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## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

### *Climate Change, Wetlands and Women: Actions Towards Creating Resilient Communities and Ecosystems*

[20 March 2023, 7 am EDT, Virtual]

Organized by:

1. Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), The Netherlands
2. South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies (SaciWATERS), India
3. Global Water Partnership - South Asia (GWP-SAS)
4. Global Water Alliance (GWA), USA
5. Foundation for Economic and Ecological Development (FEED), India
6. Society for Creative Opportunities and Participatory Ecosystems (SCOPE), India
7. NetWwater (Network of Women Water Professionals), Sri Lanka
8. NISHTHA, India
9. Bangladesh Environment and Development Society (BEDS), Bangladesh
10. Marsden Jacobs Associates, Australia
11. Arizona State University and Water Policy Group (ASU-WPG), USA

#### **Event Background:**

Wetlands are one amongst the world's most precious ecosystems and are crucial for our survival. They are nature's defence to extreme climate change events and provide protection and help communities with climate mitigation and adaptation. It's an irony therefore that wetlands themselves are under threat due to climate change. They also face large scale modification due to direct anthropogenic activities. Women, particularly in rural areas play a pivotal role in getting water to their homes (provisioning) and manage and conserve water resources. As a segment, women are the most impacted by climate change events in wetlands. It will lead to increase in time and efforts put by women manifold, to access and manage safe water, particularly in vulnerable communities. Furthermore, although women are instrumental in securing access to water sources, they have a negligible voice in decision-making and in developing water policies in South Asia, which further pushes them to the margins of society. It is in this context, an action-oriented side event was organized to showcase illustrations from South Asian countries along with other global experiences, that provided with leadership

opportunities and capacity building support, indigenous women have proved to be the real change makers leading to creating resilient communities and ecosystems. The event brought together experiences and perspectives from grassroot organizations, women networks, international developmental organizations, private sector, and state representatives. The side event was jointly hosted by WfWP and SaciWATERs and moderated by Ms. Kusum Athukorala, GWP-SAS, Sri Lanka & Dr. Jayati Chourey, SaciWATERs, India.

### **Water Action Agenda:**

Gender and Wetlands management have direct relevance for achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Goal 6 on Water. By presenting various action-based case studies on Climate Change, Wetlands and Women the event will help build a concrete agenda for action towards enhancing climate resilience and women empowerment and build new partnerships leading to synergistic impact of their actions. The event aims to contribute to advance the SDGs specifically SDG 1 (1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.b); 5 (5.1, 5.6); 6 (6.6, 6.b) and 13 (13.3, 13.1, 13.2).

### **Key Issues Discussed:**

1. Though the Dublin-Rio Principles (1992) clearly acknowledged the fact that “Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water”, it’s an irony that 31 years down the line, a side event needed to be organized to prove the same point by sharing success stories from South Asia and learnings from across the globe.
2. Attempting to overcome the silo mentality while addressing women empowerment and water, the event brought together all three key areas together, “Climate Change, Wetlands and Women”.
3. The experience shared from the State of Maharashtra, India by FEED & SaciWATERs, re-emphasized women’s wisdom in recognizing and adopting holistic and ecosystem-based approach towards wetland habitat rejuvenation for ensuring sustainable economic development. The case study also identified the importance of healthy ecosystem services for offering small-scale natural resources-based livelihoods for poor women and other marginalized groups.
4. Stories from East Kolkata Wetlands in India by SCOPE and Sundarbans in Bangladesh by BEDS highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship development and mentoring in empowering women for climate resilient communities. NetWwater (Sri Lanka) and NISHTHA (India) through their grassroot level experience discussed the challenges being faced by women group due to unavailability of targeted financial resources for women and wetlands related climate actions at the community level.
5. The Australian case study shared by Marsden Jacobs Associates, provided learnings for South Asian policy makers and planners on meaningful involvement of indigenous communities.
6. Prof. Olcay Ünver from the Arizona State University and Water Policy Group provided a global outlook by providing empirical evidence on how climate change affects men and women differently; both men and women suffer from poverty, but women have less resources to cope; and women’s engagement leads to better environmental and development outcomes for all, men, and women.

7. SDG 5 targets are off-track based on the available data. Availability of gender-disaggregated data itself is a challenge.

**Key recommendations for action:**

1. Indigenous women need to be recognized as equal stakeholders. Optimizing women resources can improve adaptation strategies towards climate change. Gender-environment nexus should be mainstreamed.
2. Gender-disaggregated data should be collected and a knowledge hub containing case studies on climate change action, women and wetlands is recommended.
3. Gender equality is everyone's issue, 'men and women'.
4. Support both professional and community women's voices, leadership, and organizations.
5. Capacity building and mentoring for adaptation, networking for advocacy and water & climate change literacy.
6. Adequate targeted financial resources for women groups and wetland community groups with a long-term vision.