

Dr. Swani Keelson

DOCTOR OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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United States

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Overview

International Affairs scholar specializing in Climate Adaptation and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) governance in the Global South. Research spans water security, gender equity, environmental governance, and the emerging implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure for water resources in the Global South. Current research in climate adaptation, AI, water governance, and gender equity.

Professional Experience

Data Governance & Regulatory Compliance

Johns Hopkins Health Systems

Evidence/Data → Outcomes

- *Regulatory Compliance & Policy Integration: Enforces federal regulatory mandates and institutional data governance policies across enterprise research systems to ensure data integrity and organizational compliance.*
- *Data Governance & Quality Assurance: Executes systematic data audits and cross-platform database reconciliations between internal research registries and external verification data systems to guarantee reporting fidelity.*
- *Operational Translation & Research Outcomes: Analyzes the execution of data policies within research workflows, translating statutory compliance requirements into standardized data protocols and measurable reporting outcomes*

Education

Doctor of International Affairs

(2025) Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)

Master of International Public Policy

(2020) Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)

Certificate in International Development / International Relations

(2015) Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)

Master of Arts in Government/ Legal Studies

(2010) Johns Hopkins University, Zanvyl Krieger School of Arts and Sciences

VISITING LECTURES & INVITED ACADEMIC SEMINARS

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Kumasi, Ghana | 2026 | Visiting Lecturer

Gender Equity and Climate Adaptation in Ghana's Water Governance

Examined the divide between rhetorical commitments to gender equity and their material implementation within Ghana's WASH governance frameworks, with emphasis on policy performance, institutional accountability, and the structural conditions shaping women's participation in water governance.

University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies Accra, Ghana | 2026 | Invited Seminar

Gender Equity and Climate Adaptation in Ghana's Water Governance

Examined the relationship among gender equity, climate adaptation, and water governance, interrogating how policy commitments to inclusion translate into institutional practice and material outcomes within Ghana's WASH sector.

University of Pennsylvania, The Water Center at Penn Department of Earth & Environmental Science | 2025 | Visiting Lecturer

Period Poverty and the Politics of Access in Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Frameworks. Interrogated the symbolic absence of menstruating bodies within WASH policy architecture, offering a decolonial critique of development language and examining the structural invisibility of period poverty within global water-governance discourse.

Johns Hopkins University, Zanvyl Krieger School of Arts and Sciences 2018 | Visiting Lecturer

Fundamentals of Nonprofits and Nonprofit Management

Delivered an invited lecture addressing foundational principles of nonprofit organizations and nonprofit management.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Virtual Presentation | 2025 |

How to Identify Performative Water Governance and the Illusion of Policy

Examined approaches for identifying the disjuncture between institutional policy language and material implementation in water governance.

Georgetown University — Democracy & Governance Student Research Symposium Washington, DC | 2024 | Presenter

Adaptive vs. Authoritative Water Governance Approaches: A Comparative Analysis of Water Management in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Rwanda, Ghana, Botswana, and China's Water Infrastructure Investments.



UNITED NATIONS & GLOBAL POLICY ENGAGEMENTS

United Nations Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-NCA)

Washington, DC | 2011 |

Water—Oil of the 21st Century

Presented on the emerging strategic significance of water scarcity and water security within international affairs

United Nations Water Conference

| 2024 | Speaker

Water Insecurity, Period Poverty and Transactional Sex

Presented within Water Security and Vulnerability in a Changing Climate: Challenges, Opportunities, and Solutions, examining the intersection of water insecurity, gendered vulnerability, period poverty, and transactional sex.

York University, Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research / UN Global Water Academy High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

| 2023 | Panelist

Humanitarian Responses to Emerging Water Crises as a Result of Extreme Climatic Events Contributed to interdisciplinary discussion on humanitarian responses to water insecurity arising from extreme climatic events and the implications for vulnerable populations.

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

| 2023 |

Water Insecurity, Gender Equity, Climate Adaptation, and Emerging Challenges within Global Water Governance.

Gender, Sexuality, and the Law (ALAS) / Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law / American University Washington College of Law Centre for Human Rights Mexico City, Mexico | 2018 |

Women, Gender and Equality in the Sokabisi Village: Moving Towards Gender Equality Presented scholarship examining gender, equality, and the structural conditions shaping women's experiences within the Sokabisi Village context.

Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) | 2011 | USAID/Maternal and Child Integrated Program. Commemorating 30 Years of HIV/AIDS.

FIELD RESERACH

GHANA | 2017–Present

Field Researcher – Water Governance, Gender Equity, Period Poverty & WASH

Central Region · Greater Accra Region · Cape Coast

- *Policy-focused research on WASH governance, gender equity, climate adaptation, and the divide between formal policy commitments and material implementation in Ghana.*
- *Gendered water security, including women's participation in water governance, informal water labor, sanitation access, and the disproportionate effects of inadequate WASH infrastructure on women and girls.*
- *Period poverty and menstrual health access among girls in underserved communities, with emphasis on sanitation infrastructure, menstrual hygiene resources, education, and gendered barriers to WASH access.*
- *Community water infrastructure and water-security interventions, including borehole drilling and initiatives expanding access to safe water in underserved communities.*
- *Field-based foundation for doctoral research on performative water governance, institutional accountability, and the structural limitations of gender-equity policy within Ghana's WASH sector.*

HAITI | 2012–2017

Post-Earthquake Cholera Epidemiology, Waterborne Disease & WASH

Mirebalais, Haiti and Port-au-Prince

- *Field-based WASH and epidemiological research on cholera following Haiti's 2010 earthquake, with focus on waterborne disease transmission and community vulnerability in remote communities.*
- *Cholera transmission within the context of damaged and inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure, unsafe drinking-water sources, and limited household sanitation.*
- *Epidemiological dimensions of water insecurity, including pathways of exposure, household vulnerability, sanitation conditions, hygiene practices, and prevention of waterborne disease.*
- *Household water security and disease prevention through access to water-filtration systems for families in communities with limited access to safe drinking water.*
- *Public-health and hygiene education for women and children centered on safe water practices, sanitation, hygiene, and cholera prevention.*
- *Post-disaster WASH infrastructure as a determinant of population health, connecting water and sanitation deficiencies with disease transmission, community resilience, and longer-term public-health vulnerability.*

BOLIVIA | 2012

Public Health Outcomes in Rural Bolivia

Cochabamba, Bolivia

- *Policy-focused research on water privatization and its implications for equitable access to water and sanitation in rural and underserved communities.*
- *Gender dimensions of water privatization, including the disproportionate household and caregiving burdens associated with inadequate, unaffordable, or unreliable water access.*
- *WASH governance and public-health outcomes within the broader political economy of water access, affordability, infrastructure, and resource distribution.*
- *Community-level implications of privatized water systems for water security, sanitation access, reproductive health, and socioeconomic vulnerability.*
- *Water as both a public-health necessity and a contested resource shaped by governance, market structures, gender, and inequalities in access.*

PUBLICATIONS AND ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

DOCTORAL THESIS

Paper Tigers: Deconstruction and Semiotics of Gender Equity as Signifier in Performative Water Governance Policies—A Case Study in Ghana. 2025.

Doctoral thesis, Johns Hopkins University SAIS. Develops a semiotic and deconstructive framework for examining how gender-equity language can perform institutional inclusion while leaving structures of authority unchanged.

Performative Democracy and Gender Equity in Ghana. Is Gender Equity Staged? 2025. *African Arguments. Examines how democratic institutions can symbolically perform gender inclusion while substantive redistribution, accountability, and political power remain constrained.*

Revolution without Reform: The Semiotics of Sovereignty in Burkina Faso. African Arguments. 2025. *Analyzes how revolutionary language, imagery, and political symbolism can be appropriated by governing institutions to construct legitimacy without corresponding structural reform.*



Justice at the Crossroads: Addressing Water Scarcity and Transactional Sex in Ghana's Remote Villages. Water insecurity, Period poverty, and Transactional sex in Underserved Ghanaian Communities. 2024. The International Journal for Water Equity and Justice (IJWEJ), University of Pennsylvania.

The Hidden A -Gender: Artificial Intelligence and Women's Informal Water Labor in the Global South. 2026. Examines the emerging intersection of AI infrastructure, water demand, gendered labor, and water justice across the Global South.

Simple Semiotics: A Visual Guide to Signs, Meaning, and Interpretation. 2026. An accessible introduction to semiotic analysis and the interpretation of signs, symbols, language, and meaning.

Liquid for Life – Water Privatization in Sub-Saharan Africa. Master's thesis. 2008. Early scholarship on the political economy of water privatization in Sub-Saharan Africa, addressing water as a public resource and the governance implications of privatized access.

GLOBAL POLICY & CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Global Water Promise – Founder & CEO | 2018–Present

International WASH and water-security organization advancing equitable access to safe water, sanitation, and menstrual health resources in underserved communities.

United Nations General Assembly – Delegate | 2018, 2023

Global development, water security, gender equity, and sustainable development priorities.

World Bank Civil Society Policy Forum – CSO /Parliamentarian | 2011–Present

Society and policy dialogue and community perspectives within international development policy.

Gender Equality and Human Rights in Climate Action and Renewable Energy at United Nations - Certificate 2026

Peace Operations Training Institute Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Asia and the Pacific - Certificate -2015

United Nations Peace Operations Training Institute Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa - Certificate -2015