



# ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC'S WATER AND SANITATION MANAGEMENT

NOVEMBER 2023



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# 1

## Introduction

Meaningful youth engagement in the water sector in Asia and the Pacific is fundamental to ensure inclusivity and to leverage the region's youth capital toward sustainable water security and resilience. Strategically involving young people and young professionals helps strengthen the delivery of projects, realize global goals, generate and share knowledge, and influence lasting positive change in communities and society at large.

The youth offer innovative thinking, solutions in emerging areas such as digitalization, and updated skill sets relevant to the critical challenges facing the water sector in Asia and the Pacific. These include rising climate change impacts, rapid urbanization, and growing water scarcity. Youth also provide significant inroads to local networks and fresh perspectives to catalyze improved water and sanitation service provision and water resources management.

This publication provides critical arguments for youth involvement, a vision for meaningful youth engagement, models and lessons for youth participation—including examples of successful youth engagement and action through case studies from around the world—and opportunities to involve young people and young professionals in water sector policies and projects.



**Taking charge.** Students in India fill bottles from their school's hand pump. Youth offer innovative thinking and updated skill sets for water programs (photo by Amit Verma/ADB).

## 2

# Why Engage Young People?

## Asia and the Pacific Is Young

With about a quarter of the population aged under 25, Asia and the Pacific is a dynamic and young region. The power of youth to identify new solutions for enduring problems faced by society and access communities is being recognized across multiple sectors and institutions for enabling wider reach and better participation in their initiatives. The actions of youth can impact not only communities but the trajectory of society. Having long recognized the potential of the youth in the region, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is strategically investing in engaging more proactively with young people and young professionals to shape the bank's programs and strategies and to inform service planning and delivery in its developing member countries.

### Defining Youth

The Water Sector Directional Guide of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) defines youth as people aged 15–30 years old.<sup>a</sup> Young professionals are considered aged 31–35 years old. In this publication, “youth” refers to both young people and young professionals. The Operational Plan for Priority 6 under ADB's Strategy 2030, focusing on strengthening governance and institutional capacity, states that “ADB will... engage with youth as a vital demographic, especially in lower middle-income countries that retain largely youthful populations” and, as an approach to engage citizens directly, crowdsource ideas from youth.”<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2022. *Strategy 2030 Water Sector Directional Guide—A Water-Secure and Resilient Asia and the Pacific*. Manila.

<sup>b</sup> ADB. 2019. *Strategy 2030 Operational Plan for Priority 6: Strengthening Governance and Institutional Capacity, 2019–2024*. Manila.

Source: Asian Development Bank (ADB).

## Inclusion Matters

Inclusion is critical for building a fair and just society that respects and values diversity. Inclusive practices ensure that not only youth but people of all ages have equal opportunities to participate in social, economic, and political life, regardless



of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, evidence shows that companies with diverse workforces and inclusive cultures are more likely to outperform their peers.<sup>1</sup>

## Everyone Benefits

Youth engagement benefits everyone involved. When a part of decision-making processes, young people improve their self-esteem and gain skills and knowledge beyond the academic curriculum, and young professionals bring innovation and forward-thinking outlooks to service planning and delivery. Organizations that embed inclusive policies and programs and adopt inclusive planning processes benefit by being more transformational, innovative, and resilient; having better community recognition; and becoming more appealing employers to youth (Case Study 1). Staff and others involved in projects that connect with the youth also gain exposure to new competencies and demonstrate increased commitment to their communities and organizations. In addition, communities benefit from increased youth participation by developing stronger social bonds. Since 2015, the role of youth in conflict resolution has been recognized by the United Nations Security Council under Resolution 2250 (Case Study 2).<sup>2</sup>

### CASE STUDY 1: ADOPT A RIVER PROGRAMME

The Adopt A River Programme was started in 2012 by the Water and Sewerage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to foster understanding between government agencies involved in water management, corporate water entities, and communities that use the abstracted water. Youth networks were central in implementing this project, including the Caribbean Youth Environmental Network—Trinidad and Tobago (CYEN-T&T).

In 8 months, the project engaged more than 1,200 schoolchildren (aged 8 to 16 years) and more than 300 community members in two communities to build a culture of environmental awareness by fostering environmental advocacy and embedding the idea of change at the community level. Activities included (i) community and town hall meetings, (ii) field trips to document land use and learn water quality testing procedures, (iii) a social media campaign, and (iv) a Water Warriors School Caravan (combining education and entertainment).

CYEN-T&T became the go-to youth voice for environmental issues in the country and represented the country at local regional and international forums. The network stayed closely connected to the utility after project closure, giving it an opportunity to take part in consultations on revisions to the National Integrated Water Resources Management policy. This project provided CYEN-T&T the visibility needed to be selected as the youth voice for the national policy on water and eventually for other environmental policies.

More information: <https://www.adoptarivertt.com/website/activities/history/>.

Source: Global Water Partnership (GWP).

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey & Company. 2020. *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council. 2015. *Resolution 2250*. 9 December.

## CASE STUDY 2: CENTRAL ASIA YOUTH BASIN DIALOGUES



**Front and center.** Panel on transboundary cooperation in the Youth and Children's Water Forum (photo by Central Asia Youth for Water).



**Youth represent.** Youth delegation at the Second High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action (photo by Central Asia Youth for Water).

The Central Asia Youth for Water Network, International Secretariat for Water, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and their partners organized a series of transboundary river dialogues in Central Asia for young water professionals. The aim was to increase young professionals' understanding of the importance of dialogue and interactions at a basin level, between states and among the populations and stakeholders. The First Youth Basin Dialogue for the Chu-Talas River Basin was held in June 2021 in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, and the Second Youth Basin Dialogue on the Syr Darya River Basin was held in June 2022 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The events consisted of thematic blocks divided between sharing water, valuing water, and understanding water. The dialogues culminated with the Second High-Level International Conference on International Decade for Action.

During these events, youth representatives increased their knowledge by participating in and organizing high-level panels and other forums and side events, and youth voices influenced discussions between policymakers and government representatives. Tools such as the Blue Peace Youth Calculations, a mediation exercise on cooperation, a joint motto for the Chu-Talas basin, and the Blue Peace Index were introduced. Participants had an opportunity to meet government, academia, nongovernment organizations, and civil society representatives from the region and beyond. Through this involvement, youth groups such as the Central Asia Youth for Water Network were recognized as key players in youth engagement in Central Asia and approved by Tajikistan's Ministry of Energy and Water Resources for inclusion and voting in subsequent basin-level meetings.

More information: <https://www.sie-see.org/en/project/mobilizing-water-peace-central-asia/>.

Source: GWP.

Furthermore, young people have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic because of extended lockdowns based on age, loss of learning, a decrease in opportunities to enter the job market,<sup>3</sup> and a higher percentage loss in employment than adults.<sup>4</sup> Meaningful youth engagement can help overcome the lingering impacts on mental and physical health caused by lockdowns and promote youth employment by providing training programs, recreational spaces, access to professional help, and professional networks.

## Water Management and Service Delivery— in Particular—Benefit

The International Labour Organization reports that the global youth unemployment rate was 13.1% in 2016<sup>5</sup> and that global youth employment declined by 34 million from 2019 to 2020 (footnote 4). Water as a sector can benefit from increased youth participation. Globally, and particularly in Asia and the Pacific region, most water subsectors such as irrigation management, water supply, and sanitation, take traditional approaches in their planning and service delivery and generally lack an intergenerational workforce. Further, about one-third of the water sector workforce is eligible to retire in the next 10 years.<sup>6</sup> Engaging youth can help develop young people to become leaders and change agents in the sector (Case Study 3). To this end, the “30/30/30 agenda” calls on water organizations to promote diversity and intergenerational cooperation by having 30% of their labor force aged under 30 years old by 2030.<sup>7</sup>



**Water works.** A young person collects clean water in Gulistan, Uzbekistan. Youth-led initiatives can raise awareness around water and climate action (photo by Grigoriy Aisenshtat/ADB).

<sup>3</sup> Global Youth Mobilization. 2022. *Powering Change: Young People Leading the COVID-19 Response and Recovery – Interim Report*.

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization. 2022. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People: Executive Summary*. Geneva.

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization. 2016. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Trends for Youth*. Geneva.

<sup>6</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2022. *Water Sector Workforce: New EPA Grant Program: Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program*.

<sup>7</sup> Wavemakers United. 2023. *Join the 30/30/30 commitment!* 28 April.

### CASE STUDY 3: TONFUTURTONCLIMAT PROJECT



**Community reach.** TonFuturTonClimat youth-focused outreach activities on water and climate change in Benin (photo by International Secretariat for Water).

Launched in 2018, TonFuturTonClimat is a partnership-based, youth-centered initiative that aims to strengthen youth associations and equip them to become promoters of innovative and sustainable solutions to water and climate change challenges. Project activities support local economic development through agriculture by finding alternatives that increase agricultural yield and simultaneously reduce negative impacts on water, soil, human health, ecosystems, and long-term productivity of the land. The project also encourages the adoption of these techniques by young farmers in communities affected by rapid emigration. The project is being implemented in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo.

TonFuturTonClimat has capacitated youth to improve agriculture practices and irrigation systems, including optimizing water and energy use through drip irrigation combined with solar-powered pumps. The training has allowed the youth to be active in water and soil conservation while also engaging in climate-resilient agro-economic activities such as hay production, vegetable cultivation, and tree nursery management. The water-saving agricultural practices allowed for additional months of production and the riverbanks were protected from soil erosion with plantings and maintained water quality.

The skills that the youth gained through capacity-building initiatives have not only allowed them to build climate resilience, adapt to climate change, and conserve the ecosystem but also equipped them to start and maintain sustainable companies. Some participants have become self-employed as trainers on the management and maintenance of pumping equipment, and others have set up composting enterprises on an experimental basis to avoid chemical fertilizers and increase yield. Further, they have become active change agents in their communities and are now recognized by local authorities for championing innovative technologies and intergenerational collaboration.

More information: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/453c3cc9dbed47c5b80a7787ea7cdd3c>.

Source: GWP.

#### CASE STUDY 4: BAGMATI RIVER BASIN YOUTH PROJECT

The Pilot and Demonstration Activity: Youth-Led Approaches to Sustainable Bagmati River Basin Management—or Bagmati River Basin Youth Project—contributed directly to the Asian Development Bank’s Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project in Nepal. It aimed to complement the community participation component by demonstrating cross-generational and global-local approaches for mobilizing and encouraging young community members to take a leading role in river basin management activities.

The project included a “World’s Largest Lesson” introductory training on climate and an intensive 6-week Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program for Nepalese youth. Participants learned about the SDGs, 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) principles, solid waste management, and safeguarding practices. They engaged in future thinking consultations for the design of interventions in river basin management.

The project trained 1,703 youth through 102 World’s Largest Lesson sessions led by 107 youth facilitators. An additional 196 participants completed the 6-week SDGs program facilitated by 10 youth. Of the 32 youth-led project proposals presented, 19 proceeded to project implementation and were further incorporated into ward, school, and civil society organization plans. The project engaged both female (55%) and male (45%) participants as well as attendees (30%) from vulnerable groups.

More information: <http://rapid-asia.com/blog/youth-work-save-bagmati-river/>.

Source: ADB.

## Young People Are Integral to Climate Action

Climate change impacts are primarily experienced through water with events such as droughts, floods, and sea-level rise. Water is also the basis of many conflicts, as transboundary water often poses political issues that may be extremely sensitive. There are examples of young people promoting water security and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 6: “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (Case Study 4). As current and future water users, youth lead various initiatives in the water sector, including peer- and community-focused education and behavior change programs on water issues; clean-ups and other water management practices;<sup>8</sup> innovation; research; and advocacy.<sup>9</sup> These youth-led initiatives not only help raise awareness around the urgency of climate action but also contribute directly to climate action and should be encouraged and expanded.

<sup>8</sup> Global Water Partnership. 2015. *GWP Youth Engagement Strategy*. Stockholm.

<sup>9</sup> Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA). 2020. *Youth Engagement in Water Governance: Vanguards of Change*. TROSA Learning Brief, Issue 1.

## Young People Lead on Innovation and Digitalization

Youth engagement can help address the urgent need for innovation and digitalization within the water sector. In this highly conservative sector, innovative solutions have been slowly adopted and recognized as viable alternatives to traditional modes of operation. Although there is limited data for youth-led digitalization efforts in the water sector, a report from the World Economic Forum points to the importance of intergenerational skills transfer, from the youth to the older generation, to address digital skills gaps in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, early contact with the water industry through internships or flagship projects can not only generate interest in the sector from students and young professionals and benefit water entities with competent and tech-savvy staff but can also help combat the generalized skills mismatch between qualified recent graduates and opportunities in the job market (Case Study 5).

### Leading the charge.

Meaningful youth engagement in water is critical to leverage the region's youth capital and improve its overall water security (photo by Al Benavente/ADB).



<sup>10</sup> World Economic Forum. 2021. *ASEAN Digital Generation Survey Calls for Joint Action for an Inclusive and Sustainable Digital Economy*. News release. 13 October.

### CASE STUDY 5: WATER INNOVATION LAB

Water Innovation Lab (WIL), a flagship program of non-profit organization Waterlution, is designed to accelerate collaborative innovation, fast-track global knowledge sharing, and devise innovations that improve water security and support climate change adaptation. WIL supports emerging leaders to implement Sustainable Development Goal targets connected to water in their organizations and their projects. WIL develops future water leaders to think holistically, design innovatively, and communicate effectively across cultures. Furthermore, it equips the next generation of policymakers and waterpreneurs with mindsets and skill sets to lead through collaboration, creativity, global engagement, complex problem-solving, and impact-oriented thinking by cross-sector and cross-disciplinary approaches for knowledge sharing. The program uses unconventional, self-developmental, and self-directed learning methods in participatory, creative, and boundary-pushing facilitation and development processes.

WIL's methodology is based on facilitation tools and techniques such as the Art of Hosting; design thinking; systems approach; and social, artistic, and cooperative games. The co-innovation process ensures participants do not arrive with a solution seeking a problem. Rather, the program invites participants to explore complex water problems presented in advance of a WIL and during the program through learning visits. Co-innovation projects that emerge out of WILs are eligible for seed grants and supported for 9 months post-WIL intensive training.

By 2023, 22 WILs had been hosted, with more than 1,000 young leaders trained and applying for funding to meet water challenges. As a result of WIL, more than 90 projects have been developed in 10 countries that address pressing water issues.

More information: <https://waterlution.org/past-water-innovation-labs/>.

Source: GWP.

# 3

## Meaningful Youth Engagement

Meaningful youth engagement in the water sector is fundamental to leveraging the Asia and Pacific region's youth capital and improving its overall water security. ADB's meaningful youth engagement framework entails three pillars: *action* to strengthen the delivery of projects and realize global goals; *insight* to generate and share knowledge; and a *voice* to influence change.<sup>11</sup> This engagement will have multiplier effects, such as empowering the region's youth to work with sector stakeholders, governments, the private sector, and local communities toward water security and resilience; increasing innovations; and improving private sector participation potential. Meaningful youth engagement occurs when enabling conditions allow the youth to participate throughout the project cycle, including planning, service delivery, and evaluation, fostering intergenerational partnerships, and contributing to positive and long-lasting outcomes beyond the water project (Case Study 6).

### Defining Water Security

Water security is defined in the Asian Water Development Outlook as “the availability of adequate water to ensure safe and affordable water supply, inclusive sanitation for all, improved livelihoods, and healthy ecosystems, with reduced water-related risks toward supporting sustainable and resilient rural–urban economies in the Asia and Pacific region.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Asian Development Bank. 2020. *Asian Water Development Outlook 2020: Advancing Water Security Across Asia and the Pacific*. Manila. p. xviii.

Source: ADB.

<sup>11</sup> **Action:** Strengthening delivery of ADB projects and programs and the realization of the SDGs: young people (co-) leading components in the design and implementation of ADB projects and programs in line with ADB's Operational Priorities and SDGs to enhance sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity. **Insight:** Generating and sharing knowledge: young people (co-)leading knowledge generation, research, and evaluation that deepens insights from a uniquely youth perspective and pioneering innovative methodologies. **Voice:** Influencing change: young people advocating for change in communities and at a policy level, (co-)leading development campaigns, and influencing youth-led development practices to build ADB's reputation and unlock new youth investments.



### CASE STUDY 6: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN WATER OPERATORS PARTNERSHIP

In 2019, the Asian Development Bank Water Operators Partnership between Mongolia Uvarkhangai Public Utility Services Organization (PUSO) and Seattle's King County Wastewater Treatment Division motivated the community, including the youth, to take bold steps to improve fecal sludge management in Mongolia's Arvaikheer town. The town suffered from poor sanitation conditions, with old pit latrines posing risks to public health. Residents were unable to empty latrines, which lacked privacy and comfort. During winter, the latrines were unsafe—particularly for children, older people, pregnant women, and people with disabilities—because they were icy and slippery.

The partnership developed a social and behavior change plan for sanitation that emphasized the value of clear and ongoing communication, public participation, and education. It focused on empowering youth as water stewards through an education program with a water and sanitation curriculum. This was especially relevant for Mongolia, as about 30% of the population is aged below 14 years old.

About 42 secondary students were engaged through a practical workshop on the basic processes of wastewater treatment and a visit to a wastewater treatment plant. The partnership helped boost confidence among youth and increase their aspiration for a better quality of life. PUSO staff were deeply engaged; they felt comfortable leading the teaching and treatment plant tours and committed to continuing these with the schools and other stakeholders. The director expressed PUSO's commitment to developing a yearly education and engagement plan as part of its strategic plan and budget.

More information: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/696026/case-story-3-water-stewardship-mongolia.pdf>.  
Source: ADB.

ADB's vision for meaningful youth engagement in water<sup>12</sup> is framed by the five key dimensions of water security, as defined in the Asian Water Development Outlook 2020.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This vision was developed alongside ADB's Youth for Asia program, which was active from 2013 to 2022 and supported by [ADB's Regional Technical Assistance to Demonstrating Innovative Employment Solutions through Regional Knowledge-Sharing Partnerships with Youth Organizations](#). Youth for Asia's unique approach centered on young people, government agencies, and development partners working together to achieve development aims.

<sup>13</sup> ADB. 2020. [Asian Water Development Outlook 2020: Advancing Water Security Across Asia and the Pacific](#). Manila.

**Table: Vision for Meaningful Youth Engagement**

| <b>Vision</b> of an Asia and the Pacific that empowers its youth and young professionals to work across generations with governments, water managers, services providers, and local communities towards improved water security and resilience. |   |
|---|---|
| Key Dimension of Water Security   | Youth Engagement Objective  |
| Rural Household Water Security  | Youth promote and improve the inclusiveness of rural household water security policies, practices, innovation, community mobilization, and youth-led research.      |
| Economic Water Security   | Youth participate in economic activities that improve water resources management and service delivery to promote the socioeconomic well-being of their communities. |
| Urban Water Security  | Youth promote inclusive urban water security through water security policies, practices, innovation, community mobilization, and youth-led research.                |
| Environmental Water Security  | Youth generate knowledge and innovative solutions to further inclusive policymaking and practices that promote ecosystems supporting diversity.                     |
| Water-Related Disaster Security   | Youth are empowered as active partners in enhancing disaster readiness and disaster resilience of communities and supporting emergency response.                    |

Source: ADB.

## Models for Meaningful Engagement of Young People and Young Professionals

Meaningful youth engagement can be achieved through various models, including opportunities for young professionals, as highlighted by many of the case studies throughout this publication.

- **Young professional opportunities.** Long-term or intensive programs targeting government officers, university students, recent graduates, junior practitioners, and nongovernment organization staff can build and sharpen knowledge and provide pathways to becoming water professionals (Case Studies 7 and 8). These can be especially useful to embed young staff in program management units and project implementation units. Terms of reference allowing the engagement of young professionals also create avenues for the career development of youth and the adoption of new trends in the water sector.
- **Volunteer programs.** Volunteering can be promoted among recent graduates from local universities to contribute to pressing sector issues, such as accelerating universal access to water supply and sanitation. Volunteers can receive training to become trainers to develop the capacity of community water and sanitation user groups and improve the administration, operation, and maintenance of local water and sanitation systems.
- **Thematic workshops.** Workshops or trainings can be held to explore the frontiers of science, technology, and practice and to foster discussion among interdisciplinary, cross-sector communities of

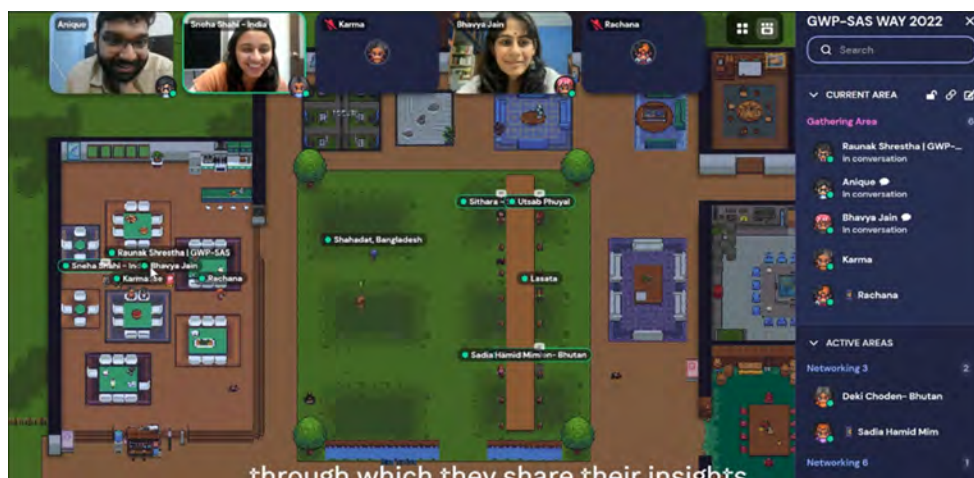
practice. This approach can help provide opportunities for the creation and promotion of pragmatic and innovative solutions to challenges in urban and rural water, sanitation and hygiene, and basin-wide water management.

- **Media fellowships.** Youth fellowships in media can engage and strengthen relationships with local media outlets while providing capacity building and information to local journalists about water issues. These fellowships can be associated with high-level reporting of events associated with project activities (Case Study 9).
- **University participation.** Projects can engage with engineering universities to seek students interested in joining the project preparatory technical assistance for their research theses.
- **School events.** School-based events can engage schoolchildren and teachers and raise awareness of water issues. Different ages can be targeted with activities of varying complexity.

### CASE STUDY 7: WATER ACADEMY FOR YOUTH

In 2021, the Global Water Partnership (GWP) launched the Water Academy for Youth (WAY) program to promote leadership, capacity building, mentorship, fellowships, internships, networking, and intergenerational dialogue. WAY is an interactive and customizable program that can be adapted to the needs and context of the region or country wherein it is being implemented. The program aims to support the acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals and improve the skills of young leaders.

WAY has been implemented at a regional level in the Caribbean, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. Innovation, entrepreneurship, and thematic tracks have been developed. The entrepreneurship track focuses on creating bankable business ideas, while the thematic



**Networked for change.** An interactive session during the South Asia Water Academy of Youth (photo by Global Water Partnership South Asia).

Case Study 7 *continued*

track focuses on project and proposal development. Each region was able to adapt its program subcomponents for each track by including areas of interest such as transboundary water cooperation, the water–food–energy nexus, integrated water resources management, storytelling, leadership, climate adaptation, problem solving, and proposal and concept note writing.

WAY is not a standalone program but a starting point to further engage youth in the water sector by fostering connections with facilitators, mentors, and the GWP network. Continued youth inclusion can take place through communities of practice, youth organizations, employment opportunities, country youth focal point placements, and seed funding for selected outputs.

Mentors and facilitators play a key role in creating connections for youth with water community actors, and some mentor–mentee relationships have continued after program completion. WAY participants have also been able to represent their countries or regions as youth cohorts in national, regional, and global dialogues, such as the Transformative Futures for Water Security Conference in February 2023.

Through WAY, participants developed research projects, stories, project concept notes, and proposals, which have the potential to be refined and extended as full projects. Examples from the Caribbean WAY highlight the skill, expertise, and value youth can offer towards improved water management.<sup>a</sup> The final presentations promoted interest from water actors and stakeholders and resulted in opportunities for the youth to continue their engagement. A proposal to identify aquifers in Northern Belize for groundwater management was awarded €4,000 (\$4,301) in seed funding to support project implementation.

More information: <https://www.gwp.org/en/About/more/news/2021/time-to-do-it-the-gwp-w.a.y/>.

<sup>a</sup> GWP Caribbean. 2022. *The GWP-C Water Academy for Youth (GWP-C WAY) Magazine is Out Now!* 12 June.

Source: GWP.

## CASE STUDY 8: YOUTH FOR WATER AND CLIMATE PROGRAM

The Youth for Water and Climate (YWC) program aims to support young professionals in acquiring transversal and specific skills essential for the water and climate sector. YWC included an 8-month capacity-building program for 20 selected young professionals, encompassing an online capacity-building course, a mentorship program, two in-person workshops, and a community of practice to support the development of their professional and/or entrepreneurial skills. The program was developed and implemented by Global Water Partnership, Global Water Partnership–Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe, Solidarity Water Europe, International Secretariat for Water, cewas, and Good Planet Belgium.

Program outputs include the [YWC e-learning curriculum](#), a mentoring guide, a platform for a community of practice among youth and partner organizations, and the YWC program roadbook. Participants increased their job market readiness by receiving inputs on their résumés and participating in mock interviews with one-on-one feedback. Many participants were able to transition to or gain jobs in water or a connected field after the program—and credited this to what they learned in the program. Strong mentor–mentee relationships were created through which some participants secured internships or were connected to water experts to support them in their career goals. Many of the mentors from reputable water organizations shared that they benefitted from the exposure to new and different perspectives and the opportunity to support the future generation while growing their networks and identifying future employees.



**Professionals in the making.** Youth for Water and Climate members and participants during at a workshop in Stockholm, Sweden (photo by Global Water Partnership Organization).

More information: <https://youthwaterclimate.org/>.

Source: GWP.

### CASE STUDY 9: YOUTH RAPORTEURS FOR THE ASIA WATER FORUM

The Asia Water Forum (AWF) is the flagship biennial conference of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The event highlights cutting-edge knowledge, generates quality discussions, and explores key issues in the Asia and Pacific region's water and sanitation sectors.

At the AWF 2022—themed “Toward a Resilient and Water-Secure Asia and the Pacific”—37 young water professionals were enlisted as rapporteurs to capture the key messages arising from the conference's 35 sessions. To undertake this task, the young professionals were provided training and resources on conference reporting. The rapporteurs participated in end-of-day synthesis workshops with ADB staff, where the main themes of the day were identified for dissemination by the AWF media team. The closing plenary also featured an all-youth, all-women panel that summarized the event's themes and findings and emphasized that engaging youth is critical to achieving long-term water security in Asia and the Pacific.

Source: ADB.



**Tapping youth potential.**  
About a quarter of the population in Asia and the Pacific is aged under 25 (photo by Samir Jung Thapa/ADB).

## Lessons from Youth Engagement Programs

Several common themes and lessons from the case studies can inform the design and development of meaningful youth engagement programs.

**Work with rather than for youth.** Program design must be informed by needs identified by youth. Having youth (co)lead project components and putting youth needs at the program's core allow for greater interest and commitment from youth participants.



**Embedding youth inputs.** Meaningful youth engagement occurs when youth are involved throughout the entire project cycle (photo by Nozim Kalandarov/ADB).

**Highlight youth contributions.** The participation of youth in high-level panels and intergenerational dialogues allows senior professionals to see value in youth contributions and provide perspectives that would otherwise not be considered. Investing in the visibility of youth participation promotes youth networks, highlights their role in decision-making, and encourages pathways for government institutions to support youth inclusion.

**Provide mentorship and intergenerational dialogue.** Mentorship is key to the success of capacity-building programs, as mentors complement the curriculum with water-specific knowledge and provide guidance on career development. Interactive sessions and presentations allow seasoned professionals to engage with youth participants in intergenerational discourse.

**Sustain youth engagement.** Youth capacity building should not be a one-off engagement—it must include opportunities and pathways for further engagement. This requires fostering a collaborative, open environment where the youth can organize themselves and collaborate for future action. These forums should foster and welcome new ideas and facilitate pathways that support youth in their goals and ambitions.

**Foster commitment and accountability.** Strong commitment from partners, local governments, and the youth enables successful youth initiatives. Concrete and actionable commitments lead to improved results. In building commitment, it is necessary to communicate expectations, establish systems for collaboration, and define accountabilities.

**Embed capacity building in youth projects.** Training sessions about budget management and reporting enable youth organizations to improve managerial and operational tasks. Pairing youth projects with skills-building initiatives can also help familiarize youth with project reporting procedures that can improve their professionalism and employability and allow them to access funds for further action.

**Encourage local ownership.** Local communities and individuals need to be empowered to take ownership of water challenges and solutions. By involving community practitioners, innovators, and entrepreneurs in the process, youth programs can generate solutions tailored to the needs and capabilities of the local communities. This approach not only leads to customized and sustainable solutions but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, including youth.



# 4

## Engaging Young People in ADB's Project Cycle

There are various opportunities for ADB and partners to embed meaningful youth engagement in project and financing operations for water and sanitation management and service delivery. This engagement can be incorporated into loan projects as a technical assistance component, ideally from the stage of project preparation but may also be considered during project implementation.

These activities can be achieved through enlisting a firm with experience in research, communications, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation or through enlisting specialists in youth civic engagement and youth communications and partnerships as part of the project team.

Crucially, ADB's implementing and executing agencies should also be involved during the design and implementation of these activities to ensure their needs and perspectives are captured, not only in designing the project but also during the selection of consultants.

### Design

Youth engagement during the design stage can include:

- carrying out a stakeholder analysis to identify national and local youth groups with operations and interests associated with SDG6, including university groups, local volunteer groups, and international organizations such as AIESEC, United Nations Volunteers, and scout groups (Case Study 10);
- working with youth to analyze contextual issues—especially water and sanitation needs—to consider how age, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status affects access to and use of water;
- identifying data gaps that could benefit from crowdsourcing via youth groups;
- drafting gender-, age-, and diversity-responsive workplans, strategies, and other planning documents with inputs from youth partners and other relevant groups; and
- liaising with universities and professional education institutes and supporting governments to develop internship programs associated with the project as a source of highly skilled labor.

## Implementation

Youth engagement throughout the implementation of operations can include:

- cross-checking the methods and tools for data collection as intended at the design stage;
- considering and addressing practical constraints for youth participation in the design and scheduling of activities (e.g., whether they conflict with school, home, and work obligations; distance of meeting places; accessibility of online platforms);
- creating spaces for senior and young water professionals to meet regularly and providing two-way mentorship opportunities to both;
- promoting the absorption of young professionals involved during the project into the project's operation after completion;
- including youth team members in stakeholder and network meetings, and encouraging them to provide input where appropriate (Case Study 11); and
- providing space or channels for youth to communicate with each other and with ADB staff about the project to address suggestions and safeguarding concerns and promote collaboration.

## Evaluation

Youth engagement at the end of the project cycle can include involving young people and young professionals in the evaluation of water projects to ensure the process captures the views of diverse beneficiaries and the impact of the projects on youth.

### Looking forward.

The future of water and sanitation efforts in Asia and the Pacific depends on the strategic involvement of youth (photo by Eric Sales/ADB).



## CASE STUDY 10: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN INTEGRATED URBAN PLANNING

Under the Livable Urban Areas: Integrated Urban Plans for Balanced Regional Development Technical Assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Youth for Asia program designed youth-led and youth-focused activities to help develop integrated urban plans in Georgia. A Youth Project Designer (YPD) has mobilized Georgian youth partners; ensured youth participation; and conducted youth-focused activities to create awareness about civic responsibility and support for inclusive designs considering people living with disabilities, the older people, the youth, and children as part of follow-on investments. A final report informing project planning and implementation tasks focused on the youth.

The YPD mobilized civil society, youth organizations, and the youth to participate in youth-led and youth-focused strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analyses; citywide visioning exercises; and action planning in the project cluster cities of Zugdidi, Mestia, and Akhmeta. These activities followed the ADB methodology for Enabling Inclusive Cities and GrEEEn Solutions for Livable Cities.<sup>a</sup> The YPD helped build capacity through quizzes, presentations, and focus group discussions for youth and university students in Tbilisi. Topics included volunteerism, tourism development, participatory approaches in urban planning, infrastructure and affordability, and social media and communication in urban development. The YPD also developed a foundation for a youth job shadowing program to support the integrated urban action plans.

The youth-focused activities identified needs, challenges, and opportunities for Georgian youth in areas related to balanced urban development in cluster regions. Education, employment opportunities, tourism development, agriculture, information and communication technology, sports and recreation services, and livelihood improvements were the areas most highlighted by youth participants in each city.

<sup>a</sup> ADB. 2016. *Enabling Inclusive Cities: Tool Kit for Inclusive Urban Development*. Manila; and ADB. 2016. *GrEEEn Solutions for Livable Cities*.

Source: ADB.

### **CASE STUDY 11: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE DUSHANBE URBAN WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION PROJECT**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Youth for Asia program collaborated with Young Generation Tajikistan (YGT), a local youth network, to support the design and dissemination of a communication campaign towards building a culture of water use reduction and water saving in Dushanbe. The campaign aimed to promote social acceptance of new water supply and sewerage systems, change behavior on water use to prevent waterborne illnesses and overconsumption, and improve customer relations and trust. It supported the project's overall technical activities that sought to reduce nonrevenue water, improve water pressure and energy efficiency, and resolve intermittent supply operations.

Youth were engaged during the project's design phase. YGT worked alongside ADB's international behavior change consultant to promote project communication, raise awareness, and promote behavior change in water consumption and sanitation practices. Youth also led data collection to understand the willingness of citizens to install water meters and the preparedness to pay tariffs associated with these installations. Finally, the youth organization supported the international consultant in preparing a communication stakeholder matrix and stakeholder communication strategy. Partnering with a local youth network (YGT) proved to be a critical element in the communication campaign. By leveraging YGT's expertise and network, the campaign was able to engage community youth in and out of schools.

Source: ADB.

# 5

## Call to Action

The youth must be a strategic part of water and sanitation delivery and operations in Asia and the Pacific. Their involvement significantly benefits communities and projects, unlocks new approaches, and provides continuity of leadership and ownership in the sector. The 11 case studies examined in this publication demonstrate that the involvement of young people and young professionals can enhance water security and resilience efforts.

Meaningful youth engagement in water and sanitation programming remains an emerging area of learning and practice for ADB and its developing member country partners. This publication serves as an introduction to spur ideas for how to engage youth practically and significantly in all steps of the project cycle—and is intended to be a catalyst for scaling up youth contributions in water operations.

To continue learning about how to better engage youth in water programming in the region, contribute knowledge and exchange experiences, access tools and resources, and connect with sector experts, please join ADB's Asia and the Pacific Water Resilience Hub (<https://hub4r.adb.org/>).

For more information, contact: [wuds@adb.org](mailto:wuds@adb.org).

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## **Engaging Young People in Asia and the Pacific's Water and Sanitation Management**

Meaningful youth engagement in the water sector in Asia and the Pacific is fundamental to ensure inclusivity and to leverage the region's youth capital toward sustainable water security and resilience. Strategic youth involvement in water and sanitation delivery and operations significantly benefits communities and projects, unlocks new approaches, and provides continuity of leadership and ownership in the sector. This publication provides critical arguments for youth involvement, a vision for meaningful youth engagement, models and lessons for youth participation—with examples of successful youth engagement and action through case studies from around the world—and opportunities to involve young people and young professionals in water sector policies and projects.

This publication was prepared with contributions from the Global Water Partnership.

### **About the Asian Development Bank**

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.



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