



# Building the next generation of water security leaders



Story of change: Key findings & emerging impacts

## Summary

- The REACH programme is committed to supporting career development by Early Career Researchers, half of whom are women.
- Over 60% of first authors in peer reviewed publications from the REACH programme are ECRs.
- ECRs play key and active roles in research dissemination and policy engagement across the REACH focus countries.
- ECRs transitioning to leadership roles will facilitate and sustain REACH programme impact through their policy and practice networks, and increase women's leadership in the sector.

## Introduction

Early career researchers (ECRs) constitute a considerable asset to the REACH programme. They are leading in writing papers, indeed representing over 60% of first authors in peer reviewed publications since 2015, and attracting funding from competitive grants. They are also taking on an active role in disseminating REACH's work in international conferences and in stakeholder events with policy makers and practitioners.

Our ambition is that, whilst supporting REACH, these opportunities will contribute to building their skills, advancing their career development and to building the next generation of water security leaders.

 Global



As they transition into new leadership roles, ECRs will continue to play a critical role in sustaining REACH's impact by facilitating research uptake into their new policy and practice networks.

For researchers to develop their careers and succeed, the early years post-doctorate are critical. Yet, we know researchers face many barriers in climbing the professional ladder in these early years.

Women, in particular, face structural constraints in gaining opportunities to support and catalyse change in many countries. REACH's ECRs provide a cohort of dynamic and motivated professionals, 50% of whom are women. These individuals will be well-placed to develop more sustainable practices in the future through the support they receive today.

REACH is committed to supporting the career development of ECRs, by providing the skills and experiences they need to excel, and raising their profile. In this story of change we provide examples of ECRs successes, and discuss how we are supporting them.

---

## ECRs progressing into leadership roles

Across the programme, REACH ECRs have made significant progresses in their careers: transitioning into career-defining and leadership roles, receiving competitive grants, receiving prestigious awards and being promoted to tenure. In their new roles, many of these ECRs continue to facilitate uptake of REACH's research, having access to new networks in academia, policy and practice. Some examples are detailed below.

**Dr Meron Teferi Taye**, who was previously the REACH Ethiopia Programme Manager, is now Researcher in Transitioning Landscapes at the International Water Management Institute. Dr Taye was supported to apply for, and was successful in receiving an AfOx fellowship in July-August 2019. She is the author of 5 REACH papers.

**Ms. Tazrina Habib Ananya** has been recruited by UNICEF Bangladesh to coordinate the WASH response in Cox's Bazar. She was previously Senior Project Officer at BUET, as part of REACH in the Matlab Observatory, where she coordinated the installation and maintenance of data loggers, and played a key communication role between REACH and UNICEF country and regional programmes.

**Dr Johanna Koehler** has been involved with REACH since the onset of the programme, as part of her PhD research, and later as Research Associate and Water Programme Manager at the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment. In 2020 she became Assistant Professor of Environmental Policy and Governance at VU Amsterdam and is now Assistant Professor of Environmental Risk Governance in the Public Administration and Policy Group at Wageningen University and Research. In 2017, her research appeared in *The Economist*, and in 2018 she was joint winner as part of the Smart Water Systems group of the inaugural University of Oxford's Vice Chancellor's Innovation Award. Her research on sharing water-related risks between the public and private sectors and communities contributed to Kenya's Water Act 2016.

**Mr. Md. Saif Uddin**, was a PhD student at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology leading research in Khulna under the supervision Professor Mashfiquis Salehin supervision and working at the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) since 2015. In 2021, he was promoted to Superintending Engineer at BWDB, using the research he is leading as part of REACH to address [water-logging issues in Coastal Bangladesh](#).

Two of our recipients from our Partnership Funding, receiving first Catalyst and then Accelerated grants, have shared how these grants have helped them to develop their career.

Based on their work, **Dr Sarah Dickin** at SEI was awarded her first independent research grant, to further her work on women's empowerment, and **Dr Sara Marks** was successful in her application for tenure at eawag, allowing her to further her work on [improving water quality in remote settings in Nepal](#).

In March 2021, the African Academy of Science (AAS) selected Dr. Behailu Birhanu as [one of 40 emerging scientists](#) from the continent who demonstrate excellence in their work.

As of 2024, Florence has taken on a new role as Programme Officer Science (Water Division) at the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa.

## Supporting ECRs’ career development

REACH is actively supporting the career development of ECRs through the following activities.

Supporting ECRs in leading and participating at events with key stakeholders including Kenya’s Ministry of Education, the Bangladesh High Commissioner in the UK, AMCOW, Oxfam and more. Examples include:

- Rebecca Peters coordinated the translation of the Bangladesh High Court judgement, granting all rivers with ‘legal personhood’. In November 2020, she organised a high-level event opened by the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK. Following completion of her PhD in 2022, she now works as Senior International Water Policy Adviser at the US Department of State.
- Mr. Cliff Nyaga organised a stakeholder meeting with Kenya’s Ministry of Education in December 2020 to discuss findings from REACH’s Schools report, and discuss policy responses.
- Dr Florence Tanui discussed REACH’s research at the Experts and Stakeholders’ Workshop on the African Ministers’ Council of Water (AMCOW)-Pan-African Groundwater Program (APAGroP) and the [National Stakeholder Forum on Climate Resilience and Water Security](#) in 2023.

## Raising the profile of ECRs in events and communications

ECRs are supported in disseminating their research at conferences, workshops and webinars, as highlighted in the table below. In 2020-21 the number of ECR speakers diminished, which may be due to the lower number of ECRs in the programme, as they are progressing into new careers. ECR are also strongly featured in online communications, including in blog and Early Career Researcher features, as well as videos and on social media.

## Supporting ECRs in applying for funding and leading research

This includes:

- Dr Ellen Dyer developed the £4.8M CLARE-funded Pan-African and Transdisciplinary Lens on the Margins: Tackling the Risks of Extreme Events (PALM-TREES) project, building on experiences and research across REACH including Weather and Climate Information Services from the UK Met Office, and intrahousehold studies on decision making (WISER).
- Dr. Sonia Hoque being successful in gaining funding to pilot an affordability methodology in coastal Bangladesh and presenting her work as part of the UNICEF/WHO global event at World Water Week in Stockholm;

Table 1: ECR statistics

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
% articles with ECRs first author	79%	81%	73%
% of ECR blog authors	70%	70%	60%
% of ECRs that are women	51%	55%	49%
Number of REACH ECRs	39	55	67

- Dr Catherine Grasham and Alice Chautard being awarded an ESR grant to lead a photo-voice project in Ethiopia;
- Dr Marina Korzenevica having received further funding to continue her work on the impacts of flash floods on riverside communities in Lodwar, Kenya.

## How has the pandemic affected ECRs?

Research shows the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting early career researchers, who are often in more precarious situations than more senior researchers, and women who generally bear the burden of family responsibilities. We found that ECRs scored lower in 2020-21 in leading dissemination and knowledge sharing events. Although numbers have now recovered, the impacts of the pandemic are unclear, as this might also have been due to a general reduction in the total number of REACH ECRs as a result of many partnership funding projects ending and ECRs transitioning into new leadership roles. During the lockdown years, REACH ECRs continued to be productive in publishing articles and blogs, and successfully leading field research (when possible) in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya. REACH continues to monitor the impacts of the pandemic on ECRs and women.

## Story of change themes



Groundwater



Land



Coasts



Gender



Schools



Services



Health



Climate



Cities



Basins

REACH is a global research programme to improve water security for the poor by delivering world-class science that transforms policy and practice. The REACH programme runs from 2015–2024 and is led by Oxford University with international consortium of partners and funded with UK Aid from the UK Government’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. Project code 201880.