

## Government To Government (G2G) Partnerships Accelerating Workforce Gender Equality In Water Utilities

*“We must therefore take bold steps and fight for the pride of place in the world, as a global growth pole. We must develop our narrative and challenge conventional thinking and paradigms. We must re-kindle the passion of our founders and our people in Pan Africanism, through unity, self-reliance, integration and solidarity”.*

Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Freedom fighter, first woman Chairperson of African Union

### 1. OVERVIEW

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#### KENYA’S WATER SECTOR GENDER AGENDA HAS COME FROM SO FAR BUT MOVED SO LITTLE

It has been nearly three decades since the 1992 [United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, declared](#) that “women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water”.

Though many ambitious women wanted to advance into leadership positions at Kakamega County Water and Sanitation Co. (KACWASCO) very few had support to assist them get those positions. Though KACWASCO BOD and Core management perceived themselves as female supporters, they did not take enough action; such as publicly advocating for gender equality, publicly confronting discrimination, and publicly mentoring and sponsoring them. Though women have the capacity to lead KACWASCO, there existed Geographic mismatches between them and opportunities so they remained underrepresented and paid less. Though KACWASCO was hiring more women at entry-level positions their numbers dwindled at management level as they encountered the Broken Rung on the ladder to success and a revolving door in entry-level jobs exists hindering career advancement – this meant KACWASCO was losing the future of the sector. Eventually, there are fewer women to hire! Fewer to promote to senior managers and overall fewer women in the sector. Women can never catch up with this status quo! Could it be different if Governments played a pivotal role in accelerating progress towards parity and adaptive learning and management took centre stage in a gender transformative water sector? No empowerment without rights, no rights without politics! The Water Resource Management and Supply Gender challenge is a Water Governance Issue and Water Governance Issues require Water Governance Solutions! Therefore, to accelerate gender transformative water sector, What can governments do? This paper provides a case that affirms the supposition of a partnership between the USAID and County Government of Kakamega through KACWASCO and that instead of focusing on making transformation the goal in gender and the drinking water sector, how about we make it a way of doing business?

## 2. BACKGROUND

In a paper entitled [\*“No empowerment without rights, no rights without politics”\*](#), it is argued that: progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the development agenda requires a human rights-based approach and support for women’s movement to activate and energize the agenda.

In this regard the [United Nations](#) organized 5 outstanding world conferences for women: 1) at Mexico City in 1975; establishing the World Plan of Action and Declaration of Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace. 2) The Copenhagen conference in 1980, 3) the Nairobi Conference Kenya, in 1985 4) in Beijing in 1995 which marked a significant turning point for the global agenda on gender equality in a global policy document (5) In 2015, Member States adopted a [political declaration](#) that provided full, effective, and accelerated implementation of Beijing commitments championing the key role of gender equality and women empowerment for Sustainable Development Goals including [SDG6](#)

However, 40 years later, still the water sector was investing in the same gender challenges emerging from gender norms that are stuck with us generation after generation. On the current trajectory, the World Economic Forum reckons if progress towards [gender parity proceeds at the same pace, the global gender gap will close in 132 years](#). The Index concludes that [“no country has reached the ‘last mile’ on gender equality”](#) on more complex issues like gender-based violence, gender pay gaps, equal representation in powerful positions, gender budgeting and public services and climate change.

This affirms the supposition that instead of making transformation the goal in gender and water sector leadership, how about we make it a way of doing business?

[Kakamega County Water and Sanitation Company limited \(KACWASCO\)](#) is one of the largest and top water utilities in Kenya and the main Water Service Provider (WSP) in Kakamega County with 12 schemes serving 345,738 people. KACWASCO is mandated to sustainably supply, affordable, reliable water and sanitation services in its service area. The [Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(KIWASH\)](#) Project was a US\$51 million 7 year activity between 2015 to 2021 funded by [USAID/Kenya and East Africa \(USAID/KEA\)](#) and implemented by a consortium led by [DAI](#). The goal of KIWASH was to improve lives and health through water resources management and supply services, sanitation and hygiene services in Kenya including Kakamega County.

The current women’s underrepresentation in water sector leadership is a prominent concern. According to a [World Bank publication on Women in Water Utilities](#), women are significantly underrepresented; less than 18% of the workforce sampled were women, one in three utilities sampled had no female engineers and 12% of utilities have no female managers. Gender diversity in the Water sector is not only a pressing political, moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. Women make up half the world’s population but generate 37% of the global GDP, reflecting the fact that they have unequal access to labour markets, opportunities, and rights.

Kenyan women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water, we are responsible for water collection in 80 percent of households without access to water on premises. [49% of us are in the labor force constituting Half of Micro and Small Business Owners](#) with [78% of jobs dependent on water](#). Women’s dual roles and time burden affect their economic productivity however inequalities

in access to education impact their growth attributing to the high rates of poor women. Therefore, the Kenyan woman in water at work and society starts at a disadvantaged position

KACWASCO female staff faced the following challenges: Efforts to close gender gaps in education and increase the enrollment of women and girls in technical bit of water did not translate into higher female labor force due to entrenched social norms. Given the high male dominance in KACWASCO management, female managers were the “Onlys” – the only or one of the only women hence more resistance, sharper criticism especially on affirming their competence, more prejudice, and more experience to micro-aggressions. Gender-biased occupational segregation and hiring. Work-place harassment. Women were often compensated differently for equivalent work. Work life conflict that disproportionately disadvantaged female workers: Maternity and parental leave policies; medical cover where female staff are considered expensive due to maternity leave etc. Workplace facilities that do not cater to the needs of women menstrual hygiene management. Access to finance for customers was weak and so on.

Gender equality is a basic human right and fundamental principle of sustainable development. The mandate for gender equality mainstreaming is drawn from national and international commitments on gender equality and women empowerment. The [Constitution of Kenya](#) (CoK, 2010) and [the Vision 2030](#) for Kenya have both reaffirmed Kenya’s commitment to gender as stipulated in Article 10. (2) (b) on national values that have included (b) human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalized; and Article 19 on Bill of Rights (2), recognising and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is to preserve the dignity of individuals and communities and to promote social justice and the realization of the potential of all human beings. This has been cascaded downwards through other sectoral policies. The water sector gives the mandate to protect the interests and rights of consumers in the provision of water and sanitation services to Water Services Regulatory Board, under The Water Act 2016 Section 70. (1). Under the CoK 2010, water supply and sanitation services are functions of the county government; the County government of Kakamega in its [CIDP](#) has identified promoting gender equity and gender mainstreaming as core development priorities and strategies.

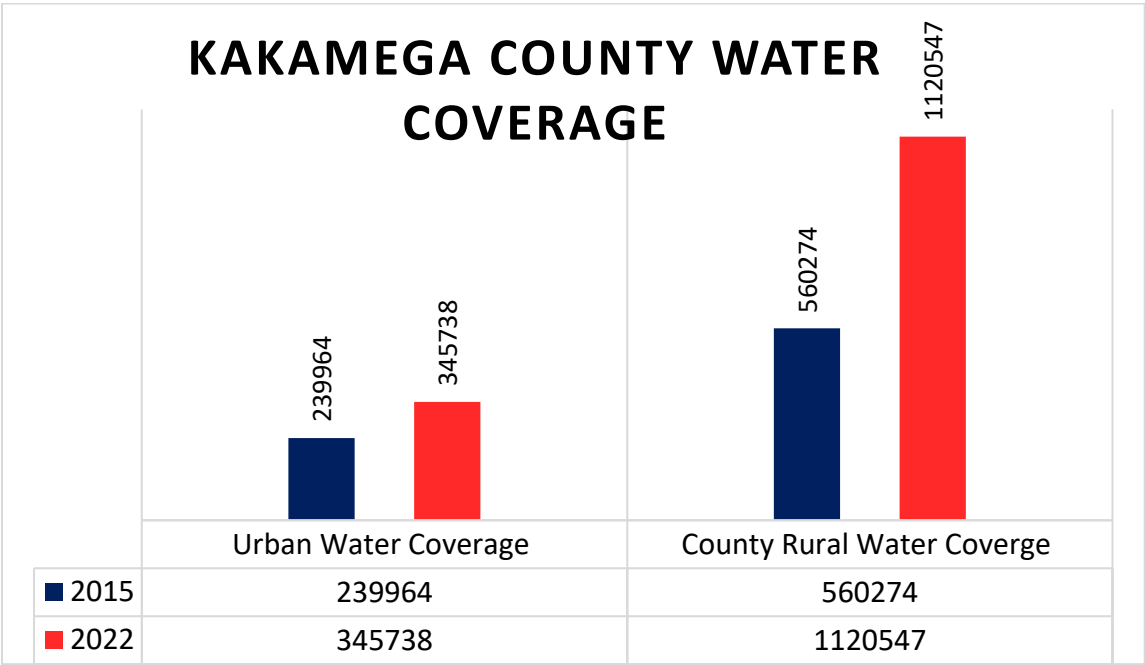
### 3. ACTION

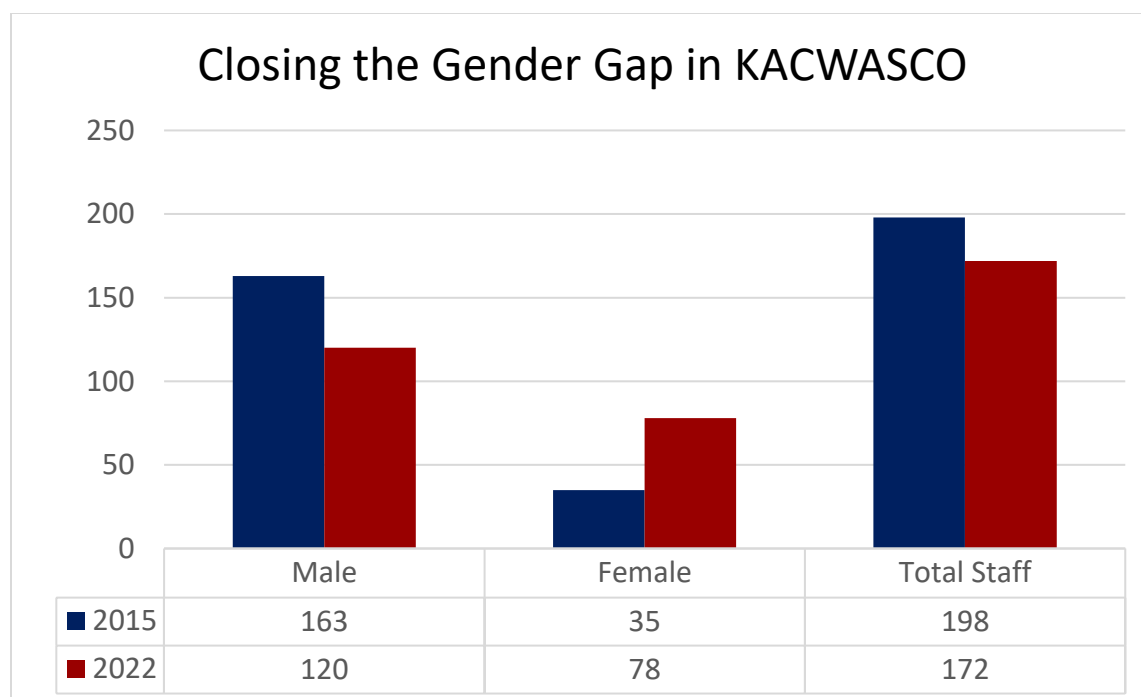
The project adopted the [Gender transformative approaches](#) to programming for all partnership activities between the USAID-KIWASH Project and KACWASCO to transform the power structures that underlie unequal gender relations and norms. This supported creation of Interventions that create opportunities for the staff and consumers to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in society, while addressing power inequities between different genders. Also KACWASCO staff participated in the [Workforce Gender Equality Accelerated Program](#) . This supported KACWASCO staff and its customers Identify gender equality gaps within the WSP, Develop a business case that demonstrates how gender equality will benefit the organization’s bottom-line; Take targeted, tangible, and strategic action, grounded in assessment, to increase gender equality for KACWASCO; Strengthen leadership and change management skills and exercise more influence to create an equitable and diverse workplace and Effectively engage other male and female leaders within their organization in support of desired change. The approach was pegged on SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 10 and SDG 17 and targeted Women as Staff, Consumers, Beneficiaries, and Service Providers. Identification of key Actions to Support Women was done through a Undertook a Utility-wide gender analysis and set up a bold roadmap. Other approaches used the IWRM and World bank tactics including: Fixing the Leaks: Retaining Female Talent in KACWASCO; From Trickle to Stream: Partnering with learning institutions on to Attract Female Talent to the Water

Sector; Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Promoting Women’s Leadership in KACWASCO; Analyze gender aspects during the preparation and appraisal stage of tenders; this turned to gender-responsive policies, bidding documents and contracts; Integrate Women-Owned Businesses in the Supply Chain and Utilize meaningful performance indicators to monitor and evaluate actions designed to narrow gender gap, document success

4. OUTCOMES

KACWASCO has put in a number of measures to promote gender equality that have included awareness raising on the role of gender in improving institutional performance and economic viability. Overall female staff increased from 18% in 2015 to 45% in 2021 with water coverage increasing in urban areas from 239,964 to 345,978 and in rural areas from 560,274 to 1,205,47. **On Policy:** The senior staff were trained on gender equality to ensure they are adequately skilled to cascade the same to their teams and customers. Institutionalisation of the 1st gender policy and entrenchment in all operational and departmental policies and strategies in KACWASCO. A Gender Committee was set up that has seen the establishment of an alcohol and drugs committee and HIV/AIDS Committee. Partnerships with Ministry of education to provide internship opportunities and hold career talks, apprenticeship for learning institutions and participation at career fairs. **On Customer Experience:** Scrap of using Title deeds for new water and sewer connections as most women did not have the document due to cultural barriers. Partnerships with Sectoral actors like Water Sector Trust Fund to provide women with access to finance to build toilets and manage them in LIA. **Human Resources:** Safe work environment where water workers thrive, Gender sensitive and localised hiring and procurement processes, Set up of WIBA for occupational health matters and medical cover for all employees, Digitalisation and automation of processes and Harmony and unity of purpose that has improved service delivery, customer satisfaction, revenues and overall utility performance.





## 5. LESSONS

2 lessons were learnt: (1) **DATA:** In order to foster water policies that are truly gender-transformative, one needs data to understand the situation on the ground. Data is the driver to improve gender equality in KACWASCO. The recurrent existing data gaps are exacerbating gender inequalities. There is need for high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by gender, among several other characteristics this should include regular updating of the Index through 2030. This can support the existing CSO movements, champions and advocates have the data they need, when they need it and in a form they can use to guide and drive policy, law and budget decisions to meet existing commitments in SDG6 to achieve gender equality. This will also support inform the financing gap accordingly to meet the gender data gaps and identified needs including: Build a coalition for more and better financing; Increase demand for water sector gender data; Deliver on the promise of new sources of data; Encourage a county-driven/led govt led approach; Prioritize core data systems; and Advocate for increased donor funding. On (2) **Policy:** Anchor all interventions on policies and laws. Local Governments perform best on the gender equality-related issues in water sector to which coordinated and concerted **funding and policy** focus have been directed over