



UN-Water Summit on Groundwater

7-8 December, UNESCO HQ

Youth Declaration on Groundwater

As youth representatives of the 'global groundwater family', we are here today to declare our commitments to improving the management and sustainability of an invaluable resource, groundwater. We are also calling upon all concerned stakeholders, including Governments, private sector, and civil society, to join us in considering these commitments.

First of all, it is recognized that knowledge amongst the general public, as well as amongst decision- and policy-makers, about groundwater and the many ways in which this precious resource is linked to other systems needs to improve further, building particularly on the efforts undertaken during the year 2022 which has been dedicated to groundwater. Our first set of commitments includes to:

- Continue advocating for groundwater education and communication in multiple and innovative ways that seek to mobilize attention and raise improved awareness;
- Promote a vision where the role of groundwater to increase communities' resilience to climate change is fully recognized;
- Promote engagement of the general public in groundwater protection, including through the development of citizen science, or by encouraging student groups in schools and universities, amongst others, to become custodians/stewards of the aquifers upon which they live.

Second, groundwater exploitation largely contributes to economic development. However, with abstraction increasing worldwide by between 1 and 2% each year, it has also in many instances across the world caused irreversible damage to the environment and sometimes to traditional uses, as a result of falling groundwater levels and pollution. In addition, high levels of uncertainty exist over the management of both renewable and non-renewable groundwater resources. Hence, our commitments are to:

- Advocate for a world where policymakers adopt an evidence-based decision-making approach;
- Promote the use of tools and technology that will serve to enhance our knowledge of groundwater systems and flows, including the critical maintenance of flows to groundwater ecosystems, while also respecting the importance of local knowledge;
- Call for investment in groundwater monitoring, which is essential to improving understanding and therefore addressing decreasing groundwater levels and the deterioration of groundwater quality;
- Encourage public authorities to fully engage in the sustainable management of aquifers, especially that of non-renewable groundwater resources and overexploited renewable systems;
- Call on public authorities to address, as a priority, the needs of traditional users as well as the most vulnerable, both of whom are invariably the first to be impacted by situations of over-use and pollution.

The third topic that we are addressing is the sustainable groundwater management which requires an interdisciplinary approach and as such involves not only hydrogeologists and engineers, but also economists, sociologists, ecologists, lawyers, and communication experts, amongst others. More generally, decision-making on groundwater involves a broad range of stakeholders. Our commitments on this topic include:

- Advocating for the implementation of a holistic, cross-sectoral approach to groundwater resources management. One which seeks to replace existing fragmented approaches that ignore the interconnections between the different components of the water cycle and the multiple functions, services, and values of a groundwater system, including those of ecosystems;
- Advocating for a global commitment to action on the establishment of groundwater legislations and relevant regulatory frameworks, especially for the management of transboundary aquifers;
- Developing improved multi-stakeholder collaborations that include youth, women, grassroots communities and indigenous groups, and to improve the inclusion of different social dimensions in hydrogeological investigations and actuation on the ground;
- Promoting the elaboration of transition scenarios where local sustainability is prioritized over market incentives when allocating groundwater resources;
- Inviting citizens and companies to consider their supply chains and water footprints, especially for food products, where over 40% of irrigated water is sourced from groundwater;
- Advocating, on a higher level, for the clear and proper inclusion of groundwater as an important item on future international global agendas starting with the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Finally, groundwater is both an issue of gender equality and inclusivity. Our commitments in this regard are to:

- Advocate for the improved collection of gender-related groundwater data and for equitable groundwater resources management to secure equal human development opportunities for all;
- Advocate for the creation of conditions that enable the full potential of young researchers by investing in research;
- Highlight the potential for job creation in the water sector concerned with activities linked to the development and protection of groundwater resources;
- Promote the notion of open data and science, especially based on the UNESCO Recommendation for Open Science;
- Advocate for the establishment of networks and organizations that play major local or global roles in bridging the gap between science and policy.