

# Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy: Baseline Study of Ethiopia

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**How to cite this paper:** Jillo, A.Y. (2026)  
Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy:  
Baseline Study of Ethiopia. *Journal of Wa-  
ter Resource and Protection*, 18, 291-322.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jwarp.2026.185016>

**Received:** March 29, 2026

**Accepted:** May 19, 2026

**Published:** May 22, 2026

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## Abstract

Women are still underrepresented in decision-making processes regarding water. Women's valuable skills and perspectives are not sufficiently harnessed in the fields of hydro-diplomacy and water diplomacy, which combine science, policy, and practical activity to help prevent the potential for conflict arising out of shared waterways. Increasingly, international forums now see the importance of full participation by women in water as vital to achieving water security, peace, SDG, and the Paris Agreement, but they will continue to be treated as passive victims of this process rather than as active agents for change. This article describes the results of a baseline assessment of women's participation in water diplomacy within Ethiopia. An online survey of a group of 51 highly qualified professionals in the water sector, including individuals employed in government, academia, and related entities, was used to collect information regarding characteristics of the respondents, the role each of the respondents has played in the water sector, the level of understanding of water diplomacy, and the level of participation in related activities. Most respondents have a high level of awareness of water diplomacy practices; however, there is a marked difference between men and women with respect to both the level of understanding and the extent of participation, with a large percentage (over two-thirds) of women demonstrating a low level of engagement. Barriers for these women can be classified in three areas: cultural, institutional, and capacity. All respondents note that the involvement of women is essential for an equitable, effective, and sustainable means of managing water resources. A list of recommendations to advance inclusive hydro-diplomacy and support SDGs 5 and 6 is outlined, including targeted development of capacity, establishing strong organizations such as EWIWA, creating gender-responsive policy frameworks, and promoting active participation of women in negotiations and decision-making.

## Keywords

Women in Water Diplomacy, Gender Equality, Transboundary Water

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Introduction

Water is vital for development and security and is necessary to use in a sustainable and fair way. With that in mind, finding professionals with the right qualifications, as well as building confidence and establishing trust with end-users of each water system, is essential for all stakeholders involved.

There needs to be a stronger commitment to social equality between men and women and to social inclusion within the water field in order to effectively manage and develop global water resources. Women have a key part to play in all areas of water management (*i.e.*, resource management, protection of resources, and/or water diplomacy); despite the undeniable evidence that engaging women in water governance is good policy, the gender gap within the water sector remains historically persistent. Moreover, when women do participate in important decision-making processes related to water in their communities, municipalities, or at the state level, their participation and engagement are limited by a number of barriers (e.g., male resistance and stigmas associated with women's ability to participate and/or engage in technical discussions).

Hydro-diplomacy is a tool for states to balance interests related to national sovereignty while strengthening regional cooperation with countries sharing common resources [1]. Water diplomacy is a multidisciplinary concept that draws on technical, political, and socio-economic knowledge; it is located at the intersection of science, policy, and practice, and includes both state and non-state actors [2]. Water diplomacy aims to promote cooperation and conflict prevention in relation to shared water resources and beyond the water sector [1].

Water has been recognized, in important international forums, as a potentially powerful instrument for peace and long-lasting international cooperation. It is invaluable to ensure that shared water resources are managed efficiently, sustainably, and equitably [3]. For hydro-diplomacy to be effective, the active involvement of many state and non-state actors is required. Ensuring the equal involvement of women, with their dynamism and talents, is critical for the success of the needed interventions at all levels. The results will contribute substantially to more inclusive hydro-diplomacy and promote the cause of peace and sustainable development in the region, which is thirsty not only for water but also for peace and gender equality [2].

When placing women, water, and diplomacy in the same sentence, often enough, the link among them is neither easily nor well understood.

In 2017, the Security Council held a briefing on Preventive Diplomacy and Transboundary Waters [2], emphasizing the role of water diplomacy and cooperation in conflict prevention. This illustrates the growing awareness of the need to

strengthen preventive diplomacy in all its dimensions, and water is an integral part of this effort. “Water, peace, and security are inextricably linked,” was the opening line of the UN Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres in the aforementioned meeting [2].

The number of women in leadership roles in the water sector does not exist solely as an end goal, or even as a quota system for shared authority; rather, there must be a balanced number of both genders at every level to assess the impact of each gender’s participation on determining priorities and collaborative objectives, and ultimately on the choices made regarding water security. This should be considered as part of an overall strategy for ensuring water security that effectively addresses aspects of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and women’s contributions to the sustainable integrated management of water resources [4].

Gender equality is an important aspect of the overall success in meeting all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [2] and the Paris Agreement [2], although most research exploring how gender-responsive policies impact women tends to consider women as passive victims [2]. This misinterpretation misses the totality of the situation because women are agents of change [2].

Meeting water diplomacy objectives requires equal representation of all stakeholders, specifically women, in all aspects of the process. While women’s roles are critical in creating and sustaining peace, resolving conflicts, and creating security, they have opened new doors regarding their role in making decisions related to water diplomacy. Within the water sector, women should have equal representation alongside men when it comes to influencing decision-making priorities, collaborative objectives, and collaborative decisions. This can all be part of creating comprehensive water security that specifically addresses: (1) diversity; (2) inclusion; (3) social equality; and (4) women’s participation in integrated and sustainable water resource development and management.

### **1.1.1. Ethiopian Water Resources**

The water resource of Ethiopia is divided into 12 basins based on topography and generates an annual flow of 122 BCM of surface water and 25 - 40 BCM of groundwater. Despite research showing this fact, the spatial and temporal distribution of the resources varies considerably, and the development needs require an increased quantity and quality of the resources. Ninety-nine point three percent of the country’s area, which is 1.13 million km<sup>2</sup>, makes up the land area, and only 0.7 percent constitutes water bodies.

Transboundary basins are those that are shared by two or more countries. Except for the Awash, Omo-Gibe, and Rift Valley Lakes Basins, most of the major rivers of Ethiopia are transboundary water resources that either cross or form boundaries with other watercourse states. Moreover, more than 75% of Ethiopia’s transboundary surface water resources flow into neighboring countries. The country faces a multiplicity of transboundary water resources challenges in the absence of a coherent strategy on transboundary water resource affairs.

Water resources play a crucial role in Ethiopia’s economic, social, and political

affairs, making them a key factor at the global level. Many transboundary rivers cross multiple countries, becoming critical issues of benefit and cost, and of conflict or cooperation. Ethiopia has been facing immense pressure not to utilize its natural resources, with negative consequences for its development. By systematically overcoming this pressure, Ethiopians have achieved significant progress, especially through the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project.

Currently, Ethiopia, in its bid to demonstrate shared benefits, is working hard to share its electricity resources widely with neighboring countries, an issue that deserves focused attention on water diplomacy.

### **1.1.2. Ethiopian Efforts in Water Diplomacy**

Water diplomacy in Ethiopia confronts the challenges of governing shared water resources for national development and water security for downstream nations for shared water governance. The aim is to convert potential conflicts into cooperative opportunities through negotiation and transparency, including institutional mechanisms and engagement with regional interests, all contributing to stability and sustainable development in boundary and transboundary water resources.

### **1.1.3. Importance of Women's Involvement in Water Diplomacy**

Women's involvement is needed in water diplomacy to create fairer, more gender-equitable, and sustainable governance of water resources. Women's leadership in water (and related) governance fosters peacebuilding, increases the chances of gender-aware policies, and enhances transboundary cooperation, contributing to human security and stability.

### **1.1.4. Women Participation in the Ethiopian Water Sector**

In the Ethiopian water sector, participation by women is critical to the sustainable and inclusive management, development, and cooperation of transboundary and boundary water resources through decision-making. Women's presence brings an entirely different set of experiences to the decision-making table, and this enhances the overall decision-making process, leading to fairer outcomes.

In Ethiopia, a number of initiatives have been put in place to promote gender equality and increase women's participation in the water sector. By improving women's participation in decision-making and broadening the scope of training and capacity-building opportunities for women, several forums have been created for women to voice their opinions.

Despite these efforts, barriers continue to exist for women, preventing their full and effective participation in water sector decision-making. Barriers preventing women from participating in decision-making around water resources include limiting cultural norms, inadequate access to information and resources, and gender bias.

### **1.1.5. Ethiopian Women in Water Association (EWIWA)**

Ethiopian Women in Water Association (EWIWA) was formed to assist in empowering women through networking, providing visibility to women within the

profession, and increasing the representation and leadership of women within the water sector [5].

Currently, the number of qualified and/or professional women working in water at high, mid, low, and expert levels is either very low or, in some areas, totally absent. Women who are qualified and/or have worked in the water sector may have difficulty returning to the workforce after childbirth or while fulfilling other cultural or social obligations. EWIWA will develop a platform upon which women can share ideas and technical assistance, as well as newsletters, capacity-building trainings, experience exchange opportunities, and the development of a network for women who can be empowered and contribute to gender balance/diversity in the water sector [5].

EWIWA will also assist in the inclusion of women in water-related discussions so that women will have an opportunity to be heard, thereby resulting in more informed decision-making, more efficient use of resources, and new viewpoints in societal development.

#### **1.1.6. Practical Action Taken by Ethiopian Women in Water Association**

The Ethiopian Women in Water Association (EWIWA) has been engaged in various activities and events to empower women in water diplomacy and other water-related fields. EWIWA has begun capacity-building trainings in water diplomacy, hydro-diplomacy, gender mainstreaming, leadership, and digital skills to help women advance their technical skills and negotiation abilities. It has provided networks for women professionals to share experiences and raise their visibility, as well as to make strategic partnerships with organizations such as USAID, Enat Bank, and international organizations to support financial empowerment and project development. EWIWA is also actively engaged as a participant in regional and global forums like the Nile Basin Development Forum, African Climate Summit, UN Water Conferences, and other international events to promote gender inclusion and influence transboundary water governance. **Figure 1** shows photos of some events organized and attended by the Ethiopian Women in Water Association. Additionally, EWIWA has started research, baseline assessments, and project proposals to combat barriers to women's engagement in water diplomacy and water resources management, develop gender-sensitive policy advocacy, and promote sustained, inclusive development in water resources at national, regional, and global scales.

### **1.2. Purpose of Study**

This research will provide an essential baseline study regarding the involvement of women in water diplomacy so that we can understand how to improve their role within this area in Ethiopia. As a result, researchers will be able to determine what is happening with women's contributions to the water diplomacy process in Ethiopia and how they can support improved advocacy regarding this process.



**Figure 1.** Photos of an event organized and attended by the Ethiopian Women in Water Association.

The paper will first present respondent characteristics based on responses addressed to different questions in various sections, followed by the respondents' water sector participation, water diplomacy awareness, level of understanding, part of and participation level, importance of women's participation, purpose of empowering women, impacts made by the participation of women, challenges women face to participate, availability of water diplomacy training, daily work linkage with SDG 5 and SDG 6 in their water sector, and additional points raised by respondents. At the end, the paper is followed by a conclusion based on the outcome of the studies and a recommendation, which demonstrates the gap that needs to be addressed in future studies and the limitation of the study. **Figure 2** below shows the study area with transboundary river flow directions and neighboring countries.



**Figure 2.** Study area with transboundary river flow directions and neighboring countries.

## 2. Objective

### 2.1. Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the current situation of female involvement in water diplomacy within Ethiopia and subsequently provide key recommendations to improve female involvement within water diplomacy processes.

### 2.2. Specific Objectives

- To assess the level of involvement in water diplomacy processes,
- To provide support to females involved in water diplomacy,
- To promote increased representation of women within the water sector.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. The Study Design and Analysis Methodology

A baseline assessment of the role of women in the water diplomacy process/domain was conducted. As basic tools, open- and close-ended online-based Google Form surveys were directed towards selected women and men (key informants) and women and men representatives who are involved in the water sector, including government organizations, intergovernmental organizations, universities/academies, research centers, embassies, non-governmental organizations, private organizations, and PhD students. Purposive sampling techniques were used to distribute the survey questionnaire. The selection of respondents was based on practical experience in the country and region, professional networks, and as considerable rep-

resentation of the water sector spectrum as possible. In the selection of respondents, the study tried to consider women and men of different academic and work levels to get a balanced and good representative response. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample size of more than 100 respondents identified through purposive sampling from government organizations, intergovernmental organizations, universities/academies, research centers, embassies, non-governmental organizations, private organizations, and PhD students based on practical experience in the country and region, professional networks, and considerable representation of the water sector spectrum as possible. However, only 51 responses were received, and these 51 responses were considered for further analysis.

The responses to closed questions were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, while the open-ended question responses were analyzed qualitatively to provide more in-depth and narrative explanations.

The questionnaire, composed of twelve categories, was designed with different numbers of questions. Category 1: Respondents' Characteristics, Category 2: Respondents' Level of Participation in the Water Sector, Category 3: Awareness of Water Diplomacy, Category 4: Understanding Level of Water Diplomacy, Category 5: Participation Level in Water Diplomacy, Category 6: Importance of Women's Participation in Water Diplomacy, Category 7: Purpose of Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy, Category 8: Impacts of Participation of Women in Water Diplomacy, Category 9: Challenges Women Face to Participate in Water Diplomacy, Category 10: Availability of Water Diplomacy Training for Women, Category 11: Daily Work Linkage with SDG 5 and SDG 6, and Category 12: Additional Points Respondents Want to Raise.

### 3.2. Key Study Focus Areas

Methodology/The overall design of the tools emphasizes providing specific insights into the following seven main issues.

- The status of women in the water diplomacy domain/process.
- Their perceptions/awareness of the role of water diplomacy.
- The importance of women's participation and empowering women in water diplomacy.
- The impact of women's participation in water diplomacy is evident.
- The main factors/bottlenecks holding back women from playing a decisive role in water diplomacy.
- The effectiveness of capacity-building activities given, if any.
- Linkages between Sustainable Development Goal 6 and Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the daily work realm of women.

### 3.3. Specific Assessment Methodologies

Awareness of water diplomacy, understanding of the level of water diplomacy, participation level in water diplomacy, and barriers to women's participation in water diplomacy are assessed based on the methodology below.

- **Awareness of water diplomacy:** Assessed via a single closed-ended survey question with binary response options: yes or no, with an open-ended question follow-up for sources/reasons. No numerical scoring or categorization was considered in this study.
- **Understanding Level of Water Diplomacy:** Assessed via a closed-ended question with an ordinal scale: very high, high, medium, or low, with a follow-up open-ended question for implicit/practical knowledge. No numerical scoring or categorization is used for this study; only ordinal categories directly from responses are used.
- **Participation Level in Water Diplomacy:** Assessed using two linked questions (Category 5): (1) Binary, part of water diplomacy? (yes/no); (2) Ordinal scale for those affirming: very high, high, medium, low, or very low, with open-ended follow-up questions.
- **Barriers to Women's Participation in Water Diplomacy:** Assessed using separate closed-ended questions for females (Do challenges prevent full engagement?) and males (Do women face challenges?) (Category 9), plus open-ended question responses for details. No numerical scoring and categorization are used for this part either; just binary yes/no per gender, with thematic grouping from open responses used.

### 3.4. Qualitative Analysis Process

All open-ended responses were exported from Google Forms to a text corpus, open-ended question by question, and the author read responses iteratively to note recurring ideas. Then higher-order themes were identified based on the content and pattern matching. For each theme, open coding was assigned. Then the codes were aligned with open-ended responses. Finally, themes were validated through frequency distribution against the full dataset for saturation and summarized narratively. No inter-coder reliability was done for this baseline because of the limited number of respondents ( $n = 51$ ).

### 3.5. Analytical Limitation

Comparative claims between male and female participants have been limited to reflect only the descriptive analysis results from the study, and hence no statistical tests (such as t-tests or chi-square tests), due to the limited sample size of  $n = 51$ , were able to be performed, as the study uses an exploratory baseline design.

Gender-disaggregated frequencies are reported descriptively to highlight patterns for future hypothesis testing; no group differences were statistically analyzed, given the non-probabilistic sample and scope.

### 3.6. Data Collection and Questionnaire Development

The Google Form was developed by the author based on study objectives and distributed to respondents via email, WhatsApp, and Telegram, and respondents voluntarily filled out and submitted their responses. Categories are aligned according

to literature and EWIIWA's assessments' needs. It did not undergo a formal pilot process due to the exploratory baseline nature of the study, but three colleagues in the water sector reviewed a draft for clarity and face validity. The final version is gender-neutral and culturally relevant for professionals working in Ethiopia.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

Standard ethical procedures were followed for this low-risk online survey of professionals. Respondents were given a form before they filled out Google Form questionnaires and proceeded by providing their implied consent. All data collected from Google Forms will be stored securely with author access only. No formal ethical approval was secured, as this falls under the exemption for non-medical, anonymous surveys of professional adults in Ethiopia. No incentives; confidentiality maintained.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Respondents' Characteristics

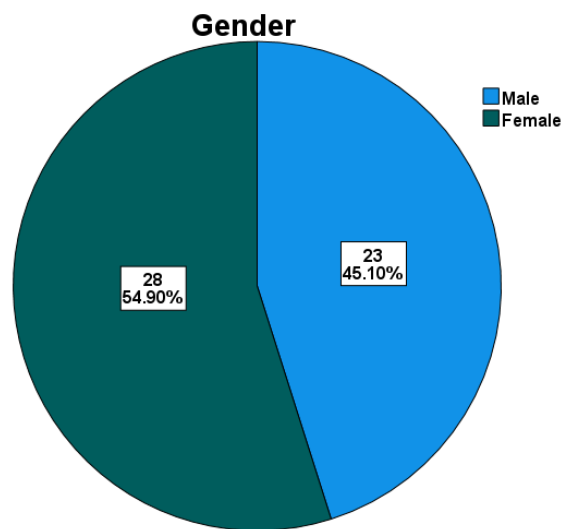
Fifty-one respondents with diverse demographic and professional backgrounds participated in this study. The respondent characteristics are shown below.

- **Gender Distribution:** Out of the 51 respondents who participated in this study, 45.1% were males and 54.9% were females. The number of female respondents is slightly higher than that of male respondents; this shows balanced gender participation.
- **Age Range:** Most respondents are in the mid-career age groups: 43.1% are aged 35 - 44 and 25.5% are 45 - 64 years old, showing experienced participation from mature professionals. Only a small percentage (2.9%) are young adults (18 - 24), and 3.9% are over 64.
- **Education Level:** Over 90% of respondents hold advanced degrees, with 56.9% having a Master of Science (MSc.), 35.3% a PhD, and 2.0% being professors. Only 5.9% have a Bachelor of Science (BSc.); this shows strong academic qualifications among the respondents. The respondents are highly educated.
- **Current Positions:** Respondents occupy a range of roles within top-level leadership and expert levels: 3.9% are top-level leaders, 37.3% are medium-level leaders, 21.6% are entry-level leaders, and 31.4% are experts, with a small portion (5.9%) in other positions.
- **Organizational Affiliation:** The largest number of respondents are from universities/academia (33.3%), followed by government organizations (29.4%) and NGOs (17.6%). The other respondents' affiliations were intergovernmental organizations (5.9%), private organizations (5.9%), research centers (3.9%), embassies (2.0%), and PhD students (2.0%). This distribution shows multi-sectoral engagement.
- **Experience in the Water Sector:** Respondents have substantial experience, with 41.2% having 0 - 10 years, 33.3% 11 - 20 years, 11.8% 21 - 30 years, and 13.7% over 30 years of experience. These show a mix of early-career to highly

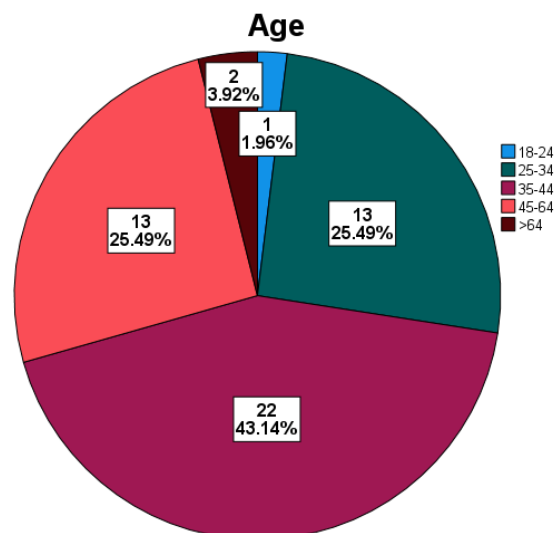
seasoned professionals.

Most respondents are representative of a good mixture of genders. In general, the sample is made up of individuals who are career professionals (mostly in middle age), and who have achieved at minimum a graduate diploma (up to PhD level). Respondents hold a wide variety of executive/leadership and subject matter expert (SME) type positions and work for multiple organizations, including academic, governmental, and non-profits. The majority of the sample respondents have extensive work backgrounds in the water sector.

SPSS analyses of demographic characteristics for all respondents (and examples of demographics are shown through **Figure 3** through 8 below), including: (1) Gender (2) Age Range (3) Education Level (4) Position (5) Organization/Entity (6) Work Experience in the Water Sector.



**Figure 3.** Gender distribution of the respondents.



**Figure 4.** Age range of the respondents.

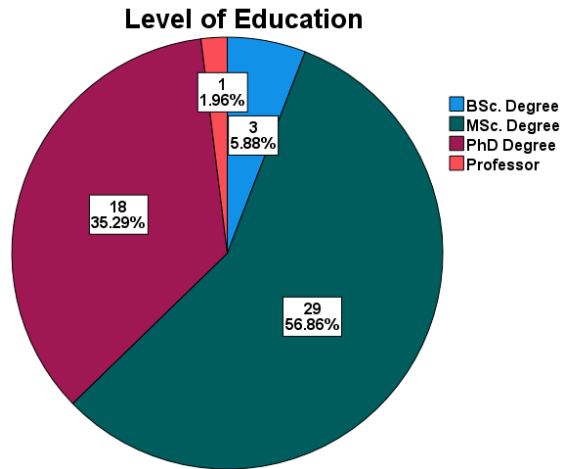


Figure 5. Level of education of respondent.

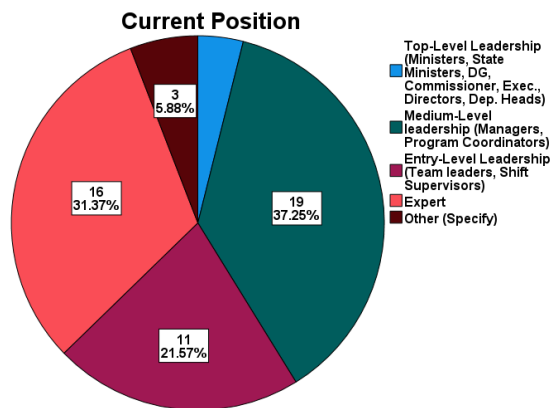


Figure 6. Current position of the respondent.

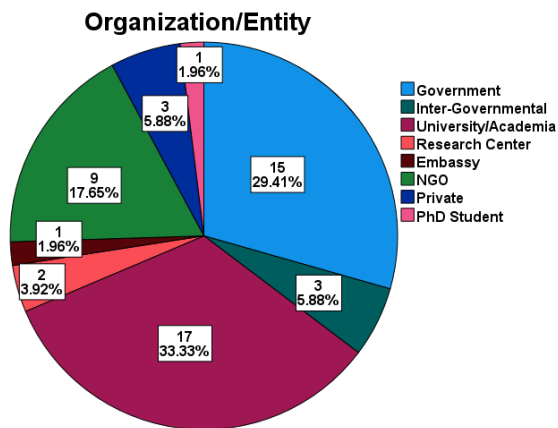


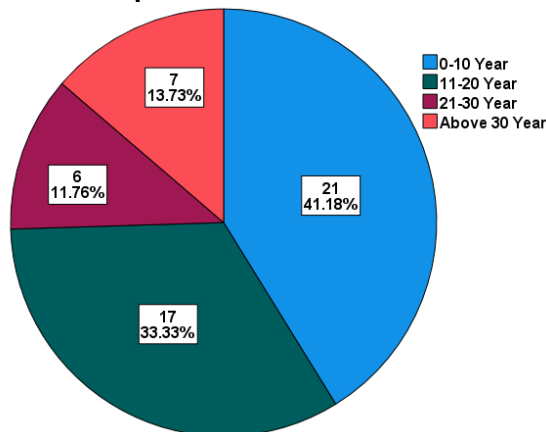
Figure 7. Organization/Entity of the respondent.

#### 4.2. Respondents' Water Sector Participation

Among the 51 respondents, a large number of respondents, 92.2% (47 respondents), are part of the water sector, consisting of 21 males and 26 females, which shows the respondents' gender balance within those participating in the water sec-

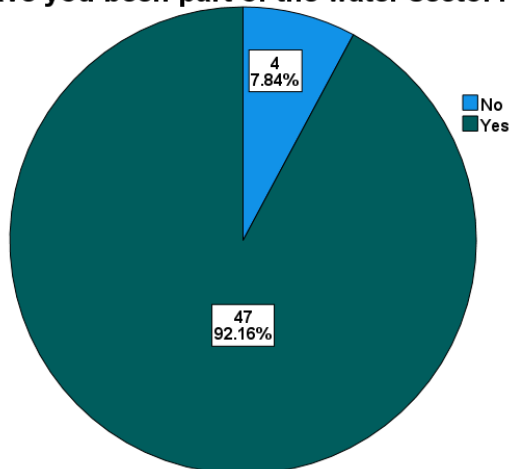
tor. A small number of respondents, 7.8% (4 respondents, 2 male and 2 female), are new to the water sector. **Figure 9** below shows the participation of respondents in the water sector.

**Year of Experience in Water Sector**



**Figure 8.** The respondent's years of experience in the water sector.

**Have you been part of the water sector?**



**Figure 9.** The respondents of the water sector participation.

The evidence suggests that the large majority of respondents possess practical experience of some kind in the water sector. The gender balance of respondents likewise suggests participation by both males and females in this study, but not in the water sector.

### 4.3. Water Diplomacy Awareness

The results show that many respondents have awareness of water diplomacy. In fact, 72.5% (20 males and 17 females) have sufficient awareness, which demonstrates high levels of awareness for most respondents. Certainly, some respondents (27.5%, or 3 males and 11 females) have less awareness about water diplo-

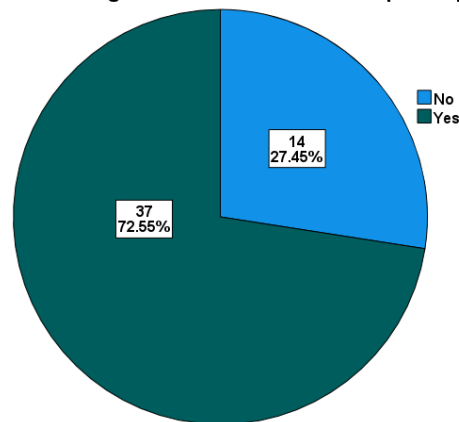
macy. **Figure 10** below shows the respondents' water diplomacy awareness level.

Regarding the awareness of male and female respondents separately:

- Among male respondents, 87.0% (20 of 23) have good awareness of water diplomacy, while 13.0% (3 males) of respondents lack sufficient awareness.
- Among female respondents, 60.7% (17 of 28) have sufficient awareness of water diplomacy, and 39.3% (11 females) have less awareness.

The result shows that most respondents are aware of water diplomacy, although 87% of male respondents reported sufficient awareness vs. 60.7% of females. This suggests that most respondents have a good understanding of water diplomacy, but specific awareness-raising is required among a few females.

Do you have enough awareness about water diplomacy?



**Figure 10.** The respondents' water diplomacy awareness level.

#### 4.3.1. The Open-Ended Response of Respondents Has Sufficient Awareness

According to the open-ended question response, respondents became aware of water diplomacy in multiple ways, including formal study, work experience, institutional engagement, workshops, conferences, meetings, and media. They mentioned that they gained awareness of water diplomacy through:

- **Engagement in Negotiations and Different Events:** Multiple respondents cited their sources of water diplomacy awareness as participation in negotiation processes, workshops, conferences, and meetings related to transboundary water resources management and development.
- **Educational and Training Opportunities:** The other sources of awareness, as mentioned by respondents, were graduate studies, capacity-building trainings, seminars, and courses—some of which were offered by organizations like the Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE), Nile Basin Initiative Secretariat (NBI/Nile-SEC), Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Ethiopian Women in Water Association (EWIWA), and the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Some of the respondents mentioned that they had (indirectly) read W. Islam Shafiqul's Water Diplomacy book.

- **Institutional Affiliations:** Being part of organizations like NBI, forums of the Ministry of Water and Energy, or academic organizations contributed to water diplomacy awareness.
- **Research and Professional Practice:** Many respondents were engaged in research on water, water resource modelling, water resources management, and hydro-diplomacy, hydro-politics, and regional projects like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), and engagement with the Nile Basin Initiative and its center, which also contributed to their practical awareness of water diplomacy.
- **Media and Communication:** Television and media were not mentioned as frequently, but they served as avenues for some respondents to gain exposure to water diplomacy.
- **Leadership and Networking:** A few respondents noted that the establishment of forums, associations/networks, taking leadership roles, and being part of women's associations/networks for water also contributed to the importance of ongoing learning and awareness building.
- **Day-to-Day Work:** Regular office work and communication with water sector programs also increased respondents' awareness of water diplomacy concepts.

The responses indicate that increased awareness of concepts related to water diplomacy is developed through the interconnected and blended nature of learning in education, training, practice, research, and/or institutional exposure. While formal education and specific participatory experiences are the primary ways to learn, media and self-directed opportunities also contribute. This variety in experience shows the opportunities for more comprehensive learning pathways for Ethiopian professionals, particularly women, in their education and understanding of water diplomacy.

#### 4.3.2. The Open-Ended Response of Respondents Does Not Have Enough Awareness

From open-ended respondents, the remaining respondents who do not have enough awareness of water diplomacy cite the following key reasons:

- **Lack of Exposure:** People have not been exposed to platforms or opportunities to learn about water diplomacy in the past.
- **Focus on Local Issues:** Some people deal with inland water or the local context (e.g., selected basins such as those in the Rift Valley). **Limited Ability and Opportunity to Participate in Water Diplomacy:** Limited participation at an international level in water diplomacy limits participants from engaging in transboundary water issues through water diplomacy.
- **Limited Capacity Building and Opportunity:** Most participants reported that their ability to participate in water diplomacy is limited due to a lack of capacity building, training, and other opportunities in water diplomacy.
- **The Common Perception of Water:** Most people want to think of water as an issue of sufficient quantity rather than as a diplomatic issue. As a result, water diplomacy is perceived as less interesting and less relevant.

- **Educational and Professional Disconnect:** Some participants received theoretical education (e.g., International Water Law) but lacked direct engagement in developing their awareness from an educational background to any practical involvement in water diplomacy.
- **Personal Initiative Barriers:** Some respondents do not have the opportunity or interest to diligently seek knowledge in this particular area.

The lack of understanding by some respondents is primarily due to exposure, limited opportunities to build awareness, and a focus on local water issues instead of awareness of water diplomacy. The persistent view of water issues as technical and the disconnect between education and practice were also contributors to the gap. Improving these aspects through further training, awareness campaigns, and inclusive avenues for discussing water diplomacy may provide an improved understanding of water diplomacy.

#### 4.4. Level of Understanding of Water Diplomacy

Among the 51 respondents, the level of understanding of water diplomacy was distributed as described below:

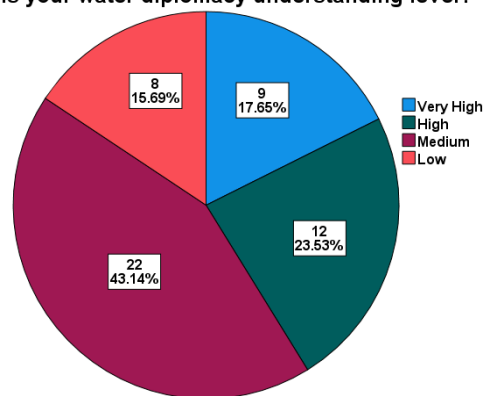
**Very High Level of Understanding:** 17.6% (7 males and 2 females) have a very high level of understanding.

**High Level of Understanding:** 23.5% (7 males and 5 females) have a high level of understanding.

**Medium Level of Understanding:** The largest group, comprising 43.1% (7 males and 15 females), has a medium level of understanding.

**Low Level of Understanding:** 15.7% (2 males and 6 females) have a low level of understanding. **Figure 11** below shows the respondents' water diplomacy understanding level.

What is your water diplomacy understanding level?



**Figure 11.** The respondent's water diplomacy understanding level.

Additionally, the largest number of female respondents, 75% (21 of 28), fell into medium/low understanding categories, compared to 39% of males (9 of 23). Only 25% of female respondents have a higher level of understanding. There are also

respondents (two females and one male) who reported a medium level of understanding of water diplomacy but were unaware of the various aspects of water diplomacy. This seems to indicate their knowledge was probably grounded in experiences learned in practice as a result of actions they have undertaken in the process without consciously recognizing they are dealing with water diplomacy, thus acquiring knowledge in an unconscious or implicit way.

#### 4.5. Part of and Participation Level in Water Diplomacy

##### 4.5.1. Respondents' Part in Water Diplomacy

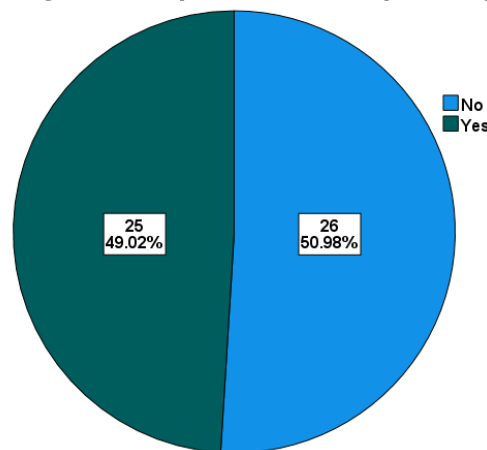
Among the 51 respondents, almost half have indicated that they are part of water diplomacy.

- 49.0% (25 respondents: 15 male, 10 female) are part of water diplomacy, and
- 51.0% (26 respondents: 8 male, 18 female) are not part of water diplomacy.

This shows that over half of the respondents have not participated/involved in water diplomacy efforts, which might suggest a slight increase of males to females in engagement, although females constitute a greater proportion not engaged.

The data show that slightly under half of respondents have experience in water diplomacy, and slightly more than half have not. **Figure 12** below shows the respondent's part in water diplomacy. The result shows 49% of respondents (25 of 51) reported involvement; this included 65% of males (15 of 23) vs. 36% of females (10 of 28), which reinforces the need to increase engagement and opportunities for women participating in water diplomacy.

**Have you been part of water diplomacy?**



**Figure 12.** The respondent's part of water diplomacy.

##### 4.5.2. Level of Participation in Water Diplomacy

The levels of participation of the 51 respondents show that most people's engagement in water diplomacy is at low to moderate levels. To explain, 31.4% of respondents have a medium level of participation, and 33.3% of respondents have a low level of participation, representing almost two-thirds of all responses.

When looking for differences by gender, men are more represented across high

participation levels.

- A very high level of participation is demonstrated only by men (9.8%, 5 men).
- Participation is nearly balanced (17.6%, 5 men; 4 women).
- Participation at a medium level is equal (31.4%, 8 men; 8 women).

On the other hand, women are more concentrated at lower levels of participation:

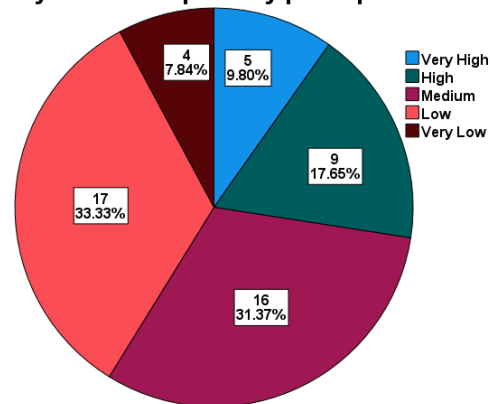
- Participation at low levels was 33.3% overall, mostly women (with 12 women and 5 men).

Participating at a very low rate are all women (7.8%, 4 women).

Overall, 55.2% of women demonstrate low or very low levels of participation, indicating women are not getting enough opportunities to participate in water diplomacy when compared to men. This further supports previous assessments that point to broader systemic barriers to the inclusion of women in important decision-making discussions or negotiations on water resources. **Figure 13** below shows the respondent's water diplomacy participation level.

This study and its implications will point to the need to take specific actions to strengthen women and enhance their meaningful participation in water diplomacy. If women participated more regularly and meaningfully, it would enable women's participation for more just, effective, and sustainable water governance in Ethiopia.

**What is your water diplomacy participation level?**



**Figure 13.** The respondent's water diplomacy participation level.

According to the open-ended question response, most respondents have a good participation level in water diplomacy, and the water diplomacy activities in which they participated are:

Most respondents are engaged in activities related to water diplomacy in trans-boundary water resources issues. Their engagements vary among negotiation processes, capacity building and technical support, stakeholder engagement facilitation, and participation in the development of policies. They are engaged in several areas, including,

- **Negotiations and Mediation:** Some respondents have been involved in nego-

tiations/reconciliation around high-stakes negotiations, which include the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) negotiations and trilateral negotiations, as well as technical meetings and negotiations among Nile Basin countries. Some have been negotiators for quite some time, showing their experience and leadership in water diplomacy.

- **Technical and Advisory Roles:** Some respondents have played technical support roles, reviewed impact assessments, and participated in scientific groups. Their role often involves the provision of good advice on environmental assessments and providing general policy or technical advice within an organization, such as the Ministry of Water and Energy, Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), and its centers.
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Many respondents have engaged in or supported training, workshops, and capacity-building activities, including the Women in Water Diplomacy Network or regional organizations such as AMCOW and NBI and its centers.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Cooperation:** Some respondents have participated in developing and implementing joint projects, facilitating negotiations, managing conflicts, benefit sharing, and stakeholder consultations within transboundary water frameworks.
- **Leadership and Related Organizational Involvement:** Several respondents hold leadership positions, including director general, directors, secretariats, and chairs, within many relevant government and regional organizations or institutions. They have been involved with academics, the media, practitioners, and others to communicate and inform water diplomacy, including both awareness and cooperation in these sectors.

The extent and depth of their engagement reflect a firmly grounded involvement in various forms of water diplomacy, as these varied experiences indicate collective expertise and aim in negotiation, technical assistance, institutional capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement. Collectively, their combined experiences affirm and highlight the need for ongoing institutional capacity-building, engagement, and negotiation strategy to promote water diplomacy within Ethiopia and around the region. This rationale for engaged processes by a motivated group can serve as a catalyst for enhancing women's roles in water diplomacy and advancing the idea of more inclusive and representative processes.

#### 4.6. Importance of Women Participation in Water Diplomacy

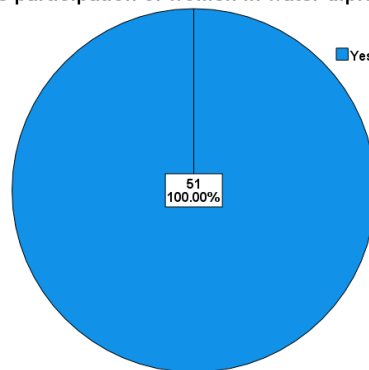
- **General Agreement:** All of the respondents agree that women are important to the field of Water Diplomacy, showing that they share the same perspective regardless of gender.
- **General Support:** Both male & female agreed on the importance of women and men participating equally in Water Governance and Water Diplomacy, suggesting there is broad support for including women in both fields.
- **Basis for Action:** This census highlights and serves as an essential basis for

advancing policies and endeavors that will support women's participation in water diplomacy processes.

- **Potential for Better Outcomes:** The collective recognition acknowledges benefits from the participation of women, including better cooperation, diverse perspectives in negotiations, and more equitable water resources management.

Overall, unanimous agreement on the importance of women's participation signifies a positive attitude and willingness among stakeholders towards greater gender inclusion in water diplomacy in Ethiopia. This common view can aid efforts to provide visibility regarding the barriers to women participating in decision-making and collaborative water management activities. **Figure 14** below shows the agreement of all respondents on the importance of women's participation in water diplomacy.

Is the participation of women in water diplomacy important?



**Figure 14.** Importance of women's participation in water diplomacy.

According to all respondents, women should participate in water diplomacy, and their reasons can be summarized from the open-ended framework:

- **Essential Stakeholders:** Women make up about 50% of the population (approximately), and they have ordinarily been the main users and managers of water resources both at home and within the community. Their close relationship to water issues makes them key stakeholders who need to be included in the diplomatic process.
- **Impact of Water Issues on Women:** women are mostly affected by water-related conflicts and scarcity. Including women in decision-making ensures that policies created to ameliorate water problems actually meet the needs of the community, as well as address appropriate societal vulnerabilities.
- **Unique Perspectives and Skills:** Several respondents stated that women bring a different process of problem-solving and negotiation capacity and are simply able to generate peace. Particularly, they thought that women bringing a disposition to ultimate consensus, sustainable practices, and a shared human interest benefits a more comprehensive agreement that promotes durability.
- **Promoting Inclusiveness and Equity:** In order for equitable processes to have a chance to work, women must be included in the processes of decision-making.

ing and governance in water. Moreover, women's purposeful inclusion fuels gender balance, human rights, and the enrichment of the cooperative process for water.

- **Enhancing Effectiveness and Sustainability:** Gender-inclusive dialogue in the water sector allows for better resolution of conflicts, more resilient peace agreements, and more efficient and sustainable sharing of resource practices for all.
- **Ability to Lead and Contribute:** Respondents voiced the view that women have the intellect, skills, and experience to contribute at many levels in water diplomacy, both for technical and high-level negotiations.
- **Broader Social Benefits:** By educating and including women in water diplomacy, they raise community awareness, encourage peacebuilding, and contribute to sustainable development in ways that are commensurate with national and international goals.

The above reasons indicate a clear understanding that the engagement of women in water diplomacy is not merely an issue of fairness but a key part of effective water diplomacy. Women will play a key role in the development of inclusive and sustainable solutions to address the complex trans-boundary water issues in Ethiopia and in this region through women's unique perspectives and experiences, negotiation strengths, and leadership abilities.

#### 4.7. Purpose of Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy

##### What is the purpose of empowering women in water diplomacy?

Based on the open-ended responses of the participants, the objective of empowering women in water diplomacy is:

- **Promoting Gender Equity and Inclusion:** Empowerment is seen as critical to increasing women's representation, influence, and leadership at all levels of decision-making to help shift the balance of male-dominated water diplomacy arenas.
- **Enhancing Effectiveness and Sustainability:** Women's perspectives bring different insights, which will lead to better, more equitable, and sustainable outcomes for water management and diplomacy that reflect the needs of real communities.
- **Addressing Gendered Impacts:** Due to their dual roles as primary users and practitioners who face disproportionate impacts from disputes regarding who controls or utilizes water, empowering women engages their distinct experiences and priorities in policy change and the resolution process.
- **Building Capacity and Confidence:** Empowerment provides women with modern technical skills, experience in negotiation, and knowledge so they can engage confidently or lead in water diplomacy processes.
- **Fostering Peace and Stability:** The inclusion of women contributes to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and collaborative water governance, resulting in agreements that are more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

- **Realizing Human Rights and Social Justice:** Women's empowerment affirms women's rights to be involved in decisions that directly affect their lives and provides a way to advance social justice and inclusiveness in water diplomacy.
- **Leveraging Untapped Potential:** the response indicated that women represent a large untapped resource, and their contributions can bring important value and new dimensions to transboundary water management.
- **Raising Awareness and Broadening Engagement:** Women's empowerment also aims to develop greater awareness about water diplomacy and to facilitate the participation of more community members in order to provide sustainability into the future.

There are several aspects of the role of women's empowerment in water diplomacy: ensuring equal participation and representation, leveraging a variety of expertise for better water governance, acknowledgment of women's gender-specific vulnerabilities, and the potential to improve peace and cooperation around shared waters. Empowerment thus becomes a critical enabler of inclusive, effective, and sustainable water diplomacy that offers benefits to women and society as a whole.

#### 4.8. Impacts Made on the Participation of Women in Water Diplomacy

The results display a range of impacts made by those who answered questions about women's participation in water diplomacy; some impacts are engaging, while others cite areas requiring greater support and engagement.

##### **Positive Contributions and Achievements:**

- Multiple respondents support women by encouraging their participation, organizing capacity-building trainings or awareness creation activities, and providing access to education or training.
- Engaging in high-level discussions (e.g., Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Nile Basin Initiative and its center, and AMCOW discussions) and a number of advisory positions show an impactful commitment to advancing women's representation.
- The Women in Water Diplomacy Network has created opportunities for knowledge-sharing, trust-building, and cooperation.
- Notable impacts are mainly in the areas of providing gender mainstreaming, increasing leadership positions, contributing to the economic empowerment of women, and increasing awareness at the community level.
- Participation in, creation of, or contribution to research, and engagement in advocacy efforts to facilitate women's inclusion in decision-making capacities.

##### **Barriers and Limited Engagement:**

- Some respondents have not yet made any impact or participated in water diplomacy, citing barriers such as a lack of opportunities, capacity, or resources.
- A few acknowledge that their impact is limited, infrequent, or even indirect due to limited involvement.

##### **Opportunities to Gain Skills and Access Support:**

- Several respondents express willingness to do more if given the opportunity to contribute, pointing to the need for expanded training, mentorship, and access.
- Increased information sharing and networking, along with more collaborative approaches, are acknowledged as one way to support efforts to reduce barriers to increasing women's participation.

While significant progress has been made in enhancing women's agency and involvement in water diplomacy, much more can be done to increase engagement and their effectiveness. Expanding capacity-building, creating inclusive platforms, and addressing systemic barriers will be key to realizing the full potential of women's contributions for more inclusive, effective, and sustainable water governance.

## 4.9. Challenges Women Face in Participating in Water Diplomacy

### 4.9.1. Challenges Women Face in Participating in Water Diplomacy —Female Respondents

The challenges women face in participation in water diplomacy were raised for women and men separately. From the total of 28 women respondents, 39.3% (11 women) noted the existence of challenges that prevent their full engagement as women water diplomats, whereas 60.7% (17 women) noted that they did not encounter barriers. **Figure 15** below shows the challenges women face in participating in water diplomacy according to female respondents.

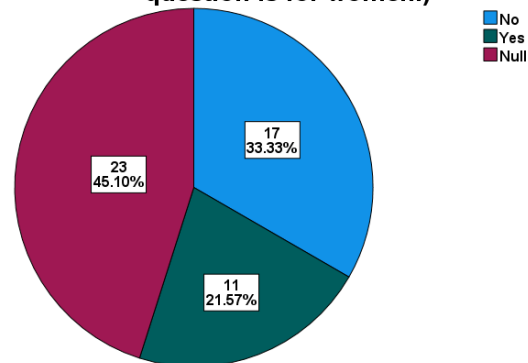
- **Moderate Proportion of Women Reporting Challenges:** Approximately two-fifths of the women respondents recognize barriers that preclude them from fully engaging as water diplomats. This indicates that structural, social, or institutional barriers still affect a reasonable portion of women.
- **Overall, the majority of women did not report encountering challenges:** More than half of the women respondents did not report barriers encountered as a water diplomat. This may show some improvement in enabling environments, or it might reflect the ability to circumvent or surpass challenges.
- **Implications for Gender Participation Gap:** Barriers alone may not entirely reflect the level of the gender participation gap in water diplomacy. Therefore, strategies to increase women's participation at a water diplomacy level should also be investigated, and other factors such as awareness, motivation, career aspirations, and outreach could be targeted.

Although women continue to face significant challenges in fully engaging in water diplomacy, most do not consider these challenges as barriers. This dual reality implies that closing the gender participation gap will require addressing structural challenges and enhancing women's interest, empowerment, and methods for fully participating at multiple levels of water diplomacy.

According to the open-ended response from respondents, there are several challenges that women face. Women respondents identified challenges that prevent them from fully participating in water diplomacy. These have been categorized into three main types of barriers: (1) social barriers, (2) institutional barriers,

and (3) cultural barriers.

**Do you face any challenges holding you back from fully performing your role as a woman water diplomat? (This question is for women.)**



**Figure 15.** Challenges women face to participate in water diplomacy—According to female respondents.

Challenges to Women's Participation in Water Diplomacy from Women Respondents' Perspective:

- **Male-Dominated Environment:** Respondents expressed a common theme that water diplomacy is perceived to be male-dominated and that women cannot compete, gain recognition, and be provided with opportunities to participate. Many women respondents commented on experiencing marginalization or exclusion during critical negotiation and technical discussions.
- **Limited Access to Information and Opportunities:** Women often experience barriers that limit their access to timely information, networking opportunities, and opportunities to fully participate in water diplomacy. These limitations restrict women from being able to have an impact on the outcome of water diplomacy processes.
- **Gender Stereotypes and Bias:** Gender stereotypes inflicted upon women contribute to bias in decision-making. It is common for women respondents to describe how they have shared an idea that has subsequently been validated by a male colleague or their male counterparts.
- **Underrepresentation in Decision-Making:** Women are significantly underrepresented in water diplomacy decision-making forums, which does not allow for any influence over the outcome of water diplomacy policies and negotiations.
- **Family and Social Responsibilities:** The presence of traditional gender roles and family burdens associated with childcare and household responsibilities makes it difficult for women to travel, attend meetings lasting longer than one day, or take the lead in relation to water diplomacy.
- **Capacity and Awareness Issues:** Lack of training, awareness, and capacity-building programs affects women's ability to participate and develop in water diplomacy.

- **Institutional and Policy Barriers:** The absence of gender-sensitive policies, as well as a lack of support from the government and institutions, restricts women from being fully empowered and participating equitably.
- **Resistance and Lack of Encouragement:** some women respondents indicated that they experienced difficulty moving forward because of opposition from existing stakeholders and the absence of support to engage in or advance in their roles in water diplomacy.

Barriers to women's participation in water diplomacy include a longstanding history of male dominance, lack of access to information and opportunities, gender bias, and competing family responsibilities. Interventions to increase women's participation and advancement in water diplomacy must address both structural and cultural barriers and may use a multitude of strategies, including but not limited to promoting capacity-building, reforming policy, supporting inclusive practices, and creating supportive systems that will help women feel equally secure and empowered within the context of water diplomacy.

#### 4.9.2. Challenges Women Face in Participating in Water Diplomacy —Male Respondents

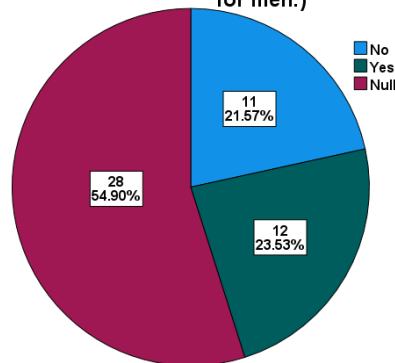
Out of the 23 male respondents, a majority (52.2%, or 12 of the men) hold the perception that women experience challenges that are barriers to their full involvement as water diplomats, while 47.8% (11 of the men) do not hold the perception that challenges are barriers to women's participation. **Figure 16** below shows the challenges women face in participating in water diplomacy, according to male respondents.

- **Majority Perceive Existence of Challenges:** Just over half of the male respondents express their perceptions of women's barriers as challenges that limit effective involvement in water diplomacy—therefore, there appears to be a general understanding among male respondents about challenges women may face, including social, institutional, or systemic barriers.
- **Considerable Minority Perceive Existence of No Barriers:** Nearly half of the men included in the study do not state the existence of barriers they perceive as preventing the full participation of women. This may reflect different levels of awareness or differing beliefs regarding the factors related to women and barriers to participation.
- **Implications for Addressing Gender Gaps:** The differing perspectives between male respondents indicate a need for increased capacity building and awareness raising related to the realities of the challenges faced by women in this field. To demonstrate specifically to participants the impact of the challenges many participants face, consensus and understanding are needed to address these challenges among all actors—including men.
- **Comparative Insights:** Compared to women respondents, a smaller proportion of men reported the existence of challenges, despite differing perspectives, and it appears somewhat more likely for them to say challenges were existent but to approach these challenges either from an external viewpoint, still ob-

serving the barriers faced by women in water diplomacy, or to shift the expectations of women fully participating in water diplomacy.

Although a little more than half of the male respondents expressed that women face obstacles in water diplomacy, nearly half of the male respondents do not see considerable obstacles. These conflicting viewpoints suggest the absence of shared understanding, necessitating some targeted awareness among men and women to more accurately recognize and address barriers to women's equitable participation in water diplomacy.

Do women face any challenges holding them back from fully performing their role as women water diplomats? (This question is for men.)



**Figure 16.** Challenges women face to participate in water diplomacy—According to male respondents.

Based upon the open-ended responses from respondents, male respondents identified major limitations to women's ability to participate fully in water diplomacy, which stem from three different sources: social norms, institutional limitations, and individual circumstances.

- **Limited Number of Women in Water Professions:** Male respondents noted that the small number of women in the water sector makes it difficult for women to be visible in and influence decisions surrounding water diplomacy.
- **Social and cultural barriers, which include** (a) patriarchal attitudes toward the female role; (b) gendered stereotypes; and (c) customs that limit women's ability to access the opportunity for leadership and decision-making, limit women's ability to engage outside the context of their families and domestic responsibilities.
- **Limited Access and Exposure:** This includes the following: (a) the education, training, and technology available to women; and (b) all of these factors limit women's ability to participate in water diplomacy and make contributions to the field. Additionally, there are limited options for exposure and awareness with respect to water diplomacy.
- **Workplace Discrimination and Bias:** Discrimination related to pay inequity, limited opportunities for advancement, and exclusion from informal networks are also barriers to women's professional development within the discipline.
- **Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities:** Women are also disadvan-

taged by family and domestic responsibilities, which are often not evenly divided with men. Family responsibilities, such as taking care of children or other caring responsibilities that women typically perform, often make it harder for them to travel, attend meetings, and devote further time and commitment to diplomatic engagements.

- **Networking and Mentorship Gaps:** Women often have less access to mentors and professional networks, which are essential for developing skills and building a career.
- **Security Risks:** In unstable areas, women working in water diplomacy face problematic personal security issues that are likely to prevent their participation.
- **Perseverance and strength:** Some men noted that patience and resilience on the part of women can be identified as positive qualities that may assist in addressing the issues, if properly supported.

Men's respondent perspectives suggested that systemic gendered inequities, cultural stereotypes, differential access to capacity-building tools, and local responsibilities are salient barriers to women's involvement in water diplomacy. Creating meaningful participation and developing the capacity of women to participate in the sector require institutional reform and policy changes; awareness campaigns; mentoring programs; and improved gender equality, inclusion, and safety.

#### 4.9.3. Overall Summary

*Both male and female respondents recognized considerable social, cultural, institutional, and professional barriers to women's participation in water diplomacy. Among the mutual challenges identified were the inherent maleness of the sector, gender stereotypes, limited access to education and training, workplace discrimination, and unequal domestic responsibilities. Both groups mentioned limited opportunities, lack of mentoring, and lack of access to information and networks as issues women faced.*

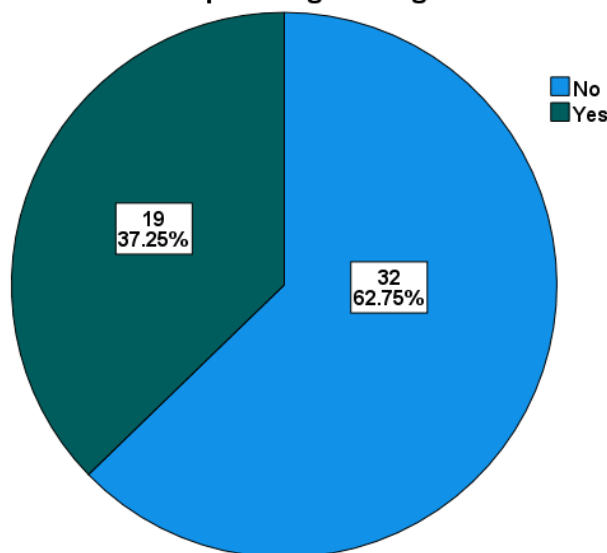
*Female respondents highlighted their own experiences with exclusion and bias; men identified systemic issues and acknowledged that there are growing numbers of women leaders who can lead successfully. Ultimately, to remove the barriers for women in water diplomacy, additional cooperation and coordination will need to occur to create supportive changes to gender-inclusive policies, build women's skills and self-confidence, promote mentorship and connect women with networks, and challenge existing norms that prevent women's ability to participate fully in meaningful and equitable ways.*

#### 4.10. Availability of Water Diplomacy Training for Women

The baseline study indicates that a large percentage of respondents believe there is insufficient training for Ethiopian women on water diplomacy empowerment. Only 37.3% (8 male and 11 female) of women reported they received training, and

a larger number, 62.7% (15 male and 17 female), believe that women do not receive empowerment training. **Figure 17** below shows the availability of water diplomacy training for women. Among female respondents, 60.7% indicated that in their opinion women did not receive training on water diplomacy, and 65.2% of males responded the same. Therefore, a consensus exists regarding the lack of training for women professionals in water diplomacy in Ethiopia. There is an urgent need for water diplomacy training specifically for women because 75% or more of Ethiopia's surface water resources are shared transboundary resources. Women need to enhance their skills and increase their awareness, as this will help achieve equitable gender participation, which is critical to effectively and inclusively addressing Ethiopia's water diplomacy issues.

**Ethiopian women had been getting water diplomacy-empowering trainings?**

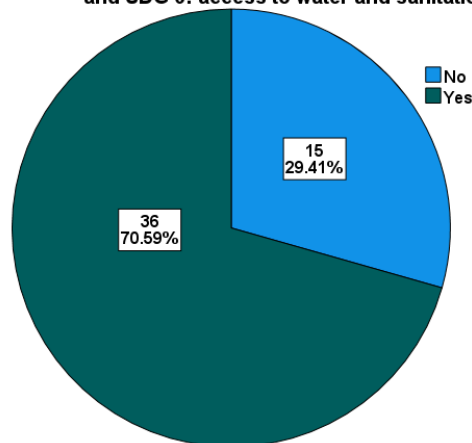


**Figure 17.** Availability of water diplomacy training for women.

#### 4.11. Daily Work Linkage with SDG 5 and SDG 6

Most respondents indicated that they see a clear link between the work they do daily and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 (gender equality) and 6 (access to clean water). Out of the 51 respondents, 70.6% (14 males and 22 females) stated that their day-to-day responsibilities contribute to these two SDGs. For the female respondents, this connection was even stronger; 78.6% (22 females) reported that their day-to-day responsibilities supported the promotion of gender equality and access to water and sanitation. This suggests that there are many professionals within the water diplomacy space who are contributing to wider development objectives connected to women's empowerment, equitable management of water resources, and the importance of including gender and water objectives in their daily roles. **Figure 18** below shows the respondents' daily work linkage with SDG 5 and SDG 6.

Is your daily work linked to Sustainable Development Goal 6 and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5: gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, and SDG 6: access to water and sanitation for all)?



**Figure 18.** The respondents' daily work linkage with SDG 5 and SDG 6.

#### 4.12. Additional Points

The additional points raised by respondents are as follows:

The respondent expressed strong support for the work of the Ethiopian Women in Water Association and suggested that women should not just be involved as stakeholders but also as negotiators and decision-makers in water diplomacy at global and national levels. They also pointed to the need to understand diplomacy as an international practice, reiterated the need for continued capacity and empowerment from education starting from the grass roots, and increased involvement of young women water engineers in negotiating processes. Many of them also pointed out the requirement for additional training and awareness raising, along with the need for affirmative action measures for the advancement of women's education and involvement in the sectors of water and energy. In addition, they recognized that there is a large connection between gender equality, access to water, and sustainable development and feel there is a need to consider gender issues when managing water resources. They also suggested developing an institutional process to coordinate water diplomacy, support traditional knowledge, enhance relationships between countries both bilaterally and trilaterally, and possibly create an avenue for collaboration among all nations in the Nile Basin.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 5.1. Conclusion

The authors found that while there is increased awareness of women's participation in water diplomacy in Ethiopia, important gender gaps persist due to social, cultural, institutional, and capacity constraints. Women's participation is still limited due to male-dominated settings, inadequate access to information and training, and ongoing family obligations. Participants still want to support women's empowerment through capacity building, raising awareness, and increasing involvement in all aspects of water diplomacy. The authors conclude that their find-

ings demonstrate the need for better gender-responsive policies and an enabling environment to support women's leadership in transboundary water management.

## 5.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided:

- Facilitating the expansion of targeted training programs for water diplomats and ongoing capacity-building efforts targeted at women professionals.
- Encouraging early empowerment initiatives starting at the grassroots and education levels to train communication and negotiation skills.
- Supporting gender mainstreaming strategies in policies related to the water sector and transboundary water governance.
- Developing frameworks to coordinate water diplomacy efforts and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and regional cooperation.
- Improving mentoring, networking, and leadership opportunities for women so that they can address professional and social barriers.
- We are promoting government support or affirmative action to increase the number of women occupying negotiator and decision-making roles in water diplomacy.
- Stimulating broader awareness of the link between gender equality, sustainable community water governance, and peacebuilding for effective and inclusive water diplomacy.

## 5.3. Contextual Implications for Ethiopian Transboundary Water Governance

Ethiopia has over 75% of its transboundary surface water resources flowing into neighboring countries, thus providing a necessary baseline for considering that there is currently 72.5% awareness by respondents of water diplomacy. However, females surveyed reported medium/low understanding of 75% and low/very low participation levels of 55.2%, respectively. This indicates that there is considerable potential for more inclusive gender-related participation when it comes to benefit-sharing and conflict resolution related to transboundary water governance. The lack of female participation may create a situation whereby decision-making is dominated by males, which could result in inequitable decision-making with transboundary implications. **Table 1** below shows the key stakeholders' recommended actions.

**Table 1.** Key Stakeholders' recommended actions.

Stakeholder	Recommended Actions from the Study
Ministries (for example, the Ministry of Water and Energy)	Mandate gender quotas in transboundary water governance and those related to water diplomacy, and fund women's specific training regarding diplomacy (addressing the 39% reported barriers).

**Continued**

<b>Basin Organization</b> (e.g., Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO), Nile Equatorial Subsidiary Action Program (NELSAP))	Integrate findings into joint capacity-building; prioritize female experts in Technical Advisory Committees and Regional Working Groups for balanced input.
<b>Universities/Academia</b> (33% of respondents)	Embed water diplomacy modules in curricula; launch scholarships for female MSc/PhD students (building on 90% advanced degrees).
<b>Professional Associations</b> (e.g., Ethiopian Women in Water Association (EWIWA), Water Resources Professional Association (WRPA))	Scale baseline-informed trainings (e.g., negotiation skills); advocate for policy reforms via networks like Women in Water Diplomacy.
Stakeholder	Recommended Actions from the Study

**6. Limitation of the Study**

This research has some limitations, namely a sample size of only 51 respondents, and it may not adequately reflect the varied views and experiences of all women and men engaged in water diplomacy across Ethiopia. It should be noted that this study was based on self-report questionnaires, which may also introduce bias in terms of over- or underestimating levels of participation, challenges, or impacts. The study is largely qualitative and lacked triangulation to corroborate responses through other data sources or in-depth interviews, which may limit our understanding of the complexity of structural and cultural barriers. Furthermore, using a sample of current professionals means that we could miss critical voices from the grassroots or emerging levels of the system, which could limit the relevance of the study to discuss important issues with gender inclusion in water diplomacy.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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