

## WATER FIRST!

Water security remains one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. In sub-Saharan Africa, women bear 71% of the water collection burden, produce 90% of all food and comprise 70% of the agricultural workforce. Women are involved in water-related activities such as water conservation, water storage, domestic cleaning, crop production and preparation of food. Despite this, women have restricted access to the resources needed to secure and manage scarce water such as land, agricultural inputs, finance and credit. African women are at the forefront of the daily struggle for water security, but few are in key leadership positions in the water resources area. This lack of representation in decision-making roles removes women's vital contribution to water resource policymaking and management, and further exacerbates the existing disconnection between policy and implementation.

WATER FIRST! is one of the international programs directed by COACH, a grassroots organization working around the globe to increase the number and success of women in science and engineering careers. Since 1997, COACH has reached over 20,000 scientists in the U.S. and over 20 developing countries. WATER FIRST! delivers workshops to women scientists to build capacity, create networks of women working in water research, academia and provide professional skills development.



### Primary outcome

WATER FIRST! is working to assure that women scientists, engineers and policy makers in Africa are educated and empowered to assume those leadership roles in water research.

### Goals

- Foster a network of women researchers in the US and Africa who have common interests in increasing international water research and collaborative activities between women scientists in these countries.
- Leverage the Water First! network and the expertise of its participants to develop innovative and cross-disciplinary strategies for advancing the research and educational activities of women researchers and their students in these countries.
- Develop plans to maintain and grow this network and to extend its outreach into other scientists (men and women), communities, and institutions.

### Milestones

**27** women from **15** different African countries attended the first workshop held in Accra, Ghana, September 9-11, 2019.

- A WhatsApp group was created for participants to continue staying in contact. To date, the site is very active with participants posting jobs, travel opportunities, conferences, etc. In addition, the WhatsApp group has been a great gauge of how the group bonded in Ghana.

### Level of evidence

Level 1	Quasi-experimental
Level 2	Pre-post or cross-sectional
Level 3	Point-in-time study
Level 4	Performance metrics/stats
Level 5	Anecdotal evidence

We conduct Networking Surveys at the workshops to determine the level of Networking within the group. The information collected: Who did you know before coming to workshop/Met for the first time at workshop/ Who do you plan on keeping in contact in the future. A follow-up survey is sent in March 2020, 6 months after the workshop.

### Future plans

The next workshop will be held in Zanzibar in December 2020.

#### Beneficiary group

Researchers and policymakers

#### Demographic

Female

#### Budget

\$70,000

#### Location

Africa



From top right, clockwise: Akissa Bahri (left), Professor at the National Agricultural Institute of Tunisia and Secretary of State for Water Resources, and Clare Muhoro, Associate Professor of Chemistry at Towson University and Science and Partnerships Advisor in the U.S. Global Development Lab, USAID.

Participants at the Women in Water workshop in Accra in October 2019. Attendees came from 15 different African countries and together with instructor Dr. Geri Richmond they developed a series of action plans to both build their network while also work to make access to clean water a priority in their countries.

**“Women’s lives are centered around water and yet, they aren’t working on policies and implementation. I want to see them become leaders, and that’s what Water First! is about.”**

— GERI RICHMOND, Presidential Chair in Science and Founder of COACH, University of Oregon.

