

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteur: Cora LeMar

Date: 22-03-2023

Event Title: Water for Sustainable Development (interactive dialogue)

The climate crisis is a water crisis, and water is fundamental to life.

8 billion people – our current planetary population. The jump from 7 to 8 billion people occurred within the past 12 years, and the UN estimates we will reach 9 billion in 15 years¹. With rapid population growth, rapid urbanization has followed. With this growth comes a necessity for adequate water and sanitation facilities to meet demand and needs. However, growth is outpacing the water and sanitation services being implemented. Yet access to water and sanitation are pillars to a sustainable city and society. In an environment where water and sanitation goals were already not met, coping with this exponential growth and its far-reaching effects that branch out like tributary streams touching not only water and sanitation but the food, energy, and health systems we all rely on is a great challenge we face. This great challenge was discussed as part of the UN Session: Valuing Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic & Urban Development. In order to create efficient and sustainable urban systems, the following SDGs must be addressed:

- SDG 6.3.1 – Wastewater Treatment
- SDG 6.4.1 – Water Use Efficiency
- SDG 6.5.1 – Integrated Water Resources Management
- SDG 2 – Zero Hunger
- SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy

And the following SDGs tie into progress in these three categories:

- SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

As part of this UN session, it was mentioned by multiple nations that water use efficiency is low in the agriculture industry resulting in water stress. Irrigated land for agriculture makes up 40% of the global food supply². To date, agriculture accounts for 70% of all freshwater withdrawals globally. However, solutions have been (and will continue to be) implemented within various countries and regional contexts. Solar pumps are being used in Ethiopia and wind energy and green fertilizers for crops are used in Morocco.

The main takeaways from the current actions made by countries and proposed solutions include:

- Local and regionally based action is indispensable.
- Indigenous knowledge should be understood and implemented while respecting, listening, and valuing the depth of knowledge and experience generations of communities have when it comes to resource management.
- Water education is key and should be implemented from a young age.
- Inclusivity, collaboration, and knowledge sharing are essential to filling all gaps.
- Valuing water will allow us to understand the importance this resource has on our lives, livelihoods, and the ecosystems we are a part of.

Since all problems overlap, solutions can also overlap (i.e. solar water pumps for high yield crops and water efficient agriculture). However, I think a huge factor to consider that wasn't discussed is accountability. How

¹ UN. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/population>

² World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water-in-agriculture>

UN 2023 Water Conference Youth Rapporteurs

Rapporteur: Cora LeMar

Date: 22-03-2023

Event Title: *Water for Sustainable Development (interactive dialogue)*

do we hold ourselves and others to this? Unfortunately, I think that in present day society there are two factors that can cause great incentivization: money and social pressure. It's amazing what happens when you give people 10 cents for bringing their own bag to the grocery store versus charging them 25 cents if they forget to bring their reusable bags. Suddenly more people start to remember to bring their bags from home. The same could happen for countries or areas that are degrading and exploiting other countries' water supplies. And while this may not work in all scenarios, it can be implemented on a case-by-case basis for areas where it is possible and makes sense. Countries that have contributed more to the detriment of water supplies can be held accountable, and expected to help more in establishing long-term solutions. Societal pressure can come from countries encouraging and discouraging others from practices that are not in line with moving towards achieving the SGDs. Most people don't want to be the only person in the room who decided not to contribute to the goal. If we have measurable goals that are enforced and progress is measured consistently and frequently – what would achievements look like? Homework and group assignments along the way to reaching the SDG goals. All is more easily said than done; however, it was something I began to ponder during this session and throughout the sessions I attended at World Water Week back in August. This word, accountability, and how we react to it and address it in a water context.

One other thing I noticed and wondered about in the session – we speak of including the youth and indigenous nations at the table – and while that is happening, the question is to what extent? I am hoping these seats at the table can become more permanent. I am wondering if there is a potential to increase the current 193 states to include these nations? Is there a way to change the seat from being temporary to more long-term (similar to our solutions) so that conversations are continually had, worked on, and discussed? If that is happening and I just am unaware, then that is great news – and if not maybe some thought needs to go into how our present day organizations are operating and what needs to change as far as the status quo goes.

Until we decide to become wholistically interested in supporting each other in a way that focuses on what is best from a planetary and societal perspective we will continue reaching for goals in a way that may always be just out of reach. Economics and positive water outcomes within the food-energy-nexus and beyond don't have to be mutually exclusive. I hope one day we move away from having to be held accountable to wanting to be accountable. I hope we can continue to move forward, be innovative, and contribute to the upward success of our water future in a way that aligns exponentially with the growth of our population.

“We must cease underpricing water. Proper pricing along with targeted support will enable water to be used more efficiently in every sector, more equitably in every population and more sustainably both local and globally.”³

³ Turning the Tide. A Call to Collective Action. Global Commission on the Economics of Water. March 2023.