



## GWP Youth Engagement Strategy

# About Global Water Partnership

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) vision is for a water secure world.

Our mission is to advance governance and management of water resources for sustainable and equitable development.

GWP is an international network that was created in 1996 to foster the implementation of integrated water resources management: the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources in order to maximise economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of ecosystems and the environment.

The Network is open to all organisations that recognise the principles of integrated water resources management endorsed by the Network. It includes states, government institutions (national, regional, and local), intergovernmental organisations, international and national non-governmental organisations, academic and research institutions, private sector companies, and service providers in the public sector.

The Network has 13 Regional Water Partnerships, 85 Country Water Partnerships, and over 3,000 Partners located in 178 countries.

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## Foreword

Today we have the largest number of young people the world has ever known and the majority of them live in our partner countries of the South. 'Youth are our future' is a commonly used phrase. But in the past the needs and interests of young people were not well understood. Public policy mainly focused on concerns for the lives of vulnerable street children in cities and the millions of young people who live in rural poverty. This constrained the development of suitable policies and services to focus on the specific needs of the young generation in the broader context of sustainable development.

This attitude is now changing thanks to the actions of the UN General Assembly in 2009 and the Action Plan for Youth which is one of the top priorities in the UN Secretary General's five-year action programme. The challenge now is to recognise the qualities of youth, the contribution they already make to life in the cities and the countryside, and to facilitate the 'inter-generational exchange that lies at the heart of sustainable development'.

This youth strategy is GWP's contribution to this process. It complements our gender strategy, and together they both support our main strategy *Towards 2020: A Water Secure World*. The youth strategy draws attention to the important development challenges that young people will inherit, and the importance of engaging youth in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable economic development as the demand for natural resources, and particularly water, increases. It provides a framework to guide our organisation and Network in engaging with young people, youth organisations, and young water professionals, and to empower them to become agents of change. It supports both youth participation in traditional water programmes and processes, and youth-led approaches for advancing water security.

We are grateful to the young people who developed this strategy in consultation with youth-led organisations and who are bringing fresh perspectives and energy to water security. And for the many contributions from our Network Partners and international organisations, including the African Ministers' Council on Water and the Asian Development Bank who are actively developing youth strategies.

I am pleased that GWP has adopted youth as a cross-cutting strategic issue and has developed this strategy to put this commitment into practice.



**Dr Ursula Schaefer-Preuss**  
Chair of Global Water Partnership

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Youth empowerment: Why it matters

There are more young people in the world than ever before. In 2012, the UN estimated that children and youth account for 43 percent of the world's population. Some 17 percent are young people between 15 and 24 years old and 87 percent live in developing countries<sup>1</sup>. Asia is home to 738 million young people – 61 percent of the world's youth. Globally, 500 million young people live on less than US\$2 a day and over 74 million are unemployed<sup>2</sup>. They face barriers to full participation in society, particularly young women and those in marginalised groups. Thus, empowering this largely untapped potential is important.

Young people can and do play an important role in transforming societies. They bring youthful energy to the table, and possess unique potential for connecting with their peers – the citizens of tomorrow. Involving youth in community development and in addressing their own particular needs can create a deeper and active sense of ownership, contribute to sustaining interventions, build trust and social capital in the community, and become effective drivers for change<sup>3</sup>. Today's youth are more geographically mobile and technologically connected than any previous generation. Empowering and engaging with them as equal partners in development can fundamentally shape our societies for the better.

In 2009, the UN General Assembly acknowledged the important role of youth-led organisations in “supporting young people's civic engagement, capacity-building and providing non-formal education”, and called on member

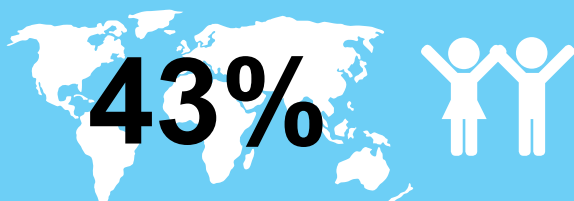
**GWP Caribbean** actively supports and collaborates with the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN) to facilitate intergenerational dialogue on water resources management and climate change.

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states to financially and technically support such initiatives. Action on youth was one of the top priorities in the UN Secretary-General's five-year Action Agenda to: “Address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes”. In 2012, this led to the UN System-wide Action Plan for Youth (Youth-SWAP). A survey for Youth-SWAP in 186 countries highlighted that young people lacked trust in government institutions and political parties and this hinders civic engagement and youth involvement in decision-making. This suggests a need for platforms at all levels to enhance coordination, promote, and scale up successful youth interventions with possibilities for exchange and support with other organisations and institutions.

### 1.2 The role of youth in sustainable development and water

The important contribution that young people make towards sustainable development was acknowledged by the world's leaders at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. Young people will inherit the development challenges we face and their consumption patterns will be a key driver for successful sustainable development in the long term. Enhancing the role that young people play and actively involving them in protecting the environment and promoting economic and social development will be essential to drive our societies towards sustainable development.



**43%**  
of the world's population are children and youth

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013) *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, ESA/PWP.228. UNDESA, New York.  
<sup>2</sup> United Nations Population Fund (2015) *Youth Participation & Leadership*. <http://www.unfpa.org/youth-participation-leadership>  
<sup>3</sup> United Nations Programme on Youth, 2011.



Water is at the heart of sustainable development and economic growth. It connects us all. Understanding those connections, working together, and involving stakeholders in planning, policy-making, and negotiating socially acceptable trade-offs, will help us all to find equitable ways to share limited water resources among many competing demands. This was the message from the global water community at the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin, Ireland, in January 1992. In light of the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Agenda, the emphasis on jointly creating the ‘World We Want’, and the huge impact of the youth demographic, it is timely for young people to play a more important role in achieving universal access and sustainable use and governance of water resources. Young people are the water users of the future. Educating and engaging them in water issues offers opportunities to share information widely with family and peers, and provides a unique space for cultural change in water management practices within society.

In 2016, the World Water Development Report will highlight the need to build the water workforce for the future as it explores the theme of ‘Water and Jobs’. This is an important space for young people. It is also timely for GWP to engage with this initiative and to help build the global water workforce – lead water professionals, managers, practitioners, technicians, and artisans.

### 1.3 A role for GWP in youth engagement and empowerment

GWP’s vision for a water secure world is one in which there is enough water to support social development, sustainable and inclusive growth, and ecosystems. Realising this vision must include future generations. Developing capacity for transformative change in water

policy and practice inherently involves reaching a broad range of stakeholders who will influence change both now and in the future. Building an awareness of water management in the next generation of leaders is thus at the core of our strategy.

GWP has always engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders both within and outside the water community. Some youth-led partnerships and young leaders are already part of our growing Network, and our Regional and Country Water Partnerships are working to engage in initiatives which target young men and women. But much more needs to be done. We intend to substantially increase and deepen our involvement with youth organisations as our youth strategy gains momentum.

We formalised this commitment in June 2012, during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) by pledging to: “Contribute to addressing the inter-generational dimension for long-term sustainability by developing strategies and tools to engage young women, men and children at different levels: international, regional and country”.

We recently reiterated this commitment as part of our 2014–2019 strategy *Towards 2020: A Water Secure World*. Youth engagement is one of our strategic cross-cutting issues, and we elaborated our commitment to include the voices of young people through our Regional and Country Water Partnerships, to coordinate communications and capacity-building activities that target young people as agents of change, and to develop strategies to enhance youth engagement and involvement across the water sector.



### 1.4 GWP Youth Engagement Strategy objective

The objective of the GWP Youth Engagement Strategy is to provide an overarching framework to guide GWP and its Network in engaging with young people, youth organisations, and young water professionals and to empower them to become agents of change.



### 1.5 Our approach: By youth, with youth, for youth

This youth strategy was developed by young people in consultation with youth-led organisations; our Regional and Country Water Partnerships; and in consultations across the regions with government departments and civil society organisations. Consultations included international organisations that are actively developing youth strategies, such as the African Ministers’ Council on Water and the Asian Development Bank. It combines the voices of young people from rural and urban areas; from the developed and developing countries; and young water professionals, academics, and advocates.

It incorporates our core values of inclusiveness, openness, transparency, accountability, respect, gender sensitivity, and solidarity. These values underpin and promote a meaningful dialogue among people of different backgrounds, and strengthen our credibility. Solidarity is at the heart of our development endeavours and is essential to our commitment to the poor and disadvantaged.

Our Regional and Country Water Partnerships are tasked with including the voice of young people in their governance structures, coordinating communications and activities that target young people, and developing youth action plans.

GWP Mediterranean partners with the Mediterranean Education Initiative for Environment and Sustainability ([www.medies.net](http://www.medies.net)) to target youth and educators; producing educational materials, such as ‘Gift of Rain’, ‘Gift of Rain in the City’; and supporting activities within the Non-Conventional Water Resources Programme in Greece, Malta, and Cyprus.

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## 2

## Engaging and empowering youth: Key terms and concepts

### 2.1 Defining youth

GWP subscribes to the UN definition of youth as “young people between the ages of 15 and 24”. But we accept that the categories for youth engagement can vary across regions and nations, according to socio-cultural norms and economic realities. Thus, we will remain sensitive to these issues while acknowledging the UN definition of youth as a global benchmark.

We recognise the difficulties of agreeing a precise age category that adequately aligns with the lived experience of young people of varying ages and backgrounds. Youth



are far from being a homogeneous group – intragroup dynamics, gender, age, socio-economic status, and diversity are important when engaging with young people. This adds to the challenge of consistently identifying or categorising youth priorities. A programme targeting youth in mainstream schools may not appeal to university students or those living independently from their parents. Youth who have already entered the workforce, or who themselves have children, may have different needs, perspectives, and policy priorities from those who are pursuing their studies or professional training. Consequently age, education level, living status, and time within the workforce are often used as qualifiers for consultations and programming.

### 2.2 Young water professionals

‘Young professionals’ refers to recent graduates under the age of 35 who have some work experience. Many face significant barriers within the workplace and some have developed stand-alone professional societies to facilitate

mentorships and capacity building. Organisations such as the International Water Association have developed targeted membership levels and programming for young water professionals worldwide. Within our strategy, *Towards 2020: A Water Secure World*, we have specifically committed to engaging with young water professionals and entrepreneurs.

### 2.3 Youth participation and youth-led approaches

GWP will support youth participation both in traditional water programmes and processes and in youth-led approaches for advancing water security.

GWP recognises the important distinction between enhancing youth participation and inclusion in traditional programmes and policies and in those which are specific to young people. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement defines youth-led approaches as “programmes, projects, and activities run with and by youth and that are particularly aimed at meeting those needs of communities, which were identified by young people themselves”<sup>4</sup>. These support youth ‘where they are at’ within their own processes, initiatives, forums, and approaches.



<sup>4</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2013) *IFRC Youth Engagement Strategy*. [http://www.rcrcmeetings.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/IFRC-YES\\_DRAFT\\_EN\\_72.pdf](http://www.rcrcmeetings.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/IFRC-YES_DRAFT_EN_72.pdf)

GWP defines youth participation as informing, consulting, and actively engaging youth at all levels in decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of water-related policies, programmes, and projects. Engaging with youth requires three interrelated pillars:

### Education

Education can raise awareness and build understanding of global water challenges among young people and can inspire them to get involved. They will need knowledge to understand the state of water resources and to stimulate behavioural change towards a new 'water culture', appropriate and targeted educational materials, broad-based awareness programmes, targeted mentoring, internships, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

### Communication

Communication enables young people and young professionals to access quality, evidence-based information and provides the platforms for them to engage with experienced professionals to gain insights and share experiences and perspectives.

### Innovation

New and innovative ideas can significantly contribute to resolving global water challenges. Supporting youth

entrepreneurship and student research programmes will help to stimulate such initiatives.

## 2.4 Engaging young men and women

The GWP Gender Strategy refers to engaging with young men and women. Issues of gender begin early in life and so it is important to specifically target youth engagement efforts by gender, such as targeted initiatives to empower girls.

**GWP South Asia** is working with 'youth brigades' in primary and secondary schools in rural communities to conduct education and awareness activities on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), water, and climate change.

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## 3

## Youth and the 2014–2019 GWP Strategy

Youth engagement is a cross-cutting process to achieve GWP's vision of a water secure world. The strategic objective for youth engagement is aligned within the broader GWP strategic objectives. Within this framework we aspire to actively contribute to creating an enabling environment that engages youth in water resources management activities, develops the capacity of youth as future leaders within the water sector, and enhances youth voices across our Network.

### 3.1 Youth and strategic goal 1: Catalyse change in policies and practice



**Enhancing youth participation in water resources management and water governance**

GWP focuses on advancing effective water governance based on comprehensive and mutually supportive policies, institutions, partnerships, processes, and information-sharing.

We will use our convening power to promote, enhance, and improve the participation of young people and youth organisations as valid civil society stakeholders in integrated water resources management planning, decision-making processes, implementation, and evaluation.

We will continue to work with regional bodies who are already developing youth strategies, such as the African Ministers' Council on Water and the Asian Development Bank, to facilitate youth engagement.

#### *Youth and thematic programming*

Our main strategy, *Towards 2020: A Water Secure World*, takes a thematic approach to water security and supports programme implementation in six key areas of

**GWP Hungary** is an organiser and scientific guarantor for the national Junior Water Prize which offers an opportunity to showcase youth innovation and achievement in addressing water issues.

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development: climate change, transboundary cooperation, food, urbanisation, energy, and ecosystems. Gender and youth are cross-cutting themes. Our support moves beyond planning and into practice.

We will embed youth engagement and intergenerational cooperation within these thematic programmes and put operational guidelines in place to facilitate youth engagement. This includes linkages with our gender strategy to strengthen the voice of young women and girls across youth processes in water governance.

### 3.2 Youth and strategic goal 2: Generate and communicate knowledge



**Developing youth capacity and social capital and fostering a dynamic communications culture that engages youth**

GWP generates and communicates knowledge to promote better understanding of water resources and the tools needed for sustainable development, and to stimulate behavioural change. Our knowledge chain enables our Partners at all levels to stay at the forefront of emerging challenges and new ideas. It connects the Regional and Country Water Partnerships, the Technical Committee, the global secretariat, strategic knowledge partners, and wider audiences so that knowledge flows in many directions: global to regional, across regions, and regional to global.

We will use our knowledge chain to provide knowledge for young professionals and to empower them to share their knowledge and experience with others.

**over 74 million**



**young people are unemployed**

*Developing youth capacity*

Our main strategy, *Towards 2020: A Water Secure World*, sets out an ambitious agenda to support training programmes and our strategic knowledge partners to develop capacity-building programmes, internships, and scholarship opportunities that will provide knowledge stepping-stones for young people and young water professionals.



We will continue to promote initiatives that specifically target and prepare youth and young students to address emerging challenges in the water sector. This includes piloting opportunities in formal education and technical training, and informal experience-building initiatives, such as internships and mentorship experiences, which connect young people with sustainable development issues.

*Communicating with and for youth: Knowledge products and social media*

Our communication strategy is to speak to a wide range of audiences who influence water management outcomes. In particular we reach out to future decision-makers by providing water knowledge products that can be adapted for use in schools and disseminated through teacher networks.

We will embed youth participation in our communication strategy and promote successful youth interventions in water resources management on our website and through other communication tools. Young water researchers will be encouraged to contribute their work using our knowledge chain.

Access to social media globally is growing rapidly and offers new opportunities for GWP to engage directly with stakeholders, and particularly with young people. We will seek ways of exploiting this to communicate directly with youth.

**3.3 Youth and strategic goal 3: Strengthen partnerships**



**Strengthening engagement of youth organisations within GWP's Network and their ability to enhance learning and catalyse change**

Partnerships underpin our work at all levels, and 'champions' within our Regional and Country Partnerships play important roles as agents of change in policies, institutions, and practice. GWP unites a wide range of Partner organisations that share the aims and values of tackling sustainable development, management, and use of water resources. Partners share information and experiences freely, and draw on each other for advice and assistance.

We will fully integrate youth participation within our own organisation and governance structure and will seek to enhance youth participation across our global Network. We will promote youth participation within our existing Partner organisations and through empowering youth-led organisations within the GWP Network of Partners.

We will seek to enhance the quantity and quality of our partnerships with young people and youth organisations by promoting partnerships with local and national youth-led organisations, youth committees, and networks to raise their awareness of water security and to reinforce their organisational capacities for effective action. Our Regional and Country Water Partnerships will be at the centre of youth participation and engagement and will reach out to groups of young water professionals to facilitate intergenerational cooperation and knowledge exchange.

We will also formalise our partnerships with leading youth water organisations, such as the World Youth Parliament for Water, the Water Youth Network, and the International Water Association Young Professionals Network. We will seek opportunities for innovative cross-regional collaboration and partnerships that will inspire and raise the profile of youth engagement in water security.

**500 million**

**young people live on less than US\$2 a day**

## 4 Delivering the youth strategy



GWP will actively reach out to young people and their organisations across our Network to collaborate in implementing our youth strategy. Its success will rely on efforts from our Regional Water Partnerships and Country Water Partnerships. They are tasked with including the voice of young people in their governance structures, coordinating communications and activities that target young people, and developing ‘Youth Action Plans’ and regional road maps to enhance youth participation at regional levels.

### 4.1 Monitoring and evaluation

GWP applies rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures that allow us to critically assess progress towards our goals. We have already begun to include relevant indicators within our monitoring and evaluation framework for youth participation (young men and women, boys and girls). We will enhance our monitoring and reporting framework to sharpen our ability to analyse and learn from our efforts to enhance youth participation.

### 4.2 Diversity and inclusion

GWP practises diversity and inclusion across our organisation with a particular focus on regional and gender balance within our staff and governance bodies. Moving forward, efforts will be made to create spaces for the voices of youth and young professionals including creating targeted youth roles, such as a global youth ambassador, and facilitating a system of youth focal points across the GWP Network. The GWP Technical Committee has begun to look at ways of enhancing the voice of young researchers through our technical publications.

### 4.3 Securing financial resources

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of our Network Partners who have volunteered their time to help achieve our vision and mission. We anticipate that enhancing youth engagement will not require major expenditure. Rather, it will require a new approach within our existing resource base. However, we do anticipate that in some areas, targeted support to enhance youth participation and engagement will be needed.

GWP will calculate the budgetary consequences of the proposed objectives and will seek to raise adequate financial resources to effectively engage youth across GWP operations and programmes.

**GWP West and Central Africa** are supporting national youth consultations in francophone countries on water, food security, and climate change that will form part of a white paper for presentation to decision-makers in the lead-up to COP21.

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