

WATER FIRST

Educate, Empower and Emulate Women in Water



Women in Water

Water security remains one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. It lies at the core of the nexus of agricultural, energy, climate, economic and geopolitical challenges. In sub-Saharan Africa, women bear 71% of the water collection burden, produce 90% of all food, and comprise 70% of the agricultural workforce.

While African women are at the forefront of the daily struggle for water security, few are in key leadership positions in the water resources area. This lack of representation by women in decision-making roles removes their vital contribution to water resource policy-making and management, and further exacerbates the existing disconnection between policy and implementation.

African women water scientists and engineers can provide fresh, relevant perspectives and solutions to the looming water security crises faced by their countries through their dual scientific expertise in water issues and profound understanding of the challenges facing both urban and rural populations. The Partnership Opportunities for Women in Water Engineering and Research (POWWER) program founded in 2014 is working to establish a network of African women practitioners whose expertise and experience can be tapped at multiple levels to address water security challenges facing the continent.

2016 POWWER Workshop

Following the inaugural POWWER workshop in 2015 in Windhoek, Namibia, the 2016 POWWER was held in Kigali, Rwanda on June 11-12. The workshop convened African women scientists and engineers from 11 countries to discuss the key water issues in their regions of Africa and develop a set of recommendations for action. All agreed that it is crucial that women at all levels, from the highest level of government to the communities and villages, be mobilized to play a more active role in making tangible gains in water security issues. A set of recommendations was developed around the themes of water quality, water storage, ecosystems, sanitation, water policy and implementation, and water sustainability.

Action Items: Efforts beyond the workshop will be focused in three areas:

1. Educate public officials and policy makers

Water security directly impacts development and economic growth of all nations. However, many African countries have not yet prioritized water in their national agenda. There is a need to raise the awareness of public officials and policy makers on the central role of water for green development and economic growth.

2. Empower women and girls to participate and lead in the water sector

Women and girls are charged with securing domestic water for millions of people daily, yet few women participate or lead in the water sector. More women should be empowered to pursue careers and career success in the water sector, beginning with the encouragement of girls to enter water-related science and technology fields. Laws and policies must be also implemented to ensure that qualified women are appointed and promoted to leadership positions in the water sector.

3. Emulate best practices and role models

The next generation of women leaders in water needs access to successful practitioners and professional networks today. Both men and women in leadership and professional positions should be tapped to serve as mentors, role models and champions to ensure the retention and success of young women in water-related careers.

This program is organized through the COACH Organization (<http://coach.uoregon.edu>) at the University of Oregon. More information about the workshop can be found at: <http://coach.uoregon.edu/coach-international/rwanda/>

