

# Making Waves: Youth engagement in Water Diplomacy



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WOMEN IN  
WATER DIPLOMACY  
NETWORK & PARTNERS



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# Water Diplomacy

Water diplomacy recognizes that there are *many different actors* that have the ability to *create solution spaces* for conflicts over water and that can *create windows of opportunity* for cooperation over water.

Water diplomacy can help to assess and generate opportunities for cooperation in shared basins and improve water security.

Many types of actors have a role to play including:



**Government officials**

(mandated at state and local level)



**Civil society**



**Non-state / non-governmental actors**



**Academics & experts**



**Private sector**



**Media**



**Others**



**Putting Focus on  
Inclusion supports  
multi-track  
approach**

Klimes, Martina and Koch, Elizabeth. Water Security in the Middle East – Opportunities and Challenges for Water Diplomacy. Routledge Handbook on Middle East Security, Routledge, London.

# Defining Youth?

Defining “youth” is a challenge as the view of who qualifies as ‘young’ depends to a large extent on **context and culture**.

- ✓ UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace, Security defines “youth” as persons between 18 and 29 years of age (Security Council, 2015).
- ✓ Many UN Agencies define youth as persons between 15 and 24 years of age.
- ✓ Some cultures consider youths as young as 13 to be ‘adult’



[Making Waves: Youth Engagement in Water Diplomacy](#) from Sundman, V., Dadvar, I., and Koch, E. 2021. Stockholm International Water Institute. Stockholm, Sweden.

# Where are young people today?

Today's generation of youth is the largest the world has ever known.

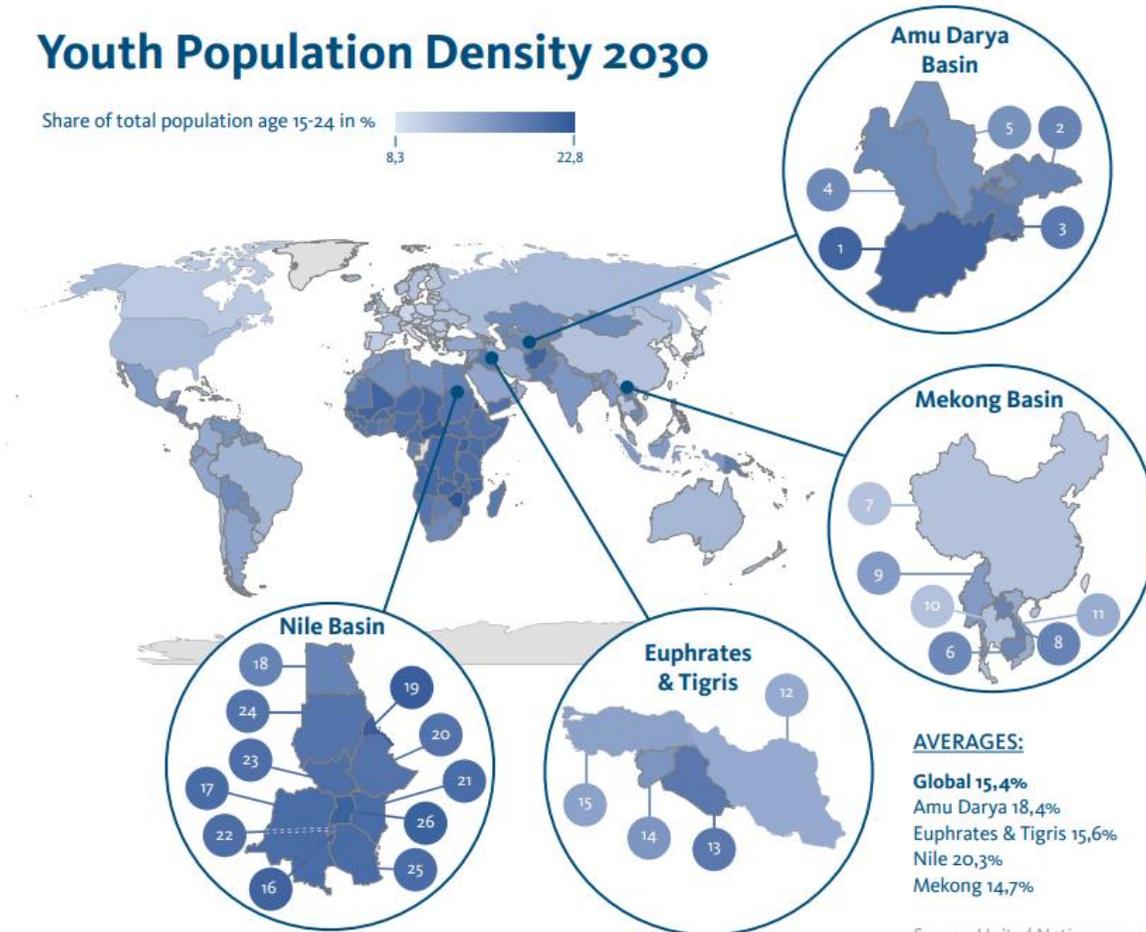
By 2030, youth will be 20% of the global population.

There are large regional differences in the youth population. The general trend indicates that youth make up a larger share of the population in low-income countries.

'Brain-drain' has affected numerous basins – often propelling young leaders to high-ranking roles.

## Youth Population Density 2030

Share of total population age 15-24 in % 8,3 22,8



### AVERAGES:

Global 15,4%  
 Amu Darya 18,4%  
 Euphrates & Tigris 15,6%  
 Nile 20,3%  
 Mekong 14,7%

### YOUTH POPULATION DENSITY 2030:

#### Amu Darya Basin

1. Afghanistan 21,4%
2. Kyrgyzstan 18,0%
3. Tajikistan 18,6%
4. Turkmenistan 17,4%
5. Uzbekistan 16,5%

#### Mekong Basin

6. Cambodia 17,5%
7. China 11,6%
8. Laos 17,9%
9. Myanmar 15,7%
10. Thailand 11,3%
11. Vietnam 13,8%

#### Euphrates & Tigris

12. Iran 14,1%
13. Iraq 19,3%
14. Syria 15,6%
15. Turkey 14,4%

#### Nile Basin

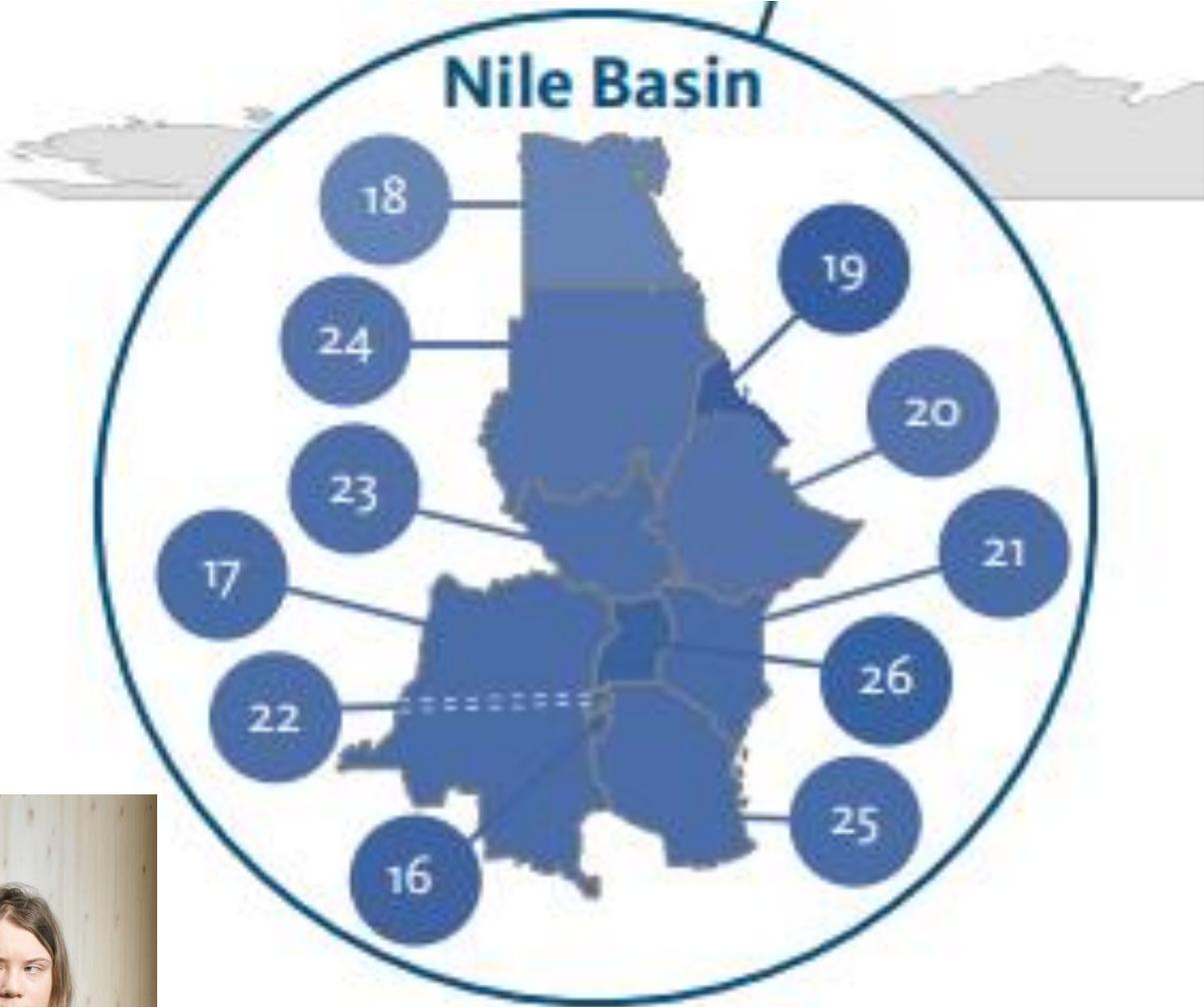
16. Burundi 20,6%
17. DR Congo 20,5%
18. Egypt 18,1%
19. Eritrea 21,9%
20. Ethiopia 19,8%
21. Kenya 20,4%
22. Rwanda 19,6%
23. South Sudan 20,2%
24. Sudan 19,8%
25. Tanzania 20,2%
26. Uganda 21,7%

Source: United Nations, 2019

# A Closer Look ...



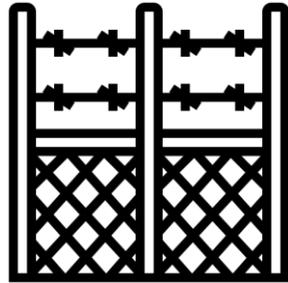
**Pictured:** Climate youth strike in South Africa (top); Vanessa Nakate, Uganda climate activist at Davos Conference.



# Persistent Barriers to Youth Voices in Regional and Global Water Diplomacy Dialogues



Sponsored in person attendance is rare.



Conflict Barriers restricting movement



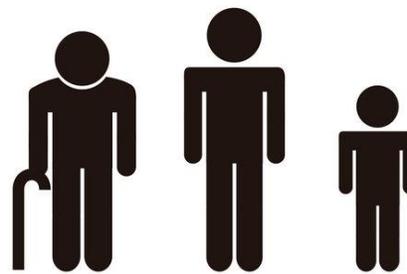
Political Barriers restricting movement



Language Barriers

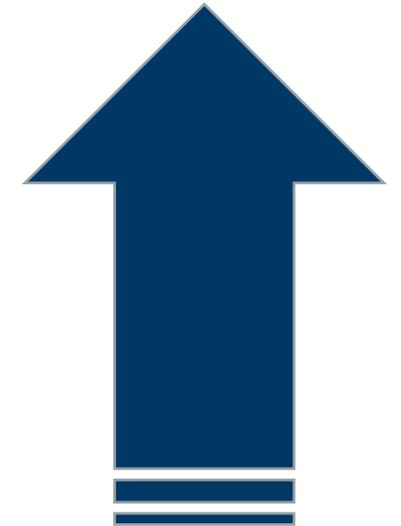


Internet connectivity



Intergenerational dis-connection/  
respect?

**Result:** Improved Inclusive Decision Making



**Target:** Removal of Participation and Influence Barriers

# Costs – Benefits – Opportunities



**Failure to include young people equitably**



**Has direct cost** to political decision-making at transboundary level



**Undermines progress** toward cooperative and sustainable management



**Support to young water experts**



**Opportunity** to elevate distinctive knowledge, perspectives and experiences



**More comprehensive understanding** of relevant water issues and challenges



Broader set of **equitable solutions**

Prepare **next generation** of water leaders

Ensure **policy continuity** and long-term success

**Resources are scarce**



**Invest in inclusion**

# UN Resolution 2250: An important tool

The United Nations Security Council adopted **Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security** in 2015. This Resolution recognizes that young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.

**Strong synergies to positive impacts of Women, Peace, Security Agenda on peace processes – opportunity to learn from WPS experience!**

Making Waves: Youth Engagement in Water Diplomacy from Sundman, V., Dadvar, I., and Koch, E. 2021. Stockholm International Water Institute. Stockholm, Sweden.

# Don't silo youth voices – integrate.

**Remember: Many types of actors have a role to play in water diplomacy – *bring in youth voices throughout!***



**Government officials**  
(mandated at state and local level)



**Civil society**



**Non-state / non-governmental actors**



**Academics & experts**



**Private sector**



**Media**



**Others**

# Examples of *good* practice

- Build-in **linkages between formal and informal** water diplomacy processes with youth represented throughout
- Support **intergenerational exchange** and two-way mentorship
- 'Build a bigger table'
- Require youth voices (quota systems – example: '*gold standard*')
- **Resource youth participation** (*youth ambassadors*)!
- Collect **age disaggregated data**!
- Strive for constant **evolution of co-design** of processes
- Include approaches to youth inclusion in program design - **both targeted and mainstreaming approaches!**
- **Identify and mitigate barriers to influence and participation**
- Consider growing **justice lens** to water diplomacy i.e., *reflecting on disproportionate and cumulative harm* – and the **intergenerational impacts of water policy.**
- Make space and **stepping back** for a new generation of leaders.



VP negotiation simulation at CALP 2019. Photo © CAREC, 2019



# Resources for ongoing learning:

WORKING PAPER - JANUARY 2021

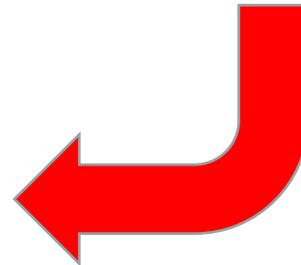
## Making Waves: Youth engagement in water diplomacy

Since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security in 2015, there has been a normative shift in the way youth are recognized as significant stakeholders in global dialogues. In recent years, governments and international organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of Resolution 2250 by creating space for youth in peace and development processes (United Nations, 2020). Despite some progress, a redoubling of efforts is needed to elevate youth voices across the water sector – including as part of water diplomacy processes.





Check out the  
references  
inside!



POLICY PAPER

## Tapping our Potential: Women's Water Leadership in the Nile Basin



Women Have a Critical Role to Play in Inclusive and Effective Transboundary Water Governance

**Dublin Statement (1992) Principle 3:**  
Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

This pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resource programmes, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.

**From Policy to Action: Balancing Gender for Stronger Water Diplomacy**

The critical role of women in water resources management and protection has been recognized and emphasized at the highest policy levels for over 25 years. The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development (see box) was only the first of countless national, basin-level and international policy statements and guidance documents that stress the need for more gender-inclusive water governance processes at all levels<sup>1</sup>. Yet, despite repeated high-level commitments to engaging women in water governance, evidence reveals a persistent gender gap in the water sector. This gap is particularly evident at the transboundary level, where water governance processes continue to be dominated by men (Rutilli and Earle, 2013; IUCN, 2017).

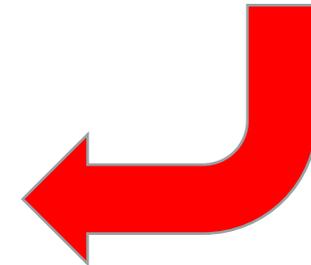
Similarly, the transformative role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding has been repeatedly demonstrated.

<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., The Beijing Platform for Action (2005); Rio Principles 20 (1992); Africa Water Vision 2025; The AWC/ICWG Strategy and Policy for Mainstreaming Gender in the Water Sector in Africa (2011); and the Making Water Governance Gender Policy and Strategy (2013).

including research showing that gender inclusive peace processes are 35 per cent more likely to last at least 15 years, that peace agreements signed by women are positively associated with more durable peace, and that higher levels of gender equity are associated with a lower instance of conflict (Krause et al. 2018; UNSC, 2000). Despite this evidence and the formal recognition of the UN Security Council of the critical role of women in peace and security efforts, between 1990 and 2017 women constituted only 2 percent of mediators, 8 percent of negotiators and 5 percent of witnesses in all major peace processes. Women in transboundary water governance therefore face a hurdle on two fronts in overcoming the traditionally male-dominated world of water and peacebuilding (UN Women, 2018). Ensuring a better gender balance in water diplomacy efforts will require a sea change in perception of gender roles in both fields, accompanied by strong and implementable policies to overcome entrenched discrimination.

The persistent failure to include women equitably in political decision-making processes at the transboundary level undermines progress towards the cooperative and sustainable

Adapt and  
adopt learning  
from gender  
inclusion!



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Troell, Jessica and Koch, Elizabeth A. (2019) [Tapping our Potential: Women's Water Leadership in the Nile Basin](#). Stockholm International Water Institute. Stockholm, Sweden

# Thank you!

Questions? Comments? Ideas to Share?

Please reach out at:

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