

2022 SMM Youth Key messages

In May, the SWA [Sector Ministers' Meeting](#) (SMM) will convene more than 70 ministers of water, sanitation, health, climate, economy and the environment.

Also lending their voices to the discussions will be SWA's youth representatives – Nicki Becker and Kenneth Alfaro Alvarado – who are keen to remind policymakers that young people are eager to partner on the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene for all.

To that end, SWA youth representatives from different regions joined a workshop to prepare a series of SMM youth messages and asks which call on government leaders to fully and meaningfully include young leaders in decision-making processes.

Young people are not just beneficiaries of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, THEY ARE AGENTS OF CHANGE

- According to the latest [United Nations estimates](#), approximately 1 in 6 of the world's population are between 15 and 24 years old. Because governments alone cannot deliver the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, SWA's inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach demands more explicit efforts to work with this population group: increasing youth participation in global and national accountability processes as well as ensuring greater representation of young people in national, regional, and global fora.
- Young people are key stakeholders in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, particularly because they are directly affected by lack of water, sanitation and hygiene services including at school (which disproportionately affects women and girls) and in their communities. Unfortunately, they are also often marginalized in decision-making processes.
- Young people are not just beneficiaries, but also agents of change. They have distinct voices and needs which should be included and heard during national participatory processes. They are also vital political pressure groups both in the field and in digital spaces and are increasingly being recognized as innovators, implementers, and entrepreneurs. More importantly, they are future leaders and guardians of the sector, and they have a right to be engaged today on the critical issues they will face in future.
- Despite comprising a significant political constituency, young people are not represented adequately in formal and political institutions and processes. Additionally, [2 out of 3 countries](#) do not consult young people as part of the process of preparing poverty reduction strategies or national development plans.
- Inclusive, intergenerational decision-making processes are proven to have more long-lasting success. Many governments and international organizations are starting to create space for young people in peace and development processes in line with the UN Resolution 2250.

However, more can be done to mainstream youth inclusion to legitimise the whole process from recognizing human rights to improving results.

- By marshalling the energy, creativity and talents of young people to address the multiple inequalities they face, we will all reap a 'demographic dividend' and build a fairer world.

Universal access to water and sanitation can END INEQUALITIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

- Children are responsible for fetching water in one in five households in Sub-Saharan Africa – an area where [six out of ten children do not have enough water to meet their daily needs](#). Water collection is not only difficult and dangerous, the time burden also often prevents children from attending school.
- Increasing access to water for young people can have an enormous impact on their education, personal lives and futures. It can reduce inequality since girls are more likely to drop out of school because of the time needed to collect water. Additionally, provision of water and sanitation services at school ensures girls can continue to attend during menstruation.
- Young people are becoming increasingly aware of the high social cost of inequalities, resulting in disillusionment instability and violence. These inequalities hinder efforts for poverty reduction and economic growth, and negatively affect [society as a whole](#).

Access to water and sanitation IS A MATTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

- As a world of individuals, communities and nations, we must act together now to end injustices related to water, sanitation and hygiene globally.
- Justice is the rock upon which we can build a resilient future that ensures everyone's dignity, health and wellbeing. It provides the strong foundation from which we can effectively tackle the climate emergency and build a future where education, strong economies and prosperity for all can become a reality.
- Access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene is not a privilege. It is a fundamental human right. Ensuring justice begins here, with provision of these services for everyone. And the time to act is now, because justice delayed is justice denied.

Young people can lead TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS

- SWA is actively seeking to include and amplify the voices of young leaders, advocates and professionals within the partnership and in the sector. This will not only help empower young people in developing their capacity as leaders and negotiators in the sector but will also tackle a critical sectoral challenge: scaling up action and ensuring the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



- As young people, we call on government leaders to prioritize and invest in water, sanitation and hygiene, recognizing WASH as a crucial resource for peace, security, development and economic recovery.
- We also call on government leaders to ensure that young leaders are never again excluded from high-level discussions and crucial decision-making processes. Today, as we face a triple crisis, we must find new ways to accelerate access to water and sanitation. Young people can lead these transformative solutions.

Our asks

1. First, include young people in national and sub-national water and sanitation planning, implementation mechanism with policy reinforcement.
2. Secondly, decision makers should recognise and utilise the “on the ground” knowledge young people have through working in their communities.
3. Third, establish a Youth desk in every water, sanitation and hygiene Ministry.
4. Fourth, support youth-led solutions on water, sanitation and hygiene. From rain-harvesting in Uganda, leadership on water and gender, to crowd-funded covid protection measures across the world – the examples of our innovation are there to see.
5. Fifth, include the youth voice in the national accountability processes like Joint Sector Reviews and other national review mechanisms.
6. Sixth, implement accountability mechanisms that are accessible, inclusive, and transparent.
7. Seventh, make sure that youth are part of those accountability mechanism, that we can bring you to account.
8. Eighth, ensure there is more public information about water, sanitation and hygiene.
9. Ninth, and finally, invest in training and capacity building of youth in this sector. We are not just water, sanitation and hygiene activists; we are also young water, sanitation and hygiene professional.

