Regional Nile Basin Women’s Network
Statement on the sidelines of Nile Day Celebrations

February 22nd, 2023

Nairobi, Kenya
The year 2023 began on a high note for the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD). As the region celebrates “Nile Day” and 24 years since the creation of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), the NBD and its grassroots Regional Nile Women’s Network (RNWN) sought to commemorate the occasion with a second convening of the RNWN leadership committee in Nairobi, Kenya on Feb 21st, 2023.

Now is the time to recognize that developmental transformation and true peace in and around the Nile region cannot come without fundamental change in who is leading and the ways of leading. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and conflict (the 3 C’s) and the disproportionate gendered impacts has challenged RNWN to quickly become the torchbearer for grassroots women in the region to ensure the gains made are not reversed. As RNWN Chairperson, Ms. Ghada Ahmadien (Egypt) emphasised during its face-to-face convening on the sidelines of the Nile day celebrations, “One woman alone cannot change the world, but many of us together can cast ripples across the river”.

The regional women’s network was launched December, 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the auspices of the NBD, and supported by the World Bank’s ‘Cooperation in International Waters in Africa’ (CIWA) initiative, and democratically elected its membership and leadership committee, comprising of women from across each of the 10 riparian countries. All members are drawn from the National Nile Discourse Forums (NNDFs) and the National Nile Women’s Networks (NNWNs). Its ambition is to create a region-wide force of women leaders who contribute to the Nile’s transformation in line with the NBI’s 10-year Strategy 2017-2027, NBD’s 5-year Strategy 2023-2027, the African Union’s ‘Africa Agenda 2063’, and the Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

This effort has five key pillars: 1) Enhancing Access, 2) Deepening Decision, 3) Active Involvement, 4) Community System Strengthening and Resource Development, and 5) Ensuring Household Wellbeing. NBD’s Chairperson, Ms. Verdiane Nyiramana, acknowledged these cross-cutting priorities and African women’s roles as water collectors, household managers, farmers, entrepreneurs, traders, academics, and leaders in the water and natural resource sectors that form the backbone of our economies.

The pandemic and climate disasters, including the ongoing drought in this region, has exposed and amplified critical gender gaps in ways that provide us with important opportunities to lead constructive responses at the community level. Even before the pandemic, grassroots African women’s contributions to their countries' socioeconomic
development were unrecognized and undervalued, although they constitute 72% of the agricultural labour force, 70% of the informal sector, and less than one in five water sector workers are women, with serious underrepresentation in both technical and managerial positions. These women, in these sectors are vital to recovery and need to be intentionally targeted in recovery measures.

Another area of focus is women's and adolescent girls' reproductive health, where services have been deprioritized as a result of the public health emergency. These services remain vital, and are especially important in view of the sharp spike in reports of domestic and gender-based violence, and the huge increase in child marriages and early pregnancy among girls due to school closure. Compounding this is conscious and unconscious gender discrimination and the diversion of funds from programmes specifically designed to empower women, which is also impacting negatively on women's contributions to development, peace, and security within the Nile region. Yet, women's solidarity and resilience are a unique social capital that should be used as a resource and engaged actively in peacebuilding processes.

The inaugural Regional Nile Women's Network consultation held last December 2022, and its leadership convening yesterday considered these and other critical issues for prioritisation and translation into immediate action. No woman or girl should suffer violence in silence; every girl child must have access to water, food, education, and other vital tools for the modern marketplace; the care economy driven by women and girls must be recognized and adequately valued; and women leaders including young female leadership, must be present at the decision-making table to engage in the planning and implementation of key priorities with a gender lens, for example, in water and natural resource management. In this regard, donors should invest in the NBD’s strategic plan and the efforts of the Nile Women’s networks as soon as possible.

Through its National Chapters, the RNWN is mobilizing women towards a Nile Basin development movement that will elevate the status of women's leadership in the region. In the words of RNWN Chairperson, "I think realising that you’re not alone, that you are standing with millions of your sisters in the Nile region is vital." Indeed, Nile women leaders at all levels can make this happen and be recognised as a force to reckon with.

One Nile One Family