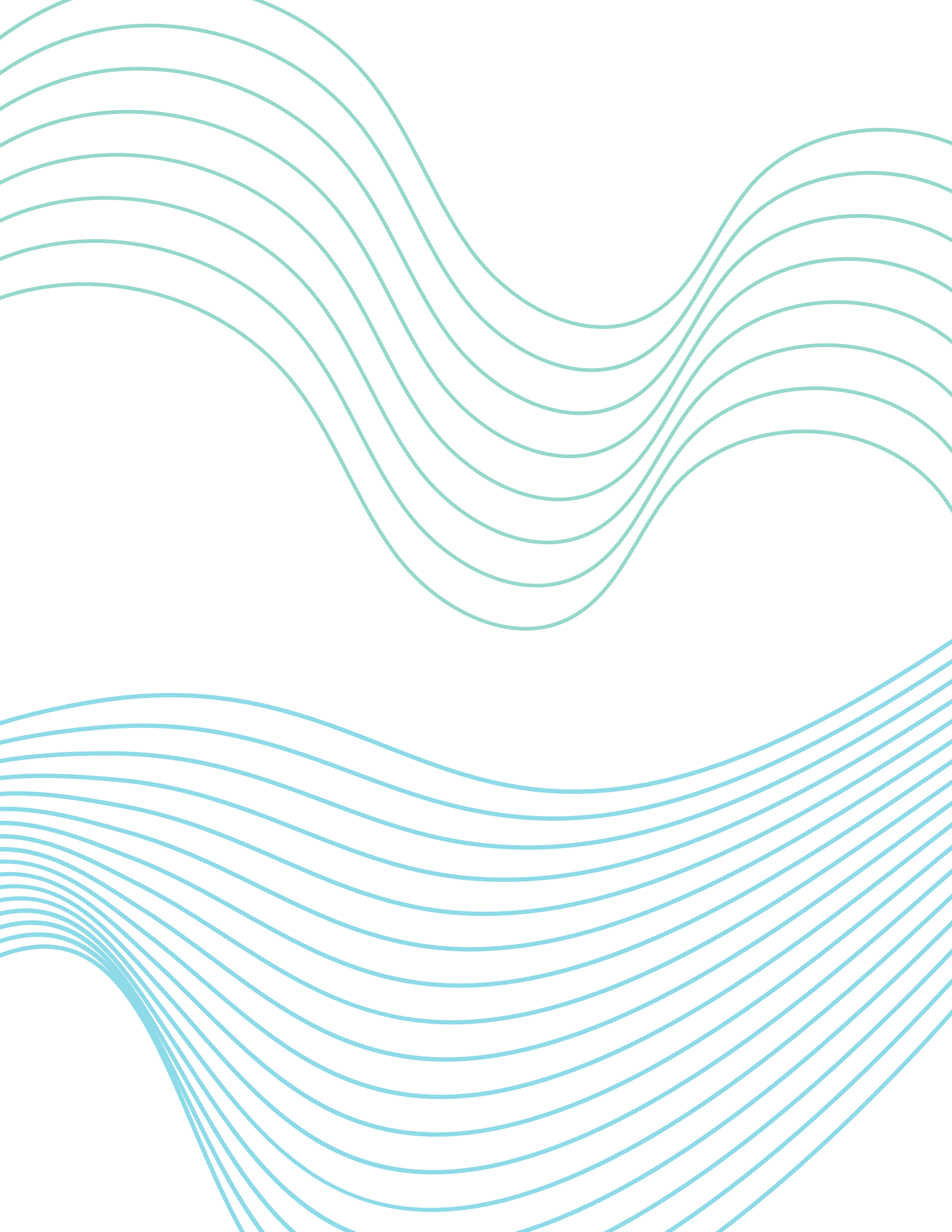


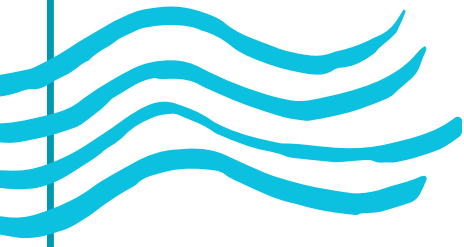


Ontario Council for  
International Cooperation

# CURRENTS OF COLLABORATION

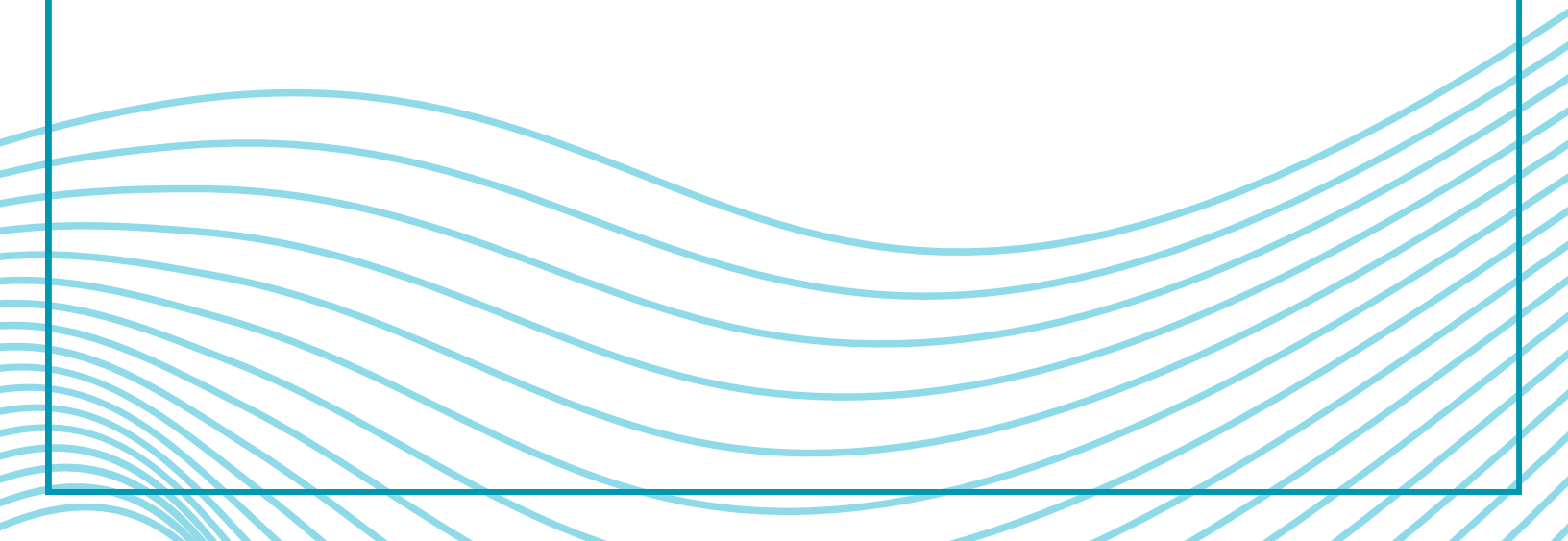
**A Summary Report on OCIC Approaches, Priorities  
and Learnings on Water and Climate**





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# Acknowledgments

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Wasan Island, the breathtaking site of the 'Spur Sparks' Regional Retreat, must also be acknowledged for inspiring OCIC's efforts to convene people in Canada and beyond on water and climate issues, this year. For all their efforts and inspiration for that 'once in a lifetime' moment, heartfelt thanks to OCIC's Regional Retreat Coordinator, Vlad Gómez; Alberta Council for Global Cooperation (ACGC) Executive Director, Rachel Levee; Spur Change Director, Andréanne Martel, Spur Change Finance and Programs team, Cedar MacRae, André Melrose and Nicolás Peña; Steering Committee members Nancy Burrows, Chargée programmes on Éducation à la citoyenneté mondiale, L'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI), Membership Manager, Saadia Ambreen, and Program Director, Lee-Ann Lavell, Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC); interpreters Michael Carty, Miriam Heap-Lalonde and Juliette Nicko; and translator Denis Côté.

Gratitude as well to each individual that contributed to the many activities highlighted below, and for your critical efforts to mobilize and to address water and climate-related challenges, locally and globally.

Sincerely,

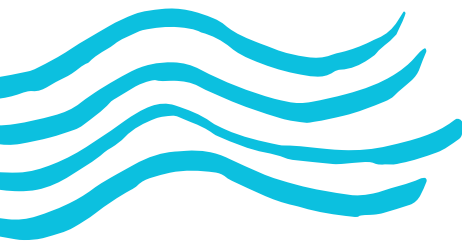
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The Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) is an expanding community of Ontario-based international cooperation and global citizenship-focused organizations, institutions, and individual associate members committed to working for global social justice, human dignity and participation for all.

[www.ocic.on.ca](http://www.ocic.on.ca)



# AN INTRODUCTION TO WATER & CLIMATE

**Water** -- a fundamental resource for life, is facing unprecedented challenges worldwide. Despite being essential for human health, agriculture, energy production, and ecosystem stability, the availability and quality of water are increasingly threatened by pollution, climate change, population growth, and unsustainable water management practices. The current state of water across the globe reflects a complex interplay of factors, including water scarcity, contamination, and inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities.

Global institutions, notably the United Nations (UN), have recognized the urgency of addressing water-related challenges and have undertaken significant efforts to tackle them. The global community has launched the Water Action Decade (2018-2028)<sup>[1]</sup> to address these challenges and achieve the 2030 Agenda,<sup>[2]</sup> particularly the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: clean water and sanitation for all.<sup>[3]</sup> Through Goal 6, the UN seeks to foster international cooperation, promote integrated water resource management, and enhance access to safe water and sanitation services in underserved communities.

Canada, with its abundance of resources and expertise, plays a crucial role in global water initiatives. Canadian institutions and

organizations contribute resources, funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building support to address water-related challenges in partner countries.<sup>[4]</sup> Global Affairs Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) reflects Canada's approach, which emphasizes holistic and inclusive strategies for international assistance that recognize the interconnectedness of water with social, economic, and environmental factors.<sup>[5]</sup> By supporting international government organizations with partners and projects focused on water governance, infrastructure development, and community empowerment, Canada strives to enhance water security and promote sustainable development globally.

The significance of raising public awareness, capacity building, and garnering support cannot be overstated in the success of effective water management and conservation efforts. Capacity building initiatives, including training programs, workshops, and knowledge-sharing platforms, empower stakeholders to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and implement sustainable water solutions. Public awareness campaigns, educational outreach, and community involvement further mobilize support and foster a culture of water stewardship at local, national, and global levels.<sup>[6]</sup> ■

## *Our Approach:* **CURRENTS OF COLLABORATION**

As a community of international cooperation organizations, institutions and individuals based in Ontario, OCIC seeks to build capacity, to convene multi sectoral dialogue, and to influence and inspire systemic change. We do this through various capacity building, knowledge exchange and public engagement initiatives that amplify the experiences, expertise and resources of partners, members and other key actors, locally and globally.

Inspired by the UN 2023 Water Conference – a global event at the midpoint of the International Decade for Action on Water rallying world leaders, civil society, business leaders, young people, scientists, academics, members of the UN system, and a variety of environmental and water actors to mobilize, take action, and bring successful solutions on SDG 6 to a global scale – OCIC dedicated much of our programming efforts in 2023-2024 towards:

- convening a ‘Spur Sparks’ Regional Retreat that brought diverse participants together on Wasan Island to deepen collective awareness, understanding and action towards international, national and local efforts on water, the environment and climate change;
- coordinating an International Development Week virtual panel, ‘Navigating Gender and Water Challenges Globally’, and a youth-focused in-person Innovation Lab on ‘Exploring Innovative Approaches to Global Water Challenges’;
- developing a World Water Day e-zine showcasing personal stories about water, co-hosting a virtual Storytelling Night, and co-creating an in-person community arts workshop prioritizing non-technical voices and the social and cultural dimensions of water issues, including relationships with water and peace.

**#WASAN2023**  
Wasan 2023 Spur Sparks  
Regional Retreat

**#IDW2024**  
Virtual Gender Panel &  
In-Person Innovation Lab

**#WWD2024**  
Storytelling Events &  
Community Arts Workshop

# *Our Priorities*

## **1 INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION**

Indigenous Peoples and communities have deep-rooted traditional knowledge and connections to the land and waterways. Indigenous representation in learning spaces helps to ensure that Indigenous values of conservation and respect for nature are centered and carried forward from education to action. We are grateful for the Indigenous leaders and community members who shared their perspective and knowledge with us this year.

## **2 CONNECTION TO NATURE**

The simplest solutions are often the most overlooked. When we foster meaningful connections with the natural world around us we are more inclined to prioritize its preservation and wellbeing. Reminding ourselves that we are part of an ecosystem and that we are all connected by the water and to the land is a vital step in water and climate action.

## **3 PARTNERSHIP, COLLABORATION & INNOVATION**

Water and climate challenges are complex and require diverse, multi-sectoral and innovative approaches. We can experience the power of partnership and collaboration with Indigenous leaders and community members, subject matter experts, youth, students, civil society, government and other actors. These approaches open doors for much needed creativity and innovation.

## **4 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

As stewards of our planet, youth are central to meaningful water and climate action. When the lived experience, knowledge, wisdom and activism of diverse youth with intersectional identities are valued and amplified, including in policy-learning and making spaces, we all benefit.

## **5 ARTS-BASED APPROACHES**

The arts offer accessible and welcoming ways to reach new people, have meaningful discourse, and challenge systems that don't work. Music, storytelling, dance, painting and multimedia arts bring diverse individuals and groups together and can be powerful tools for engagement, advocacy, peacebuilding and healing. ■

# *Our Takeaways:* **A CONFLUENCE OF ISSUES AND ACTIONS**

In this work we have noted a confluence of interconnected issues and actions necessary to address complex challenges and promising solutions in the water sector and beyond:



## **GENDER DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO SAFE WATER**

The gendered effects of inadequate access to safe water cannot be overstressed, as despite international promises to advance gender equality, women, girls and gender-diverse individuals still bear the brunt of labour, like gathering water and managing sanitation for the home, which hinders their ability to pursue education, and to achieve good health and economic empowerment. It is crucial to implement water management plans and programs that are inclusive of local, community-based gender considerations in order to bridge the existing gaps and guarantee fair access to water and sanitation facilities.



## **INDIGENOUS WATER RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Indigenous communities continue to confront barriers as they strive to safeguard and steward their water sources and ancestral domains. The historic and ongoing impacts of colonialism and exploitation of resources continue to persist in sidelining Indigenous perspectives, practices and initiatives in water governance and stewardship, creating a major hurdle in attaining fair and lasting water stewardship.



## **DATA UTILIZATION IN WATER PROJECTS**

Particularly in discussions of programming, various actors identified gaps in the effective utilization of data for water-related projects, which hinder optimal outcomes. They emphasized the importance of utilizing appropriate, relevant and disaggregated data in water projects to create more informed decisions and policies and build local capacity within the WASH sector.



## **FUNDING AND PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY**

Ensuring long-term funding for water stewardship projects is a complex issue. Challenges include obtaining enough resources amidst other priorities, relying on short-term funding, and the risk of depending too much on external sources. Moreover, there is a lack of suitable financial mechanisms and opportunities for projects focusing on conservation. These projects are susceptible to political and economic uncertainties, and there is a need for meaningful community involvement. To overcome these challenges, diverse funding sources must be explored, local capabilities must be strengthened, partnerships should be nurtured, and sustainability principles should be integrated into project planning and execution from the beginning.





## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING BEYOND THE WATER SECTOR

While numerous education and cooperation efforts are underway, the challenge of broader public engagement in water conservation projects still exists. Additionally, there are barriers preventing certain communities, especially marginalized groups, from fully participating and benefiting from these initiatives.

Limited access to information, low awareness of water concerns, a general disconnect from the realities in other parts of the world, and unequal distribution of power impede meaningful contributions from many communities in deciding and implementing relevant and effective initiatives. This apathy and lack of understanding, coupled with the lack of capacity of policy-maker and sector experts to work with non-technical voices, prove to be a major hindrance to advancements towards achieving sustainable water management objectives.



## NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN ADDRESSING WATER ISSUES

In exploring approaches to water stewardship and peace, Dr. Larry Swatuk, Professor, School of Environment, Enterprise and Development at the University of Waterloo, emphasized the need for “new geographies of social change and interaction” and of looking at issues from different perspectives, in non-traditional ways, transcending boundaries and conventional principles of participation, production and collective action.

By creating meaningful spaces for dialogue and collaboration that extend beyond linear conversations in traditional spaces, and by convening new, potent spaces in which actors can interact on different levels, we can harness the collective wisdom, experiences, resources and creativity of individuals and organizations to address water issues effectively. These “new geographies of social interaction” offer opportunities of seeing the world and understanding issues, to build bridges, share best practices, and co-create solutions that are inclusive, contextually relevant and contribute to our social and ethical fabric. ■

# WASAN 'SPUR SPARKS' REGIONAL RETREAT 2023

The Wasan 2023 Spur Sparks Regional Retreat, hosted by OCIC in partnership with L'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI), the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC) and the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils (ICN) Spur Change Program, was an opportunity for civil society actors from small and medium sized-organizations (SMOs), including youth (18-35 years) from across Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada to come together on Wasan Island to deepen collective awareness, understanding and action towards:

- the UN International Decade for Action on Water 2018-2028;
- the UN 2023 Water Conference;
- Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) Action Area 4 (focused on the Environment and Climate Change); and
- Pan-Canadian efforts of SMOs and youth to advance and connect to global efforts on water, the environment and climate change.

During preparatory discussion sessions and on site at Wasan Island the retreat provided space for participants to tap into and learn from collective wisdom and efforts, and to share and co-create initiatives and strategies for increasing public awareness and action in 2023-2024 and beyond, and for amplifying community-led initiatives and calls for action, globally and locally.

Image Source: [WasanIsland.de](https://www.wasanisland.de)



## ABOUT THE GATHERING PLACE

Wasan Island is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe. This territory is covered by the Robinson Huron Treaty (1850) and the William Treaty (1923). There are several neighbouring First Nations communities whose ancestors live(d) in this area, including Rama (Mnjikaning), Wahta, and Wasauksing (Parry Island). There are three nations represented in the area: the Anishinabe (Ojibway), Pottawatomi and Mohawk.

The Muskoka area is considered shared hunting ground among many Indigenous nations. Communities lived in this region in permanent villages or summer settlements historically. Chief Mesqua Ukee or Misquakie (English name William Yellowhead) fought with the British during the War of 1812. The Muskoka region is named after him. The Mohawks of the Wahta First Nation were moved to this area in 1881, from Quebec after a dispute with the Catholic Church.

The first permanent settlement in the Muskokas was called Obajewanung, at present day Port Carling. Within 20 years of signing the Robinson Huron Treaty, the community members were relocated to reserves in the area. In more contemporary times, Indigenous peoples are often erased or invisible from the landscapes of "cottage country" in Ontario, including the Muskokas. Cottage country has shifted how Indigenous peoples interact with their traditional territories, and in some areas this has led to strained relations.

# WASAN 'SPUR SPARKS' REGIONAL RETREAT 2023



## HIGHLIGHTS

The retreat was led by Vlad Gomez, Kimberly Gibbons, Lisa Swainston and Nancy Burrows, Wasan Retreat Steering Committee Members, and nurtured by Wasan Island Manager, Peter Vanderploeg, and team.

The first full day commenced with a Water Ceremony led by Eliza Knockwood, a Two-spirit Mi'kmaw water keeper and filmmaker from Epekwitk (also known as Prince Edward Island). This activity facilitated participants' connection to the environment through collective and individual land-based learning. The day's presentations began with Nina Bianchi from the International Secretariat for Water, who discussed the UN Frameworks, the World Water Forum, and youth mobilization at the UN Water Conference and beyond. Key discussions included challenges in youth participation, essential advocacy priorities, and the #FillUpTheGlass campaign, which documents and encourages youth through grassroots activism and local interventions.

Rae Landriau and Mei-Ling Patterson, members of the Jane Goodall Youth Advisor

Council, followed with a presentation about the importance of youth perspectives and agency in environment and climate action and their youth-led research projects.

Rae presented their MSc thesis about contaminated fluids seeping from drilling waste sumps in Western Arctic Canada, which various implications about the lasting environmental effects of off-shore and on-shore drilling and their impacts on both the human communities residing nearby these drilling sites as well as on wildlife and other living organisms in these areas. Rae also talked about the work they have done in making environmental education accessible. Mei-Ling discussed the direction of her MAsc thesis towards studying inclusion and integration of racialized newcomers and immigrants in the environmental sustainability sector in Canada. In her initial foray into this topic, she has found out that racialized newcomers and immigrants are underrepresented in the sector and face a diverse set of additional barriers before being able to join the sector.





Concluding the presentations, Eric Mamboue, Country Director of WaterAid Burkina Faso (WABF), highlighted WABF's projects concerning water, sanitation, and health (WASH), including their goals, approaches, successes, and challenges. Some of WABF's successes over two decades included successful water service delivery, collaborations, partnerships, and alliances with different water actors, and active advocacies; on the other hand, some of its challenges involved issues with governance and partner capacity, threats of political instability and insecurity, the mobilization and financing of resources within the sector from internal and external sources, and the overall larger question of program sustainability. Eric also emphasized the significance of data utilization and capacity building for achieving project success within the WASH sector. Central to their current projects in WABF is building the capacity of basin authorities, ensuring that systems are strengthened, and that Integrated Water Resources Management at the national level meets the needs of Securing Water Resources Approaches at the local level.

The second day began with a recap and a session on Public Engagement Strategies, Approaches, and Good Practices by Kimberly Gibbons and Nancy Burrows, and the GAC Public Engagement Results Framework by Paul Galipeau from GAC. Participants then engaged in open space discussions to determine focus themes for smaller group discussions. Participants were divided into four discussion groups on youth and climate action, politics and power, arts and engagement, and organizing coalitions, discussing key issues and challenges and key strategies for engagement.

The retreat concluded with a reflection activity on learnings, and discussions on future follow-up activities related to water and climate. Eliza then led a closing ceremony where everyone had the opportunity to share thoughts on the retreat and actions moving forward, as well as to commit to be more connected to nature and continue work in environmental stewardship. ■

## LESSONS FROM BURKINA FASO



Eric Mamboue has been Country Director of WaterAid Burkina Faso for 17 years, and has decades of experience in international development, especially in education, HIV and AIDS, secure livelihoods, water and sanitation, child protection, and humanitarian management. One of WaterAid Canada's long-term partners, Eric joined the Wasan 'Spur Sparks' Regional Retreat to share his expertise, and to exchange ideas and knowledge with others. Eric emphasized the need for capacity building of water actors and the need for strong national and local systems and approaches as key to successes in water access and management.

# Reflections from Mei-Ling

**Mei-Ling Patterson**

Wasan Retreat Participant/Contributor &  
Jane Goodall Institute Youth Advisory Council Member



**Q: What is your greatest takeaway from the retreat?**

**A:** The importance of creating space for community connections and co-learning.

**Q: Which activity from the retreat was your favourite?**

**A:** Although there were many spiritually, personally, and professionally meaningful activities, one of my favourites was the thanksgiving address and ceremony led by Elder Christopher Stock. Oftentimes, at conferences, meetings, and other in-person events there are tokenistic land acknowledgements given without further action and space created for deeper reflection and commitments. As such, I really appreciated being given the opportunity to be grounded in such a special way and to learn more about the history of settlement of what is colonially known as Ontario and the Muskoka Area which is the territory of the Anishinaabe. Learning about how every being in nature has so much purpose from the insects underground to the soil to the roots of plants to the birds in the sky to deer and to many more animals and plants and showing our gratitude and respect for each one was and is an important teaching. Although I often yearn to spend more time connecting with nature, I often forget to vocalize my gratitude for Mother Earth and everything she provides.

**Q: How has your perspective on water, its significance, and its connection to your life evolved after participating in this water retreat?**

**A:** Another one of my favourite activities from the retreat was the water ceremony and smudge

on the second day in the morning hosted by Eliza Knockwood. This was an important moment of reflection for me as a settler living in a highly urbanized area who has always had access to an abundance of clean drinking water. I've never had the experience of having to worry about my family, friends, or loved ones running out of water and/or having contaminated water that may harm our health. However, this is a privilege that is denied to many Indigenous communities across Canada as well as many racialized and Indigenous populations across the Global South even though water is a human right and an essential resource.

**Q: What is one thing you have learned from your colleagues in the retreat that you would like to try/use/replicate/adopt in your work?**

**A:** The importance of investing time in connecting with nature to foster a sense of environmental stewardship and care. When we feel connections to the ecosystems surrounding us, we're more likely to want to protect it. Given my experience in climate and environmental communications and in facilitating environmental education workshops emphasizing the importance of getting outside and experiencing the natural world will be a lesson that I'll aim to focus on more and where possible will make efforts to incorporate this practice. Whilst also recognizing the systemic barriers to accessing nature for low-income and racialized communities and finding ways to create a more inclusive outdoor space. ■

# INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK 2024

## GENDER PANEL: 'Navigating Gender and Water Challenges Globally'



Recognizing the urgent need for concerted efforts in addressing the intersectionality of gender and water issues, Pragma Tikku, OCIC's Community Engagement & Gender Equality Specialist, worked with partners to convene a global virtual panel on 'Navigating Gender and Water Challenges Globally', to launch OCIC's International Development Week 2024 activities.

The gendered impact of lack of safe and accessible water poses a serious equality issue. Panelists focused on providing insights into global and local commitments on gender and water, positive and sustainable transformations advocating for gender-inclusive water management strategies including WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) priorities, youth perspectives on water and gender, women's water leadership and mitigating the disproportionate impacts of water-related challenges on women and girls.



[CLICK HERE to watch the recording on YouTube.](#)

## HIGHLIGHTS

Dominic O'Neill, Executive Director, UN Sanitation and Hygiene Fund, opened the panel with a discussion on current approaches to development finance and how gender must be included as a main element in all discussions and programs, particularly in the sector of sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health.

Nina Bianchi, Project Manager, International Secretariat for Water and Panel Moderator, set the context and framed the topic with a brief introduction on the interrelation between gender and water.

Dr. Grace Oluwasanya, Water, Gender and Climate Lead, United Nations University-Institute for Water, Environment and Health, emphasized the need to study the differential impacts of water scarcity on women and girls, and its implications for achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She underscored that water-related objectives can only be realized alongside gender equality across all spheres and spaces.

Ann Turinayo, Country Director, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Burkina Faso, delved into the allocation of water resources for women and female farmers, advocating for innovative approaches to water challenges that are socially and culturally appropriate. She shared real-world stories, illustrating the necessity for projects to heed and amplify grassroots voices.

Adnan Ibne Abdul Qader, Climate and Water Governance Specialist, WaterAid Bangladesh and Climate Change Focal Point, WaterAid South Asia Regional Office focused on WASH initiatives, locally-driven adaptation strategies, and women's rights, particularly within the framework of gender disparities exacerbated by climate change.

The panel yielded crucial insights, notably stressing the urgency of advancing gender equality to expedite progress across all SDGs. Additionally, it underscored the pivotal issues of funding, financing, and project sustainability, while emphasizing the significance of deep listening to lived experiences and increased data and research for more comprehensive intersectional analyses of the gendered impacts of water issues. When concluding, panelists issued a call to sustain dialogue and continue fostering inclusive spaces for discussions and exchanges among technical experts, advocates, activists, the private sector, and the broader public. This concerted effort aims to harness collective action to drive meaningful impact in addressing gender and water challenges. ■



**Dr. Grace Oluwasanya**

“We know over the years that women are water managers at the household level, but when you get to the decision making level, how many of them are there? At the country level, at the global level, at higher levels beyond the household? How many women are represented in decision-making in government? This is what we need to shift [...] Fast tracking SDG 5 is crucial to fast tracking SDG 6. Until we figure out and target, fast-tracking gender equality into every space, we may not be able to fast-tracking gender equality into the water space, in particular.”



**Adnan Ibne Abdul Qader**

“...one example, in sanitation, as we're talking about menstrual health as well, [there are] areas that lack safe drinking water or water for accessing hygiene facilities. We're seeing adults and girls dropping out of schools because community schools in those climate prone areas don't have adequate water services or sanitation services. And usually those girls ought to stay back at home and don't feel and up to not face the taboo surrounding menstrual health on those particular areas.”



**Ann Turinayo**

“More or less and globally speaking, can we change the way we program? Can we not be in a hurry to program but actually listen to the different contexts and then make sure that the solutions we are working on are owned by these communities, are sustainable, and respond to multi-dimensional needs and issues?”

# INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK 2024

## INNOVATION LAB: 'Navigating Gender and Water Challenges Globally'



OCIC's Innovation Lab 2024, 'Exploring Innovative Approaches to Global Water Challenges', brought 46 individuals and organizations from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Hamilton with interest in reflecting on their relationship with water and climate issues to join participants in Waterloo for a day of exploration. Envisioned by OCIC's Learning & Impact Specialist Shehara Athukorala, in collaboration with Dr. Larry Swatuk, Professor, School of Environment, Enterprise and Development at the University of Waterloo, the event was supported by Ashley Anthony, Regional Engagement Coordinator, Climate Reality Project Canada, and Kimberly Gibbons, Vlad Gomez, Lisa Swainston and Mishka Watin, from OCIC.

## HIGHLIGHTS

The day commenced with a road trip to our venue and a participatory welcome.

Dr. Lina Taing, Senior Researcher, United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) then provided a keynote presentation on 'Transformation and Innovation in the Global Water Sector to Meet 21st Century Needs'. Dr. Taing addressed the significant deviation from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's trajectory and introduced UN 2.0, advocating for internal transformations





within UN entities to enhance impact, sustainability, and resilience. She discussed the goals of UN 2.0 to strengthen expertise and culture to better support the UN's member states, particularly in employing the Quintet of Change, which makes use of improved skillsets in data, innovation, digital expertise, behavioural sciences, and strategic foresight as essential in achieving the goals of UN 2.0 and reach targets.

Dr. Taing particularly highlighted the importance of behavioural science, the study of human actions and interactions, as a potent ingredient for targeting determinants of change. She talks about the Behavioural Adaptation for water Security and INclusion (BASIN) 2023-2026 project in 3 Sub-Saharan African countries, which applies behavior science to draw insights from the Global South and build climate resilience in water security projects. In closing she emphasizes the need for just and inclusive innovative approaches, including the use of alternative ideas, practices, technologies, and tools for greater impact and to better navigate uncertainty, and the need for transdisciplinary, intersectional, and decolonial approaches to global water challenges.

Following lunch participants heard 'Indigenous Perspectives on Water and Climate' from Thomas Johnson, Executive Director, Eskasoni Fish & Wildlife Commission, and Linda Debassige, Former Chief of M'Chigeeng First Nation and Director of Government Relations and Advocacy, Independent First Nations Alliance, who joined us virtually. They shared insights on the challenges, successes, and key strategies within their respective First Nations communities, emphasizing the importance of scientific engagement to monitor nature, the necessity of government and public support for environmental protection, and the impacts of climate change and industrial activities. The Eskasoni Fish & Wildlife Commission has seen successes in watershed protection and habitat restoration, and sees a critical need for collaboration on water protection amidst challenges like mining, flooding and fire emergencies, and for intergenerational cooperation and consultation with First Nation communities for climate justice.

Dr. Kelsey Leonard, Assistant Professor, School of Environment, Resources, and Sustainability at University of Waterloo, and Lucas Shumaker, Environmental Engineering Student at the University of Waterloo, then





underscored rights-based approaches and Indigenous energy sovereignty, emphasizing that 'not all renewable energy is just energy'. Indigenous energy sovereignty is the right of Indigenous peoples to develop, own, and independently control local energy systems, including their right to choose which energy source they wish to honor and utilize in their communities. Dr. Leonard and Lucas' presentation highlighted the significance of rights protection for Indigenous communities, so that they may have their needs addressed and their independence to decide for their communities, as well as incorporating Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge as critical to innovative environmental programs.

After a quick break, participants joined one of two parallel sessions. Justin Murgai, CEO, WaterAid Canada, focused on 'Exploring the Crucial Role of WASH in Safeguarding Communities Worldwide', emphasizing WASH's role in different real-world contexts and its importance in building resilience to climate change. It plays a multifaceted role in building resilience to climate change by ensuring access to essential services, promoting public health, supporting sustainable development, and protecting ecosystems. Investing in WASH infrastructure and promoting hygiene

education are critical strategies for enhancing resilience, such as in healthcare settings, urban and rural communities, disaster response and recovery, agriculture and food security, and throughout natural ecosystems, at both local and global scales.

Ejiro Movoria, Likhitha Varikuti and Sarah Kowalczyk, University of Waterloo Society of the Water Institute Graduate Students (SWIGS) presented their 'Salt-ernatives' project exploring alternatives to road salt use, which is a major concern for groundwater quality across Canada. Every year, Canada uses 10 million tonnes of road salt, which negatively impacts the quality of groundwater for communities relying on it for drinking as well as altered water chemistry, making it potentially toxic for aquatic life. Some of the alternatives they presented for de-icing included beet root juice, pickle brine, cheese brine, and coffee grinds. Participants likewise discussed additional solutions such as ash and wood chips, suction methods, and improved application of road salt, and discussed strategies for implementation across various institutions and stakeholders, including offering tax incentives to residents, enforcing penalties and fine, looking for more research funding opportunities, and enforcing regulatory changes at all levels.



Dr. Larry Swatuk and Dr. Leah Jones-Crank, Assistant Professor, School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability at University of Waterloo, then led a discussion on 'Water for Peace and Pathways Forward', emphasizing the necessity for improved collaboration and new social interaction dynamics in addressing conflict and resolution, particularly for lasting peace amidst water and environmental issues. They emphasize the need for creative collaboration for water and the need to talk about these collaborations more in the discussions of water for peace, to change the focus from narratives of war and conflict surrounding water into narratives of creativity, collaboration and cooperation. They also highlighted the need to articulate our different standpoints, to listen to Indigenous knowledge, to become an ally and conduit for coalitions, and to acknowledge that we are nodes in a large network of individuals and groups working to solve issues and conflicts and ultimately support each other's essence and survival.



The day culminated in a 'Development Café', where participants shared ideas on how to incorporate Indigenous worldviews, as well as key insights and ideas for World Water Day 2024 and longer-term action for water and environmental conservation. The closing Networking Reception capped off the event, before the return road trip from Waterloo, for many.

The Innovation Lab provided a platform to listen to insightful presentations from experts on water and its associated challenges, and to actively engage with a diverse array of individuals passionate about addressing these issues. Contributors from different sectors offered valuable insights into the complexities of global water challenges and the dialogue and exchange of ideas among participants further enriched the experience. This immersive environment was an opportunity to deepen understanding of water issues, and to ignite a sense of urgency and commitment to contribute meaningfully to water conservation efforts, moving forward. ■



## Reflections from Participants

The OCIC Innovation Lab 2024, which took place in Waterloo this February, was a hub of innovative thinking and collaborative action, dedicated to finding solutions to the critical challenges of water security and climate change. The event was a ray of hope, showcasing a blend of traditional wisdom and modern science to forge new paths toward a sustainable and just future.

At the heart of the lab were the compelling stories shared by individuals like Tom and Linda from two Indigenous communities, who illuminated the struggles and victories of communities facing the maximum impact of environmental degradation. Their stories were not just accounts of hardship but beacons of

resilience, demonstrating the power of community-driven innovation in addressing the water crisis. The lab emphasized the critical interconnectedness of climate and water issues on a global scale, highlighting the need for a unified response.

The lab championed the philosophy that our solutions must be as interconnected as the problems they address. Initiatives like the WAMPUM Lab's focus on renewable energy underscored the importance of a sustainable transition that honors both the environment and its original guardians. This holistic approach advocates for a paradigm shift, where sustainability and respect for the planet are integral to our decision-making processes.

*- Srishti Ratnu on taking a holistic approach to tackling water issues*

Many young participants were excited about the event's focus on amplifying the voices of their generation, the generation that will deal with the increasingly challenging water crisis. With younger generations witnessing the world's progress veering off course from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by the midpoint of the 2030 UN Agenda, their enthusiasm for actively engaging in solutions becomes even more pronounced.

The enthusiasm of many young participants for actively engaging in solutions to the water crisis reflects the urgency of addressing global challenges. With the world's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) falling short by the

midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the need for innovative approaches becomes increasingly evident. In response to this pressing challenge, a vision for a modernized UN system, termed 'UN 2.0,' has emerged. This initiative seeks to reshape thinking and skill sets to better address the complex challenges facing humanity and the planet in the 21st century. Central to this new approach is the recognition of the 'Quintet of Change' as a priority skill set, encompassing innovation, data, digital, foresight and behavioural science approaches. By harnessing these essential skills, the UN aims to drive meaningful progress towards the SDGs and foster sustainable development worldwide.

*- Linda Li on actively engaging youth in solutions to the water crisis*

## Reflections from Participants

It was a privilege to listen and meet some of the prominent scholars working in the field of water management globally. The discussion began with Lina Taing, UN researcher and Development Sector Advisor on SDG 6 - Water and Sanitation. She highlighted that 69% of deaths by diarrhea have become the second leading cause of death globally. She emphasized the drought conditions in Alberta, Canada, and shed light on think tanks at the United Nations Institute, raising alarming concerns about water challenges. Her talk also touched on the impact of the colonial past in developing countries like India and mostly the Global South, where water issues, such as wastage and inadequate rainwater harvesting technology, have been prevalent. However, the disposal of industrial waste into rivers has seldom been addressed. She also spoke about the vision of "Rethink, Refocus, and Recharge," aiming for significant progress by 2030.

For me, "Rethink" involves drawing inspiration from the water management systems of ancient civilizations like the Indus Valley and Egyptian civilizations, which have sustained through the ages and still influence us today. Why not take inspiration from history and adapt these techniques to suit contemporary

needs, helping people reconnect with their past and embrace ancient technology?

"Refocus" urges us to consider reviving ancient water systems and integrating them with modern technology to create sustainable solutions that require minimal maintenance. Drawing from the wisdom of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, we're reminded of the value of using natural materials for water management. These early urban centers boasted sophisticated water systems, including drainage systems and the earliest flush toilets, crafted from brick and stone. Their approach to sustainability and community well-being serves as a model for us today, particularly in rural areas where we can avoid environmentally damaging plastics and embrace materials that are kind to the soil and our surroundings (SINGH, 2019).

"Recharge" represents my desire to shift people's ideology towards sustainable water management by reviving historical methods. Using sustainable, easily accessible materials can financially sustain communities and strengthen their connection to their past.

Change is indeed gradual, but it must be steered in the right direction.

- **Sarthak Arora** on the call to "Rethink, Refocus, and Recharge"

The world's water resources require implementing projects and international mechanisms that unite governments, businesses, scientists, academics, researchers, civil society, and indigenous communities. This collaborative effort aims to design and implement solutions for the responsible use and protection of water. Placing water cooperation at the forefront of plans amid wars, climate change, mass migration, and other political challenges is necessary. Additionally, the potential for water to lead us out of crises emphasizes the importance of uniting for equitable and

sustainable water use on international, national, and local levels to foster harmony among countries, nations, communities by adopting efficient technologies, taking initiatives to reduce global food loss and waste, enforce urban water conservation measures, and invest in wastewater treatment and reuse technologies are vital for sustainable water management, protecting natural ecosystems, and enhancing infrastructure further contribute to safeguarding water resources and ensuring their availability for future generations.

- **Racha Abou Chakra** on a collaborative approach for global solutions

# WORLD WATER DAY 2024

World Water Day serves as an annual platform to raise awareness and galvanize efforts to address the global challenges surrounding water and sanitation. This observance is spearheaded by the UN and centers on a theme closely linked to the UN World Water Development Report which is facilitated by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water. In 2024 the focus was on 'Leveraging Water for Peace,' reflected in both the theme of World Water Day and the title of the accompanying report, 'Leveraging Water for Peace and Prosperity.'

At a provincial level, OCIC's World Water Day activities centered around arts-based engagement as tools to learn more about water and water-related issues. Developed by Mishka Watin with support from Sarah Judd, our e-zine showcased contributors' personal and cultural relationships with water; a curated virtual storytelling night focused on oral stories about water; and an in-person community arts workshop gathered community members and artists alike to explore movement, dance and visual art as tools to encourage water stewardship on both personal and collective levels. ■



**E-ZINE:**  
**'Connected by Flowing  
Narratives - Stories of  
Water and Change'**



**STORYTELLING  
NIGHT:**  
**'Calming the Waters -  
Stories of Water,  
Peace, and Life'**



**COMMUNITY ARTS  
WORKSHOP:**  
**'Creating Ripples'**

# WORLD WATER DAY 2024

## E-ZINE:

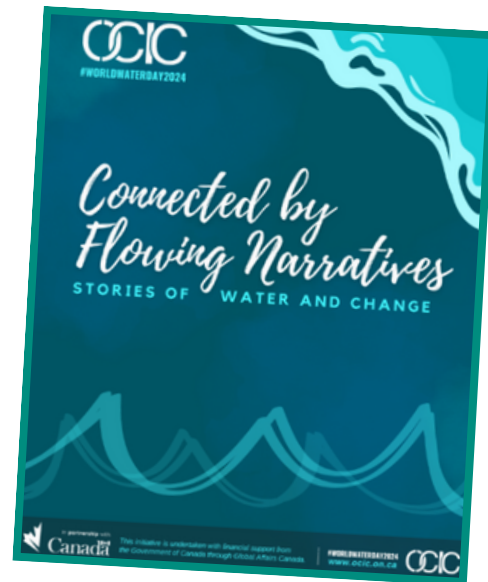
### 'Connected by Flowing Narratives - Stories of Water and Change'

Water is not just a resource; it's a powerful, fundamental part of our lives, shaping our experiences and connecting us to each other and the world around us. In honour of World Water Day 2024, we invited contributions to highlight the profound connection between individuals and water, while shedding light on pressing global issues of concern.

## HIGHLIGHTS

A diverse collection of 12 personal narratives and photographs from Srishti Ratnu, Perihan Kucukosman, Paulina Constancia, Shreya Menon, Alek Phan Trúc, Kahlil R., Beatriz Garcia Granados, Bakir H. Amin, Agbavito Koku Selom, Racha Abou Chakra, Eddy Lee, and Minu Benny, OCIC's e-zine is a testament to the multifaceted relationships we share with water. It inspires readers by the depth of individual experiences, and also reminds us of the urgent need for collective action to safeguard the planet's most precious resource. Themes explored in this collection include personal journeys and reflections, childhood memories and placemaking, personal experiences with water, challenges related to water access, projects addressing water issues, the effects of climate, and working with water.

Through these contributions the significance of water is seen as more than just a vital resource, but as a conduit for human experiences, emotions and memories.



Each story and photo offers a unique perspective, highlighting the interconnectedness between individuals and water, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. By showcasing these personal accounts we hope to foster empathy and understanding, and to inspire deeper appreciation for water stewardship.

This approach provided a unique avenue for engaging people in candid conversations about conservation and sustainability, beyond scientific facts, to evoke emotional responses and spur meaningful action. In a world facing increasing water challenges, these creative personal endeavors are crucial in nurturing a collective sense of responsibility and empowering communities to protect and preserve this invaluable resource. ■



[CLICK HERE to read the stories in 'Connected by Flowing Narratives - Stories of Water and Change'.](#)

# WORLD WATER DAY 2024

## STORYTELLING NIGHT: 'Calming the Waters - Stories of Water, Peace, and Life'



On the eve of World Water Day, OCIC partnered with the 1001 Friday Nights of Storytelling community for 'Calming the Waters: Stories of Water, Peace, and Life,' a themed storytelling night that featured a curated selection of personal narratives, folk tales, fairy tales, songs and other oral pieces that explore the beauty, mystery and significance of water.

From time immemorial, oral stories have been powerful tools in transmitting wisdom across generations, inspiring shared values and our collective unconscious, and equipping the very young to the very old with a sacred connection to the natural world. This underscores the enduring power of storytelling in highlighting water's significance across cultures and generations, serving as powerful reminders of the intrinsic value of water, weaving together threads of heritage, wisdom, and reverence for the natural world, and shedding light on pressing

water issues in less technical, more digestible ways for the broader public.

### HIGHLIGHTS

The program was developed by Anna Kerz, Karen Blair and Anna-Lynn Filice, 1001 Friday Nights of Storytelling curators, in collaboration with Mishka Watin. Established and emerging individuals from the storytelling community, including Anna Kerz as host, Marylyn Peringer, Pat Bisset, Nick Micelli, June Brown, Howard Kaplan, Eddy Lee and Lynn Torrie, took to the virtual stage, engaging 58 listeners from across Canada, the USA and the UK. From captivating tales of tides, turkeys, dolphins and mermaids, to a song about high-fibre diets, and thought-provoking accounts of droughts, contaminated wells and polluted seas, there was something for everyone. ■



# WORLD WATER DAY 2024

## COMMUNITY ARTS WORKSHOP: 'Creating Ripples'



'Creating Ripples: A Community Arts Workshop to Celebrate World Water Day 2024' centered on the essence of water, combining the fluidity of movement and the beauty of performance and visual arts. In this immersive experience, stories and experiences about water were shared through movement, dancing and art. Through guided exercises, participants moved and danced together, all while learning about and discussing issues related to water. Afterwards, participants created beautiful water-inspired mixed media artworks that focused on giving appreciation to water.



## HIGHLIGHTS

The afternoon began with 'Bodies of Water', a Movement and Dance Session led by storyteller and community arts facilitator, Eddy Lee, and dance enthusiast and social entrepreneur, Angelina Ding. It focused on the global water issues embedded in SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 13: Climate Action, and SDG 14: Life Below Water, utilizing movement and dance as mediums for connecting with self and being, communicating, and urging action related to water stewardship.

Azul Baez, social artist, arts program developer and food justice and mental health advocate, then led a Visual Arts Session. Participants expressed reflections on water through mixed media, letting their imagination flow freely as they illustrated a mini album filled with thoughts, emotions, and appreciation for water, the life-giving element.

Through these expressive mediums, participants were invited to engage with water in a deeply personal and embodied way, connecting with its fluidity, rhythms, and transformative power. The workshop offered a space for collective exploration using the body and transcending language barriers and cultural differences to unite in a shared commitment to environmental conservation. Through movement, dance and art, the workshop provided an opportunity to amplify diverse personal voices, elevate perspectives, and inspire intentions towards sustainable water stewardship. In harnessing the transformative potential of artistic expression, facilitators sought to cultivate a deeper sense of reverence and responsibility for water, provide space for mental and emotional recentering, and thus inspire healthier, more interconnected individuals and communities. ■





## *Open Sails:*

# THE WORK CONTINUES

What a year it's been! Through the process of convening the 'Spur Sparks' Regional Retreat on Wasan Island, International Development Week Gender Panel and Innovation Lab, and three World Water Day initiatives, OCIC and many partners and participants have begun to form relationships and develop a shared understanding of the diversity, complexity and interconnectedness of water and climate issues. In these spaces, experts, advocates and activists alike have emphasized the urgency of sustained investment, the need for nuanced gender analysis and data-driven decision-making, the importance of innovative and inclusive approaches, community

involvement, and meaningful engagement of both technical and non-technical actors in water stewardship efforts globally.

The call to action is clear: we must work together with a sense of urgency and purpose to foster and engage in “new geographies of social interaction” and to amplify diverse voices, perspectives and initiatives in advancing water conservation and climate resilience efforts. Let us realize the vision of a world where water is not just a resource, but a source of peace, prosperity, sacred connection and shared well-being. ■

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## KEY LINKS

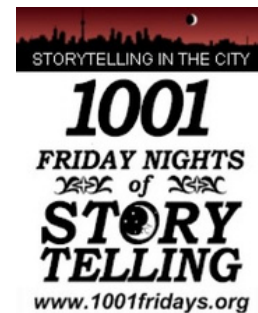
- [OCIC International Development Week 2024 Program](#)
- [OCIC IDW 2024 - Virtual Gender Panel - Recording on YouTube](#)
- [OCIC WWD 2024 - Connected by Flowing Narratives \(E-Zine\) - View on Canva](#)
- [UN International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028](#)
- [UN 2023 Water Conference](#)
- [UN 2.0 Quintet of Change](#)
- [UN World Water Day](#)
- [World Water Forum \(May 2024\)](#)
- [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\) Action Area 4, focused on the Environment and Climate Change](#)
- [Essential element: Aid's continuing and critical role in financing water, sanitation and hygiene | WASH Matters \(wateraid.org\)](#)
- [Global Youth Movement for Water - #FillUpTheGlass Campaign](#)
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- [International Water Association \(IWA\) Water Canada Summit \(August 2024 in Toronto\)](#)
- [IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition \(August 2024 in Toronto\)](#)

# Sincere Thanks

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