

Industry Paper

The World Water Envoys Programme

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Practitioner Report

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ABSTRACT: The International Water Resources Association (IWRA) has been working for more than 50 years towards a more sustainable use and management of the world's water resources. One of the key instruments is the World Water Congress where knowledge exchange across continents and disciplines is the main mission. For the recent Congress in Daegu, South Korea, IWRA not only worked closely with Korean stakeholders to increase awareness of water-related issues but launched an Envoy Programme inviting young and ambitious people from various countries in the world to bridge the world of the conference audience and the realities of societies for whom clean and sufficient water is out of reach.

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IWRA History and Mission

Established in 1971, IWRA is a member-based non-profit association that provides a global, knowledge, and research-based forum working at the interface between science and policy for the sustainable use and management of the world's water resources.

Through IWRA, experts and enthusiasts in the field of water from all over the globe come together to collaborate and share knowledge, resources, and engage, debate, and thus work to find solutions to the world's water resource issues, and in turn, improve water resource decision-making.

Its first President and a driving force in its initial years was Ven Te Chow, Professor of Hydraulic Engineering at the University of Illinois (USA). The association's mission is: "To be a cross-disciplinary, membership-focused, international association that uses events, projects, publications and research to facilitate and inspire dialogue, knowledge sharing, and science-based solutions for the sustainable management of water resources across all sectors, scales and communities at the interface between science and policy." (IWRA, 2023).

The goal of IWRA is to improve and expand the understanding of water issues through education, research and information exchange among countries and across disciplines. IWRA seeks to continually

improve water resource decision-making by improving our collective understanding of the physical, ecological, chemical, institutional, social, and economic aspects of water. IWRA is deeply committed to the sound management of water resources through:

- Providing an international forum for water resource issues.
- Advancing water resources and related environmental research.
- Promoting water education throughout society by improving global access to relevant data and information.
- Enhancing the quality of knowledge used in decision-making.
- Improving exchanges of information and expertise.
- Networking with other organisations to advance common interests and goals.

IWRA maintains three main projects in the area of smart water management, water quality and water security. The organisation publishes an international journal and policy papers, and organises the World Water Congresses next to other conferences and events related to advancing water resources knowledge, policy and management around the world.

Strategies for Global Impact

The World Water Congress is the largest event linking water researchers and policy practitioners in the world. In its XVIIth edition since 1973, the Congress held in Daegu, Republic of Korea in November 2021 focused on a key, timely theme: “Foundations for Global Water Security and Resilience: Knowledge, Technology and Policy.” It is known that water security can be endangered in many ways: water scarcity, natural hazards, conflicts, contaminants, etc. The challenges and priorities around water security are multiple, complex and diverse. That is why for this Congress, IWRA wanted to hear stories from representatives of the next generations and give them a chance to showcase the issues they face when it comes to Water Security during the next XVII World Water Congress in Korea. The five selected representatives are called “World Water Envoys”.

How did the idea/plan to enable and/or create some legacy impacts started?

The idea for the IWRA Envoy Programme came from the IWRA Executive Office - looking for ways to better engage with youth from all regions, including developing countries (ensuring that they are part of the conversation, and not placed in a silo or on the side-lines). We also wanted to bring the “real world” into the conference hall, and to find ways to develop a narrative before, during and after the Congress. This also required using a variety of media, and ensuring that the Envoys were part of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies alongside the usual VIP speakers, as well as having their own special session. During the opening ceremony of the Congress, the World Water Envoys will have the opportunity to talk about the water security challenges they face in their community and the impacts it has on everyday life. They will then have the chance to discuss this issue in more detail over the following days with experts attending the Congress, and then will be asked to summarise in the Closing Ceremony what they have learned over the week, and what connections they made that might help their community to overcome its water security challenge.

Who took the lead? Which type of collaboration with whom and which organisations were necessary/successful/not successful?

IWRA took the lead, but of course worked with our hosts for the XVII World Water Congress, as they covered their costs to get to Korea and to attend the Congress. The collaboration between IWRA and the Envoys did not only start at the Congress: the preparation year before the Congress in Korea was an opportunity to already engage with the five Envoys, and gave them the chance to take part in IWRA Task Forces and projects. The response to this initiative was so positive that the Envoys were then invited by the World Water Council to attend the 9th World Water Forum in Senegal (all costs covered) following our XVII World Water Congress in Korea.

What are the particular design aspects of the entire event which led to the impacts and legacies you were reporting?

The selection process was a short video application explaining the water insecurity issue facing their communities, and the impact on them, their family and neighbours. This was accompanied by an “iconic” photo of the water insecurity issue facing the community the Envoys come from. These were reviewed and a shortlist was invited to interviews. The Envoys had to be able to communicate clearly and confidently in English about their issue. Other media were also used to spread their stories, and each Envoy was connected to a mentor from the IWRA Executive Board to help them prepare presentations etc for the Congress. In addition, past Envoys moving forward will also be mentors for future Envoys.

The World Water Envoys for the XVII Congress were (IRWA, 2021a):

1. Georgina Mukwirimba, Zimbabwe, Water Supply (IRWA, 2021b)
2. Deepesh Jain, India, Safety water and sanitation (IRWA, 2021c)
3. Maria Almonte, Dominican Republic, Urban River management (IRWA, 2021d)
4. Bayan Khalaf, Palestine, West Bank, Agrochemical pollution (IRWA, 2021e)
5. Pallavi Pokharel, Nepal, Groundwater pollution (IRWA, 2021f).

The following exhibit shows some pictures the Envoys used to share the stories of their communities:



Figure 1: Palestine (©IWRA)



Figure 2: Zimbabwe (©IWRA)



Figure 1: India (@IWRA)



Figure 2: Dominican Republic (@IWRA)

Lessons Learned and Event Impact

It can still be a challenge in some cultures to give youth space on the stage with senior VIPs (ministers etc.). Working with the hosts of each Congress requires an understanding of their needs and concerns, but external validation such as the impact wards helps. This particular Envoy Programme won the Incredible Impacts Award in 2022 organized by ICCA and the Best Cities Alliance.

The impacts derived from the Envoy Programme are summarized here:

- Envoys are actively involved in IWRA's Early Career and Young Professionals Task Force.
- Envoys will become peer mentors for future World Water Envoys, who will be selected for the upcoming XVIII World Water Congress in September 2023.
- Envoys will contribute to a special issue of IWRA's flagship journal, Water International.
- Envoys applied learnings from the conference to their communities, contributing to visible and immediate impacts. These include new drinking water pipelines in the Manohara region of Nepal; education for Palestinian farmers that proposes alternatives to pesticides and fertilizers; and laying the foundation for future integrated water resources management in Zimbabwe.

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