

ONLINE PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT 2020

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 2021

WATER, MEGACITIES AND GLOBAL CHANGE

YOUTH DECLARATION

7 TO 11 DECEMBER 2020



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Service public de l'assainissement francilien



Replay sessions, full papers and presentations available : <https://en.unesco.org/events/eaumega2021/preconference>

Preamble

We, the Youth Steering Committee of EauMega2021, are young people working on water from across the world. The members of the YSC along with 29 youth organizations and networks working on the issues of water, megacities, and climate crisis got together to discuss the water challenges related to megacities and global change. Each one brought their own knowledge and experiences to share in the firm belief that the youth can be the drivers addressing such challenges in the world.

This declaration reflects our views which was also highlighted and discussed during pre-conference event Youth Online Panel on December 7, 2020, for the EauMega 2021 Conference. This document presents ideas, experiences, and suggestions for actions.

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 inter-linked SDGs and debunking the traditional concept of the "water sector" as merely referring to utilities. The unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 has emphasized the vital importance of water, sanitation, and hygiene services for everyone, everywhere.

The current young generation will bear the brunt of future problems if not already in our megacities so young people need to be a part of decision-making, policy-making and analysis, investment planning and implementation of decisions that will determine the future world. Young people are aware of the issues that affect their megacities and we believe are capable of catalyzing systems-level change. Hence, the viewpoint of young people as well as of other demographics such as women, elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, and indigenous peoples 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.

This document consists of the challenges faced by megacities in the context of water and climate issues identified by the consulted youth organizations. The first part covers challenges regarding the water and climate issues in megacities and challenges regarding meaningful youth engagement. This is followed by solutions for the challenges identified proposed by the youth organizations in a similar order. Solutions are matched one-to-one to the challenges.

Challenges

A. Water and climate issues in megacities

1. In some megacities, the right to access to water, including safe and reliable water supply, sanitation, and hygiene, is still not recognized and/or not implemented, and thus communities struggle to acquire a basic amount of water which affects their quality of life.
2. In many places, communities do not have access to the sewage treatment network thus, elevating the risk of water-borne as well as vector-borne diseases.
3. Many of the proposed and implemented solutions are short-term with no regard to the local ecology, geography, the social and political economy of the region. This is because of a lack of strong institutional structures, systemic, integrated thinking in policy and planning not only between the disciplines but also the various actors.
4. The problems across the world are comparable but often there is no transfer of technology and knowledge from the countries who have solved them to those who are encountering the problems.
5. Most of the solutions are hard and technology-centric.
6. 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.
7. Global convenings on water issues often have limited accessibility due to linguistic barriers, attendance costs, and lack of information sharing.
8. 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.
9. Planning for the development of water and sanitation services in megacities does not take migration into consideration.
10. 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.

B. The role of youth

1. There is a lack of space. In megacities, there are few or no mechanisms for youth to voice their concerns related to issues like access to information, data, training programs, and job opportunities in research and practice.
2. Outcomes of consulting youth and other members of civil society are often not incorporated meaningfully into the policies and other programs.
3. Global conventions and conferences on issues of cities, water, and climate crises often do not involve young people as both speakers and participants.

Challenges

4. There are insufficient professional development schemes and knowledge exchange platforms for young water specialists.
5. Young people face barriers in presenting their research and exchanging ideas with senior professionals.
6. Young people are unable to access financing to develop their research and prototypes.
7. There are few young people who express their interest to be a part of the water sector and/or study water.
8. Young water researchers with innovative ideas for applicable technical solutions to solve the local problems cannot find support in terms of implementation pathways.
9. 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.

Visions

We envision a day when the availability of clean and safe drinking water is no longer a challenge. When the basic human right of access to water will be guaranteed to every person on the planet: when everyone will have access to a sufficient and affordable supply of water to meet their needs; when women and children no longer have to spend their precious time each day to collect water that may not even be clean; and where sustainable consumption of water resources is a practice adopted by governments, industries, and individuals alike.

We envision a future where society can develop and co-exist sustainably with nature. Where the need for water from both people and the planet can be met sustainably and efficiently; where decisions about human development will strive to minimize their environmental impact; where cities will no longer remain contributors to water pollution: and where natural disasters can be managed effectively and securely.

Solutions

A. Management of water and climate issues in megacities

1. Acknowledging the importance of water issues is the first step towards working on solutions. National governments and local authorities must recognize and implement in megacities the right to access to safe and reliable water, sanitation and hygiene for all.
2. Local authorities need to prioritize ensuring sanitation and deployment of sewage treatment technologies. Support should be provided to initiatives which develop off-grid sewage networks and independent underground sewage tanks.
3. A holistic approach should be undertaken to address issues related to water and megacities. We need to understand the interlinkages between water, climate change and livelihoods.
4. The potential of international associations and networks should be leveraged to share knowledge and best practices between cities and countries all around the world. Most of the solutions are hard and technology-centric.
5. We need an integration of hard and solutions. This can be designed through inclusive consultative processes of governance and polycentric governance, where cities interact with regions, basin-level federations, and nation-states.
6. Governments need to implement programs and policies promoting gender inclusion in decision-making, research, management and technical positions in the water sector.
7. International conferences should have simultaneous interpretation available in several languages to increase their audience share and provide subsidized attendance fees for researchers and professionals from vulnerable communities.
8. The national governments should be cognizant of the issues at a regional level and work towards creating better systems at transboundary levels.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Solutions

B. Youth engagement - Reiterating the importance of acknowledging the knowledge and interdisciplinary understandings that the youths provide

1. Youth should have better channels to voice their concerns and suggestions to the decision makers in regard to their needs in megacities. A possible avenue and suggestion could be the establishing youth environment parliaments or youth councils at the city level.
2. Accountability measures should be incorporated in the policy design process to ensure effective implementation of consultations outcomes in the final policy formulation.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. There is a need for youth research groups, where youth can form research networks and mixed research groups with senior researchers.
6. National and local governments need to provide funding for youth initiatives in order to meaningfully contribute to solving the future challenges of megacities.
7. Water issues should be incorporated in educational curricular to improve the understanding of the water issues among youth and encourage them to enter the sector.
8. Local governments should convene youth for community- or city-level challenges and support the outcomes of these sessions to ensure development and implementation of locally-tuned and community-specific solutions.
9. 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: (alphabetically)

- i. Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Mansoura University
- ii. EauMega 2021 Youth Steering Committee
- iii. European Junior Water Programme
- iv. Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad
- v. WASH Africa
- vi. Jalashay Integrated Water Solutions
- vii. Nigeria National Chapter of World Youth Parliament for Water
- viii. Northeast Development Agency (NEDA)
- ix. South African Young Water Professionals
- x. Swiss Water Partnership Youth
- xi. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Youth
- xii. Water Science Policy
- xiii. Water Youth Network
- xiv. Xylem Inc.
- xv. Young Water Professionals Mexico and LAC
- xvi. Young Water Professionals Poland