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## The First Aral Sea Summer School Young Water Leaders – Vector of Change 11-18 August, 2019

### Background

Today, more than ever before, water is recognized as a fundamental resource to ensure future sustainable and inclusive economic growth; and access to water is vital as a basic human right. In committing to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), we aim to implement our summer schools on an annual basis, focusing on United Nations World Water Development Reports'

themes. Consequently, the first Aral Sea summer school will be entitled to “no one is left behind”, and will service youth – one of the most vulnerable groups as specified in the 2030 Agenda.

Young water leaders are future decision-makers, who will influence development of the Central Asian region and beyond. Thereby, we aim that the summer school will be a tool to empower and inspire youth to choose nature-based solutions when addressing environmental challenges. We will lead an expert-to-youth knowledge exchange, as well as capacity-building and networking opportunities for future water leaders.

The first summer school in Aral will also celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “Barsakelmes” Nature Reserve by implementing nature-based solutions approach in enhancing skills of participants, and providing the youth with an opportunity of engagement with local communities.

### Structure and approach

#### Three main directions of influence:

- *Ecosystem based disaster risk reduction*

Ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction is the sustainable management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems to provide services that reduce disaster risk by mitigating hazards and by increasing livelihood resilience. Healthy ecosystems reduce people's vulnerability to disasters by supporting livelihoods and meeting basic needs for food, water, fuel and shelter.

- *“Conservation agriculture”*

Agriculture is by far the largest water consumer, accounting for 69% of annual water withdrawals globally. Agriculture will need to meet projected increases in food demand by improving its resource use efficiency while simultaneously reducing its external

footprint, and water is central to this need. A cornerstone of recognized solutions is the ‘Conservation agriculture’, which incorporates practices aimed at minimizing soil disturbance, maintaining soil cover and regularizing crop rotation, is a flagship example approach to sustainable production intensification.

➤ *Energy: hydropower and bioenergy*

Biofuels and hydropower are particularly relevant in terms of nature-based solutions for water supply in the context of energy production. Biofuel crops potentially use large amounts of water and can increase water scarcity, among other impacts. However, nature-based solutions for biofuel crops are essentially the same as those for agriculture. Agriculture will need to meet projected increases in production through improved resource use efficiency whilst simultaneously reducing its external footprint, and water is central to this process.

Applications of nature-based solutions for improving water supply for hydropower essentially involve improved catchment management approaches that regulate water supplies to hydropower installations and reductions in the sediment loads to reservoirs in order to increase dam storage efficiency.

***All three thematic scopes will be structured to develop a better understanding of transboundary and regional cooperation, as well as discover potential of youth for water and peace.***

## **Methodology**

The summer school will be based on interactive thematic lectures, which then to be followed by working sessions to foster intergenerational dialogue, and build capacities of the participants. Field trip around the Aral Sea Basin will provide an opportunity for engagement of youth with local community and interaction with civil society, which will be an essential part of experience and traditional knowledge sharing.

## **Objective**

- Expand knowledge of future water leaders in the field of nature-based solutions by approaching disaster risk reduction, agriculture and energy sectors;
- Raise awareness of the youth through strengthening a platform for networking to create ties between different youth initiatives and allow new, concrete actions to emerge in the region and beyond;
- Promote dialogue between the youth and civil society;
- Cultural representation of the event in media to provide more visibility and opportunities of cross regional cooperation.

## **Eligibility**

The summer school is open to both national and international students (bachelor’s, master’s degree and PhD level) from different disciplines; however, knowledge of the Central Asian regional context and an interest in three main directions of influence of this event are desirable.

We encourage young researchers involved in work related to the Aral Sea Basin to apply for available grants for supporting their scientific publications.

Eligible candidates should be able to communicate in English.

## **Expected outputs**

- ✓ Promote nature-based solutions in committing to address water availability and quality in the Aral Sea Basin and beyond
- ✓ Knowledge and experience exchange to valorize local actions of youth active for water
- ✓ Engagement of young experts with civil society
- ✓ Media coverage of situation of the Aral Sea Basin

## **Fees**

The summer school is fully funded by the organizers of the event. ***The privilege of travel grants will be provided to early-stage applicants, who will submit their applications by May 15.***

## **Enrolment**

In order to apply, interested candidates should submit a completed online application form, with their CV and a letter of motivation attached to the form. **Deadline for applications is 27 May 2019.**

## **Partners**

The event is organized by “Central Asia Youth for Water” (CAY4W) Network in cooperation with the Kazakh-German University, Almaty and International Secretariat for Water, Canada (ISW) with the support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), World Bank (WB) and Global Water Partnership (GWP).