

The Aral Sea Summer School
Young Water Leaders – Vector of Change
August, 2020

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 second Aral Sea summer school will be entitled to "water and climate change", 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. It is also crucial to raise awareness of the Aral Sea desiccation and how this man-made environmental tragedy continues to affect local population, who had to migrate and leave their homes. Therefore, we envision an added value of the summer school in acknowledging current situation in the Aral region, and attracting more young specialists to engage with the topic in their professional and academic life.

Structure and approach

Three main directions of influence:

❖ *Nexus: water and agriculture*

Threats to food security can be reduced by adopting measures to adapt to climate change through impacts on water. Consequently, climate-resilient water management is a potentially powerful mechanism for achieving local, and possibly global, food security. With regard to mitigation, conservation agriculture can serve as a tool to improve soil organic matter and reduce food waste in general.

❖ *Nexus: water and ecosystems*

There are many ecosystem services that can help mitigate and adapt to climate change, to name a few: carbon sequestration in forests; providing a source of water, nutrition; protecting communities from storms, floods and droughts through coastal forests and wetlands. At the same time, freshwater systems are still under serious threat around the world, and climate change can further complicate this interaction. Therefore, ecosystem protection must be fully integrated into climate plan and policy dialogues.

❖ *Nexus: water and energy*

Between 2017 and 2040, it is estimated that global energy demand will increase by about 27 percent, while water demand is likely to increase by about 55 percent over the same time period. Due to the expected increased reliance on energy-intensive water supplies, renewable energy sources with less water footprint could potentially make up a growing part of the total energy supply.

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;
- 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.