender transformation through policy guidance in Zambia's National Gender Policy, National Water Policy and the Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning Guidelines.



Annah Ndeketea

The effects of climate change in the SADC region are all too visible. Floods due to recent tropical cyclone Ana in December and January, plus months of severe drought in Southern Madagascar has claimed lives, destroyed crops and infrastructure, and worsened the food security crisis.

"These investments will address the social inequalities and burden inflicted on women," says Anna Ndeketea, Programme Officer, GWPSA

Through GWP's SADC Nexus Dialogue Project, Fostering Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus Dialogue and Multi-Sector Investment in the SADC Region, Programme Officer Annah Ndeketea supports planning and policymaking aimed at increased water, energy, and food security in the context of climate change. The European Union funded project aims to identify priority national projects that can be implemented to improve access to water, energy and food (WEF) resources.

These investments will address the social inequalities and burden inflicted on women. Reducing the time spent fetching water, collecting firewood and food production allows women to venture into other economic and educational activities to improve their livelihoods.



"Projects have a better impact on women at the local level," says Asha Msoka, GWP Tanzania AIP Coordinator

Asha Mercy Msoka

Societies in Southern Africa continue to be

patriarchal, so women are rarely involved in decisions that will eventually impact on their lives. Asha Mercy Msoka is GWP Tanzania's Coordinator for AIP; its scorecard to track the levels of investments in water infrastructure was recently adopted by African Union Heads of State. It says women bear the worst effects of lack of clean water, decent sanitation and hygiene in their communities, so it makes sense for them to be part of processes and interventions in the sector.

"My work is contributing to the improvement of water and sanitation impacting directly on women's livelihoods. Some of this work involves mobilising female engineers to participate in work and policies in the water sector. When they take up leading roles, they have a better impact on women at the local level because they understand critical issues that affect women and girls due to poor access to clean water and good sanitation," says Msoka.



Deborah Muheka

Deborah Muheka is GWP Malawi Coordinator for the AIP. She believes that being a woman leader in a male dominated career offers practical experience on the impact of water programmes on gender equity.

Deborah Muheka - GWP Malawi AIP Coordinator: "Women will have more time to run businesses."

"Our work is set to have a positive impact on women and girls because will promote practises that will reduce the time they spend walking long distances to collect water, allowing them more time to study, do home chores and run their businesses.

The AIP programme aims to transform and improve the investment outlook for water security and sustainable sanitation by mobilising \$30-billion per year by 2030 to address among others the issues of gender transformation, women and youth empowerment and social inclusion.



Shamiso Mlilwana

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for countries to invest in durable water and sanitation initiatives. During the pandemic, women, who are the traditional caregivers at home, have had to ensure the availability of clean water for handwashing and

Shamiso Kumbirai-Mlilwana, GWPSA SDG Investments Specialist: "Investments in water & sanitation will uplift women's livelihoods."

good sanitation in their home. In many instances, this essential commodity has been scarce.

GWP's SDG Investments Specialist, Shamiso Kumbirai-Mlilwana, believes that the challenges women face around water and sanitation can be resolved through improved financial and policy commitments. "As we celebrate International Women's Day, governments and the private sector in Africa should reflect on their role in investing



African women are often exposed to water challenges and are becoming more involved in mitigating the effects of climate change

in the water and sanitation sector, which will in the long run contribute to poverty alleviation and uplift the lives of women and children," says Kumbirai-Mlilwana.



Litumelo Mate Sievers

Litumelo Mate Sievers, Gender Specialist for the GWP Southern Africa believes water and climate change challenges are better resolved when there is social inclusion. Mate Sievers supports the implementation of the AIP and WACDEP-G.

"We advocate for gender equality and social inclusion integration in water investments," says Litumelo Mate Sievers, GWPSA Gender Specialist, AIP WACDEP-G Programme

integration in water and climate change interventions, at both policy and local implementation levels. Notably, the efforts have culminated in the recognition of the gender transformative approach by key water and related implementing institutions in Zambia. This will result in the development of guidelines and a gender transformative shared vision for the water sector in Zambia," says Mate Sievers.



Elouga Murielle Zoba

About 500 000 Cameroonians are at risk of dental fluorosis, an oral health disease caused by drinking groundwater with a high fluoride concentration. A recent study by GWP Cameroon shows that the disease has a greater psycho-social impact on girls and

Elouga Murielle Zoba, GWP Cameroon Programme Coordinator, WACDEP-G Programme: "Women and girls now take part in social activities."

women than on their male counterparts.

Elouga Murielle Zoba, Programme Coordinator of WACDEP-G programme in Cameroon, says her team has been carrying out gender sensitisation campaigns where communities are informed of the cause of dental fluorosis and the need not to stigmatise women and girls suffering from the disease. Previously, women and girls with dental fluorosis were considered witches and not fit for marriage, as it was thought that they would pass the condition on to their children.

"As a result of our campaigns in the far North region of Cameroon, many young girls affected by dental fluorosis who were often timid have regained their confidence and now partake in social activities in their villages like reading Bible texts in church and singing in the choir," says Zoba.

The current water and sanitation sector investment in Africa stands between \$10-billion and \$19-billion per year. The African Development Bank estimates that \$64-billion should be invested annually to meet the 2025 Africa Water Vision of Water Security for All. Urgent action is needed to close this gap.

AIP Scorecard

On March 2 2022, Global Water Partnership Southern Africa (GWPSA), the African Union Development Agency and other development partners will officially launch the AIP Scorecard as part of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). The goal of the AIP Scorecard is to leverage US\$30-billion in climate resilient water investments for Africa by 2030. Discussions will focus on how the scorecard will work as a key tool to track the transformation of investments for water security and sustainable sanitation in Africa. The objective is to enhance job creation through gender sensitive investments in water security and climate resilient development

About GWPSA:

The GWPSA is one of 13 regional networks that make up the Global Water Partnership, an international network that fosters implementation of integrated water resources management. GWPSA, which hosts the coordination unit for the wider Africa region, offers practical support for sustainably managing water to governments and stakeholder institutions working in the water and climate change sectors.