

Women in Water Governance Platform

Steering Committee
23-24 February 2023
Workshop Report





WORKSHOP SUMMARY : CO-CREATING A SAFE SPACE

For two full days, on 23 and 24 February, 12 Steering Committee members from six countries across Asia convened in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to begin the challenging process of co-creating a safe-space platform for women to connect, share, and learn from one another for water governance. Representing diverse NGOs and INGOs across the region, these women brought together unique perspectives and experiences, and through hands-on creative processes and open deliberation, were able to determine a path forward for the future of this platform.

The group began by establishing principles to support the co-creation processes, and in doing so established a framework for how to work together and support one another. Even the word ‘platform’ is open to interpretation, and it was determined that any ***collaborative learning system that supported the legitimate, credible amplification of women’s voices*** requires both on-line and off-line mechanisms to be successful. A platform could be a stage (amplification), an area where people embark and disembark from a train (movement), or an on-line, secure location for connection and sharing (repository).

The ambitious agenda of the two-day workshop was co-developed by members of the Steering Committee with the support of a facilitator. Steering Committee members were involved in developing and leading sessions on visioning, understanding various platforms, developing platform governance, and sustainability. The committee conducted a gender analysis to support the clarification around broader transformational objectives and to identify areas of potential backlash and tension around the challenges of supporting women in water governance.

Strategic information was provided to support the understanding of the ‘technical’ side of how the platform could be put into operation - with the support of a developer who presented a solution for communities wanting to contribute to the platform in a context of no electricity, no data connectivity, no literacy or digital literacy, with minimal hardware - representing a baseline where all challenges identified through the co-design process (2021) were represented.

The group also explored, through hands-on and reflective approaches, team processes related to co-creation. Each individual in the steering committee brings her own way of working and doing, and exercises designed to help explicitly unpack different approaches to reaching consensus, delegating and ownership of tasks, leadership, and communication approaches were explored and discussed as a part of the workshop.



WORKSHOP SUMMARY : BUILDING A PLATFORM WILL TAKE TIME, COMMITMENT, AND COMMITTEE WORK

Working in small groups, the Steering Committee members embraced the complexities of what this co-creation entailed, and developed a series of outputs and commitments that set out a path to support the building of the platform through the end of 2023 by establishing ad hoc committees focused on aspects of the platform and work areas needed to drive these developments. The Steering Committee is supported by a Global Advisory Panel, who will work to support the Steering Committee to identify blind spots and make links to other related efforts and agendas. Engaging stakeholders across multi-level governance systems, from village-level to international, will require careful consideration and coordination to ensure that the envisaged ‘safe space’ is maintained in accordance with agreed-upon principles.

The Steering Committee will now continue its work remotely for the next several months, with tentative plans to reconvene in late October in-person to realign efforts for the next stages of development. The tasks ahead are complicated, but with the right level of commitment, support, and alignment the Steering Committee is able to see the next steps towards the co-creation of a multi-scalar, multi-lingual, safe space for women in water governance.



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1. CO-CREATION

WHAT CO-CREATION MEANS FOR US, AND HOW WE WANT TO CO-CREATE TOGETHER

We understand co-creation as a distributive leadership approach where we work with our heads, hearts, and hands to build equity.

Distributive leadership = shared leadership, based on interconnectivity and teamwork

OUR PURPOSE

- To **co-create** a safe space to **share** knowledge information and stories about water and rivers
- To **amplify** women's voices in the Mekong region and beyond
- To give women's knowledge **credibility and legitimacy**
- To partake in **collaborative** learning

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF CO-CREATION

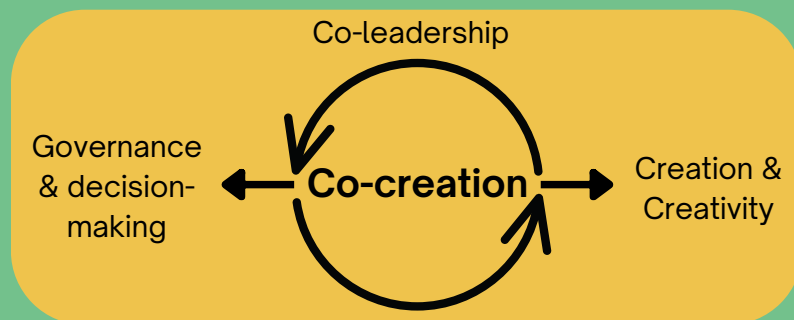
We operate on principles of **respect** and a **willingness to agree to disagree**.

We will be **transparent** and **accountable** to one another.

We are dedicated to **building trust and connection**, and **exploring and understanding our differences and similarities**, related to our diverse goals.

We are dedicated to **understanding how we use, hold, and share power** to co-create together.

Co-creation is a co-led process that encompasses creation & creating alongside governance & decision-making. As members of the steering committee, we endeavour to co-create the WIWG Platform as a safe space, and we also co-create the rules and processes that will guide us through our collaboration.





2. SAFE SPACES

ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES WE FACE AROUND CREATING AND HOLDING SAFE SPACES

What is a safe space??

A safe space is a place where women are physically and emotionally secure and able to express their voices, and share their stories, experiences, and perspectives.

OUR SAFE SPACE WILL BE DESIGNED BY AND FOR WOMEN BUT WILL BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL GENDERS.

OUR SAFE SPACE WILL OPERATE BASED ON VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF CO-CREATION, LISTED ABOVE.



Our safe space will:

- Operate both online and offline
- Be accessible in terms of technology, language, and understanding
- Increase digital literacy
- Build agency to mobilise and take action together
- Bring together women's voices for advocacy at all levels
- Be a supportive space for women to get help and make demands
- Be fun and interactive
- Not perpetuate patriarchal norms that see women as inferior in society
- Decide when and how to promote policies, laws, regulations and institutions that ensure the rights of women are respected and fulfilled

We understand that there is no such thing as a neutral, non-biased context; there are always power dynamics and inequities at play. Our safe space does not seek to ignore or neutralise these power dynamics and inequities, but rather to engage with them to build power and act together at multiple levels.



3. OUR VISION

WHAT WE SEE THIS INITIATIVE LOOKING LIKE IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS, AND BEYOND : HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

The Women in Water Governance Platform will:

- Be digitally literate and build and expand literacy within the community.
- Be owned and accessible by co-creators and emerging women leaders wanting to join the conversations and collaborate.
- Address strategic, systemic challenges for women regarding understanding, accessing, and realising their rights.
- Be an inclusive safe space for all genders to co-create and support the emergence of equity.

We recognise the importance of transparent, accountable, and effective governance systems to support the Steering Committee in moving forward, and to allow for a platform to emerge that reflects the aims and values we envisage.





4. GENDER ANALYSIS CONSIDERATIONS RELATING TO AGENCY, ACCESS, NORMS, AND LAW/POLICY/INSTITUTIONS FOR US AND FOR A WIWG PLATFORM

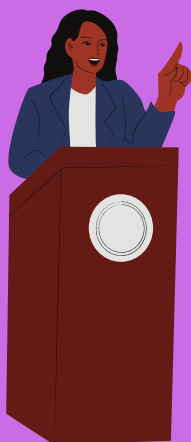
Central to the gender analysis is to develop a platform and mechanism for engagement that does not add burden to the lives of the women who will make up the community of users. Considering backlash in terms of shifting power dynamics as the platform amplifies women's voices must also be central to a no-harm, and eventually a gender-transformative approach.



When women speak out there are sometimes unintended consequences. Depending on the context of the family and community, a woman who amplifies her voice may find herself further marginalised or have increasing difficulty to engage in decision-making. **Backlash** can be a risk for a women looking to her voice.



Women need more ways to support one another to understand and realise their rights, and to find and use their voice to share their knowledge.



Finding one's voice and exercising the right to express oneself and be heard in an environment dominated by exclusive, technocratic jargon creates barrier to authentic knowledge sharing and participation. Accessing these spaces, this language, and this way of thinking presents challenges to women and other socially marginalised groups.



'Gender approaches' need to be fully integrated into policies and initiatives, beyond just collecting data and meeting quotas. Equity shifts need to be meaningful and inclusive.

The Women in Water Governance Movement seeks to support gender-transformative change, particularly for laws, policies, and institutions that do not value or understand the importance of women's knowledge, women's participation and inclusion, and gender equality in a way that does not increase burden or workload for its members.





5. ETHICS & ACCOUNTABILITY

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY, AND WHAT WE NEED AND HOW WE'LL GET WHAT WE NEED TO ADDRESS THEM



The SC is committed to developing a set of evolving guidelines to support ethical engagement in support of the principles of co-creation and the vision of the Women in Water Governance Platform - both for internally and externally accessible content.

As a part of these guidelines, the SC will develop:

- Do's and Don'ts (infographic) in country languages
- A video tutorial to support ethical platform engagement
- Tools for flagging content that does not meet guidelines

Some guidelines for internal and external facing components of the platform have been provided, with some clear guidelines needed to support public-facing, external sharing of knowledge and stories on the platform.



6. ETHICS & ACCOUNTABILITY

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY, AND WHAT WE NEED AND HOW WE'LL GET WHAT WE NEED TO ADDRESS THEM

GUIDELINES

- Adhere to the guiding values and principles of co-creation
- Maintain and protect a safe space for all members
- Conduct due diligence before you post any content
- Accountability and responsibility:
 - Consider and be accountable for the consequences of data or stories you share
 - Take responsibility for your promises and actions
- **Maintain confidentiality when required and only disclose information after securing Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC).**

DO'S

- Active communication to increase and support engagement
- Communication that supports safe space and co-creation principles
- Give equal opportunity for representation

DON'TS

- No aggressive or attacking language
- No judgement or assumptions
- Don't introduce political conflict, national conflicts
- Do not spread mis/dis-information; instead maintain factual integrity



We operate on principles of respect and a willingness to agree to disagree.

We will be transparent and accountable to one another.

We are dedicated to building trust and connection, and exploring and understanding our differences and similarities, related to our diverse goals.

We are dedicated to understanding how we use, hold, and share power to co-create together.



7. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT COMMITMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

The following next steps were identified:

1. The establishment of Ad Hoc Committees
2. Network mapping
3. Engaging global advisory committee
4. Working towards another in-person meeting in October 2023
5. Regular on-line meetings to address the following:
 - a. Neutrality / non-bias / advocacy
 - b. Risk assessment
 - c. Sustainability
6. Develop a governance structure to support transparent decision making, ensure the safe space is upheld and maintained, and support the ethical consideration and the principles of co-creation

WIWG Ad Hoc Committees: Committees & Descriptions

Outreach: Schedule meetings and share information with Advisory board members to engage their expertise to support the steering committee

Rules of Engagement, Code of conduct: Develop a written document articulating principles and rules around how to engage with the platform based on initial work completed during SC meeting (internal / external)

Risk assessment and management: Develop a written document based on risk analysis to support risk identification and mitigation

Gender analysis: Support ongoing gender analysis to identify possible unintended consequences, areas of backlash, and secure a no-harm approach

Theory of Change: Conduct a Theory of Change to support the WIWG Platform

Unpacking non-biased neutrality: Discussion committee to support clear thinking on issues of neutrality and unbiased approaches for an inclusive platform

Sustainability: Develop a transparent mechanism for tracking potential areas of funding and support, expenses, and ownership of the platform

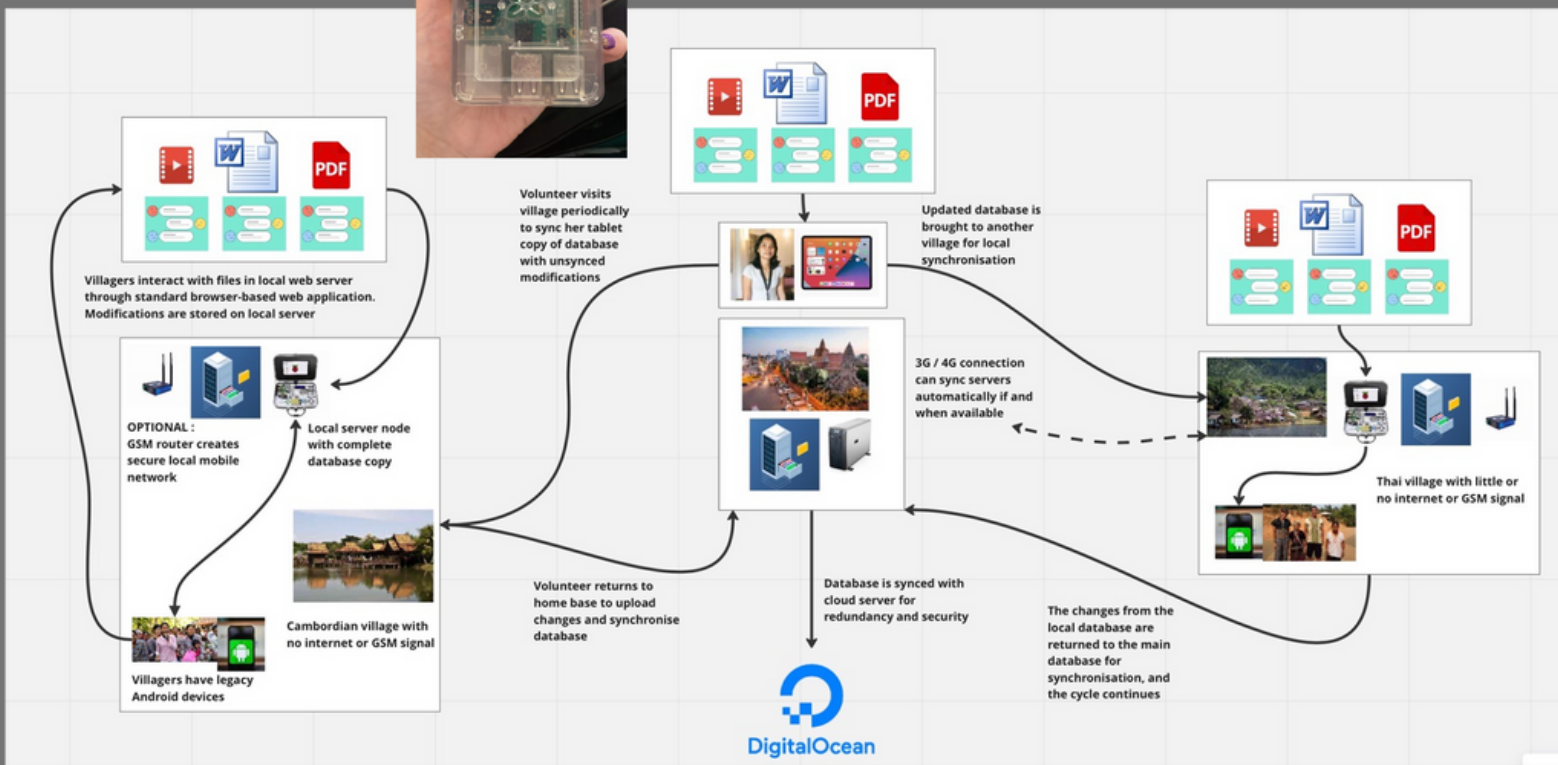
Wireframing / Prototyping: Developing initial sketches and ideas around how the platform would look and feel, and what initial and longer-term features it could have





8. ANNEX ONE POSSIBLE TECHNOLOGY APPROACH

Addressing security and access



Brainchild of Richard Osborne, <https://digitalbricks.io>

Technical considerations were provided to support the development of the (digital) platform in a context where women faced significant limitations - in terms of funds, devices, electricity, connectability and where secure storage of hardware from either attacks or weather conditions requires special attention.

It was proposed that two separate user interfaces be developed - one for older android phones to support women facing tech and access limitations, and one that supports women on recent phones with greater connectivity. Thinking about these two sets of users as having different products (web-based for low-access and app for high-access, for example) is one way to address the divide in terms of access.



Thank you

Thank you to all members of the Steering Committee for your commitment and engagement as we tackle the challenge to support, legitimise, and amplify women's voices.