WEBINAR REPORT

Gender-Responsive Water Stewardship: Policy, Practice and Pathways

Abstract

This report consolidates insights from policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders to present comprehensive policy recommendations for gender-responsive water governance in Pakistan.

Ecological Sustainability & Circular Economy Unit
Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

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1. Introduction

Water is fundamental to health, livelihoods, and sustainable development, yet global access gaps remain significant. As of 2022, approximately 2.2 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water, 3.5 billion lacked safely managed sanitation, and 2 billion had no basic handwashing facilities at home. These deficits undermine public health, economic productivity, and progress toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on clean water and sanitation.[1] [2] [3]

Pakistan exemplifies the urgency of this crisis. National and international assessments classify the country as critically water insecure. Depending on the metric used, only 39–89% of the population has access to safe or basic drinking water. Persistent challenges include deteriorating water quality, groundwater contamination, and limited wastewater treatment coverage. Rapid population growth, urbanization, and rising demands from agriculture, industry, and energy intensify stress on freshwater systems, reduce resilience, and exacerbate social inequalities.[4] [5]

The impacts of water insecurity are not gender neutral. Globally, women and girls are responsible for water collection in roughly seven out of ten households without water on premises, collectively spending an estimated 200 million hours per day fetching water. In Pakistan, rural women often walk several kilometres and spend three to five hours daily securing household water. This burden limits educational and income-generating opportunities, poses safety risks, and reinforces structural gender inequalities.[6] [7]

Despite bearing these responsibilities, women remain underrepresented in formal water governance structures at local, regional, and national levels. Global monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.1 on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) shows that gender considerations are among the least advanced components of water governance, with many countries reporting limited or no progress on integrating gender objectives into water policies and plans. Evidence from Pakistan and elsewhere demonstrates that when women participate meaningfully in water user associations, village water committees, and governance platforms, outcomes improve, yielding stronger institutional accountability, better-maintained infrastructure, enhanced cost recovery, and greater sustainability. Gender-inclusive water stewardship is therefore both an equity imperative under SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and a strategic necessity for achieving durable progress under SDG 6.[8] [9]

Against this backdrop, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) organized this webinar to provide a platform for exploring how gender-responsive water governance can be operationalized within policy frameworks, institutional systems, financing mechanisms, and monitoring processes (Appendix 01). The discussions aimed to move beyond formal commitments, identifying practical, evidence-based pathways to strengthen both water security and gender equality in Pakistan and beyond, particularly as the global community approaches World Water Day (22 March).

[1] https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/tools-portal/tool/jmp-global-database
[2] https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/water-sanitation-and-health/monitoring-and-evidence/wash-monitoring
[3] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/
[4] https://www.wateraid.org/pk/publications/infographic-on-wash-facts
[5] https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/water/women-in-water-in-pakistan-shows-the-way
[6] https://www.unesco.org/en/wwap/gender
[7] https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-women-and-girls-bear-brunt-of-water-and-sanitation-crisis---new-unicef-who-report
[8] https://www.cif.org/sites/cif_enc/files/rising_tide_-_new_look_at_water_and_gender.pdf
[9] https://www.worldvisionphilanthropy.org/hubfs/resources/UNC_Women_in_Water_Committees.pdf

This report consolidates insights from policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders to present comprehensive policy recommendations for gender-responsive water governance in Pakistan. It emphasizes the need for institutional coordination, data-driven decision-making, climate-resilient management, and locally adapted innovations while promoting women's empowerment and community ownership. By aligning governance reforms with international best practices and local realities, these recommendations aim to strengthen Pakistan's water stewardship, enhance resilience against climate extremes, and ensure equitable access to water for all communities.

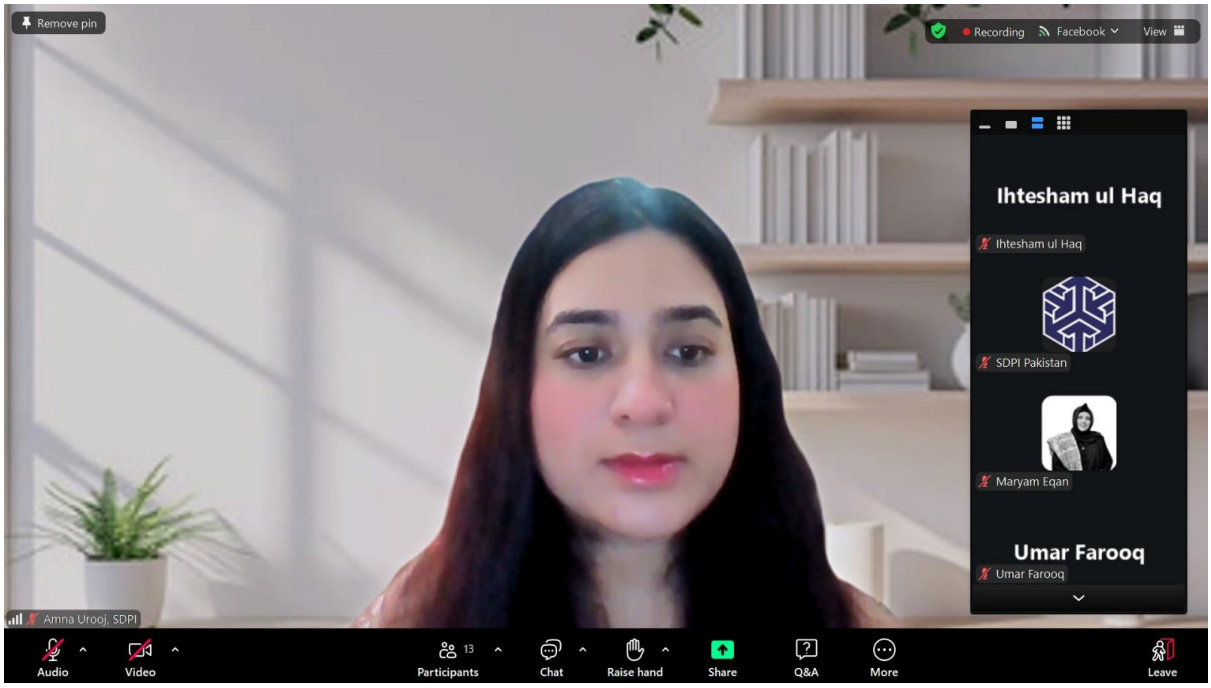
2. Opening Remarks

Amna Urooj (Research Associate, SDPI)

Ms. Amna Urooj opened the webinar by setting the context for discussions on gender-responsive water governance in Pakistan. She highlighted that water is not only a development concern but also a social equity issue, particularly for women and marginalized communities who experience water scarcity most acutely.

She emphasized the strong interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 5 – Gender Equality, noting that access to safe drinking water remains uneven across both rural and urban areas. Declining groundwater levels, increasing demand, and inadequate water management are intensifying water insecurity across the country.

Ms. Urooj underscored that women often bear a disproportionate burden of water scarcity due to their responsibilities in household water management and caregiving. She stressed the importance of sustainable and inclusive water governance systems that integrate community experiences and gender perspectives into policymaking. The webinar aimed to create a dialogue between policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and community stakeholders to bridge existing policy gaps and promote practical solutions.



3. Welcome Remarks

Ms. Zainab Naeem (Associate Research Fellow, SDPI)

Dr. Zainab Naeem highlighted that while discussions around water security and governance are often well articulated at the theoretical and policy levels, their practical realization remains limited. Reflecting on the impacts of recent floods, she emphasized that water security debates must move beyond national-level narratives and water diplomacy to focus on frontline communities who continue to struggle with safe and reliable water access.

She explained that Pakistan currently faces two extremes in water availability: excessive water during floods and glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events, and severe shortages during drought periods due to limited water storage capacity. These conditions have intensified water insecurity across both rural and peri-urban areas.

Dr. Naeem stressed that women in frontline communities are disproportionately affected, as they often travel long distances to collect water while managing household responsibilities, childcare, and other domestic duties. These responsibilities expose women to safety risks, harassment, and health challenges, particularly during heatwaves and periods of severe water scarcity.

She further noted that water governance debates often lack integrated and updated data, particularly gender-disaggregated information that could inform evidence-based policymaking. Mountain and remote communities were highlighted as particularly vulnerable due to limited infrastructure and restricted access to freshwater resources.

Dr. Naeem also pointed to several structural challenges affecting water governance in Pakistan:

- Fragmented institutional mandates and overlapping responsibilities among water management agencies
- Limited coordination between government, private sector, and development partners
- Lack of communication strategies to promote water stewardship and awareness
- Insufficient support and networking opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) working in water-related sectors

Drawing insights from consultations conducted under the Hill Torrents project, she noted that women participants often provided more practical and detailed insights on water management challenges than men. Concluding her remarks, she stressed that although data exists across institutions, it is rarely integrated or effectively used to prioritize policies and interventions, which continues to hinder progress in addressing water security challenges in Pakistan.

4. Panel Discussion

Ms. Sanaa Zulfikar (Director External Relations, Hisaar Foundation)

Ms. Sanaa Zulfikar emphasized that sustainable water governance in Pakistan critically depends on community ownership and engagement. She highlighted that communities should not be treated merely as beneficiaries but as active partners in all stages of water and sanitation initiatives, planning, design, implementation, and identification of intervention areas, to ensure solutions respond to local needs and realities. She underscored the importance of building leadership at the community level, noting that empowering local leaders helps decentralize governance processes, expand outreach, and enhance the sustainability and impact of interventions.

Ms. Zulfikar stressed the critical role of women in water governance, noting that:

- Women are central actors in household water management, hygiene practices, and broader community water stewardship.
- Despite their central role, women face systemic inequalities that limit their participation in decision-making.
- Pakistan's low ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report reflects persistent gender disparities that directly influence women's access to resources, including water.

She highlighted several strategies to address these challenges:

- ***Community-Led Governance:*** Establish local water committees and train community members, including community-nominated caretakers, to manage water systems and ensure long-term sustainability.
- ***Integration of WASH and Behavioral Change:*** Link Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) interventions with hygiene promotion, advocacy, and awareness campaigns to improve community practices.

- ***Women as Agents of Change:*** Recognize women not only as recipients of services but as key stakeholders and decision-makers. Initiatives such as the Women in Water Action Network foster women's leadership in water governance.
- ***Coordination Across Institutions:*** Strengthen institutional collaboration, which is currently fragmented, to ensure coherent policy and program implementation.
- ***Broader Development Linkages:*** Emphasize that water management impacts health, education, livelihoods, and overall community well-being, making it foundational for achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Ms. Zulfikar concluded by reinforcing that gender-responsive and community-led water stewardship is essential for sustainable development. She emphasized that empowering communities, particularly women, through participatory approaches, capacity building, and awareness initiatives can help Pakistan achieve more resilient, equitable, and effective water governance systems.

Mr. Ehsan Leghari (Member, Indus River System Authority – IRSA)

Mr. Ehsan Ul Haq Leghari emphasized that sustainable development in Pakistan is closely linked to effective water resource management, particularly within the context of the Indus River system and the roles of public sector institutions. While Pakistan has multiple policies and institutional mechanisms, including the National Water Policy (2018), the country often overlooks the governance systems and operational structures required to translate these policies into practice. He highlighted the importance of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as a central framework for managing water resources. Although IWRM has been discussed in policy circles for decades, many stakeholders lack clarity on its practical implementation, limiting its impact.

He explained that water governance in Pakistan must be considered across three key dimensions:

- ***Governance and Institutional Coordination:*** Pakistan possesses strategies and policies comparable to other countries, yet operationalizing them is weak due to bureaucratic barriers, fragmented mandates, and poor coordination among water management authorities.
- ***Justice and Equity:*** Water debates often neglect the balance between surface and groundwater management, despite existing legal frameworks that could address these concerns. Inequitable

allocation disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, requiring stronger mechanisms for fair access.

- ***Social Dimension and Gender Inclusion:*** Women experience water access differently from men, as they are primarily responsible for collecting water for drinking, livestock, washing, and cooking. This exposes them to safety risks, harassment, and social vulnerabilities, particularly when traveling long distances. Gender inclusion should be mainstreamed across institutions, policies, monitoring systems, and community awareness campaigns.

He highlighted several challenges within Pakistan's water governance system. Governance weaknesses and institutional fragmentation continue to hinder coherent policy implementation, limiting the ability of authorities to translate strategies into effective action. Social justice considerations receive insufficient attention, particularly regarding equitable access to water for vulnerable populations, exacerbating disparities in resource distribution. Additionally, while legal and policy frameworks exist at both national and provincial levels, their implementation remains weak, preventing these provisions from achieving tangible improvements in water management and service delivery.

To address these challenges, Mr. Leghari recommended:

- Strengthening governance mechanisms and improving institutional accountability.
- Addressing inequities in water allocation and access, ensuring policies reach frontline communities.
- Integrating gender perspectives across all aspects of water management, recognizing women as critical actors in household and agricultural water use.
- Enhancing focus on water quality and groundwater management, aligning policy objectives with operational monitoring.
- Leveraging women's perspectives through direct consultation, which often reveals practical solutions and innovative approaches.
- Adapting IWRM principles into practical, basin-level frameworks that account for local realities, institutional capacities, and social equity.

He further noted that rapid population growth and urbanization are intensifying water management challenges. Existing legal frameworks require stronger design, reorientation, and enforcement to address emerging governance and equity concerns. Meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making forums is essential, not only for equity but also to effectively identify, prioritize, and implement sustainable water solutions across Pakistan.

Ms. Maryam Eqan (Environmentalist, WWF Pakistan)

Ms. Maryam Eqan emphasized that water scarcity disproportionately affects women, often in ways that are overlooked in conventional water governance strategies. She noted that women interact with water resources daily at the household level, managing drinking water, hygiene, cooking, and sometimes agricultural tasks. Their lived experience provides critical insights that can make water management more effective, contextually relevant, and responsive to local needs.

She outlined several key priorities for promoting gender-inclusive water governance:

- ***Enhancing Women's Participation in Decision-Making:*** Women must be actively included in local water governance structures and decision-making platforms. Participation should be meaningful rather than symbolic, ensuring women have real influence in committees, planning, and policy discussions.
- ***Capacity Building for Women:*** Targeted programs should strengthen women's skills, technical knowledge, and leadership abilities, enabling them to take on prominent roles in water stewardship and governance processes.
- ***Data Collection and Evidence-Based Policy:*** There is a pressing need for gender-disaggregated data on water access, usage, and management practices. Such data should inform inclusive, evidence-based policies and interventions that address both household and community-level challenges.
- ***Creating Dedicated Platforms for Engagement:*** Establish forums where women can actively contribute to water governance discussions, share insights, and co-design solutions. These platforms help overcome barriers such as social norms, mobility restrictions, and lack of information.
- ***Addressing Mobility and Social Barriers:*** Cultural, informational, and logistical constraints often limit women's ability to participate fully in governance processes. Providing access to information, training, and resources empowers women to contribute safely and effectively.

Ms. Eqan stressed that water governance policies must explicitly integrate gendered perspectives to reflect the realities of women's daily interactions with water. Programs should shift from token participation to meaningful empowerment, positioning women as central actors and decision-makers in both community-level and broader water management strategies. By valuing women's local

knowledge and expertise, governance structures become more responsive, equitable, and sustainable, ultimately improving water management outcomes for entire communities.

Mr. Haziq Khan (PhD Scholar, Kochi Core Research Institute, Japan)

Mr. Haziq Khan highlighted that water challenges in Pakistan are primarily governance and management issues rather than purely resource scarcity. He stressed the importance of integrated river basin planning, noting that fragmented institutional approaches have limited the country's ability to manage water sustainably. Access to safe drinking water remains uneven, with some regions facing particularly severe challenges, underscoring the need for strategic planning, coordination, and innovation in both urban and rural water management.

He drew lessons from international best practices that could be adapted to Pakistan's context:

- ***Japan – River Basin Planning and Coordination:*** Water management in Japan follows river-basin frameworks, avoiding fragmented departmental approaches. River basin water cycle councils bring together multiple stakeholders to collectively manage resources, maintain shared data platforms tracking water quantity, quality, and groundwater levels, and integrate wastewater treatment into river health management. For Pakistan, a pilot basin-level initiative could be implemented in the Lower Indus Basin, featuring a shared digital dashboard to monitor flows, water quality, and groundwater conditions.
- ***China – "Sponge City" Concept:*** Urban planning is used to retain rainwater locally, reduce polluted runoff, and lower flood peaks through infrastructure such as rain gardens, green spaces, storage ponds, and permeable surfaces. Pakistan could incorporate sponge city elements into urban regulations, particularly in flood-prone areas including roads, parks, and housing developments.
- ***Singapore – Advanced Water Reuse Systems:*** Systems like NEWater and the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System treat wastewater for reuse, easing pressure on freshwater supplies. Pakistan could establish industrial water reuse zones near major cities, ensuring these projects include adequate operation and maintenance budgets. Public trust can be enhanced through transparent standards, regular reporting, and demonstration plants open for public visits.

— ***Australia – Surface and Groundwater Management:*** Australia separates surface and groundwater management with clear diversion limits and annual public reporting. Pakistan could introduce simple withdrawal and pumping limits in high water-stress areas, gradually scaling up accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Key recommendations for Pakistan included:

— Adapt international models to local contexts rather than copying them directly.
— Integrate women as agents of change in household, community, and policy-level water governance.
— Strengthen institutional coordination through multi-stakeholder platforms and data-sharing systems to improve planning and operational efficiency.
— Link infrastructure investments, such as treatment plants, reuse systems, and urban design interventions, with proper maintenance, regulation, and community engagement to ensure sustainability.

Mr. Khan concluded that effective water governance in Pakistan requires combining lessons from global best practices with locally adapted strategies. Integrated basin-level planning, gender-inclusive participation, coordinated institutions, and innovative infrastructure solutions can collectively improve water security, reduce stress on rivers and aquifers, and enhance resilience against floods and droughts.

5. Chief Guest Address

Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal (State Minister, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC))

Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal emphasized that water security is both an environmental and national priority for Pakistan, with climate change creating unprecedented pressures on water resources. She highlighted that altered rainfall patterns and intensified extreme events, including floods and

droughts, are increasing volatility in water availability, complicating water management, and threatening public health, livelihoods, and overall development outcomes. Pakistan's water stress is evident in the dramatic decline of per capita water availability, from approximately 500 cubic meters in 1950 to less than 1 percent today, and the widespread contamination of major water resources, with less than 1 percent undergoing treatment before entering water bodies. These conditions pose severe public health risks, particularly for women and children, who are disproportionately affected due to household water collection responsibilities. Recognizing Pakistan as a water-stressed country underscores the urgent need for effective governance and climate-resilient solutions.

Dr. Kharal outlined several government initiatives and frameworks aimed at enhancing water resilience. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) focuses on the water-agriculture nexus, providing a framework to balance resilience, water management, and disaster preparedness, given that agriculture consumes nearly 90 percent of freshwater resources. The Living Indus Initiative aims to restore and protect the Indus River ecosystem while strengthening climate resilience across communities and ecosystems. Additionally, climate insurance and other resilience measures support water resource management and reduce vulnerability among frontline communities facing climate extremes.

She stressed several key challenges that require attention: institutional coordination remains weak, with governance structures and planning processes needing improvement across federal and provincial institutions, civil society, and development partners. Women, central to household water management, remain underrepresented in decision-making processes, highlighting the need for gender-responsive approaches. Moreover, climate-induced extreme events such as floods and droughts exacerbate water scarcity, requiring strategic, multi-stakeholder responses to ensure sustainable water access and management.

Strategic Approach to Water Security:

- Promote ecosystem restoration and comprehensive water management.
- Ensure inclusive and coordinated governance integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations.
- Foster collaborative stakeholder engagement, including government, civil society, development partners, and the private sector.
- Guarantee meaningful participation of women in water governance at household, community, and policy levels.
- Link water stewardship with climate resilience, implementing multi-sectoral and evidence-based interventions.

Dr. Kharal concluded that addressing Pakistan's water security challenges demands urgent, integrated, and gender-responsive strategies. By strengthening policy frameworks, institutional coordination, and community participation, particularly of women, Pakistan can safeguard health, livelihoods, and sustainable development outcomes.

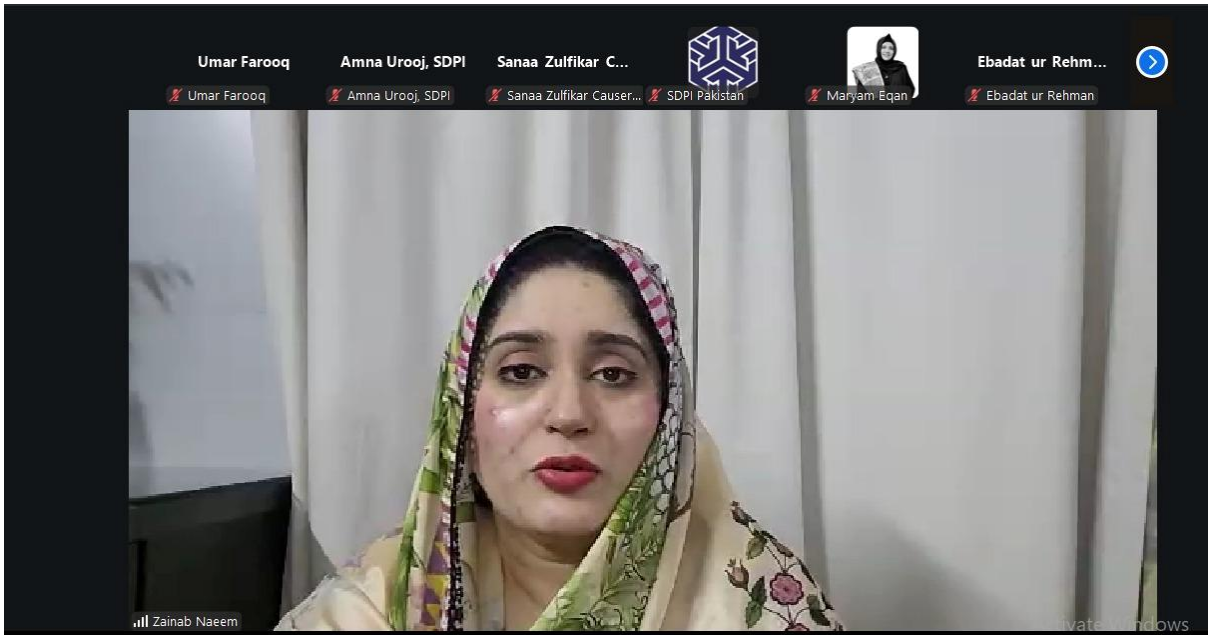
6. Closing Remarks

Ms. Zainab Naeem (SDPI)

In her closing remarks, Ms. Zainab Naeem thanked all speakers and participants for contributing to a rich discussion. She emphasized that many effective solutions to water challenges already exist at the local level, but they need to be strengthened and scaled through supportive policies and institutional collaboration.

She also highlighted the importance of integrating gender-responsive approaches in climate and water governance, including addressing issues such as mental health, climate anxiety, and rehabilitation needs arising from climate-related disasters.

The session concluded with a call for continued dialogue, stronger partnerships, and enhanced implementation of gender-sensitive water governance practices in Pakistan.



7. Policy Recommendations

Ensuring sustainable water governance in Pakistan requires integrating gender responsiveness, community engagement, and evidence-based management into policies, institutional frameworks, and implementation mechanisms. Current water management challenges, exacerbated by climate change, rapid urbanization, and resource contamination, underscore the urgency of addressing inequities in water access and governance. The following recommendations aim to strengthen policy design, governance structures, and practical interventions for inclusive and effective water stewardship.

1. Strengthen Governance and Institutional Coordination

— Reform fragmented mandates to clarify responsibilities and reduce overlaps among water management authorities.

— Establish multi-stakeholder coordination platforms that integrate federal, provincial, and local institutions, private sector actors, and civil society for coherent policy implementation.

— Mainstream Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) principles into practical, basin-level frameworks, incorporating monitoring, adaptive management, and accountability mechanisms.

2. Promote Equity and Social Justice in Water Access

— Ensure equitable allocation of surface and groundwater resources, prioritizing vulnerable and marginalized communities.

— Implement transparent monitoring and reporting systems for water use, quality, and availability to strengthen decision-making and accountability.

— Integrate social equity considerations across policies, legal frameworks, and regulatory guidelines.

3. Enhance Gender Inclusion and Women's Empowerment

— Actively involve women in decision-making at household, community, and policy levels, ensuring meaningful rather than symbolic participation.

— Develop capacity-building programs for women, including technical training, governance literacy, and leadership development.

— Establish dedicated platforms for women's engagement in water governance, enabling co-design of interventions and integration of local knowledge.

- Address cultural, mobility, and informational barriers, providing resources and training to empower safe and effective participation.
- Prioritize safety and accessibility for women and girls during water collection, particularly in remote and peri-urban areas.

4. Foster Community-Led Approaches

- Recognize communities as active partners rather than passive beneficiaries in all stages of water management projects.
- Build local leadership through training of community members and water caretakers, ensuring decentralized, sustainable governance.
- Integrate behavioral change campaigns with WASH interventions to improve hygiene practices, awareness, and community engagement.

5. Adopt Contextualized International Best Practices

- Adapt global models (e.g., Japan's river basin councils, China's sponge city concept, Singapore's water reuse systems, Australia's surface-groundwater management) to local contexts.
- Combine infrastructure investments with regulatory oversight, operations and maintenance planning, and community engagement for long-term effectiveness.
- Introduce pilot initiatives, such as basin-level monitoring dashboards, sponge city components in urban flood zones, and industrial water reuse zones near major cities.

6. Strengthen Data, Evidence, and Policy Integration

- Collect and utilize gender-disaggregated and location-specific data on water access, usage, quality, and management practices.
- Integrate data across institutions and sectors to enable holistic planning, coordination, and prioritization of interventions.
- Conduct research and local consultations to capture community-specific insights, especially from women, to guide policy and program design.

7. Link Water Governance with Climate Resilience and Development Outcomes

- Align water management strategies with climate adaptation plans, ecosystem restoration initiatives, and disaster preparedness frameworks.
- Recognize water stewardship as foundational to health, livelihoods, education, and broader sustainable development goals.
- Promote collaborative approaches engaging government, civil society, development partners, and private sector stakeholders in climate-resilient water management.
- Incorporate climate risk mitigation into all water governance policies, including adaptation measures for floods, droughts, and contamination events.

8. Promote Sustainable and Innovative Water Solutions

- Encourage wastewater reuse, urban sponge city infrastructure, and industrial water recycling aligned with river health objectives.
- Support SMEs in water stewardship through access to technical assistance, networks, and platforms to scale their solutions.
- Link infrastructure investments to maintenance, regulation, and community engagement to ensure long-term functionality.

These recommendations collectively emphasize inclusive, gender-responsive, community-led, and integrated approaches to water governance in Pakistan. They prioritize women's empowerment, equitable access, institutional coordination, and adaptation of international lessons to local contexts, ensuring sustainable water security, climate resilience, and development impact.

8. Appendix 01

Concept Note & Agenda

Gender-Responsive Water Stewardship: Policy, Practice and Pathways

11 March 2026 | 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM (PKT)

A. Background and Rationale

Water is fundamental to health, livelihoods, and sustainable development, yet global access gaps remain stark. As of 2022, an estimated 2.2 billion people worldwide lacked safely managed drinking water, 3.5 billion lacked safely managed sanitation, and 2 billion people did not have basic handwashing facilities at home. These deficits undermine public health, economic productivity, and progress toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on clean water and sanitation.[10] [11] [12]

Pakistan reflects the urgency of this crisis. Recent national and international assessments classify the country as critically water insecure. Depending on the measurement used, only between 39% and 89% of the population has access to safe or basic drinking water, with persistent concerns about water quality, groundwater contamination, and wastewater treatment coverage. Rapid population growth, urbanization, and increasing demands from agriculture, industry, and energy continue to intensify stress on freshwater systems, limiting resilience and compounding inequalities.[13] [14]

These pressures are not gender neutral. Globally, in households without water on premises, women and girls are responsible for water collection in roughly seven out of ten cases. Collectively, women and girls spend an estimated 200 million hours every day fetching water, often sacrificing education, income-generating opportunities, safety, and well-being. In Pakistan, rural women frequently walk several kilometres and spend three to five hours per day securing water for their households. This burden contributes directly to school dropout rates among girls, restricts women's participation in paid work, and reinforces structural inequalities.[15] [16]

At the same time, women remain under-represented in formal water governance structures at local, regional, and national levels. Global monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.1 on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) indicates that gender-related dimensions are among the least advanced components of water governance. Around half of reporting countries indicate limited or no achievement of gender objectives within water management policies and plans. The disconnect is clear: those most affected by water insecurity are often least represented in decision-making processes. Yet evidence from Pakistan and other regions demonstrates that when women participate meaningfully in water user associations, village water committees, and governance platforms, outcomes improve. Projects show stronger institutional accountability, better-maintained infrastructure, improved cost recovery, and greater sustainability. Gender-inclusive water

[10] https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/tools-portal/tool/jmp-global-database
[11] https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/water-sanitation-and-health/monitoring-and-evidence/wash-monitoring
[12] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/
[13] https://www.wateraid.org/pk/publications/infographic-on-wash-facts
[14] https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/water/women-in-water-in-pakistan-shows-the-way
[15] https://www.unesco.org/en/wwap/gender
[16] https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-women-and-girls-bear-brunt-of-water-and-sanitation-crisis---new-unicef-who-report

stewardship is therefore not only a matter of equity aligned with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), but also a strategic imperative for achieving durable progress under SDG 6.[17] [18]

As the global community approaches World Water Day (22 March), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) is organizing this webinar to provide a timely platform for examining how gender-responsive water stewardship can be operationalized within policy frameworks, institutional systems, financing mechanisms, and monitoring processes. The dialogue aims to move beyond formal commitments toward practical, evidence-based pathways that strengthen both water security and gender equality in Pakistan and beyond.

B. Objectives

The webinar aims to:

- Examine why gender-responsive approaches are essential for effective water stewardship.
- Identify policy gaps and institutional barriers limiting gender integration in water governance.
- Showcase practical experiences and case studies demonstrating successful approaches.
- Propose pathways for embedding gender responsiveness into water planning, implementation, and accountability frameworks.
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogue between policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and development partners.

C. Key Themes

Policy

How national and regional frameworks address (or fail to address) gender dimensions in water governance.

Practice

Experiences from field implementation i.e., what works, what does not, and why.

Pathways Forward

Institutional reforms, financing mechanisms, accountability tools, and monitoring indicators that can operationalize gender-responsive water stewardship.

D. Target Audience

This webinar is designed for:

- Government officials (water, environment, planning, gender ministries)
- Development partners and UN agencies
- Civil society organizations

[17] https://www.cif.org/sites/cif_enc/files/rising_tide_-_new_look_at_water_and_gender.pdf
[18] https://www.worldvisionphilanthropy.org/hubfs/resources/UNC_Women_in_Water_Committees.pdf

- Academic and research institutions
- Water utilities and private sector stakeholders
- Students and early-career professionals in water and sustainability sectors

E. Expected Outcomes

Participants will leave with:

- Enhanced understanding of gender-responsive water stewardship frameworks
- Identified entry points for reform within policy and programmatic structures
- Practical recommendations for institutional integration
- Strengthened collaborative networks aligned with inclusive water governance

F. Proposed Agenda

Time	Session	Speaker
11:30 – 11:40 AM	**Welcome Remarks & Setting the Context** — Overview of Pakistan's water insecurity landscape — Gendered dimensions of water access and governance — Linkages with SDGs 5 & 6 and World Water Day	**Dr. Zainab Naeem**, SDPI
11:40 – 11:55 AM	**Session 1: Technical & Institutional Dimensions** — Data systems, monitoring, and SDG 6.5.1 gaps — Gender in integrated water resources management (IWRM) — Implementation constraints within public institutions	**Mr. Ehsan Ul Haq Leghari**, ADB
11:55 – 12:10 PM	**Session 2: Policy & Governance Perspectives** — Civil society advocacy for inclusive water governance — Participation, accountability, and gender mainstreaming gaps — Strengthening policy–practice linkages	**Ms. Sanaa Zulfikar,** Hisaar Foundation
12:10 – 12:25 PM	**Session 3: Scaling Inclusive Water Stewardship for Community Action** — Field-level experiences in gender-responsive water initiatives — Scaling community participation	**Ms. Maryam Eqan**, WWF **Mr. Haziq Khan**, Kochi Core Centre Japan

	— Public–private collaboration in shared water risk management — Embedding gender equity within stewardship partnerships and supply chains	
12:25 – 12:40 PM	**Moderated Discussion** — Policy gaps and realistic reform options — Institutional enablers and barriers — Audience questions	**Moderator: Ms. Amna Urooj**, SDPI All Speakers
12:40 – 12:50 PM	**Chief Guest Address: Policy Commitment & National Priorities** — Integrating gender in national water strategies — Institutional responsibilities and reform priorities — Aligning water stewardship with climate and development agendas	**Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal**, MoCC&EC
12:50 – 1:00 PM	Closing Remarks & Vote of Thanks	