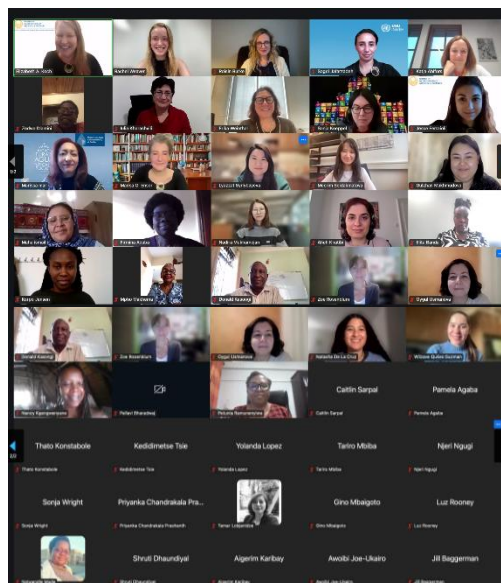


Women in Water Diplomacy Network: Open Online Experience Exchange Seminar Confidence Building Measures in Water Diplomacy¹

February 11, 2025 | Online

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network is a community of practice comprised of both formal and informal women decision-makers working collectively to strengthen women’s leadership in transboundary water decision-making with support from a global coalition of partners and members in basins across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

On February 11, 2025, the Network hosted an open online experience exchange seminar on the subject of ‘Confidence Building Measures in Water Diplomacy.’ The seminar was convened in partnership with the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-IN WEH), Utrecht University, and the Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPAX). The meeting was not recorded and held under the Chatham House Rule. The session brought together 80+ Network members and supporters from 30+ countries including both formal and informal water diplomats and decision-makers. The seminar provided a platform for peer-to-peer learning on confidence-building measures (CBMs) in water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation and highlighted various mechanisms for fostering trust and collaboration drawing from the experience of Network members. The session program and slides presented are available here: <https://www.eli.org/events/women-water-diplomacy-network-open-online-experience-exchange-seminar-confidence-building>.



The session began with Women in Water Diplomacy Network announcements from **Elizabeth A. Koch**, Senior Manager at Environmental Law Institute and Process Support Team Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Elizabeth provided an update on the establishment of a new Global Leadership Council to enhance the network’s governance and outreach as well the Network’s planned events around International Women’s Day 2025. Elizabeth stressed that recent dramatic shifts in international development aid has caused most of the Network’s resources to be frozen/ cancelled. This means that the Network no longer has financed staffing until new resources are identified. Elizabeth encouraged Network members to consider how they can elevate their engagement through volunteering to support the Network through the Network’s new Volunteer Roster.

¹ This Women in Water Diplomacy Network Experience Exchange session report is authored by Rachel Weaver, Master of Environmental Management Candidate, at Duke University and Elizabeth A. Koch, Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network on behalf of the co-convening partners.



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Dr. Róisín Burke from the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, Platform on Peace Security and Human Rights at Utrecht University then introduced the role of CBMs in water diplomacy. Róisín discussed how CBMs serve as strategic tools employed to foster trust, enhance cooperation, and facilitate governance in fragile and conflict-affected areas, highlighting several contemporary examples from the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Ignite Speaker **Katja Ahlfors**, Senior Advisor for the Northern and Western Africa Unit within Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided deep insights into the application of CBMs in water diplomacy. Katja highlighted the role and impact of various CBM measures such as formal agreements and treaties, joint strategies, co-development projects (e.g., water related infrastructure projects or joint ecological and environmental measures like cross border projects), cross-border dialogues, experience exchange sessions, capacity building and trainings, economic empowerment efforts, and cross-border professional communities of practices and networks like the Women in Water Diplomacy Network.

Following this important context setting, Network members and supporters from diverse contexts provided real world examples of how CBMs can be designed to support and enhance water diplomacy processes at various scales in a discussion facilitated by **Sogol Jafarzadeh**, UN and Government Relations Coordinator & Gender and Capacity Building Focal Point for Africa at UNU-INWEH. During the discussion, **Dr. Erika Weinthal**, John O. Blackburn Distinguished Professor of Environmental Policy at Duke University in the United States emphasized that in water diplomacy, the process is just as important as the outcomes. Trust-building and informal relationships behind the scenes play a crucial role in influencing diplomacy and formal negotiations, particularly as donor landscapes shift. **Sonja Koepfel**, Secretary of the Water Convention and co-Secretary of the Protocol on Water and Health, UNECE, Germany, highlighted international legal frameworks such as the Water Convention in fostering transboundary cooperation and capacity-building on the ground. **Julia Kharashvili**, Chair of the Internally Displaced Persons Women Association "Consent", Georgia shared insights on grassroots engagement and gender inclusivity in transboundary water management. **Dr. Zodwa Dlamini**, Former South Africa Chief Delegate and Permanent Representative to the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission and Founding Member of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network provided summative reflections addressing the importance of gender inclusivity in water diplomacy and the necessity of integrating women's voices in negotiations.