

ARP RESEARCH PROJECT: GENDER & DIVERSITY

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AMWAJ

Women's Empowerment Through Water Management and Rehabilitation Projects

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Meet Our Team



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We dedicate this research project to all the powerful and inspiring Syrian women who we had the privilege of meeting. - شكراً, Thank you!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 31st of August, we left Switzerland and flew to Hatay, Turkey, in the apprehension of staying in a red-zone area for more than 10 days, without expecting the life-changing, humbling, and inspiring experience we were about to witness. During our stay, we had the opportunity to meet with many Syrian refugees, men and women whose stories deeply moved us as well as their current situation, determined to build a new life after their significant physical, material and sentimental loss, all while pending a residency permit that would allow them to cross borders in the hope of greater opportunities. This trip was made possible through a partnership with Geo Expertise, a non-profit organization founded in 2010 and based in Geneva on a project called “Amwaj” focused on Women's empowerment through water management and rehabilitation projects. The objective of the project is to strengthen the capacities of women by providing skilled women in the field of engineering and economics with training on writing project proposals, designing and managing water rehabilitation projects. Our contribution consists of conducting a series of qualitative interviews with Syrian NGOs and women engineers to explore the overall experience of women employed in the water/WASH sector and the barriers they are facing to find a job as well as achieve a greater sense of empowerment once employed. Through our 27 interviews, we were able to observe individual success stories of women reporting a higher level of empowerment according to Kabeer's definition and framework. However, women are still facing countless challenges in the sector, hindering their empowerment as a collective group due to two main factors: 1) patriarchal norms, including the complementarian view of gender, and 2) safety issues related to the current political context of Syria, which prevents women from working in the field. Moreover, upon our partner's request, at the end of each interview we would ask women for recommendations about the form and content for the next training program GeoExpertise aims to implement in Northern Syria. Thus, through this report we want to let the inspiring people we met speak and try to transcribe their words and experiences as accurately as possible.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

FPE	Feminist Political Ecology
GIS	Geographic Information System (GIS)
GWTF	Task Force on Gender and Water
GWP	Global Water Partnership
ICWE	International Conference on Water and the Environment
IHEID	Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales et du Développement
IO	International Organization
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, And Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SECD	Syrian Engineers for Development and Construction
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNEP-DHI	United Nations Environment Programme Centre of Water and Environment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WUA	Water User Association

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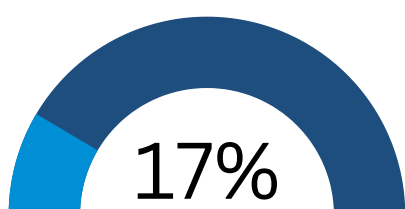


Introduction

The gender and water nexus has been a prominent topic and lens of discussion, research, and project implementation in the international sphere since 1992. As a result of the International Conference on Water and the Environment (ICWE), the third principle of the Dublin Statement affirms that “women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water” (GWP, n.d.). Therefore, policies need to be adopted not only to address the specific needs of women with regard to water but also to empower them to participate “at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation” (Khayat, 2021).

Despite some advances on the global front to ensure greater gender representation under the ambition of reaching an all-inclusive means of decision-making, so far the contribution to women’s empowerment and gender equality in the water sphere has been limited. Even though they are major water users, women still have little influence on the major decisions on how this precious resource is governed, be it at the local, national or transboundary levels (OSCE, 2015). Traditionally water management—the science and engineering of the resource—and water policymaking have been male-dominated spaces, much like other fields of governance. The role of women within water decision-making spheres, both at the domestic level and even more so at the international, transboundary space, has been unrecognized and overlooked.

Just this year, a new report by the Global Water Partnership (GWP) and UNEP-DHI (United Nations Environment Programme Centre of Water and Environment), shows progress has been slow in countries meeting gender objectives in their water management policies and plans (UN Water, 2022). Women and girls are the primary providers, managers, and users of water; however, women make up less than 17% of the water, sanitation, and hygiene labour force in developing economies and a fraction of the policymakers, regulators, management, and technical experts, according to IWA (ibid).



Women and girls are the primary providers, managers, and users of water; women make up less than 17% of the water, sanitation, and hygiene labour force in developing economies and a fraction of the policymakers, regulators, management, and technical experts (IWA, 2022)



The SDG 5 and SDG 6

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals highlight both gender, as well as water, as key goals. Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life is a fundamental target in order to achieve SDG 5 on Gender Equality, as well as an integral factor for the achievement of SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation.

Women have intimate knowledge of water sources, water quality, and daily household water requirements. Hence, women have a major stake in water matters and must be part of any decision about water issues: they influence decisions in the home, manage household budgets to accommodate sanitation needs, and educate the community on the value of proper sanitation, and yet they are inadequately represented in high-level planning and decision making about sanitation. Water projects designed and implemented with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those without. However, females are underrepresented in the water sector leadership, largely due to the scarcity of women water professionals, entrenched cultural and traditional attitudes, gender stereotyping, and perceptions that women lack managerial and technical skills. This is why, putting women at the heart of management of water facilities has been an important focus in many of the conference declarations, programmes, and projects onwards.

A shift towards an integrated approach with demand management, re-use, and recycling practices with a more balanced representation of women in making and implementing these policies will help address such unequal water management frameworks. Women are keenly aware of the needs of their households and local communities and can contribute to overall sustainable water management, hence their inclusion as key stakeholders will provide important perspectives and timely solutions to subsisting water issues. It is time to view women and girls as active managers of the resource which defines their everyday life, and not simply as mere collectors.



200 M Women and children spend 200 million hours every day collecting water



Women and girls spend an estimated 152-200 million hours a day collecting water



Surveys from 45 developing countries show that women and children bear the primary responsibility for water collection in most households (76%)

To this end, Geo Expertise, a non-profit organization founded in 2010 and based in Geneva, Switzerland, is implementing Amwaj: Women's Empowerment Through Water Management and Rehabilitation Projects (funded by Swiss Water Partnership (SWP) Youth). Our partner, Geo Expertise co-founder Dr. Ahmad Haj Assad, leads programs on Water for Resilience and Recovery in Syria, and focuses on the geopolitics of water and water management as a tool for post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation in Syria. The project's objective is to strengthen the capacities of skilled women in the fields of engineering and economics based in Idlib, Northern Syria, by providing them with training to build their technical and soft skills (Geo Expertise, n.d.). Topics will include how to write project proposals, how to communicate ideas effectively, and how to design and manage water rehabilitation projects (Geo Expertise, n.d.). As student researchers, we joined Geo Expertise by collaborating on the research component of the Amwaj project that studies three different aspects of and barriers to the empowerment of Syrian women in the water/WASH sector. Amwaj is a step towards peace building. Amwaj is one of many peacebuilding projects helping Syrian communities to rebuild their lives post, and during, the ongoing conflict that has now lasted over ten years.

The human toll of the Syrian crisis is overwhelming; as of September 2016, 6.1 million Syrians are internally displaced, 4.8 million have fled as refugees, and a total of 13.5 million need urgent humanitarian assistance (Geo Expertise, n.d.). The objective of our partner's project is to strengthen the capacities of women by providing skilled women in the fields of engineering and economics with training on writing project proposals, designing and managing water rehabilitation projects (Geo Expertise, n.d.). While there are several ways for Syrian women to achieve greater engagement in the current and post-conflict environment, water management is an important channel through which women can participate in significant decision-making and play a role in peacebuilding processes. Merging the skills and capacities of women with the potential for cooperation presented by water management projects provides a key opportunity for Syrian women to play an active role in important decision-making processes in the water sector both during and post-conflict. Through the Amwaj project, we hope our research can contribute to helping empower Syrian women through water management, and to assist in the Syrian community's peacebuilding process.

Research Questions

1. How can water rehabilitation and governance activities serve as a tool for women's empowerment?
2. What are the lessons from the theory and from the field?

This paper will explore and identify how water rehabilitation and governance activities can serve as a tool for women's empowerment. The paper will first presents an overview of the literature exploring how a Feminist Political Ecology approach to water resource governance can bring transformative changes to post-conflict communities. The second part of our analysis focuses on empowering women in the water sector; we define empowerment, present common obstacles encountered to women's participation and representation, and illustrate ways to boost women's motivation to be involved in water management.

The main research question of this project will allow us to focus water as an empowerment tool for Syrian women. Looking beyond women as simply users of water, our research serves to understand how women are currently participating in water management projects in post-conflict communities living in Northwestern Syria. For this, our field research consists of primary empirical and qualitative data gathered during a 10-day fieldwork trip in Turkey. 27 semi-structured interviews (in-person and virtual) were conducted amongst women actively participating in (either implementing or leading) water projects in humanitarian camps in Northwestern Syria to better understand women's role on-ground in water management projects.

Our field research in Turkey (Reyhanli, Gaziantep, and Antakya) was an enlighten journey. The women interviewed helped shine light on the current challenges and opportunities to empowering females in the water management sector. They all helped shape our recommendations to our partner Geo Expertise on their quest to empowering women through water rehabilitation projects.

The report is a story of Syria women, those we interviewed and the ones we lived with. It is a story of their inspiring journeys...

Literature Review

The literature review consists of both a brief review of Feminist Political Ecology (hereafter, FPE) as well as a review of academic sources and policy documents regarding water and gender more broadly, and women's empowerment through water management projects more specifically. To initiate the review and choose our sources, Geo Expertise came to us with the following guiding research questions:

- How can feminist approaches to water resource governance bring positive changes in the communities of a conflict society?
- How can water rehabilitation and governance activities serve as a tool for women's empowerment?
- What are the lessons from the theory and from the field?

The literature review first highlights relevant sources in the expanding literature of FPE, giving our research a theoretical underpinning. As a remerging and broadening theoretical lens itself, FPE allows for a gendered engagement with humanitarian work in the water/WASH sector in post-conflict communities as well as the notion of “gendered knowledges” (Rocheleau et al., 1996). In the second half, the review explores the extent to which women engaging in the Water/WASH sector as decision-makers can serve as a tool for their empowerment by looking at lessons learned from the field.

A. Drawing Inspiration from Feminist Political Ecology: A Brief Overview

In their landmark opening, Rocheleau et al. (1996) elaborate the importance of adopting the conceptual framework of FPE. By discussing the relationship between gender, environment, and development, the authors argue that, due to their gender roles, men and women have different environmental concerns as well as experience environmental issues differently (Rocheleau et al., 1996). To this end, FPE considers “the uneven distribution of access to and control over resources on the basis of class and ethnicity” and treats gender as an important factor in the shaping of “access and control of resources [...] to [further] shape processes of ecological change” (Rocheleau et al., 1996).

Furthermore, this analytical framework focuses on three key themes: gendered environmental knowledges, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, and gendered environmental politics and grassroots activism (Rocheleau et al., 1996; Elmhirst, 2011).

After the publication of *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experience*, there was a great shift in how to approach gender theoretically in the social sciences (Elmhirst, 2011). However, even with efforts to mainstream gender into natural resource management interventions, and development policy more broadly, gender “lost its critical and politicised edge, having been institutionalised into a series of tools and techniques that are far removed from the transformatory potential of gender as a feminist concept” (Elmhirst, 2011). After Rocheleau et al. (1996)’s promising opener, it seemed that, for the next decade, the subject of FPE had disappeared; there was a dearth of academic texts that self-defined as FPE or showcasing it as a sub-field (Elmhirst, 2011). One reason for this is that a considerable body of research, as well as practice, could have been considered as FPE but was not named as such (Elmhirst, 2011). Darling (2012) looks at the sustainable water governance framework and water management at the global level, where there is a tendency to be technocratic and androcentric. She finds that the notion of access to water as a human right (international level) and the valuing system, especially for human flourishing, can actually reinforce western economic imperialisms and legacy of colonization i.e., reinforce dominance structures that determine who flourishes and how. She urges that women should not be reduced “to mere users and water to a simple resource [and to] acknowledge the complexity of our relationship to each other and to our environment” (Darling, 2012). In this way, instead of treating “water scarcity as a threat to which only a narrow spectrum of efficiency-based solutions are available, we must prepare to afford the diversity of cultural, spiritual and scientific views a seat at the table” (Darling, 2012). While not explicitly identifying as adopting an FPE lens, Darling (2012) operates within its framework as she treats gender as an important factor in the shaping of “access and control of resources” and considers “gendered environmental rights and responsibilities” at a global level (Rocheleau et al., 1996; Elmhirst, 2011).

In the edited volume, *A Political Ecology of Women, Water, and Global Environmental Change*, the authors explore the connections between women, water, and global environmental change (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). Building on previous FPE research, this volume recognizes that often “so called minorities’ by gender, race, class, and ethnicity are unfairly disadvantaged in

the face of restricting political economies” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). The authors illustrate the importance of considering “multiple layers of social difference as produced by and central to the effective governance and local management of water resources” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). In these case studies, women are considered as “strategically important for future resilience and mitigation of global change issues as they are experienced in localized sites” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). Using FPE enables the authors to address “how the same dynamics that produce unequal access to resources [...] are often key components of social and political differences” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). This collection of work also criticizes the “normative gender discourses that underlie policies and practices surrounding water management [...], resource knowledge and expertise, and critical livelihood studies” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015). One chapter points out a particular paradox regarding women and water. This paradox—“the importance of women in water management on the one hand, and their lack of resources and power to appropriately manage water on the other hand”—is often reinforced by development projects and policies that do not take into account the various needs and interest of rural women as opposed to those of their male counterparts (De Moraes, 2015).

Adams et al. (2018) contribute to FPE engagement with urban waterscapes. They look at how gender dynamics influence participation in community-based urban (as opposed to the largely documented rural) water governance systems. More specifically, their study explores the dynamics of gender and power relations that influence “participation, decision making processes, [...] among Water User Associations (WUAs) in the urban informal settlements of Lilongwe, Malawi” (Adams et al., 2018). They adopt an FPE lens to examine whether and how community-based governance of drinking water in an urban context leads to (in)equitable gender participation and decision making. They find that the latter do not guarantee equitable gender participation and that inequitable participation is realized through “gendered representation in WUA structures, socio-cultural practices and women’s self-exclusion; and community micro-politics and power relations” (Adams et al., 2018). These findings oppose the notion that “community-based governance of water leads to equitable participation and empowerment of women” (Adams et al., 2018). In terms of policy implications, this means that unless systematic efforts to incorporate “women’s needs, interests, and voices” are taken, so-called participatory approaches to water governance will actually serve to “suppress women’s agency and reinforce existing gender-based inequalities” (Adams et al., 2018).

Additionally, in recent decades, it has been a development focus to mainstream gender in water governance through “how to do gender” toolkits (Shrestha et al., 2019). However, these toolkits have been widely argued as ways that actually simplify the “complex, nuanced realities of inequalities by gender in relation to water” failing to notice “the fact that the proposed users of such gender-water toolkits, i.e. mostly male water sector professionals, lack the skills, motivation and/or incentives to apply these toolkits in their everyday work” (Shrestha et al., 2019). In their article, Shrestha et al. (2019) adopt an FPE lens in order to analyze some of the obstacles to reduce social inequalities in the management of global commons such as international rivers (Shrestha et al., 2019). In the context of their study, where choosing a career in engineering in the hydropower sector is one of the “strongest performances of masculinity one can choose”, paying attention to and/or being sensitive to gender is seen as irrelevant and are even perceived as a threat to masculinity (Shrestha et al., 2019).

B. The water/WASH sector as a tool for women's empowerment

1. Defining "empowerment"

Firstly, it is important to clarify what we mean by empowerment and the different dimensions this vague buzzword encompasses if we aim to measure it. The commonly accepted definition of empowerment refers to the “expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer 1999a, 437). Beyond this straightforward definition, the feminist literature also explores the different dimensions and characteristics included in the notion of empowerment which is of crucial importance to acknowledge in order to conduct this research. First, empowerment is not a static state, but is observed through a transfer of power overtime (Malhotra et al., 2002, 7). Empowerment is also context-specific, thus we need to look at local norms and institutions shaping women's opportunities and restraining them, the “structures of constraints” (Kabeer, 1999a, 457; Glennerster et al., 2018, 4–5). Then, empowerment is an individual rather than collective process and is linked to personal agency and someone's individual awareness (Stromquist, 1996, 13; Malhotra et al., 2002, 15). Finally, empowerment has both an intrinsic value (realization of women as agents of change) and instrumental value (changing the distribution of power) (Stromquist, 1996, 13; Kabeer, 1994, 224; Mandal, 2013, 18).

These dimensions add layers of complexity which in turn challenge and limit the analysis and measurement of the level of empowerment. By instance, as women may have internalized society's views and their lower social status, the notion of deliberate choice and personal agency becomes ambiguous (Kabeer 1999a, 9; Glennerster et al., 2018, 8). Then, empowerment is not solely observed through the outcomes of a decision but is also defined by someone's agency and bargaining power in the negotiation process. However, intra-household dynamics are hard to observe (Malhotra et al., 2002, 19; Glennerster et al., 2018, 7). Finally, the meanings and manifestations of empowerment are dependent on the socio-cultural context, which means we cannot have a fixed list of indicators (Kabeer 1999a, 456; Glennerster et al., 2018, 8; Malhotra et al., 2002, 17).

Thus, acknowledging the complexity of this overarching concept reinforces the relevance of following Kabeer's framework which aims to include all these dimensions. The model states that in an attempt to measure empowerment, three interdependent aspects must be taken into account (Kabeer 1999a): 1) resources (control, access, and ownership), 2) agency (power in making strategic life-choices), and 3) achievement (well-being outcomes). Thus, we are also using this framework to draft the questionnaires, to allow us to consider and address all aspects of empowerment during our interviews.

2. Women's participation in the water/WASH sector

The emergent approach for a greater empowerment of women through the WASH sector, seen through both the theory and the field, is the promotion of women's active employment, increasing their representation and participation in the public sphere and NGOs. In the literature, we can find several examples of these emerging structures, such as the Water Users Associations (India), an all-women NGO called Water Women (Brazil), women's community-based organizations (Pakistan), rural water committees (South Africa), etc. However, as in any other sector, not all jobs in WASH are equivalent in terms of responsibility, authority and tasks. Thus, to assess the level of empowerment, we must report where the women are located in the organization hierarchy, and where they are based, as their tasks and responsibility will greatly depend if they are working from an office or going to the field.

First, regarding women working in an office, an analysis of policy reports and academic writings reported positive effects of women's employment on their level of empowerment. Women are gaining more recognition and authority in

their communities which represents a shift in cultural norms (Sam & Todd, 2020; Kevany & Huisingh, 2013; Kulkarni et al. 2008).

Their bargaining power within their communities and households also increases (Das 2014; UN DESA 2006). Moreover, women report a higher level of self-esteem and self-confidence through the new knowledge and experience acquired, which in turn increases their inclusiveness, mobility, and respect within their communities (Hemson, 2002; Ivens, 2008; UN DESA 2006; Kevany & Huisingh 2013, 62)

Data from the field reveals that fewer women are working as field engineers due mostly to gendered cultural norms and the strict division of labor viewing women engineers as not socially acceptable (Sam & Todd, 2020). Despite this reality, some authors argue that technician training can be more efficient to increase women's empowerment as it confers them a greater role and responsibility, it defies gender roles, and it provides them with technical skills and an income generating activity (Sam & Todd, 2020, 365). Positive outcomes, some similar to working in an office, have been reported when the program has been successful in enrolling women as technical engineers. First, the sustainability of water facilities increases due to the reduction in the rates of pump breakdown (Sam & Todd, 2020, 358). Then, women's interest in engineering is enhanced (Sam & Todd, 2020, 363). A higher level of self-confidence, a sense of personal responsibility and competency was reported (Sam & Todd, 2020, 366; UN DESA, 2006, 24–25). Finally, a shift in cultural norms and gender roles is observed as male employees report a greater confidence in women technicians and leadership ability as they are progressively giving more instructions (Sam & Todd, 2020, 365). For instance, in South Africa, increased collaboration between women and men in construction work is observed which can be linked to the growing presence of rural water committees employing an important number of women (UN DESA, 2006, 23).

3. Barriers to women's participation

Despite the traditional role of women in domestic water supply and irrigation agriculture, women's representation in the water sector is still low compared to men (Singh 2006; Adams et al., 2018; Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen 1998). Some improvements are still necessary for an equal participation and representation of women in the WASH sector (Adams et al., 2018; Cleaver & Hamada, 2010). A vast literature exists on the remaining barriers to women's entry to the WASH sector and for women to achieve a greater sense of empowerment once employed, which can be summarized as follows:

- Women are less likely to occupy leadership positions in water committees and organizations (Sam & Todd 2020; Adams et al., 2018).
- Women are only passive participants: in South Africa surveys reported women on the committees were not free to express their views or to participate in decision-making, they have a low level of verbal participation, and they defer to men on major issues (Hemson, 2002, 27). In Tanzania, they occupied "secondary" and "supportive" positions in the committees (Mandara & Niehof, 2017, 129). In India, surveys reported that women did not feel they have earned a lot from their membership, because they never felt that they were making any contributions (Kulkarni et al., 2008, 69).
- Many strategies were adopted by men to exclude women during meetings: withholding information, husbands replacing their wives, scheduling meetings at inconvenient times for women, membership criteria excluding women such as legal ownership of irrigated land (Sri Lanka), etc. (Sam & Todd 2020, 358; Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen, 1998, 341; GWTF, 2006, 4).
- Intersectionality: women represented in the water sector do not represent all women (Cleaver & Hamada, 2010, 34), in certain contexts older women and widows are more likely to be leaders as they experience less restrictive gender norms (Mandara & Niehof, 2017, 128). Another study reported that the majority of female leaders in water committees in Namibia come from the family of the ruling elites (Steimanis et al. 2020).
- Prevailing gender roles: existing cultural preference for male leaders and decision-makers (Sam & Todd 2020; Adams et al., 2018), also internalized by women as women's leadership capacities are often doubted by a significant share of both men and women (Hemson, 2002, 28; Carmi et al., 2019, 336).
- High social costs: stigmatization of women active in the public sphere or working as technicians (UN DESA, 2006). They can be subjected to ill-intentioned rumors, slander and scandals (Carmi et al., 2019, 336). For this reason, most men do not allow their wives to participate in public activities (Adams et al., 2018, 139).
- Lack of education of women can be a barrier as most of them are illiterate in rural settings (Sam & Todd, 2020, 363).
- Self-exclusion: women reported not to feel legitimate or knowledgeable enough on management and technical aspects of water even when they meet the level of education required for the position (Adams et al., 2018, 138; Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen, 1998, 342).
- Higher opportunity costs for women working given the demanding domestic workloads and restricted mobility (Adams et al., 2018, 139; Das, 2014, 207).



Methodology

A. Preparing for Fieldwork and Developing Interview Questions

Dr. Ahmed encouraged us to collect primary data through interviews to complement our desktop research. Turkey was selected as our destination as there is a Geo Expertise field office as well as multiple humanitarian organizations based in Turkey and implementing water/WASH projects, among others, in Syria. Before leaving Switzerland, and to ensure our safety, we prepared and submitted paperwork to assess the potential risk of our fieldwork. We also developed a working contact list of prospective interviewees according to specific categories (see next section). We developed an agenda of whom we would speak with and which cities in Turkey we would stay in so that we could meet with interviewees in person. We were also invited by Sultan, a friend of Dr. Ahmed, to stay at a the womens' shelter run by his NGO, Ward Organization, which itself is funded by the Swiss-based non profit organization, Human Action International, for some of the nights we were to spend in Reyhanli, Turkey.



The literature review (see previous section), as well as the evolving needs of Geo Expertise, helped shape the content of the interview questions. The literature review gave us the theoretical lens of FPE, helped us to define the concept of empowerment and how to measure it, looking at best practices of and challenges women face working in the water/WASH sector. Geo Expertise's expectations and the objectives of the technical training it plans to implement helped develop the content of the interview questions (later adapted), as well as categorize prospective interviewees (see Appendices II, III, and IV).

As student researchers, we adhered to Geneva Graduate Institute's Research Ethics Guidelines (n.d.) in order to keep our interviewees as informed as possible, either verbally or in writing (See Appendix I), and free from harm to the best of our ability. To respect the dignity, rights, and safety of our research subjects, we only accepted voluntary participation, established informed consent, granted anonymity when requested, and considered any question we posed for its potential to do harm. We also decided, with the input from Dr. Ahmed, not to record any of the interviews in order to encourage the free expression of ideas. When necessary, e.g. in group interviews, we asked male colleagues to give us the privacy to speak to their female counterpart(s) alone.

B. During Fieldwork: Adapting Interview Questions

The main purpose of the interviews was to gather information about the experience of Syrian women who are working, or have worked, in the water/WASH sector. The data would help us to assess whether they felt empowered in their position, paying attention and the (potential) ongoing barriers to achieving or maintaining it. Thus, even in our questionnaires, we divided the questions into three categories following Kabeel's framework to measure empowerment's aspects of resources, agency, and achievement (see Appendix II). Depending on the professional background, employment status, and gender of the interviewee, we used other questions not adhering to this particular framework (see Appendices III and IV). We initially developed a short survey (see Appendix V) to be given at the end of each interview, however, it was simpler to ask the question as open-ended ones.

Depending on the linguistic skills of both the interviewer(s) and interviewee(s), each interview was conducted in either English, Arabic (in three different dialects: Syrian, Tunisian, and Egyptian), and, in some cases, a mixture of both languages. Each student researcher took individual notes which were later compiled and stored digitally. With few exceptions, all three student researchers co-conducted the interviews which were followed by a debrief session when time permitted. Our contact list also expanded as interviewees referred us to their colleagues, friends, and acquaintances.

While Syrian women trained in engineering and economics were the main target of the interviews, we also included unemployed women, women working in other fields, students, and men. One reason for this was that it was difficult to preselect contacts but this allowed us to better understand wider issues such as the educational and professional opportunities available (or not) to both men and women, as well as changing gendered cultural norms within a post-conflict context. Several times, our initial questionnaires were limiting or did not apply to the interviewee so we adapted or made them more precise, often during the interviews themselves.

C. Post-Fieldwork: Analyzing the Data and Some Reflections

We developed an internal Excel table (see Appendix VI for adapted version) in order to organize and categorize our interviews. This allowed us to extract our own statistics and quantitative data. To analyze the qualitative data, we combined narrative and content analysis to capture major themes as well as specific ideas or insights. We interpreted respondents' answers following Kabeer (1999b)'s framework. While we used this framework to draft the questionnaires, this model also allowed us to assess whether or not we observed greater women's empowerment through its three interdependent dimensions: resources, agency, and achievement (Kabeer, 1999b). Another objective of our research was to provide Geo Expertise with a list of recommendations for the technical training it will implement. From our notes, we gathered several recommendations and best practices.

For the first fieldwork experience either of us had ever had, we collectively prepared ourselves in several ways: we booked our flights, picked our culturally appropriate outfits, bought gifts for our hosts, conducted a fieldwork risk assessment, etc. Our main goal was to interview as many people as possible in the limited time we had. But we were not prepared for what was the warmest welcome we could have possibly received from our hosts and interviewees alike. We spent some of the most memorable nights of our lives with the women and children at Ward in Reyhanli. We had a wonderful evening and delicious dinner with Dr. Ahmed and his family. Our interviewees were enthusiastic, open, and very generous. Although it was only 10 days, our trip felt like it had lasted much longer as we had fallen into the rhythm of early mornings, late nights, many cups of coffee or tea (or both!), and making call after call. At first, it was a relief to return to Switzerland and our creature comforts but we realized, more than answers to interview questions, we gained new friendships and a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Syrian culture.

D. Limitations

A major limitation to our research is language. Conducting interviews primarily in English often presented a challenge to interviewees, as they were not all fluent speakers, and thus had a harder time articulating their thoughts. We can also assume that cultural insights might have been lost in translation. On the other hand, interviews that were conducted in Arabic were also challenging for us. Only two student researchers spoke Arabic, and, due to the different dialects (Syrian, Egyptian and Tunisian), it was often difficult to ask questions, translate/interpret, and take notes all at the same time. In addition, since we decided not to record any interviews, we had to rely on the accuracy of our notes. Our research is also limited by the general drawbacks of qualitative interviews. Fully structured interviews would have produced more standardized answers which could then be quantified for better data visualization. However, we decided that a semi-structured model would permit spontaneity and deeper responses. Our interviews were more or less informal, which established a safe environment for female interviewees to open up. We are aware that our data could be interpreted or expressed in different ways. While it was also a lengthy process to synthesize findings from our qualitative data, it allowed for a more in-depth understanding of our fieldwork context and for a more genuine connection with the interviewees, especially the women. In fact, time-constraints precluded us from deepening our analysis.





Findings

We gathered qualitative data by conducting 27 semi-structured interviews. Most (23 out of the 27) were with individuals while the remainder were in small groups, namely staff members NGOs. The majority of individual interviews were with women (16 female and 7 male) with engineering backgrounds. The majority of respondents work in the humanitarian sector and implement varied projects in water/WASH, nutrition, health, agriculture, etc., working either from the office (in Turkey) or directly in the field (in Syria).

Our research provides evidence for two main findings, which are developed in two different sections structured following the three dimensions of Kabeer's framework: 1) Individual success stories reporting a higher level of empowerment for women working in the water/WASH sector, yet there remain 2) Persisting barriers limiting women's empowerment as a collective group because of two main factors: patriarchal values, including the complementarian view of gender, and safety issues related to the current political context of Syria, which prevents women from working in the field.

In our fieldwork context, “resources” refers to the percentage of women employed in the organization, their leadership position, salary, and access to the job market. “Agency” refers to leadership and the decision making power women have. Finally, “achievement” refers to a possible change (positive or negative as viewed by the interviewee) in social status, gender roles, and self-confidence.

A. Evidence for Increased Empowerment at the Individual Level

1. Resources

Most women we interviewed (14 out of 17) were working in the MEAL department based in an office (as MEAL officers, assistants or program managers), rather than in the technical engineering team going in the field. In the MEAL department, their job mostly consists of administrative tasks, monitoring the team on the ground without having to go to the field. Technical engineers, on the contrary, have to undertake construction activities in the field.

The vast majority of organizations we interviewed had quotas for the number of female staff imposed by their donors (the number can vary). However, it was not always clear if the number was an objective or if it represented the current situation, and whether it was self-imposed or requested by the donors. The following table illustrates statistics from the qualitative data we gathered:

Name of Organization	Percentage of Male Employees (in the field/office)	Percentage of Female Employees (in the field/office)	Female employee percentage required by donors
Mercy USA	52%	48%	N/A
Insan Charity	80%	20%	30%
SECD	50%	50%	N/A
Takaful Al Sham	60%	40%	N/A
Amal Organization	N/A	N/A	30%

2. Agency

All women (except one) reported feeling heard and trusted in their current position. They feel free to share their ideas and feel like they are in an equal position to men. Some felt they had decision-making power along with their position and felt comfortable to give orders. Most women have a leadership role and act as team leaders, supervising both men and women (up to 10 people) in the office or in the field.

3. Achievement

Every woman interviewed reported feeling:

- More self-confident, stronger, bolder and braver, and noticed a positive change in their personality.
- More knowledgeable and helpful as they bring a direct contribution to their family and society, which was noted as an important aspect in the current context; “women need to contribute to the reconstruction of the country”.
- More respected by their family, friends and male colleagues, which translates into a higher social status.
- Note: many women noted a progressive positive change in the perception of the role of women by their male colleagues and society in general, but only after a few years working.

Women also reported having developed:

- Social skills, as after a while they become more comfortable to interact with their colleagues, especially men.
- Practical, technical skills linked to their job position.
- Leadership skills, which was said to be also helpful in their personal life, especially in the household, because “if you are a good leader at work, you will be a good leader in your family.”

Financial independence and contribution was also cited as an important component, giving women strength and decision-making power in the household and their community. One woman also said that earning a salary helped her learn how to manage money and the value of it.

As refugees, many women explained how working was a positive distraction from the suffering they endured and are still enduring, giving them a sense of purpose.

Note: there were no differences in answers from women working in the MEAL department and women working as fieldwork engineers.



Personal stories of empowerment



As a MEAL Officer, A.H. manages a small team of men and women working in Syrian camps from Gaziantep. Although Syrian women prefer to work part-time, due to their household and familial responsibilities, most jobs in the humanitarian sector are full-time. AH chose to work full-time as it was important for her to support her family. At first her husband was weary about her working late into the afternoon and evening. However, with time, his perspective on gender roles changed when he witnessed the high caliber of AH's and his female colleagues' work. He now even shares the responsibility of house chores. As a result of these experiences, AH feels more respected by her family, relatives, and friends.

When L.M. moved to Turkey, she had to start over from scratch, as everyone fleeing a war does. She had to look for a job all the while taking care of her family. She learned Turkish and English and subsequently found work as an Arabic-English translator to earn some income. She experienced extreme hardship from leaving Syria but the fact that she was able to overcome several obstacles and hardships has given her more confidence. She also noted the importance of having a degree; as a degree holder, it is still difficult to find work (in Turkey), especially as a woman, without any technical or practical experience.

M.S.Y. studied as a pharmacist but did not finish university because of the war in Syria. When she came to Turkey, she said she felt shy and weak and experienced a lot of personal difficulties. It has been a great challenge to work and raise her child as a single parent in a foreign country. Fortunately, her current organization where she supervises a team of 70+ people, gives her a lot of support and flexibility. Another major impact on her confidence has been the support she receives from other women, especially from her previous manager who urged her to not give up. Now she feels empowered, strong, and not afraid to speak her mind. What also gives her confidence is her 10-year career working in the [humanitarian] sector.



During the war, R.M. had different positions, giving psychological support, teaching English, and translating. She then found a position as a MEAL assistant for NGO X implementing water-related projects in humanitarian camps in Northwestern Syria. At first, working in the camps was met with some tension from beneficiaries, especially the men, due to more conservative social traditions. Being the only female made her stand out; men would stare and question what she was doing. "I didn't like this [but] with time I got used to it," she commented. After a while, they stopped as they saw the benefits of her work. She gained their respect as she became a friend to their families. "I see myself as a woman and I serve the people around me... [this is a] big aim for me. Helping my husband, mother, and daughters to lead a better life and give them everything they need."

B. Evidence for Persisting Barriers Limiting Women's Empowerment as a Collective Group

Despite individual success stories, including the ones previously mentioned, overall inequalities persist. For instance, there is a significant gender gap when it comes to employment in the sector and an underrepresentation of women in the field. Starting in university, only a few women choose to study STEM; our interviewees were sometimes the only women in their cohort. They also noted geographical disparities; in the south, there are more female engineers because the agricultural sector is more significant. Thus, from our data, we found evidence that men are more likely to work as field engineers and women to work in the MEAL department. Moreover, men are more likely to hold leadership positions.

In this section, we will interpret the answers we received from the interviews and explore what factors limit and hinder women's empowerment as a collective group.

1. Resources

From the interviews, we identified two main reasons which can explain the persisting inequalities in the access of women to resources (jobs, high-leadership positions and salaries):

1. The complementarian view of gender roles and patriarchal values:

- Men view women as not capable of doing men's tasks: most men explicitly said women were not suited for fieldwork and logistical tasks, because of physical work or safety reasons (outdoor work).
- Women are viewed as better suited for managerial roles and protection/prevention/distribution projects in nutrition, hygiene and health which are often less paid and with less responsibilities.
- Construction activities undertaken by women are not socially acceptable. Many men admitted questioning women's role and knowledge in technical engineering. For many, women do not have the capacity to deal with the equipment (excavators, machines, hammers); "those tools are not for them" (interview). Two factors can explain this opinion: cultural norms and the perceived lack of experience of women in the field.
- One man said the veil prevents women from performing technical tasks, especially with hot temperature but a woman engineer rejected this argument.

- Some women said their family was not supporting their career choice because it was not culturally acceptable and was defying traditional gender roles.
- When we asked if there are solutions, a man said: “there are no solutions because it’s in the nature of women”.
- It has been noted that in the local culture, earning a high salary is not socially acceptable, “it annoys men”, and the husband must earn more money. Women we interviewed thus endured strong public criticism and judgment.

2. The post-conflict context represents a challenge for women’s equal participation due to the high risks for women’s safety :

- It was reported not being safe for women to work in camps or go in the field in Syria because of the ongoing conflict in certain areas
- The current conflict forces NGOs to send charismatic figures on the ground, people who are respected by the local authorities, who can communicate and negotiate with the different parties in war (i.e. Kurdish group in the north) and has an excellent knowledge of the situation. A man explained women are not qualified for this job.

Most men we interviewed justified their preference to hire a man by citing women’s lack of diploma and field experience, which can be explained by cultural norms discouraging women to go to university or to the field. Thus, not questioning those cultural values but putting the blame on women further reinforces the system and women are trapped in this vicious circle which does not lead to a transformation of society’s view of what is a woman’s place and role but perpetuates the gender imbalance observed in the WASH sector.

2. Agency

We identified the same primary factors limiting women’s agency in their job, namely patriarchal values and safety issues due to the political situation of the country :

- Many women reported the need to work harder than men, to make an extra effort to be listened to and their leadership trusted. Three women said they had to be better organized and stricter than their male colleagues. The expression “having to prove yourself” came back often during the interviews.

- When starting a new job, every woman reported feeling not trusted or listened to by their male colleagues, especially by those occupying lower positions in the organization. Both men and women interviewed noted that “men do not like receiving orders from women”. At the beginning, women felt their leadership and legitimacy were constantly questioned by men. A woman gave examples and explained that men she supervised were not asking for her feedback or approval in advance. On average, women said it takes 1 to 2 years to feel trusted and listened to.
- Sexual harassment in and outside the workplace also represents a threat for women, limiting their physical mobility. A woman explained not being able to go to the office too early nor leave too late at night. For this reason, some NGOs are implementing strict policies and punishments in case of sexual abuse.
- We should note that women who work as engineers face even more barriers than women in the MEAL department because of the stigma associated with being a woman technician and also the challenges and the risks taken when working in the field. Many women explained feeling constrained to work in the MEAL department for this reason.
- Sexism and discrimination was not only found in the local context but also when working with foreign staffs, as one woman stated that she is aware her hijab is bothering her western colleagues and she knows she would have to take it off if she ever wants to join an International Organisation.

3. Achievement

Despite individual success stories of improved social status and greater level of self-confidence, many societal and cultural factors are hindering the empowerment of women as a collective group, namely:

- The presence of a double burden: Many women expressed the difficulty to combine two jobs at the same time, as they are working inside and outside the house and not having time to see their friends anymore. This represents one of the biggest challenges for working women in the Global South, because without a transformation of gender roles inside the household and a provision of social assistance to families, women’s empowerment through employment is only an illusion. Indeed, women indicated that 1) Maternal leave is very rare in NGOs and IOs, 2) Traveling to the field is a challenge for women with children, 3) In the water/WASH sector, it is not often possible to work part-time, there are long working hours without a lot of flexibility.

- Internalized and normalized misogyny: during the mixed interviews, we witnessed sexist attitudes which were not reported by women later (mansplaining, men speaking over women, women sitting on the side). This suggests that those sexist attitudes are likely to be underreported as women have internalized the common cultural misogyny.
- Complementarian view: When men were asked why hiring a woman is important, only two answers were given:
 - Women represent half of the beneficiaries and in the cultural context, only women can interview women on the ground and understand their needs.
 - It is requested by the donors.
- This reflects a complementarian view of gender roles ; women are useful only when men cannot do the work. Thus, even if more women are progressively employed in the sector, it will not translate into a reform of the traditional gender roles in Syrian society. We found no evidence of a change towards an egalitarian view of gender roles, which does not allow us to conclude that there is empowerment for women as a collective group, only individual stories of empowerment were observed.

To conclude, since women as a collective group did not experience a higher level of empowerment, we need to look at the profile of the individuals behind the success stories and thus consider intersectionality. The women we interviewed were all Syrian, coming from both cities and the countryside; however they were all well-educated, went to university, the majority spoke English and one of them had a professional experience abroad. Thus, even if the doors to enter the water / WASH sector are progressively opening, not everyone is equally welcome.



Personal stories of challenges faced



H.A. is a civil and environmental engineer and is the only woman in the construction department of the NGO she works for. She reported having issues with her current male manager as he discriminates against her because of her gender. He gives her less responsibilities, does not let her talk during meetings, and does not listen to her ideas even when she knows they are relevant. He does not trust her knowledge and judgment as he is watching her from a distance when she is doing construction work and managing her team. Yet, he does not give her male colleagues the same treatment. She feels sad about this situation, neglected, and marginalized. Hopefully, she has a different relation and experience with the two men she supervises.

When F.O. completed her university studies, she dreamed of becoming a successful engineer. However, when entering the humanitarian sector, she realized that she did not have enough practical experience. She explained that part of an engineer's responsibilities is to supervise contractors in the field. In a "masculine culture [...] men tend to think women are not capable," she went on, "but now they see [that] I'm capable." A lot of the contractors would neither listen to nor agree with her at first; it took time until "[she] proved [herself] and changed their view." FO still faces challenges—"they are always there"—but "you have to face them, prove yourself."

Recommendations

The second purpose of this research project that emerged was to also provide Geo Expertise with a list of recommendations for a training program for women that it will implement in Northern Syria. Thus, at the end of each interview, we asked open-ended questions regarding best practices and any advice and/or suggestions the interviewee had for trainings based on their personal opinions and experiences.

After analyzing our qualitative data, we identified and selected relevant recommendations to inform and support Geo Expertise's technical training:

- **A mixed training is recommended:** although some women asked for a women-only training, it was generally recommended to be mixed in order to break the barrier between men and women so they can learn how to work with each other and change the mindsets, so it can be beneficial to both.
- **Have women in the teaching/training team:** trainers should also be well informed and passionate about the topics they are presenting. They should also encourage discussion from participants and not just lecture.
- **Pre-training and post-training surveys/questionnaires:** could send a survey in advance to know their expectations and/or competences for the training as well as a follow-up survey 1-2 weeks after
- **Technical/practical skills are crucial:** There aren't a lot of opportunities for women to learn these skills, and it goes against cultural norms. So, it is important to show women how to use the tools and let them try, so they can become confident. This can even translate into small fieldwork sessions/projects. Training topics should be directly applicable to the job and give a sense of responsibility.
- **Financial compensation or offering equipment:** If the training is held during the day, then people cannot go to work so it might be a good idea to give money or equipment but coupled with conditions i.e., checking attendance or examination at the end.

- **Workshop on gender roles, cultural norms, women empowerment,** and coaching to educate people and allow men and women to discuss together the role of women. This session could also be the opportunity to talk about the challenges women face and what could be the solutions. Other topics can include dealing with disrespect, work challenges, and women's lack of work/fieldwork experience.
- A **special session** during the training (if mixed) for women only to empower them, guide them to reach their full potential and allow them to express their ideas, opinions, and emotions freely.
- **The quality of the training space is important:** it should be spacious, well ventilated, well-equipped, and have good lighting. the equipped training centers can be used permanently,
- **Highlighting personal benefits** to take part in the training can be a good strategy to mobilize women participants.
- **Showcase success stories** of women in STEM/ Water sector (also throughout history) to empower women.
- **Session on PSEA** to make women feel safer: The consequences should also be mentioned (men are afraid of punishment) and what NGOs are implementing to tackle this issue.
- **Women's network:** many women emphasized the importance of the support they received from other women, individuals and groups, throughout their career. One respondent mentioned engaging with the North Syria Women's Association.
- **Recruitment process:** It was recommended to advertise the training through social media and email.
- **Other (soft) skills that can be covered:** Communication skills (how to design a proposal, report, and questionnaire, how to communicate with beneficiaries and contractors), project management, business management, data analysis, languages (English or Turkish), leadership and organizational skills, networking, etc.





Conclusion

According to Kabeer's framework (1999b), our research provides evidence for two main findings: women experience empowerment at the individual level but not as a collective group. While women reported a higher level of empowerment through working in the water/ WASH sector on all three dimensions (achievement, agency, and resources), there remain persisting barriers limiting this empowerment due to gendered cultural values as well as issues of safety related to Syria's current geopolitical context which can prevent women from working in the field (on the ground). Although we did not make a direct link between how feminist approaches to water resource governance can bring positive changes in the communities of a post-conflict society, our research adopted an FPE lens in order to engage with womens' work as skilled humanitarians in the water/WASH. Another result of our research was the compiled list of recommendations for a technical training geared towards female engineers and economists that Geo Expertise will implement in Northern Syria. Our findings are limited by the general drawbacks of qualitative research methodologies. We decided that a semi-structured model for our interviews would permit spontaneity and deeper responses. While it was a lengthy process to synthesize findings from our qualitative data, it allowed for a more in-depth understanding of our fieldwork context and for a more genuine connection with the interviewees, especially the women. In fact, time-constraints precluded us from deepening our analysis.



Diary of Reyhanli

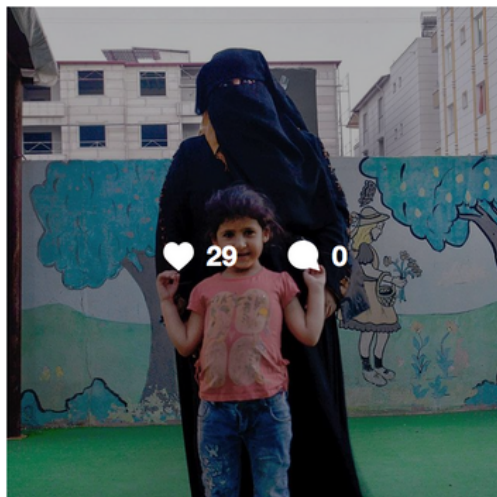
Walla supportive house is located in Reyhanli, 5 km away from the Turkey-Syria border. The housing offers a safe and stable environment where women and children could heal their traumas and rebuild their lives. Walla comes from Arabic and means "to make a promise", which was named after the second daughter of a Syrian war widow. Walla's childhood was broken when she lost her father and her home she was forced to flee to safety with her mother and her older sister.

Our accomodation in Reyhanli was at Walla support centre for Syrian women. The women we lived with were not part of our quantitative or qualitative research. However, they helped us imagine the lives and struggles of Syrian women living in Turkey. The centre includes 3 floor; the ground floor is the common kitchen and living area, and the two other floors each consisting of one big apartment hosting different women. The centre hosts Syrian widows and orphans. It provides them with a community, safety and a life post conflict.

Fatma and her children hosted us in their apartment on the third floor for the duration of our stay in Reyhanli. When we first arrived late at night in Reyhanli, after missing our connecting flight in Istanbul, we were welcomed by Fatma's daughter. It was dark, and we were exhausted- ready to sleep. We woke up the next morning and were immediately invited by Fatma for what became the first of many many traditional Syrian coffees. We were happy to connect with the women that were so kindly hosting us in their humble home. When we came back home from our first interview at Insan Charity, Fatma had cooked us one of our favorite Middle Eastern meals: Molokheya- a meal eaten across the region but cooked differently in each country. One meal a day, all the women of the center sit to share one meal together...and so we shared our first meal, molokheya, with everyone. But that was just the first of many meals we got to share surrounded by survivors.

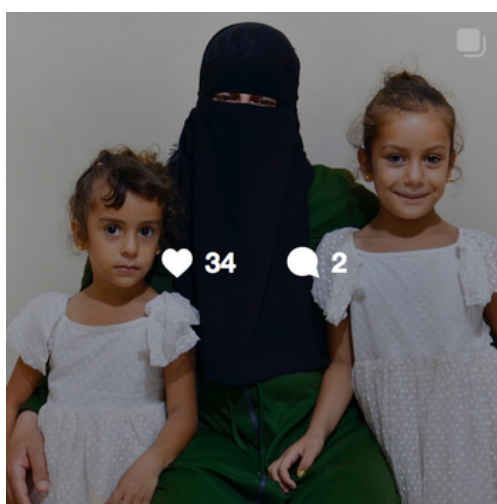
Syrian hospitality was overwhelmingly generous; these women, who had suffered through the war in different ways, building a new home in a foreign country overlooking their old one that is now separated with a grim and grey wall, had welcomed us with wide open arms. Our data may not be about the women of the centre, but our work is dedicated to them and all the inspiring, and strong Syrian women. The women we interviewed and the ones we lived with. We wanted to dedicate a section to our family at the Walla centre- their survival stories and their journeys.

Women of Reyhanli



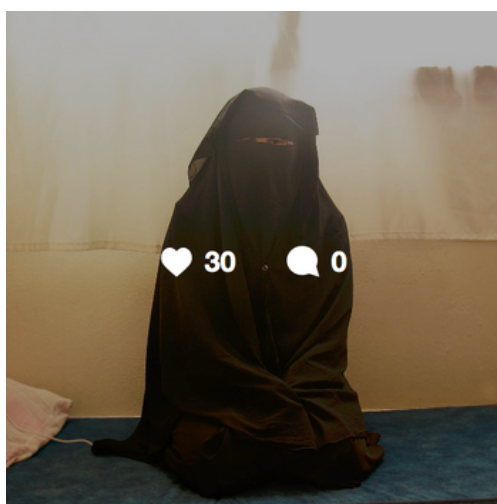
Ragad, 26

When I was 13 years old my mother died and my father remarried a new woman leaving me and my three sisters homeless. After that, I married a relative of mine and we had a baby girl named Sofia. Two years later my husband passed away, leaving me homeless again and this time with a baby girl. Neighbours and friends of mine decided to raise money so that both of us can cross the border. Now that I am in Daralwala i feel really safe and I enjoy my privacy very much. I wish my 5 year daughter to study.



Najah, 39

Back in Syria she worked in agriculture even though it was an exhausting job, it was the only thing she knew how to do. When the revolution started in Syria, Najah crossed the border and started working in any kind of job she could find, until one day her husband stole absolutely all of Najah's savings and took her two older children with him. Leaving Najah with no money and three children to provide by her own. Her husband after leaving Najah ran off with another woman, meanwhile both of her children were physically abused by their father. Najah, did everything she could to get her five children back and ran away with them. When she arrived to Daralwala she immediately felt safe and grateful to have a home where her children could grow up in peace



Roa, 19

With only 19 years old, she is a war survivor. At the age of 15 she married a man from her own village in Syria. When the revolution began, a bomb was dropped on her house, leaving her without a hand and vision in her right eye. Having lived through this, her husband did not want her back and abandoned her. It took her a long time to reintegrate back into society. When she arrived to our shelter, women at the house helped her a lot and give her confidence in herself again. Now she has new friends who trully accept her as she is. Roa is safe now and feels this is her real home.



Samandağ
Yayladağı
İskenderun
Adana



D.817

Reyhanlı
Halep

D.420



esmergil
1936
FABRIKA SATIŞ MAĞAZASI

MURAT
OTO TAMİR

Diary of Reyhanli

Beyond the research, an honest and open moment of reflection of our time in Reyhanli...

We prepared for our trip to Turkey, booked our flights, planned our culturally appropriate outfits, and put together the interviews and went over the ethical consideration of our first on the field research trip. But what we did not prepare for was a much bigger life lesson. Our trip began with a lot of excitement, and not many expectations; just one goal: interviewing as many people as possible and getting the needed data to complete our capstone project. We arrived in Reyhanli, and were welcomed by our hosts at a women's center overlooking a grim wall that separates the Turkish and Syrian border. What we did not know is that the community we lived within in Reyhanli provided us with immeasurable data; something quantitative or qualitative data can ever show. The women we interviewed and the women we lived with showed immense strength, courage, kindness and love.

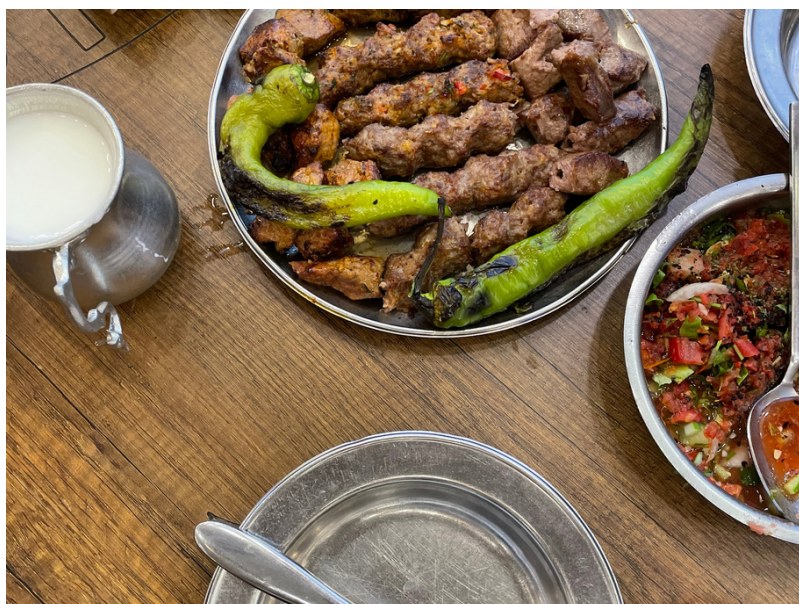
Of course the linguistic barrier made a difference; talking to the women in Arabic allowed for a different level of intimacy and comfort. All of a sudden, the politics of one of the most complicated regions became a distant topic. And despite the different dialects and cultures, our Arab identity brought us together: a common language, similar cuisine, the same melody of songs... Spending 10 days surrounded by such powerful female figures was inspiring. Despite the war, the loss, the trauma and the never ending burden of having to continue without ever a sense of belonging, they each shared their lives with us with full grace, simplicity and laughter. And they made it look so easy.

Coming back to Switzerland was not as easy of a transition. A little fatigue, a little confusion and maybe a little sense of disorientation. It's two worlds apart. Two worlds we couldnt really grasp given their difference.

But we get to keep a little piece of Reyhanli with us. We are still in touch with the wonderful women of the center in Reyhanli. And as we keep them in our minds, as we continue to help and support them from afar. We are extremely grateful for this opportunity, for the wonderful Syrian humans we met on our journey, for the strong women who have inspired us beyond words, and we hope to go back to Reyhanli soon.

With love,
Elona, Mariam and Sarah





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Appendix I

Letter of Introduction

Dear Prospective Interview Participant,

We are Mariam Kerfai, Elona Wahlen, and Sarah Shafik, Master in Development Studies candidates at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Switzerland. As a part of our studies, we are carrying out an Applied Research Project (Amwaj) with Geo Expertise.

Amwaj is an ongoing field project which aims to counter the marginalization of women during the Syrian crisis by strengthening their engagement in Syrian society through meaningful participation in key decision-making processes regarding water management. Our research contribution to the project aims to tackle the underrepresentation of women in the water sector and will focus mainly on the empowerment of women via a participatory approach to water governance and management in a post-conflict society.

We will conduct qualitative research in the form of interviews. Our main objective is to get womens' perspectives on what it takes to enter the water sector as professionals as well as potential obstacles when it comes to decision-making in water management. The data collected during the interviews will help us elaborate the content of a training program that will take place in October in Syria and better address women's needs and concerns when entering the water sector.

These interviews will remain confidential and will not be shared unless consent is given. You may also withdraw your consent after we have completed the interview, or at any point after. Your identity will not be shared unless consent is given. We assure you that data, recordings, and notes will be stored securely.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best regards,
Mariam, Elona, and Sarah

Appendix II

Interview Questions- Category A

Category A: Trained women who have worked/are currently working in the water/WASH sector.

Were there difficulties or obstacles to enter the sector?

1. Resources:

- Who do you work for? What does your job consist of?
- Are you involved in a water committee if yes, what is your position?
- How many people do you supervise? Who are your colleagues? How many women and men? How many people are in your office?
- Would you qualify your salary as a decent one? Do you earn as much as your male counterparts?

2. Agency:

- What challenges do you encounter working in the water sector?
- Do you feel heard and trusted with your leadership?
- About decision-making authority: do you feel free to share your ideas, are they heard? are you included in the decision-making process?, do they share every information with you? Do you have decision-making power?
- Have you ever made a proposal? Was it accepted?

3. Achievement:

- Do you notice a change in your social status? Higher respect and bargaining power? within the HH and community? Do you notice a change in cultural norms and gender roles? Something not socially acceptable before?
- Do you feel a higher level of self-confidence?
- Can you give personal concrete examples?
- What do you think are advantages for women entering the sector?
- About representation: who are your female colleagues, what characteristics, rural/urban, low or middle high class, ethnicity?
- Better access to water for yourself and your community?

Do you have any recommendations for our training program?

- What is an important (soft) skill to teach women?

Appendix III

Interview Questions- Category B

Category B: Trained women who have tried but failed to enter the water/WASH sector

1. How was your experience trying to find a job in the water sector?
2. When you see a job application, do you doubt your competencies? Do you feel capable and legitimate to apply?
3. What were your husband and family's reactions/ attitude when you decided to become an engineer? Did you receive your husband and family's approval?
4. Was it easy to find job offers? What were the obstacles you encountered when trying to find a job?
 - a. administrative and time consuming (a lot of paperwork)
 - b. mobility (need to move for an interview or job was too far away)
 - c. financial constraints (need to pay for the bus, take a day off work)
 - d. gender bias and cultural burden (do you think being a woman played a role)
 - e. work family life balance (difficult to find the time to dedicate for a job)
5. Do you think you meet all the requirements when you apply? What skills do you think you are lacking/ you wish you had learned?

Appendix IV

Interview Questions- Category C

Category C: Trained women who have not tried to enter the water/WASH sector

1. Can you give us your reasons?
2. Did you receive offers that you declined?
3. Can you think of advantages and disadvantages for women entering the sector?
4. What were your husband and family's reactions/ attitude when you decided to become an engineer? Did you receive your husband and family's approval?
5. Is the water sector intimidating for a woman? Would you feel comfortable working around men only?
6. Do you think motherhood can be compatible with working as an engineer?

Appendix V

End of Interview Survey

On a scale of 1 to 10 is it a good idea?

- An all-women training program
- Financial compensation
- Teaching women leadership, negotiating and technical skills -> Which skills are lacking?
- Developing a women water committee or a support group
- Organizing workshops to educate people about gender roles in the community
- Highlighting success stories of women leaders as role models
- Highlight the personal benefits associated with participating in the training program
- Increasing the institutional support at all levels
- Setting up a gathering space, an office for women's meetings

Appendix VI

Interviews

Interview	Organization Type	Field/Sector	Group/Individual	Gender	Educational Background	Location	In person/phone call	Oral/Written Response	Main Language(s)
1	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Small group	Female/Male	N/A	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
2	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Small group	Female	Computer Science/Other	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
3	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	Pharmacy	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
4	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	N/A	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
5	NGO	N/A	Individual	Female	N/A	Syria	Phone call	Oral	Arabic
6	IO (working with Turkish Gov)	N/A	Individual	Female	Agricultural Engineering	Turkey	Phone call	Oral	English
7	Foundation	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	N/A	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English?
8	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Pharmacy	Syria	Phone call	Oral and Written	English
9	N/A	N/A	Individual	Female	N/A	Syria	Phone call	Oral	Arabic
11	Foundation	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Water Engineering	Syria	Video call	Oral	English
12	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	Civil Engineering	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
13	School	Education	Individual	Female	Civil Engineering	Turkey	Phone call	Oral	Arabic
14	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	English and Development	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
15	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	N/A	Turkey	Phone call	Oral	English
16	University	Education	Individual	Female	Agricultural Engineering	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
17	NGO	Humanitarian	Small group	Female/Male	N/A	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
18	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Agricultural Engineering	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
19	NGO/Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Civil Engineering	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
20	Foundation	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Oil and Environmental Engineer	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
21	University	Education	Individual	Female	Agricultural Engineering	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
22	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	Civil Engineering	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English
23	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	Pharmacy	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
24	Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Female	Civil Engineering	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
25	Non-profit	Humanitarian	with female colleague	Female	Pharmacy (did not graduate)	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
26	NGO	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	Civil Engineering	Turkey	In person	Oral	English
27	NGO/Non-profit	Humanitarian	Individual	Male	N/A	Syria	Phone call	Oral	English

