



# Youth Declaration on Water, Megacities and Global Change

## Preamble

So far until this day, we, the Youth, have witnessed and lived the consequences of a fast-changing environment due to the growing population and metropolises as well as rapid globalization. These fast-changing realities have brought into attention the effects of climate change and the complex duty of solving issues concerning water security and natural risks around the globe that concerns everybody.

We, the young peoples, believe that there is an urgent call for international cooperation in order to create a dialogue on water, especially in megacities which by 2030 will be home to over a billion people. Today we stress that actions must be taken towards adaptation and mitigation, and prevent the sequels of global change. This needs to be done through the inclusion of every diverse stakeholder linked to water management ranging from the most vulnerable populations suffering environmental injustices to decision-makers, services providers, governance leaders, community-based organizations, among other actors who have the power to be the change.

Youth, as a rising generation, acknowledge that collective work and mind shift towards sustainability is needed, a change of paradigm in the water management dialogue and its implementation. We are convinced that we are change agents but we call upon older generations to open the way for a different future, a sustainable reality for the upcoming generations.

We, the Youth, as a united group, envision a sustainable, secure, fair, equitable, and egalitarian world where gender, ethnicity, age, among other social, political, and economic factors are not an obstacle to achieving fulfillment as beings that make up a socio-ecosystem where environmental conditions such as access to water or natural phenomena are not limiting factors to achieve this.

Together, as young people, we affirm that water issues need to be seen from a systemic point of view and with the understanding of systems-level changes. It is critical to achieving the interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), debunking the traditional concept of the "water sector" as merely referring to utilities. The unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 has also emphasized the vital importance of water, sanitation, and hygiene services globally.

The younger generation rightly must be part of the decision-making and policy processes since we and the upcoming generations will be facing the consequences of the decisions taken today. The involvement of young people must be meaningful with their participation in problem analysis, planning, investment and implementation decisions.

We believe that addressing global environmental problems starts with awareness. We, as young people, are aware of the issues that affect our megacities and that are capable of catalyzing systems-level changes.



In order to change our reality and the future, the viewpoint of Youth as well as of other demographics such as women, elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, indigenous peoples, and any other minorities or vulnerable groups should be acknowledged, respected, and included when considering problems and solutions. Advocacy for resolving water and climate issues must involve all parts of the society, including the public and private sector, media, and civil society.

Governance systems and policy frameworks differ greatly between the cities but these differences should not hinder meaningful youth engagement. There must be more financial opportunities available for young people to take action while also considering their word and facilitating their involvement in the governance framework. And, provide capacity-building services and learning opportunities for young people in order for them to have more skills and knowledge in water management.

As Youth representatives, we have worked alongside youth organizations to address the challenges that are faced in megacities immersed in different contexts and that face a diversity of issues concerning water and climate. We have covered general and specific issues for youth to give an outline of how these upcoming realities can change.

## Challenges

### A. We recognize diverse water and climate issues in megacities such as

- Mentioned by UNICEF, worldwide, 2.2 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water which affects the quality of life.
- 1 in 4 people in the global population does not have access to safe sanitation and thus, elevating the risk of water-borne as well as vector-borne diseases.
- Many of the proposed and implemented solutions are short-term with no regard to the local ecology, geography, or the social and political economy of the region. Due to a lack of strong institutional structures, systemic and integrated thinking in policy and planning, and the discipline's actors included.
- Though there are many lessons learned from the issues of water insecurity, technology, and knowledge transfer remains limited.
- Most of the solutions are hard and technology-centric with little or no regard for long-term operations, maintenance, management needs, and socio-cultural preferences.
- Within the households, women are mostly the main persons responsible for all aspects of water - collection, storage, and rationing for use. However, there are low numbers of women in the water sector, especially in water science, technology, and policy-making.
- Global convening on water issues often has limited accessibility due to linguistic barriers, attendance costs, and lack of information sharing and selective invitations.
- In the face of increasing water crises issues of political stability among nation-states in a region leads to conflicts regarding availability and control over resources
- Planning for the development of water and sanitation services in megacities does not take migration and informal settlements into consideration.



- The imbalance between available water and recovered water in the basins of megacities has caused water stress in such basins and even in basins from other regions that serve as a source of supply.
- The need for a shift concerning water management, going from a technical and “using the last drop” point of view into thinking that we are part of a socio-ecosystem and water fulfills not only human needs but also the ones related to other species and dynamics that take place in an ecosystem.

**B. We also stress the role of youth since:**

- There is a lack of space for us to participate, such as in megacities, where there are few or no mechanisms for youth to voice their concerns related to water issues like access to information, data, training programs, and job opportunities in research and practice.
- Outcomes of consulting youth and other members of civil society are often not incorporated meaningfully into the policies and other programs and projects.
- Global conventions and conferences on issues of cities, water, and climate crises often do not involve young people as both speakers and participants.
- There are insufficient professional development schemes and knowledge exchange platforms for young water specialists.
- Young people face barriers in presenting their research and exchanging ideas with senior professionals.
- Young people are unable to access financing to develop their research, prototypes, projects, and strategies.
- There is limited information and availability of high-quality courses to educate young people to enter the water sector. And, there are few openings and opportunities in the sector for young water professionals.
- Young water researchers and practitioners with innovative ideas for applicable technical solutions to solve the local problems cannot find support in terms of and implementation pathways.
- The potential abilities that may contribute to solve water issues such as, communication, digitalization, and knowledge exchange between professionals at the early career, have been underestimated by current decision makers in several regions of the globe.

## Call for action

**A. We therefore call on governments, stakeholders and the world to attend management of water and climate issues in megacities, such as:**

- Acknowledging the importance of water issues as the first step towards working on solutions. National governments and local authorities must recognize and ensure, especially in megacities, the right to access safe and reliable water, sanitation, and hygiene for all.



- Local authorities need to prioritize ensuring sanitation and deployment of sewage treatment technologies. Support should be provided to initiatives that develop innovative non-grid and decentralized sanitation solutions.
- A holistic approach should be undertaken to address issues related to water and megacities. We need to understand the interlinkages between water, culture, climate change, and livelihoods. And, promote research and knowledge about these subjects.
- The potential of international associations and networks should be leveraged to share knowledge and best practices between cities and countries all around the world.
- We need an integration of alternatives and solutions designed by an inclusive and consultative process of governance and polycentric governance, where cities interact with regions, basin-level federations, nation-states, local governments, and communities.
- Governments need to implement programs and policies promoting the inclusion of gender, youth, and other under-represented groups in decision-making, research, management, and technical positions in the water sector.
- International conferences should have simultaneous interpretation available in several languages to increase their audience and provide subsidized attendance fees for researchers and professionals from vulnerable communities.
- The national governments should be cognizant of the issues at a regional level and work towards creating better systems at transboundary levels.
- A long term planning which is more dynamic and adaptive in nature is needed for the development of suitable water and sanitation utilities to reach the agenda of water and sanitation involved in SDG 6 and leaving no one behind.
- Creating and implementing strategies and master plans to reach a balance between available water and recovered water in the basins of megacities and affected regions that serve as a source of supply.

**B. We pledge to commit to a Youth engagement, Reiterating the importance of recognizing the knowledge and interdisciplinary understandings that youth provides. For this**

- Youth should have better channels to voice their concerns and suggestions to the decision makers in regard to their needs in megacities. Such as establishing youth environment parliaments or youth advisory councils at the city level that are linked to decision-making.
- Accountability measures should be incorporated in the policy design process to ensure effective implementation of consultations outcomes in the final policy formulation.
- Global conventions and conferences need to include young professionals and youth organizations in all aspects of these events to promote intergenerational dialogue, especially as speakers and moderators, while considering funding and exposure for youth participation.
- Policies need to be made to improve the availability of both short training, degree programs, seminars, webinars, and mentorship to prepare future generations for tackling the most pressing needs ahead.



- There is a need for youth research groups and water networks, where Youth can form links and senior researchers and practitioners in order to reduce the generation gap regarding water management and its diverse sectors.
- National and local governments need to provide funding for youth initiatives in order to meaningfully contribute to solving the future challenges of megacities.
- Water issues should be incorporated in educational curricula to improve the understanding of the water issues among Youth and encourage them to enter the sector and be conscious about the different realities concerning this subject while sharing their own experience.
- Local governments should convene youth for the community- or city-level challenges and support the outcomes of these sessions to ensure the development and implementation of locally-tuned, and community-specific solutions.
- The role of the Youth in the wise use of water should be formalized through local mechanisms of participation that involve them to find solutions to the water issues, as well as we (as youth) gain responsibilities and experience.

**Signatories:**



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