

Water and Gender Call for Action

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Information Briefing to UNESCO Permanent Delegations

A recent assessment by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) shows progress towards gender equality to be off-track with respect to international agreements and declarations. Consequently, WWAP is promoting a Call for Action (CfA) to "Accelerate the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Water Domain", which calls upon leaders and key decision-makers to ensure the swift implementation of concrete actions, including urgent gender-transformative strategies. On that behalf, WWAP organized an online information session on 12 July 2021 to present the Call for Action to the UNESCO Member States' permanent representatives, chaired by the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, Shamila Nair-Bedouelle. During his address, Massimo Riccardo (Ambassador of the Italian Republic to UNESCO) underlined the tremendous importance borne by water and gender equality, as gender equality and women empowerment are key priorities of Italy's G20 presidency, and announced the organization of a Ministerial Conference on the empowerment of women during their term. He called upon all Member States to take concrete actions in line with the recommendations made within the UNESCO WWAP "Call for Action" Initiative. The statement was seconded by the Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to UNESCO, Meta Bole, who pointed water out as one of the key priorities of Slovenia's presidency to the European Council. She offered Slovenia's full support to the Call for Action: during its presidency, Slovenia will organize together with UNESCO WWAP, a 2-day conference on water and gender equality (October 2021), with as focus to accelerate concrete and transformative actions towards gender equality in water, improving humanitarian support, human development and peace. Michela Miletto, Director of the UNESCO WWAP, pointed out that the existence of a data gap on gender and water remains a huge stumbling stone to the progress towards the Agenda 2030 achievement as well as other international commitments made. She highlighted the existing solutions to address this very issue, and focused on the unique WWAP methodology developed for the collection of sex-disaggregated data, its comprehensive capacity development programme, and above all, the novel initiative "Call for Action: Accelerating Gender Equality in the Water Domain - Bridging the data gap and developing concrete actions". Within this framework, she explained the findings of both the "Taking Stock assessment" and the political "Position Paper" on which the Call is based. This Position Paper stipulates a list of recommendations for concrete actions to change the current status-quo of gender equality in the water domain. Finally, Ms. Miletto explained the modalities to become an official member of the Coalition of Multi-stakeholders supporting the Call for Action - "Contact" to express such interest.

In the second half of the Information Session, a panel of four high-level speakers representing Member States, regional organizations, and UNESCO Chairs took place, highlighting existing challenges in the field of water and gender, showcasing national or regional efforts made so far in promoting the participation and leadership of women in water affairs, and responding to the Call for Action: Euphrasie Kouassi Yao, Special Advisor to the President of Cote d'Ivoire on Gender, holder of the "Water, Women and Decision-making" UNESCO Chair; Almotaz Abadi, Managing Director, UfM Water, Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat; Concepcion Marcuello Olona, Coordinator of International Water Issues, Directorate General of Water, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, Spain; Mary Mbiro Khimulu, Chairperson of Kenya Water Sector Trust Fund Board of Directors, Former Ambassador/Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Kenya to UNESCO. The speakers flagged similar issues in both developing and developed countries for what concerns women's underrepresentation in academic as well as professional water-related positions, and the far going negative socio-economic consequences this gives rise to. The elimination of gender inequalities hand-in-hand with enhanced capacity development and awareness were identified as imperative for the achievement of not only SDG5 and 6, but of all SDGs within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In line with this, the speakers expressed their support to the WWAP "Call for Action" Initiative, and called upon Member States to implement the available methodologies developed by WWAP.

Watch the event