

WITH WOMEN BETTER RESULTS IN WATER MANAGEMENT

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■ Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) is a unique organisation of twenty-eight women's organisations and networks, uniting women in leadership. All member organisations are rooted in society and are active in the areas of water, sanitation, sustainable development, and women's participation. WfWP positions women as active leaders, partners, experts, and agents of change in water. WfWP links day-to-day practice to policy at national and international levels and vice-versa and contributes to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (specifically goals 5 and 6) with a focus on women and universal access to water for all, for all uses. www.womenforwater.org



Companies with the highest percentage of women in management are, on average, 47% more profitable than those with the lowest,¹ and have a 55% difference in operating results.² Leadership styles more frequently used by women are the most effective in addressing the global challenges of the future and critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.³ These are some striking results of studies, mainly of the private sector to the impact of having more women in decision-making processes. These studies indicate that diversity matters in terms of performance, the planet and society.

What about the water sector? It has been three decades since the world recognised women's crucial role in water issues. At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, it was agreed that "women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water", the Dublin principles. What happened afterwards? What are the results when more women are involved in decision-making processes? What are good practices? What are the main drivers and enabling factors to increase the involvement of women in water governance? And what are effective strategies?

Women for Water Partnership tried to find answers

to these questions through a literature review and an analysis of 13 case studies.

A summary of the study is presented in this article, starting with a short description of the methodology (1), a general overview of the representation of women in paid jobs as well as the water sector (2.1), the differences between men and women in terms of careers (2.2), the responsibility of women for water beyond the professional water sector (2.3) and the impact made by involving more women (2.4). In chapter 3 three examples are shown of the case studies collected and analysed, one from India (3.1), one from Armenia (3.2) and one from Malawi (3.3) and the chapter closes with the findings of all 13 cases (3.4). The conclusions of the study are presented in chapter 4 as well as an overview of bottlenecks, drivers and enablers to include women. This article ends with recommendations formulated as guidelines for change (chapter 5).

1 Methodology: Case studies and literature review

In 2018 a preparatory study (desk research) was done together with OECD providing an impression of women's involvement in water related decision-making. The current study builds upon the desk research and presents

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practices of women's involvement in the water sector. For that purpose, eighteen organisations have been approached. They have been selected according to the following criteria: different continents, governmental and non-governmental organisations at different levels, private sector organisations and donor organisations all covering different fields of the water sector.

Thirteen organisations responded positively and represent the desired variety with one exception: donor organisations did not respond. These organisations enclose private water operators, governmental water agencies, community groups, national and international NGOs, and research institutes in several parts of the globe, including India, Tanzania, Great Britain, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Armenia, India, the Nile Basin, Malawi, Jordan, Madagascar, and Africa. The practices described in the case studies vary from access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, to water awareness, water quality, the fight against pollution, irrigation, research in the field of climate and water, to transboundary water management and the complete water sector within a country. The respondents filled in a survey with open questions and additional information was obtained by interviews and email exchange. Based on this information thirteen case studies have been composed with an emphasis on approaches that work, as well as the drivers and enabling factors to include women.

Another part of the research is a literature review to establish a global view on the involvement of women in (water) governance processes, also looking beyond the water sector itself. To capture the most recent insights and experiences, information from public sources is used mainly from 2014 onwards. Older publications are looked at in case they are perceived as key documents for this study.

Both the literature review and the case studies are the backbone of this publication.

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2 Insights literature review

Below the main findings of the literature study are presented.

2.1 Few women in decision making positions

Worldwide in general less than 50% of women have a paid job, compared to 76% of men⁴ and women hold 28% of managerial positions.⁵ In the political arena, women's representation in parliament in most countries and regions has more than doubled from 12% in 1995 to 25% in 2020, whilst the number of female ministers has quadrupled and stands at 22%. At this pace gender parity in ministerial positions will be reached by 2077.⁶ In local government bodies, there are more women active: data from 133 countries in 2019 show that 36% of members elected are women, more than in parliament. The share of women municipal mayors was 15% in 2019, much lower than the number of municipal councillors.⁷ The use of temporary measures such as gender quotas has raised the participation of women in national and local decision-making bodies in many countries. Yet, despite the demonstrated impact, less than half of countries around the world have some form of legislated quota in place.

In the water sector, sex disaggregated employment data are very scarce. Less than 17% of the employees are women⁸ and this number comprises all jobs in the water sector as well as all kinds of organisations such as water agencies, local water management institutions, and national or transboundary water bodies. The number for female technical experts, managers, regulators, and policymakers is not known.

According to an interesting study by the World Bank⁹ on sixty-four utilities in twenty-eight countries, the percentage of women stands at 18%, however, there were many differences between the utilities surveyed. On average 23% of engineers and managers in a utility are female, 32% of the utilities had no female engineers and 12% had no female managers.

2.2 Career differences men and women

Once having entered the water sector, many women leave the sector especially those in technical positions such as engineers: in utilities female engineers worked 5.8 years

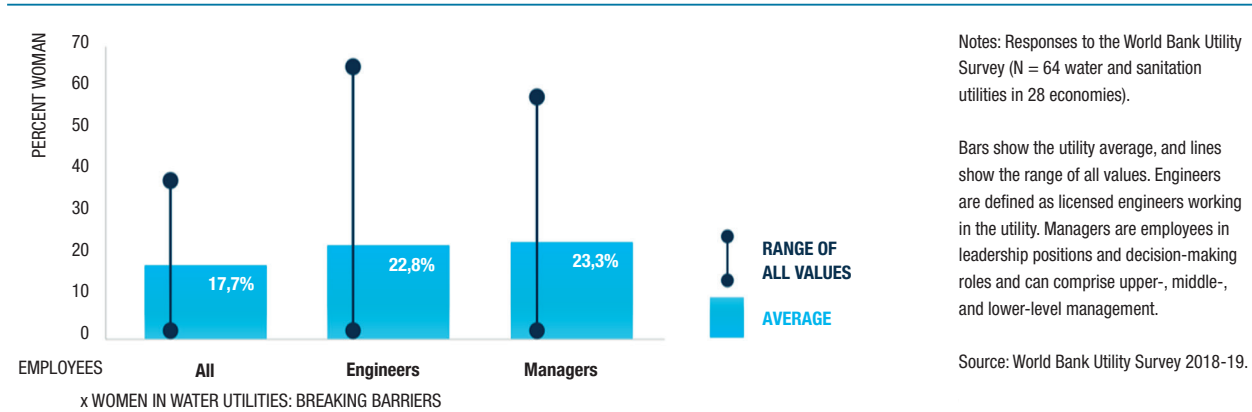


Figure 1: Average share of employees in a water utility that are women, 2018-2019.

in a company and male engineers 8.5 years. For managers there is a similar trend: women were 8.6 years in their position and men 10.6 years.¹⁰ On top of this, data indicate that many women starting to work in Science Technical Engineering Mathematics (STEM) related fields leave within the first year. The reasons why women are leaving vary from a feeling of isolation in a male-dominated environment, lack of facilities such as toilets or changing rooms, perceived problems in field-related functions, lack of adequate equipment, a culture of overwork (24/7 commitment) making it difficult to combine the work with caring responsibilities.

2.3 Many women responsible for water

How different is the situation beyond the professional water sector: In many countries, women and girls are responsible for fetching clean drinking water for the family and taking care of waste or wastewater. Furthermore, women play a prominent role in the productive use and management of water for activities including agriculture, forestry, and fishing. All these tasks are unpaid, meaning that the contribution is not visible and often not recognised. So, beyond the professional water sector, many women are involved in water issues and performing important roles in achieving equitable access to water for all and for all uses. Nevertheless, they are less involved in decision-making processes about water management. Involvement in decision-making bodies is linked to water rights. Water rights are often allocated based on formal land rights, and most women do not possess rights over the land. On the other hand, the involvement of women in water issues is a hidden source of capacity for the professional water sector.

2.4 Impact women

In 2018, WomenRising2030¹¹ did an extensive study on the impact of women’s leadership in companies concluding that when more women are in corporate decision-making positions, the companies benefit as well as the society, and the environment: companies with more women in high-level management positions are better able to focus on longer-term growth goals as opposed to short-term profit. Women leaders are better skilled at reaching decisions that benefit

all stakeholders’ interests and increase the capacity of a company to innovate. Moreover, companies with women board members are more likely to offer employees better working conditions, stronger benefits, and try to help vulnerable communities along their supply chain. Studies by McKinsey & Company show that companies with greater gender diversity in their leadership teams outperform those with less—often by as much as 30%. They found that companies with the highest percentage of women in executive committees delivered better performance than those with all-male executives: they exceeded all-male executives by 41% in a return on equity and by 56% in operating results. So, a strong correlation was found between the presence of women in company top management and better performance. The few studies that have taken place in the water sector show similar findings. When women are involved in (decision-making) processes, the results are more effective and sustainable.

3 Case studies: Women included by design

Because data are scarce in the water sector, thirteen case studies covering a wide range of practices (SDG 6 and water related targets) implemented by different types of organisations in varied settings of the world, have been collected to look at the relationship between the involvement of women and results. The analysis of the case studies emerged in a division of the cases indicating differences in approaches, although in all cases women are included by design. The division is as follows:

- 1** Involvement of women, meaning that women are involved in the implementation of a project and/or activity and not deliberately in decision-making processes.
- 2** Women-only projects are projects which have been designed, implemented, and controlled by women and women have fully taken part in all phases of the decision-making processes.

3 Systemic inclusion of women, meaning that deliberate and systematic actions have been taken and/or planned to involve women in all levels of an organisation including decision-making processes to change the system.

An example of each category is described below.

3.1 Involvement of women

In the category 'Involvement of women' Veolia, member of Aquafed in India,¹² engaged the women because of their responsibility to fetch water for the family. In Nagpur in India women must walk and queue up at public standposts and water tankers, where water quality is not guaranteed, and they only operate during fixed hours of the day. Moreover, women risk being confronted with high prices and sextortion. The myths about the water tariffs were reasons why many households initially resisted the idea to get an authorised water connection at their doorstep, despite the many health, social, cultural, and economic benefits gained from a reliable water supply.

Veolia wanted to change that situation and aimed at 24/7 access to safe water for all. A Social Welfare Team was created to better understand the women and their concerns also beyond water. Lack of accessible water prevented the women from earning money and learning new skills. Special efforts were needed to gain the commitment of women. A budget was set aside for community-based education and training schemes. Beauty parlour courses have been set up and these have been so successful that they are now run online. A partnership was set up with an NGO to provide computer training which helped the younger, more literate women. An education centre was established for children attending government schools who cannot afford extra private tuition. This was aimed particularly at children aged 15 and 16 who take major national exams. The connection between education and water was encouraging for women, particularly as their children's education is a huge source of pride for them.

A network of volunteers on the ground was created for any issues they might have such as water management, complaints regarding water leakages, and theft. Also, because communication by the women themselves made

it easier to remove any doubts customers might have, and explain the benefits of access to safe water, resulting in fewer refusals to pay and smoother operations. Many women have become 'water friends' and nowadays advocate for reliable and safe water. Women were critical to reach the objective of 24/7 access to safe water for all, however they were not deliberately involved in the decision-making processes of Veolia.

3.2 Women-only projects

Regarding the second category 'Women-only projects' the project 'Enabling women to participate in sustainable water management in Armenia' is exemplary. The project is implemented by the Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE)¹³ and funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF). The goal was to promote equitable access to drinking water, and efficient management of irrigation water resources in vulnerable communities.

The cornerstone of the strategy was to include women in all phases of the project and work with women leaders. Local stakeholders were identified, capacitated, and supported, amongst them active women, such as farmers, schoolteachers, health workers and parents. Gender sensitive assessments were carried out to get to know the practices of rural women, and to tailor the design of the project activities to the community and women. Special methods and measures were used to stimulate their participation, including field visits to better understand the problems faced. A budget was available, and a combined top and bottom approach added to the sustainability of the project. For example, the existing drinking water tariffs in Armenia were analysed and its impact on vulnerable and marginalised groups. This analysis was discussed and endorsed in a national workshop, initiating a national discussion on current drinking water tariffs for vulnerable populations in the frame of the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health. Over 80% of the participants represented women decision-makers of all levels, in addition to community activists.

The monitoring system was based on sex-disaggregated data, and had specific indicators related to the inclusion of women. Training on the monitoring of water resources

was organised and those trained facilitated community dialogues on monitoring of community water resources. Field monitoring activities were organised to create opportunities for more detailed discussions. And most importantly, when organising any activity with women farmers, it was important to respect their schedule of farming activities. The strategy of this project also incorporated elements of the concept 'male champions of change' to encourage men in water management decision-making, to use their individual and collective leadership to elevate gender equality.

Upon completion of the project, UNDEF conducted an independent evaluation.¹⁴ The results were amazing such as better access to drinking water, and better management of irrigation water, leading to increased agricultural yields and more nutritious food. Eighty percent of the direct beneficiaries were women.

3.3 Systemic inclusion of women

The Lilongwe Water Board (LWB)¹⁵ of Malawi is an example of the category 'Systemic inclusion of women'. The Board provides water and sewerage services to about 70% of the population in Lilongwe City. A gender assessment found that women typically held low level positions, and disproportionately lacked access to jobs and employment opportunities; in fact, women made up only 15 % of the total workforce. Women were absent from (middle) management positions, the Board of Directors and executive management. Additional institutional barriers were identified to enable women to reconcile work and caregiving responsibilities and essential amenities such as separate toilets, adequate bathrooms for menstrual hygiene management, no space for nursing mothers, and no childcare facilities were absent.

Based on the gender assessment and supported by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Project, LWB designed a comprehensive action plan consisting of a five- year institutional development programme (2016-2021) with five objectives, one of which targeted gender imbalance and underrepresentation, Human Resources (HR) policies were updated, and a gender and disability focal person was appointed to support and oversee the integration of gender in LWB programmes and plans. An independent reporting

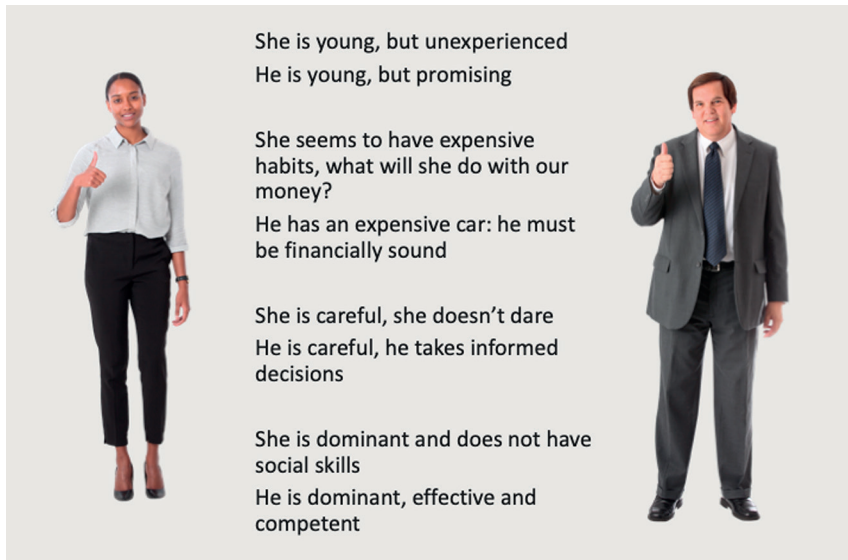
system for harassment and gender-based violence was established including facilitating the orientation and training of staff on sexual harassment and abuse. To contribute to female empowerment and capacity development, a mentorship and scholarship programme, in partnership with local universities, was designed. LWB incorporated gender budgeting into its annual budget and workplaces and shared a plan with all its service providers, to increase the women and youth employment rate. Women already working at LWB were encouraged to apply to higher positions. Moreover, working facilities were built, such as a childcare room with space for nursing of children under the age of five.

Spurred by increased encouragement for current female staff and interns to apply to higher positions, the LWB saw a four percent increase in female recruitment from 2019 to 2022. The number of female employees rose from 69 female staff to 104 and the LWB appointed three female senior managers. As a result of these coordinated efforts, the share of women in supervisory roles increased to 25%, translating to 26 female staff at the decision-making level. At the top of the organisation, the government of Malawi appointed two female fiduciaries to co-lead what used to be a male-dominated board of directors and two female members to chair two board committees. Further diversification of the workforce resulted in the first hire of a female contract manager – a role previously only seen filled by a male colleague.

The case of LWB shows that with a systematic strategy and action plan, as well as a supporting mechanism, it is possible to achieve better representation of women and create a more inclusive work environment in a male-dominated sector. There are indications that services to customers are improving.

3.4 Findings case studies

In all thirteen cases the performance within and beyond the water sector improved with the increased involvement of women. The cases confirmed the findings of the literature study. Examples of results are barriers for tariff setting have been resolved and the willingness to pay improved; better services to customers; increased access to clean water; improved maintenance; efficiency of irrigation projects has



increased (less water usage); less pollution; safe sanitation; better health; more nutritious food; more women and girls empowered; better access to education and skills training; higher attention to climate change, environmental and social issues; change in the composition of staff (more women on board); safer workspaces; better economic opportunities (jobs, own businesses).

In terms of approaches, particularly in the category of ‘women-only projects’, listening to the women involved to better understand them and their needs was essential, not only at the start of the project but during implementation. With increased listening and communication, changes were able to be made throughout the process, less conventional methods were used, and risks were taken to reach the objectives. In the category, ‘systemic inclusion of women’ commitment at the top of an organisation proves essential. Additionally, clear targets are key, as is having a picture of the composition of the staff at different levels of an organisation. In ‘women-only projects’ and ‘the systemic inclusion of women’ many measures have been taken to involve women in all stages of a project, or at all levels of an organisation, including the decision-making processes. The whole system is being adapted to facilitate the inclusion of women.

4 Conclusions

Based on the literature study and the thirteen cases the following conclusions are drawn. Next to a general picture of the situation, the conclusions are presented in terms of bottlenecks, drivers for change and enablers to answer the questions of this study.

1 Workforce: The overall conclusion is that inequality in the workforce and workplace between women and men is persistent. In the water sector, particularly when compared to other ‘technical’ sectors, fewer women are working, only

17% and in utilities on average 23% women are working in managerial positions.

Reasons for these differences are for example existing stereotypes, legal barriers, and limited numbers of women in STEM fields. Women do not enter the sector easily and they also leave the sector earlier compared to men. The work in the sector is often perceived as ‘unsuitable’ for women: too technical, too dirty, too dangerous, or too heavy.

2 Relation women and results: Studies by McKinsey & Company and others, show there to be a strong correlation between the presence of women in top management positions and better performance. Companies with higher numbers of women in leadership teams can be seen to outperform those with fewer women, often by 30%. The thirteen cases investigated in this study show a comparable pattern. The performance within and beyond the water sector improved with the increased involvement of women.

3 Bottlenecks: There are legal obstacles threatening employment, entrepreneurship and equal opportunity and do not support working women. Worldwide on average women have 75% of the legal rights of men.¹⁶ Around twenty-six countries have restrictions on women working in the water sector. Out of these more than 50% prohibit women from working in sewers and 20% do not allow women to work as plumbers. Next, there are other constraints such as the low number of women graduating in STEM-fields, but even with such training stereotypes and norms, the lack of female role models prevents women from entering the water sector. Next gender-based violence is prevalent and the work in the sector is perceived as too technical, too dirty, too dangerous, and too heavy; all perceptions standing in the way of attracting women. Also, recruitment procedures are not counteracting these ‘images’ of the sector, on the contrary. Hiring processes

are often biased or use discriminatory language in job postings and are not focused on and adapted to recruiting women.

4 Drivers: Drivers to include more women differ across organisations. They are often a combination of moral reasons such as equality between men and women, as well as the demonstrated improvement of performance, and the qualities of women such as the ability to communicate and manage funds. Next, declarations and conventions for example the Dublin Principles emphasising women's central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water, might play a role. However, implementation is happening at a very slow pace.

5 Enablers: Enablers are manifold such as the commitment of the top (executive) level. Supportive laws and policies act as enabling factors, as do specific budgets that engage, attract, train, women and carry out specific activities to retain women coupled with changes in HR policy and procedures. Moreover, altering mindsets and addressing unconscious biases is key. Creating the right environment and conditions for women to participate might include appropriate clothing and equipment, bathroom facilities, breastfeeding rooms, or childcare, together with access to ICT and transport. Consideration must be given to the presence of family responsibilities. The appointment of gender experts to support the implementation of a gender strategy and action plan, clear objectives and targets, and the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive budgeting are also crucial.

Women's movements play a role in the call to end female injustice or inequalities, for example the ME-TOO movement motivates organisations to take steps to analyse and/or change the situation and narrative.

5 Recommendations: Guidelines to change

The lessons of the literature review and the thirteen case studies, lead to the following five guidelines to stimulate

and facilitate the inclusion of more women in decision-making processes in the water sector:

- 1** Analyse a situation regularly to understand the numbers of men and women involved, the issues of the women in a specific context (women are not one group, but heterogenous), the stereotypes at play, how much resources are available for men and women etc.
- 2** Translate the analysis into a plan with clear objectives, measurable targets, and a sound budget: a 40-40 balance between men and women is such a target, leaving 20% free. Involve women in drafting a plan and the decision-making process around the plan and budget.
- 3** Make sure the top level is committed, remains committed and that their messages are consistent. Do not leave other layers of management behind and develop clear accountability mechanisms. Moreover, organise support for the implementors to be able to translate policy into practice for example by introducing focal points, ambassadors or help desks and training.
- 4** Create the conditions for women to be included and remain included, such as by changing HR policies and regulations, organising leadership courses or mentor programmes or vocational training or accepting and certifying already acquired skills, by addressing stereotypes and unconscious bias regularly to change mindsets, by ensuring that there are facilities for women, access to ICT and transport, by taking action against sexual violence.
- 5** To keep abreast with the developments, develop a monitoring system which provides both quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data. Analyse the data regularly to enable learning and adapting plans and budgets regularly.

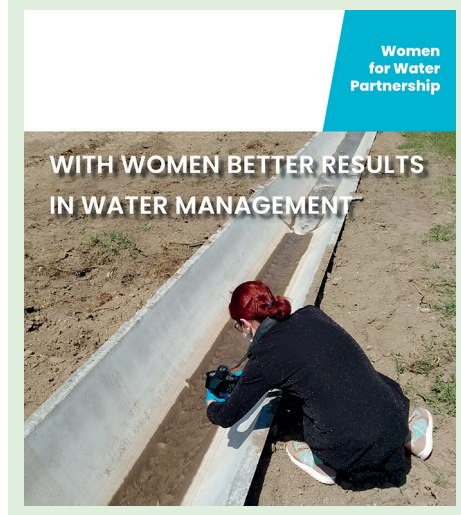
These guidelines are interconnected and reinforce each other.

**Inclusion of women needs special efforts:
when doing this, better results are guaranteed!**

Information:

If you are interested to read more, open the following link:

http://www.womenforwater.org/uploads/7/7/5/1/77516286/20220722_women_for_water_partnership-with_women_better_results_in_water_management.pdf



In verschillende sectoren is aangetoond dat meer vrouwen in de top leidt tot betere resultaten zoals meer winst, een betere betrokkenheid van diverse stakeholders en meer aandacht voor milieu, duurzaamheid en (sociale) omgeving. Women for Water Partnership onderzocht of eenzelfde verband te zien is in de watersector. Naast een literatuurstudie zijn 13 cases verzameld en geanalyseerd. Zowel de literatuurstudie als de casestudies bevestigen het hiervoor geschetste beeld: ook in de watersector beïnvloeden vrouwen de resultaten in positieve zin. Het binnenhalen en binnenhouden van vrouwen gaat echter niet vanzelf. Er zijn speciale activiteiten nodig en niet te vergeten een specifiek budget. Deze studie laat zien wat de situatie is voor vrouwen op de arbeidsmarkt. Er zijn weinig cijfers en feiten over dit onderwerp in de watersector: er werken 17% vrouwen in de watersector op wereldniveau en daar vallen ook alle administratieve en ondersteunende medewerkers onder. In deze studie is uitgezocht wat de drempels zijn voor vrouwen om in de watersector te werken, wat de drijfveren zijn voor organisaties om meer vrouwen aan te nemen en wat voor activiteiten er over de hele linie van een organisatie nodig zijn om vrouwen gelijke kansen en mogelijkheden te bieden. Ook worden er dertien inspirerende voorbeelden getoond uit verschillende hoeken van de wereld. Als activiteiten om vrouwen aan te trekken en te behouden systematisch worden uitgevoerd, dan zijn de resultaten buitengewoon.

- 1 Women as Levers of Change: unleashing the power of women to transfer male dominated industry; FP Analytics (FPA) 2020.
- 2 Women Matter: Ten years of insights on gender diversity; McKinsey 2017
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- 3 Leadership competencies critical to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals are long-term thinking, innovation, collaboration, transparency, environmental management, and social inclusiveness. (BETTER LEADERSHIP BETTER WORLD Women Leading for the Global Goals by Women Rising 2030 March 2018
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