



**Report of the WYPW Conference on World Water Day  
22 March 2013  
The Hague, the Netherlands**



**Background**

During the 6<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in Marseille, March 2012, a platform has been set up within the framework of the World Youth Parliament for Water on which students and young water professionals can share knowledge, experiences and skills and develop themselves as young leaders in the water sector. Over the last year we have continued to build this platform on both international and national levels.

During International World Water Day 2013, the Conference of the World Youth Parliament for Water in The Hague was organised to invite young people from all over the Netherlands to participate in the official programme of World Water Day. The conference was linked to the official program of World Water Day.

**Overview**

The conference was officially opened by *Wim Kuijken*, Government Commissioner for the Dutch Delta, with a Keynote Speech about 'The Future of Water', which was followed by a Q&A-Session. The conference continued with a Stakeholder Debate with the participation of *Prof. Dr. Rob de Wijk*, Professor on International Relations at Leiden University, *Murray Biedler*, external Water Consultant at the European Water Partnership, *Jasmine Moussa*, PhD-Candidate at Cambridge on International Water Law and *Rozemarijn Ter Horst*, independent consultant and founder of the Water Youth Network.

The Solutions Forum that followed provided an opportunity for all participants to discuss the Water Post 2015 Agenda within different thematic commissions. This was followed by a Plenary Forum, in which all commissions presented the outcomes of their discussions.

An additional event was the official closure of the Dutch competition of guest-lectures on water. In this competition, a total of 732 guest lectures were given by representatives of the top sector water to young students. To celebrate this important success, *Rogier Burger*, waterwonderen ambassador of the Netherlands Water Partnership, presented a certificate to *Hans Huis in 't Veld*, Head representative of the Dutch Top sector Water.

In closing, *Bart Devos*, President of the World Youth Parliament for Water, presented results of parallel WYPW activities, which was followed by the final closing remarks of *Annerieke Sleurink*, Dutch Representative to the World Youth Parliament for Water and main organiser of the event.

**This report will consist of the following sections**

- Inspiration (reflection on the Keynote Speech and the Stakeholder Debate)
- Solutions Forum (output of the different Commissions)
- Recommendations for the Water Post 2015 Agenda
- Follow-up

## **Inspiration**

The Keynote Speech of Wim Kuijken, combined with the following Q&A-Session and the Stakeholder Debate formed an inspiration and basic grounds for the discussions that were to take place during the Solutions Forum.

Wim Kuijken, Delta Commissioner, stressed the innovative essence of the Delta Works for the Netherlands, as well as the importance of taking a different view on water governance, with the Delta Organisation approach to focus more on prevention of disasters rather than response. This idea was based on the economic approach that the restoration of the Delta works after a disaster would cost 7 times as much as it would cost to install procedures for a prevention of that same disaster. While this may seem like a logical step, the Netherlands is one of the first countries to take this approach. An implication of this approach is that protection from water becomes more and more integrated with planning and infrastructure, and plans have to be developed more systematically in cooperation with the people who live in endangered or buffer areas. Consequently, the more citizens that stand behind the plans for the Delta Works, the more successful the establishment of the process is. However, successful water cooperation is only possible when there is a common goal based on shared values. Step by step, with careful consideration and preparation of all stakeholders, the Government Commissioner for the Dutch Delta is leading the Netherlands to a new Delta plan, to be presented in 2014.

Within the Stakeholder Debate, led by Natalija Milicevic, student at UNESCO-IHE on Water Conflict Management, panel members discussed what water cooperation entails.

Prof. Dr. Rob de Wijk set the scene for the debate by not only discussing water cooperation, but by discussing the importance of cooperation for all different natural resources and other sectors. He presented the idea of strategic cooperation, which is cooperation based on mutual interest, rather than cooperation that is based on the exchange of goods. More partners benefit from such systems. However, few countries take such an approach at the present time. This underlines the importance of this year's theme 'International Cooperation for Water'.

Murray Biedler, consultant at the European Water Partnership, stressed the importance of water cooperation and the lessons we can learn from various institutions. For example, water cooperation in Europe is far advanced, despite the challenges, because of Europe's overarching political structure and water policy. Moreover, Mr. Biedler stressed the importance of youth cooperation as stakeholders. Working with the World Youth Parliament on Water, Mr. Biedler has first-hand experience on what young people can accomplish and how important it is to involve them as stakeholders.

Jasmine Moussa, PhD student at Cambridge University on Water Law in the Nile Basin, introduced a different form of cooperation, as she explained about the organisation that she is part of, which gathers students from all countries of the Nile Basin to work together for common water governance. This is exceptional within the existing situation where the countries in the Nile Basin have difficulties in cooperating. Jasmine Moussa furthermore stressed the difficulties that arise with water management in international basins, especially when there are different legal frameworks involved that are also not binding.

Rozemarijn Ter Horst emphasized mainly the inclusion of youth in water cooperation, in order to engage society with policy-making and to ensure that current policy-making is not only concerned by the needs of society of today, but also looks ahead towards 2025 or 2050. She re-emphasized the importance of including the youth on the one hand, and the duty of the youth to empower themselves, share information and make sure they are informed on national and international youth processes. She recently launched the website of the Water Youth Network ([www.wateryouthnetwork.org](http://www.wateryouthnetwork.org)), a platform aiming to contribute to youth empowerment in the Water Sector.

Both Rob de Wijk and Murray Biedler furthermore agreed that not only an exchange of knowledge is important, but that certain skills are essential as well. This includes being able to

think out of the box as a significant skill for building cooperation, not only for water but for all other dimensions and challenges. The transfer of these skills and knowledge should be actively promoted.

### **Solutions Forum**

During the Solutions Forum, participants were divided in the following Commissions: Water&Human Capital, Water&Sustainable Development and Water Governance & Youth Participation. The commissions were chaired by representatives from HCA Water, the Dutch Youth Council (NJR) and the European Water Partnership. Participants of these commissions were challenged to come up with concrete proposals that would contribute to the international debate regarding UN Water's Post 2015 Policies.

Outcomes of the commissions of the Solutions Forum will feed into other youth processes through links with the UN Water Post 2015 Policies, as well as through links with the World Youth Parliament for Water, the International Water Week and the Water Youth Network.

#### ***Commission 1 – Water&Human Capital (hosted by HCA Water)***

The outcomes of this commission highlighted three main topics: Awareness, Education and Access.

*Awareness:* We should focus more on what is currently being done in the water sector; what does the private sector do, what do knowledge institutes and what does the government do in the field of water? What are the opportunities for young people in the sector, now and in the future? How can both people with a social and technical background be useful in the water sector, and make a career, both on vocational level and academic level?

*Education:* Cooperation between the sector and universities, which has already been set up, should be further strengthened. Not only a careful adaptation of studies to the market is necessary, but the water sector could also think of traineeships to train young potential candidates (both with technical and non-technical studies), to prepare them for the tasks at hand.

*Access:* Getting a job is not easy and youth unemployment is high at the moment. However, the future water sector needs more human capital in order provide for the needs of the country as well as abroad. Therefore a strong link between the young generation and the water sector should be established immediately. If young people are given the chance to participate, they will do so. Important is availability of jobs at entrance level which can provide young people with the chance to start in the water sector directly after graduation and to build stronger experience in the sector.

#### ***Commission 2 – Water&Sustainable Development (hosted by NJR)***

Participants agreed unanimously for WASH as number one priority for sustainable development. Nowadays WASH is seen rather as an economic good instead of a human right, whereas we believe that we need to be more concerned with human value of water than with the economic one.

In order to raise more awareness and stimulate a renewed value of water, a practical solution was given to encourage people to pay the real price that it takes to produce clean water, including the costs to clean it again after usage. Furthermore awareness raising about virtual water, the amount of water used and consumed for different processes, was recommended.

Concrete commitments from participants included becoming more conscious about their water use, and a continued awareness raising about the way we consume water in relation to the amount of water available on the planet.

Furthermore, involvement of youth in policy-making is seen as essential for sustainable development that is ultimately supported by society. Youngsters felt that their voice was not heard enough in official channels and negotiations. The WYPW Conference on World Water Day

22 March in The Hague itself was a unique opportunity, but the fact that it is unique already shows that there should be a change in the way different stakeholders (such as youth) are involved and able to engage in policy-making. Finally, the gap between being conscious about problems and actually changing behaviour is very large, and we may require more time than we think to solve some of the issues. At this moment we as youth are not essential in solving water issues, yet the leaders of today will have to invest in education and involvement of young generations in water-issues in order to prepare them to face the future challenges concerning the management of water and other natural resources.

### ***Commission 3 – Water Governance & Youth Participation (hosted by the EWP in cooperation with the GWP)***

Education is seen as a key-component to ensure the engagement and involvement of young generations in policy-making. Youth-participation is beneficial to both policy-makers and the young generation itself. Everyone can contribute to the discourse around water problems and young generations can play an essential part in moving the general public towards a common goal. Young generations are also able to bring in new perspectives as they often prioritize different interests as compared to the policy-maker generation; with fresh and ambitious perspectives they can add crucial insights to the problem-solving discussion. Furthermore, by being involved in policy-making the intra-generational transfer of knowledge and experience, which will ultimately have to happen at some point, can take place on a higher level than is presently possible.

A renewed form of education is necessary to enable this connection between young generations and policy-making generations, and should take place at different levels: older generations - the current policy-makers - need to become more aware of the added value of involvement of young generations in policy-making activities, and understand the potential of this form of cooperation; young generations on the other hand need to understand the importance of cooperation, and learn the basic skills necessary to engage in discussion and contribute effectively, including being aware of their potential to contribute as stakeholders.

Specifically for universities it is proposed to offer students opportunities to participate in the creation of their own study content. As there are gaps in the research concerning specific parts of water management -either because existing researcher have biased purposes or due to limited resources- students should have the possibility to focus their final thesis on these topics and try to make research more relevant for the public. This way, students do not only participate in choosing the topics that they prefer to study, but also create a situation in which both the fields of research and the general public are more connected.

### **Recommendations for the Water Post 2015 Agenda**

- The key to successful water cooperation is to have a common goal based on shared values. Therefore the awareness of a common goal should be raised.
- The inclusion of citizens in policy-making takes more time at first, yet in the end it results in more successful operations. Therefore more communication towards citizens should take place about what is currently being done and what should be done.
- The concept of strategic cooperation, which is based on mutual interest between two partners rather than the exchange of goods for money or other, should be considered as one of the role models for future cooperation, in specific in regards to water, but as well in other fields.
- WASH should be considered as the main priority on the political agenda when it comes to water governance, not only because of its economic importance to ensure the entire world population of access to clean water and sanitation, but rather because of the human value that people give to water. This requires a change in approach of water challenges, by not only taking into consideration its economic value, but by also acknowledging its cultural and social value.

- Non-binding legal frameworks in international water law can cause many difficulties in water cooperation, especially for governance. Therefore new treaties should be promoted for river basins, which are binding on the countries that share those basins.
- Good and successful cooperation is not only realised through exchange of knowledge, but qualification accompanied with necessary skills is essential as well. Here lies a responsibility for education-institutes at primary and secondary education, as well as at higher education for developing skills as well as transferring knowledge.
- In order to strengthen the link between young generation and the water sector, and in order to provide for the increasing need of human capital to be able to address water challenges both in the Netherlands and abroad, three key-components are high-lighted, namely Awareness, Education and Access. Awareness of both the need for more human capital as well as the possibilities that the water sector can bring, should be stimulated by making the water sector more Accessible for young generations In order to achieve this, Education plays a key-role in preparing young people for the sector, as it not only qualifies young generations with the skills to engage and become involved, but also ensure the intra-generation transfer of knowledge from the working field.

### **Follow-Up**

The foundation for a platform for Dutch students and young water professionals has been set up within the WYPW Conference on World Water Day 2013, through cooperation between the World Youth Parliament for Water, the Water Youth Network, HCA Water, NJR and Jong KNW. We will continue to strengthen this cooperation to stimulate the engagement of young people in the water sector through the creation of events, online meetings and other activities.

The outcomes of the different commissions are both written out and recorded. Video-messages will be spread through social media water campaigns in the period April 2013-June 2013. Written statements will be presented to officials at local, national and international level. Via both ways, the statements will add to the current international debate about International Cooperation for Water.

Concrete recommendations as written out in the section above will feed into other youth processes through links with

- HCA Water
- UN WaterPost2015 policies via the UN Wings4Water Youth Program
- Global Water Partnership
- Water Youth Network
- NJR (Part of the Solution-Campaign)
- World Youth Parliament for Water

Furthermore, recommendations will feed into other youth processes within

- European Youth Parliament for Water, 12-19 May 2013, Yerevan, Armenia.
- Budapest Water Summit 2013, 9-11 October 2013, Budapest, Hungary.  
<http://budapestwatersummit.hu/the-2013-budapest-water-summit>
- Amsterdam International Water Week, 4-8 November 2013, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. <http://internationalwaterweek.com/young/front/>
- 7<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, March 2015, Daegu, South-Korea.