

Why Gender Equality is at the Heart of Our Water Security Strategy in Peru



Peru is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change. This will largely be felt through water security: longer, more frequent droughts and more intense flash flooding are just a couple of ways that climate change is expected to increase water stress in Peru.

Peru also suffers from acute gender inequality. Gender equality is central to climate security, especially because of the critical roles men and women each play in managing two resources: water, and the “natural infrastructure” that captures, filters, and regulates that water. Both resources are vulnerable to climate change and critical to mitigating its impacts.

In partnership with the government, civil society, academia, and women leaders from communities to national ministries, Forest Trends is building a strategy that aims to tackle both water security and gender equality. Our goal is to make increased investment in and

capacity for natural infrastructure a central piece of Peru's water security and climate resilience planning. We're also building the pathways, tools, and capacities that effectively translate that planning into action on the ground. The Natural Infrastructure for Water Security (NIWS) Consortium is funded through a \$27.5 million joint grant from USAID and the Government of Canada. NIWS aims to leverage another \$45 million in funds from the Peruvian government and water users.

Closing gender gaps is a core objective across all of the Natural Infrastructure for Water Security project's work. Our focus on gender equity as inseparable from water security, combined with the diversity of partners and sectors involved in our efforts, distinguishes the NIWS project from many conservation initiatives. We are working this way because we know that addressing gender inequity leads to better project outcomes.



Why Natural Infrastructure?

“Natural infrastructure” refers to natural ecosystems such as wetlands, forests, and grasslands. Healthy ecosystems have been shown to help protect and improve the function of engineered water management systems like filtration plants and dams (i.e., “grey infrastructure”).

Investing to preserve or rehabilitate ecosystems can significantly reduce operational costs for water systems and avoid the need for new capital expenses. Forest Trends analysis shows, for instance, that a combined infrastructure approach could save the city of Lima 18% on water infrastructure costs compared to a grey infrastructure-only strategy.



The water management sector in Peru is overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Women actively maintain natural infrastructure and manage water resources daily in Peru. But they are still an unrecognized and underutilized source of knowledge and authority when it comes to the institutions that make decisions about water. We see an opportunity to strengthen Peru’s water sector and women’s well-being by advocating for increased female representation and participation in decision-making.

Gender equity in resource management leads to better water security outcomes. Studies

6% Water utilities in Peru where women hold a general management position

10% Share of management positions held by women in local water user boards

76 Average hours work per week performed by women. Over half is unpaid labor in the home.

22% Share of agricultural land titles held by women. Land ownership is required to participate in water user groups.

70% Percent of men's salaries earned by women for the same roles. Women in rural areas only make 61%.

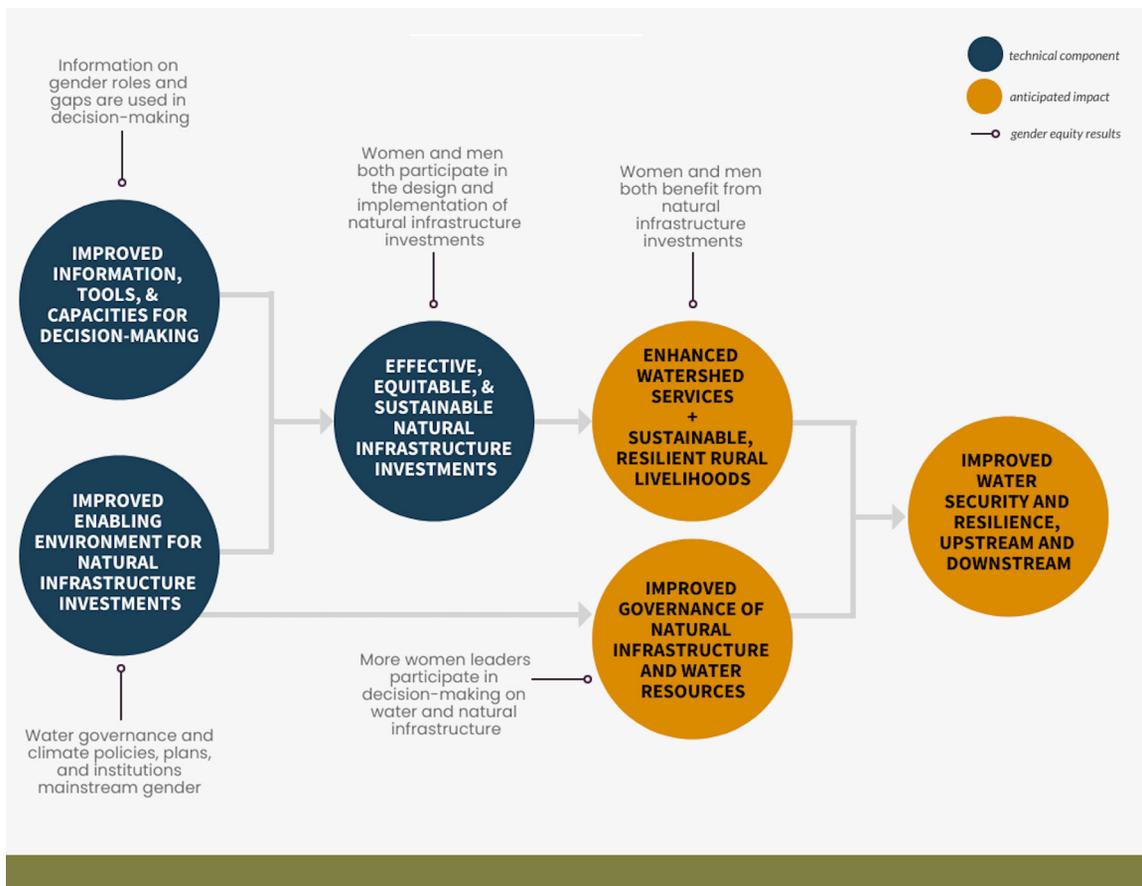
19% News stories about water security in Peru where the protagonist is a woman.

have shown that women participating in natural resource management are better positioned to contribute to stability, equality, and peace in their communities. Equitable participation improves the economic and personal well-being of women and their families.¹ Research also suggests that water projects are more successful, with longer lasting effects, when both men and women influence water policies and institutions. Women have also been shown to share water more equitably, especially in times of crisis.²

Gender equity improves conservation outcomes, too. For example, we find that in Andean communities, women are more likely to look to natural infrastructure as solutions to water challenges. In rural Peruvian communities where natural infrastructure strategies are being implemented, women might know better which local plant species are indicators of compacted soils, or how indigenous water management technologies interact with local springs.

Understanding the gender gap when designing a specific resource conservation project is critical to long-term success and community well-being. In Peru, leaving women’s roles in water management unrecognized and not acknowledging structural, cultural, and political barriers to their participation in decision-making disenfranchises them. It also weakens the country’s ability to address water security and implement existing natural infrastructure policies.

How we're integrating gender equality priorities in Peru



“ It's believed that nature doesn't contribute to the economy. We see the same thing when we look at gender...[These are] issues that we must strive to mainstream.

- Fabiola Muñoz-Dodero, Minister of Environment of Peru



Peru: water & the gender gap

Women are the main users of water for domestic consumption, subsistence agriculture, family care, and basic sanitation. But they have few opportunities to participate in water-related decision-making. A gender gap assessment³ by Forest Trends shows the following dynamics in the watersheds where we focus in Peru:



- Men and women share the overall responsibility of maintaining natural infrastructure and water resources. Meanwhile, **women typically bear primary responsibility for providing drinking water for their families, caring for family members sick from water-borne diseases, and water-related household tasks.** Despite these contributions, women are rarely adequately represented or involved in water and natural infrastructure-related decision-making.
- Men from high Andean communities have been increasingly travelling to urban areas for seasonal work to supplement family incomes (although during the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen a reversal of this trend). In their absence, **women are assuming roles traditionally held by men,** including upkeep of natural infrastructure, in addition to their existing responsibilities in the home.
- **Women face substantial barriers to participation in decision-making on water at all levels,** including less access to formal education, higher rates of illiteracy, less access to natural resources (e.g., land), salary inequity in the workplace, and expectations to perform more unpaid labor than men. They also experience more physical and sexual violence and are subject to strict expectations related to their roles in the home.
- The gap in participation in decision-making is partly due to disparities in land ownership. **Holding water rights and participating in water user groups are directly contingent upon owning land, but women hold only 22% of agricultural land titles in Peru.** This disparity in resource ownership also has important consequences for employment and wealth generation opportunities.
- **There are opportunities to improve female representation in water and natural infrastructure management.** The NIWS project and partners in key government institutions will continue to identify barriers to women's participation in decision-making, and begin to overcome those barriers by 1) acknowledging women's knowledge and contributions and encouraging others to do the same, and 2) engaging Peru's leading water authorities to incorporate gender equity into how they operate.



Our impacts

- The NIWS project secured institutional commitments from Peru's leading national water agencies – the National Superintendence of Sanitation Services (SUNASS) and the National Water Authority (ANA) – **to mainstream a gender approach and address gender gaps in the water sector**. These commitments have already led to the first regulation to explicitly consider gender, issued by SUNASS in November 2019.
- Following this ratification, Forest Trends and our partners **kicked off processes to develop comprehensive institutional assessments and Gender Action Plans** in ANA and SUNASS, with specialized consulting teams and task forces in each institution. Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations is a key partner and is tasked with mainstreaming gender in all national authorities and local and regional governments. With Forest Trends' support, the water sector is one of the first to tackle this challenge.
- During the **Gender Equality and Water Security Forum** in June 2019, the Peruvian Government represented by three ministries and two agencies, USAID, Canada, and the NIWS project recognized 20 women leaders working for water security in Peru. For many of the women, it was the first time that their leadership was officially acknowledged.
- This forum was also **the first time that women's leadership in the water sector was explicitly recognized and valued at a national level** by the public entities responsible for water governance. The event was attended by over 350 policymakers, advisors, and local water leaders.
- Forest Trends and partners launched a **Women's Leadership Program for Water Management** in June 2020 to support 88 women leaders across multiple sectors by offering training to increase political, technical, and leadership skillsets. (Resources and seminars are currently virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic.)
- Forest Trends and partners worked closely with the Ministry of Environment to ensure that **a representative of women's organizations will be added to the National Climate Change Commission**.
- The NIWS Consortium is working with civil society, water utilities, and public investment professionals to systematically include a gender focus in our full portfolio of natural infrastructure investments undergoing development.

The NIWS project continues to share findings from their report, *Gender Gaps in Natural Infrastructure*, with relevant stakeholders in Peru. Forest Trends plans to replicate this gender equity-driven approach in future conservation projects.



In their own words

María Isabel García: New rules of the game for water leaders



“Being the one responsible for water is a very, very difficult task,” says María Isabel García, a fairly young woman for the position she occupies as general manager of EMAPA, the public water utility for the city of San Martín. “Our work is of the highest responsibility because water sanitation services run 24 hours a day. It is just like a hospital — if we neglect our work for a second there may be an epidemic in the city, or a shortage of vital service.”

“I am very proud to have integrated more women than men into this institution during my tenure.

Today, under my management, we outnumber men in the main roles, and that is a privilege in a region whose characteristic is not necessarily fairness.”

“Having school-age children makes it very difficult to exercise the leadership of an organization. Being a mother and a wife could have prevented me from continuing, but thanks to the support of my family the challenge was bearable.”

"I used to be scared to talk about water at the Commission meetings, because I did not feel I could understand the science or technology. The training programs and events like this one have given me the confidence that I need to participate in decision making for my watershed, and I hope to share this knowledge through trainings and exchanges with other women who want to work in the management of water."

- Clara Vásquez

Clara Vásquez: The value of capacity-building

Born in the town of Capote in the Lambayeque region of Peru, Clara Vásquez Santisteban has spent most of her life farming 15 acres of rice, fruit trees, and staple crops. Water is very important to her livelihood. But until she began participating in trainings supported by the NIWS project, she never felt she could have a voice in how water was managed in her region.

Vásquez is now the President of the Capote Water Users Commission and conducts trainings on water resource management for women. She was among 20 Peruvian women celebrated at the Gender Equality and Water Security Forum.



“Water is a scarce resource and, in many occasions, because of being women, we have been the last to receive it and do not have a role in managing it,” Vásquez explained in a presentation about her local water user group. “Pollution and climate change are problems that affect us all. I ask myself: what planet do we want to leave our children?”

Works Cited

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² UN Environment Programme, UNWomen, UN Development Programme, & UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. *Gender, Climate & Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*. 2020. www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/gender-climate-security-sustaining-inclusive-peace-frontlines-climate-change.

³ Forest Trends. *Gender Gaps in the Management of Natural Infrastructure and Water in Peru*. 2020. Washington D.C.: Forest Trends. www.forest-trends.org/publications/brechas-de-genero-en-la-gestion-del-agua-y-la-infraestructura-natural/

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