

WOMEN, WATER AND PEACE

Conference Report



March 18-19, 2016
Istanbul, Turkey

Co-hosted by
Strategic Foresight Group
&
MEF University

In co-operation with
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

More than 50 opinion makers and policy makers from the Middle East came together to discuss linkages between women, water and peace in a conference hosted by Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) and MEF University in co-operation with Sida on 18th and 19th March 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. Participants included Members of Parliament, former ministers, government officials, media leaders, entrepreneurs and scholars from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The conference was part of the experience exchange process of the Blue Peace community in the Middle East.



The conference took place on the backdrop of serious conflict in the region and the shadow of terror in the host country, Turkey. Only a few days before the meeting, a major terrorist attack took place in Turkey killing several people. Even as the conference was in progress, a terrorist attack took place only a few kilometres away from the conference venue. Nevertheless, all participants arrived in Istanbul as scheduled and participated fully in the seminar. This demonstrates their serious and solemn commitment to the Blue Peace process. It is particularly significant that one of the three members of the high level group of the Blue Peace community had lost his life in a terrorist attack in Beirut. The determination of the community to continue their participation in this process despite these experiences and tragic events in Istanbul is of extraordinary value in the otherwise bleak political environment.

The conference was convened particularly to focus the attention of policy makers to the gender perspective in the region. The role of women in addressing water and peace linkages was discussed by experts and media observers having direct experience of the subject in the presence of senior parliamentarians, government officials and political leaders. The conference was instrumental in linking different levels of policy making structures in the region.

The conference also included a presentation on institutional co-operation in the Nile River Basin as part of exchange of experiences with other parts of the world in collaborative management of shared water resources.



Opening Plenary: Dr Aysegul Kibaroglu (Turkey), Princess Hayat Arsalan (Lebanon), Hon. Bohar Isa, MP (Iraq), Engr. Maysoun Zoubi (Jordan)

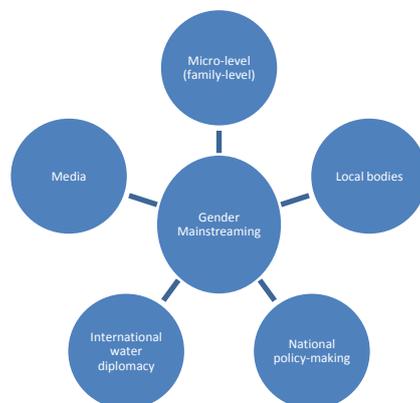
Perspectives from Sweden



Welcome Remarks by Prof Mustafa Kibaroglu, Mr Yasar Yakis and Ms Ulrika Holmstrom

In the opening session of the conference, Ms Ulrika Holmstrom, Senior Gender Advisor at Sida, presented the Swedish perspective. With the objective of achieving gender equality, Sweden has launched a feminist foreign policy which emphasises on three Rs – Rights, Representation and Resources. In the context of water and peace, there is a strong need to stress on the rights of women to participate meaningfully in policy-making and peace agreements. Women must be represented in a holistic way in peace negotiations because there are strong links between sustainable peace and inclusion of women. Increasing women’s representation in governance, peace building efforts and core economic institutions is vital. Finally, to achieve the goals of more rights and representation for women, women’s access to resources must be increased and channelled.

Message from Marmara



Micro-level

Participants brought to attention the role of women in water management for family needs, particularly in light of the refugee crisis in the Middle-East. The increasing influx of refugees

has placed a great burden on women managing water both in households in host countries as well as refugee camps. Participants also highlighted that many international organisations and NGOs working with refugees negotiate with the “*shaweesh*” who is the male head of a refugee camp for water related decisions and that women are systemically left out of this process. Women’s rights as core users and managers of water cannot be exercised until and unless they are empowered to make decisions related to water management at the domestic level. A positive story of women learning techniques of plumbing to curb water wastage provided the positive dimension. In doing so, not only did the women succeed in saving vast amounts of water but also challenged traditional patriarchal roles that recommended that plumbing is a job reserved for men. This was a significant step towards gender parity in the region using water management as a tool which further underlined the need to increase the participation of women as decision makers at the micro level.



Local bodies (Mayors and Municipalities)

When women are appointed at the local level – i.e. in municipalities and as mayors, they are quicker to respond to crisis related to issues of water scarcity. An example was given of the case of Yuksekova in Turkey where a newly appointed woman mayor started drilling for water wells within 10 days following protests by women in the region. Time and energy are precious resources lost when basic needs such as water need to be addressed. Often girls are made to walk long distances just to procure drinking water for the family. Non-inclusive policy-making leaving women out of decision making processes increases water scarcity which is further exacerbated by climate change.

National Policy-Making

Several times, decisions taken by women leaders are more favourable to family issues. There is a need for understand what “co-operation” truly means and this can be done only by agenda setting before any situation. It has been seen that having more women at the national policy making level increases multi-stakeholder inclusiveness in policy-making. This is particularly important in light of the fact that almost half of the refugees in the Middle East are women, while about 25% of these women refugees are under 18 years of age. In the

Middle-East, women are also often the managers of agricultural water since large number of women work on farms.

International Water Diplomacy

When women negotiate, they focus on building relationships and trust. Which is why, it has been observed that peace agreements are more sustainable when women are included. Making policy changes to mainstream gender concerns at the international level needs cultural acceptance at local levels, for which education is extremely important. An example was given that when a particular ministry appointed 68% women executive bureaucrats, the country was looked at more favourably at the international level. It was also felt that since women are more detail oriented, chances of success of negotiations become higher.

Media

Media can play an important role in gender mainstreaming. On the panel concerning the role of the media, there was complete agreement among all participants that a positive story is much stronger than a negative one and the media should focus on positive stories that realign female roles as heroes rather than victims only. Journalists can take care to use gender neutral language so as to not reinforce traditional gender roles. It is also essential that barriers stopping women from reaching decision making processes in the media are identified, including the need for salary and compensation parity. It was suggested that a ‘bio-regional’ process led by women could create an effective water management system. Also, the gender angle could help the media to narrow down water and peace linkages. Journalists need training to talk about serious issues such as water and peace and skill building workshops could be used for this purpose.



Panel on Media: Mr Mehmet Celik (Turkey), Ms Hana Namrouqa (Jordan), Ms Hala Zureiqat (Jordan), Ms Marwa Osman (Lebanon), Mr Michael Young (Lebanon)

Lessons from the Nile Basin

The conference had a session on experience exchange with a presentation on the Nile Basin by John Rao Nyaoro, Executive Director of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). He explained that successful trans-boundary cooperation depends on the existence of three critical factors:

1. Institutional infrastructure for cooperation
2. Stakeholder dialogues at multiple levels
3. Personal commitment of the Heads of States and governments.



Mr John Rao Nyaoro making a presentation on the Nile Basin Initiative

In addition to the three critical factors mentioned above, it is important to have a mechanism for exchanging technical know-how and developing technical solutions. The involvement of Heads of States is the beginning of finding a solution. However once the Heads of States provide a political direction for grand bargains between the riparian countries, it is the task of the technical teams to convert the vision into a reality.

Normally, the process begins with the emergence of dialogues between stakeholders. However at some stage, the dialogue process must be complemented by the creation of an institutional mechanism. It is not enough for an institution to come into existence. In order to make the process of cooperation substantive and significant, joint technical projects should be launched. When the process reaches this level, it creates a good platform for finding solutions to conflicting interests of the riparian countries. At this stage, there is still risk of conflicts and cooperation having a limited impact due to its technical nature. Once the Heads of Government get involved, the political process is initiated. Once they provide a direction, there must be convergence of political, technical, institutional and multiple stakeholder dialogue processes.

The NBI Executive Director further explained that these three factors had enabled the Nile Basin Initiative to evolve from technical cooperation to strategic and political cooperation. Their latest achievement is an agreement between Heads of States between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan in the planning of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on a cooperative basis.

He said that there is still a long way to go for the Nile Basin Initiative to reach the level of cooperation achieved by some other shared river basins in Africa.



Strategic Foresight Group is grateful to the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the MEF University of Istanbul for their support and cooperation in convening this conference. This report reflects the perspectives of the Strategic Foresight Group on the key messages derived from the conference. It does not indicate the endorsement of its views by either partners or participants, as it is a reflection and not a consensus statement.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Special Invitees

- ◆ Mr. John Rao Nyaoro, Executive Director, Nile Basin Initiative, Kenya

Iraq

- ◆ Dr Hajim Al Hassani, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Industry, and former Speaker of the Parliament
- ◆ Ms. Bohar Isa, Member of Parliament (Women's Committee)
- ◆ Mr Safa Alsheikh, Deputy of National Security Advisor to the Iraqi Government
- ◆ Dr Sadeq Jawad, Adviser to the PM on Water Issues
- ◆ Mr Raad Abdul Jalil, Director General, Ministry of Water Resources
- ◆ Dr Maha Alziydi, Technical Expert, Ministry of Water Resources
- ◆ Ms. Ghada Alamily, General Director, Almada Group for Media, Culture & Arts
- ◆ Asst. Prof. Maria Saldarriaga, American University of Iraq

Jordan

- ◆ Mr Ibrahim Shahahdeh, Member of Parliament (Chairman of the Water and Agriculture Committee)
- ◆ Mr Jamil Nimri, Member of Parliament
- ◆ Mr Salim Batayneh, Member of Parliament
- ◆ Dr Hakam M. Al Alami, Advisor to HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal on Water and Sanitation
- ◆ Dr Maysoon Zoubi, Former Secretary-General, Ministry of Water and Irrigation
- ◆ Ms Hala Zureiqat, Former Director of Jordan Television, Advisor to the Head of Roya TV
- ◆ Ms Mayyada Abu-Jaber, Founder, World of Letters
- ◆ Ms Seta Tutundjian, Director of Partnerships and Knowledge Management, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture
- ◆ Ms Iman Alfares, Editor, Al Ghad Newspaper
- ◆ Mr Feras Nusir, Director General, Channel 3
- ◆ Ms Reem Alrawashdeh, Senior Columnist, Al Rai Newspaper
- ◆ Ms Hana Namrouqa, Journalist, The Jordan Times

Lebanon

- ◆ Dr Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament
- ◆ Princess Hayat Arsalan, President, Society of Lebanon the Giver
- ◆ Ms Zeina Majdalani, Economic Expert, Office of the Prime Minister
- ◆ Mr Michael Young, Opinion Editor, Daily Star Newspaper
- ◆ Ms Mey Al Sayegh, International News Editor, Al-Joumhouria
- ◆ Ms Marwa Osman, Political Show Host, El Etejah English News Channel
- ◆ Ms Sara Mattar, Senior Columnist, Future Newspaper
- ◆ Ms Zeinab Othman, Journalist, Al Akhbar Newspaper

Turkey

- ◆ Dr Yasar Yakis, former Foreign Minister of Turkey
- ◆ Mr. Egeman Bagis, former Minister of EU Affairs, Turkey

- ◆ Mr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament
- ◆ Ms. Simla Ozkaya, Senior Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- ◆ Dr Selmin Burak, Environmental Engineer, Istanbul University
- ◆ Ms Burcu Calli, Turkish Water Institute (SUEN)
- ◆ Mr Ugur Kocbas, Managing Editor, Vatan Newspaper
- ◆ Ms Gizem Acar, Foreign News Editor, Milliyet
- ◆ Mr Dursun Yildiz, Director, Hydropolitics Academy
- ◆ Mr Ediz Ekinci, Deputy Director of Hydropolitics Academy
- ◆ Ms Sanem Güner, Assistant Director, Hollings Center for International Dialogue
- ◆ Ms Nilay Vardar, Editor - Politics of Environment, Bianet
- ◆ Ms Christina Bache Fidan, Research Fellow, Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University
- ◆ Mr Mehmet Celik, Journalist, The Daily Sabah
- ◆ Ms Begum Zorlu, Independent journalist specialising in peace and conflict
- ◆ Mr Ceyhun Efe Oc, Independent news documentary-maker

Sida

- ◆ Ms Ulrika Holmstrom, Senior Gender Advisor, Department for Asia, North Africa and Humanitarian Assistance
- ◆ Ms Yosra Albakkar, Regional Program Manager, MENA Unit

MEF University

- ◆ Prof. Dr. Fevzi Unal, Vice Rector
- ◆ Prof Dr Mustafa Kibaroglu, Chair, Dept. of Political Science and International Relations
- ◆ Prof Dr Aysegul Kibaroglu, Dept. of Political Science and International Relations

Strategic Foresight Group

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- ◆ Ms Ilmas Futehally, Vice-President and Executive Director
- ◆ Ms Ipshita Chaturvedi, Research Analyst and Project Co-ordinator