

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteurs: Kyle Rezek & José Castro

Date: 22-03-2023

Event Title: *Water for Health (Interactive dialogue)*

The first interactive dialogue of the United Nations Water Conference on the theme “Access to WASH, Including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation” gathered diverse representatives of international organizations in an open floor to share perspectives on the link between Health and Water as well as Human Rights. Key messages of the three-part dialogue, co-chaired by the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom, include the urgent need for increased financial and political investment in Water and Sanitation “ensuring accessibility and affordability to leave no one behind”, the challenges presented by the recent pandemic and negative global economic climate, as well as the highlighted need for active inclusion of diverse stakeholders such as women and the youth.

Though water is seen as a human right, in practice, it is not guaranteed with many countries lacking the ability to provide safe and clean drinking water to their populations. Mozambique’s population of 33 million is mostly dispersed with 62% living in rural areas and half having access to safe and clean water. In Colombia, 3.2 million people have no drinking water access, 1.5 million people open defecate, and the people also suffer from acute malnutrition with the Colombia delegate mentioning large-scale investment and technological capacity are required to face these issues.

Without clean water and proper sanitation, the health of the community is at risk. Each problem and initiative must be seen from a holistic health risk viewpoint consisting of microbiology, chemical, physical, or radioactive problems. In Senegal, one out of four healthcare facilities do not have basic water and sanitation services which jeopardizes providing safe healthcare to the community, but especially for maternal and child health services. Disease outbreaks, such as cholera or COVID, shift health priorities to limiting their infection though circumstances can occur that simultaneously improve water and sanitation services or decrease the services affecting disease spread. During the cholera epidemic in Togo, a system was established for building household latrines which helped accelerate their safely-managed sanitation services as well as raising public awareness. Since March 2022, Malawi has had one of its worst cholera outbreaks and was starting to contain the disease when a tropical cyclone struck in March 2023. The flooding caused loss of lives, displacement of people, and an overall increase of disease susceptibility due to additional lack of clean water and sanitation services increasing risk of waterborne disease transmission.

Short-term solutions are not sustainable for decision making on water since the decisions made today impact the future of water. **Long-term solutions should incorporate decisions as responsible stewards acting on the water resources to keep the complex ecological natural system intact.** Communities and their water sources have been poisoned by pollution and the need to recover the rivers and aquifers which provide drinking water is needed to move forward to ensure SDG 6 is met. Thailand is undergoing a 20-year municipal

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteurs: Kyle Rezek & José Castro

Date: 22-03-2023

Event Title: *Water for Health (Interactive dialogue)*

plan for improving river basin water quality with water and wastewater treatment to avoid continued environmental pollution. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Water and Sanitation, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, said to “Make peace with rivers” and to ensure that water is accessible to all as a common good under democratic governance. It is a human right, not a business opportunity, he added.

As Boluwatito Awe, President of the Nigerian Youth Parliament for Water highlights, the involvement of youth is critical for achieving sustainable water and sanitation systems.

“I'VE HEARD YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR COMMITMENTS AND NONE OF IT INVOLVES YOUTH ACTION.”

Awe remarks. With the world's population getting younger, youth have the potential to drive positive change in water and sanitation policies and practices. Engaging youth in the design, implementation, and monitoring of water and sanitation projects can lead to innovative solutions and a better understanding of the needs and preferences of young people. Involving youth also creates opportunities for capacity-building and skill development, empowering them to become advocates for water and sanitation issues in their communities. Ultimately, including youth in decision-making processes related to water and sanitation is essential for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 of ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all.

To make progress, there is a need to: step up, speed up, quadruple action, increase accountability, and involve people at all stages of the process. While moving forward, no one must be left behind especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized as well as including those who have been silenced such as women, youth, indigenous, and persons with disabilities. A multi-stakeholder approach is required to uphold water quality and work together on next steps as part of the 2030 Agenda. Engaging the private sector to form public private partnerships with diverse stakeholders is critical to close the WASH gap. Eva Muhia, Deputy President of Pan-African Association of Sanitation Actors, from Kenya suggested engaging the private sector by localizing the language and having mutual accountability and respect for each other. Laura Chinchilla, the former president of Costa Rica, said that to close the water gap there must be diverse stakeholders with clear commitments undertaken to accelerate the progress while also eliminating inequities and discrimination. Collaboration between stakeholders is necessary especially with a focus on the local level and the provincial governments. By measuring output in smaller units, such as by the provincial governments, there can be increased focus on individualized issues facing the areas rather than approaching generalized solutions on the federal level. When issues are additionally handled at the institutional level, coordination between the state and government is important to

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteurs: Kyle Rezek & José Castro

Date: 22-03-2023

Event Title: *Water for Health (Interactive dialogue)*

codify measures into laws for water, health, and sanitation. In Zimbabwe, water is a constitutional right and across the country borewells are being drilled in 35,000 villages and mega-dam construction projects are being undertaken in order to make this right a reality.

Water must be seen as a way to promote improving health, while simultaneously ensuring access and sustainability. That was the main message conveyed on the first day of the UN Water Conference. Without commitments and effective involvement of diverse stakeholders, however, this challenge will only remain and continue to be a burden for the coming generations.