



Graduate Women
International (GWI)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact: Stacy Dry Lara, Executive Director
sdl@graduatewomen.org, Tel: +41 22 731 23 80**

On World Water Day, Graduate Women International highlights the unequal effects of water scarcity on women and girls' education.

Geneva, Switzerland, 22 March 2024 - On this World Water Day (WWD), Graduate Women International (GWI) underscores the critical intersection of water scarcity and gender inequality in accessing education, highlighting the disproportionate impact on women compared to men. Emphasising the urgent need for action, GWI advocates for heightened awareness and intervention in water-related issues, which directly threaten women's and girls' access to education and empowerment. As example, its [2023 WWD infographic revealed globally, 29% schools lack basic drinking water services, impacting 546 million schoolchildren](#).

The systemic gender inequalities ingrained within societies further exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls, particularly evident during environmental crises, such as those leading to water scarcity. GWI is taking a stand to address this pressing concern, emphasising that an overwhelming seven out of ten women and girls are responsible for fetching water, which directly influences women's and girls' access to education, proper menstrual hygiene, and overall socio-economic opportunities (UN Women). "Water scarcity is a critical issue affecting the most vulnerable in our community. As advocates for lifelong education for women and girls, we are dedicated to addressing these structural gender inequalities, especially for women and girls in economically disadvantaged countries," said GWI President Patrice Wellesley-Cole.

Water scarcity has profound effects beyond physical strain. For countless women and girls, the daily journey to fetch water involves traversing vast distances, spanning several kilometers, and consuming hours each day. According to UNICEF, these efforts collectively amount to at least 200 million hours daily. This reality burdens their physical and mental well-being and obstructs their education. The time spent fetching water diminishes study opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Often, this burden forces girls to abandon education entirely, perpetuating intergenerational poverty.

Issues relating to water access are at the forefront of GWI's focus. Both Resolution 7 (Climate Change and Gender) and Resolution 8 (A Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment is a Human Right) adopted by GWI's 34th Triennial General Assembly stress the intrinsic relationship between water scarcity and equitable access to education. Furthermore, in 2019, GWI affiliates in Kenya and Bangladesh organised "WWD Workshops" to enhance women's and girls' understanding and awareness of the importance of water and sanitation. These workshops also featured training sessions designed to improve water access through practical skills acquisition. These initiatives inspire optimism and highlight the importance of funding such endeavors.

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality, and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

Contributing to this press release is GWI intern, Ondine Deruaz-Scheiblin.

###