



Youths during world water day at Chandpur
Photo credit: Masud Al Mamun/ CNRS/Oxfam

TROSA LEARNING BRIEF

ISSUE 6/MAY 2020

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN WATER GOVERNANCE VANGUARDS OF CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is home to 19% of the world's youth population and regional youth unemployment stands at 11%.¹ There is growing evidence that climatic variability has impacts on water availability and quality, which jeopardizes social stability and jobs for the youth. Sustainable water management, water infrastructure, access to water and sanitation improve living standards, expand local economies,

lead to the creation of jobs, and ensure greater social inclusion.

More than 40% of the people on this planet are younger than 25, and more than 55% is younger than 35. Investing in this group of young people can contribute now to the implementation of the SDGs, and who will be responsible for taking the next steps after the finalisation of agenda 2030.²

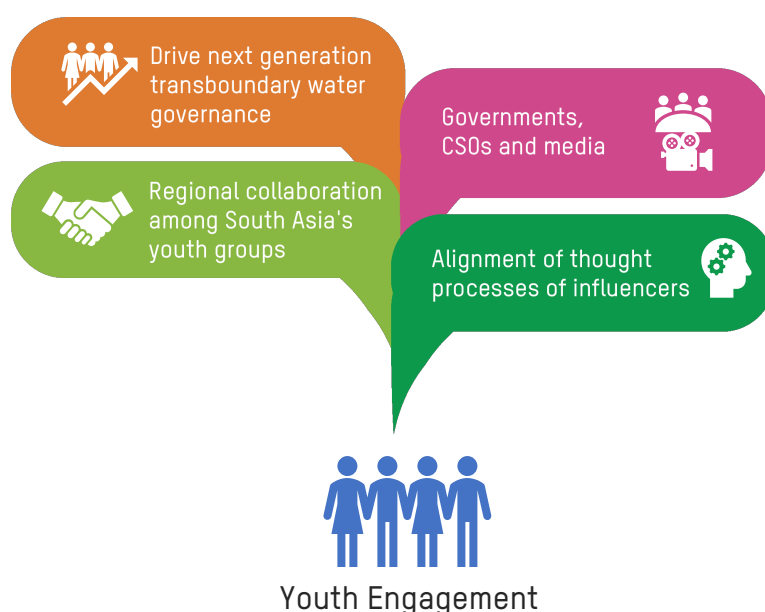
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

TROSA's approach

TROSA recognizes the youth community as an extremely well-placed stakeholder group and actor that can bring awareness, innovation and drive the next generation policies for water governance related issues at the transboundary level. It's approach to working with youth as active citizens supports young people to collectively use their energy and skills to contribute and create transformational change in society.

TROSA youth engagement strategy underpins regional collaboration among South Asia's youth groups to strengthen cooperation on water management in transboundary waters. It focuses on bringing together governments, CSOs practitioners and the media together to attract, engage and empower the youth to engage them in inclusive water governance.

This strategy looks overcome the misalignment of the thought processes of influencers across South Asia's river basin landscape and bring young water leaders to a common platform for shared understanding and partnership regarding transboundary water governance.



¹ UN DESA Youth report Correct reference Link/Year

² <https://www.wateryouthnetwork.org/water-governance/>

River Camps in Bangladesh

Since 2017, TROSA with partners Riverine People, Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) and Gana Unnaan Kendra (GUK) have been organizing River Camps - a congregation of youth participants from Bangladesh and neighbouring countries. The 4-5 day event hosts 20-30 participants and uses a strategic mix of lectures and curated mentorship by experienced professionals in the water governance sector, along with participatory sessions facilitated by mentors, followed by field visits to villages and towns where marginalized communities are facing water resource governance challenges. At the end of the camp participants come up with joint action proposals which are followed up for about a year thereafter.



Field work during regional youth camp
Photo credit: Masud Al Mamun/ CNRS/Oxfam

The first river camp in April 2018 hosted 12 young women and 26 young men in Dhaka, followed up with a 'Young Researchers Workshop'. This led to 4 joint researches done by river camp participants and many other local actions. There was a growing demand for taking this to the regional level to include young leaders from other countries, which led to the next camp in June 2019 including participants from Nepal and India.

In June 2019, the camp hosted 21 participants from Bangladesh, India and Nepal and featured four case studies in ongoing youth-

led partnerships and actions including joint research, surveys, awareness drives and advocacy targeting city corporations to suggest measures to reduce pollution in rivers. Similarly, 55 young volunteers collected evidences from about 480 fishers from around the Brahmaputra-Meghna river basin and use that to advocate for a more inclusive river fisheries governance. Such youth-led initiatives have gained traction in capturing the attention of the private sector engaged in fisheries and influential attention towards outstanding environmental and humanitarian issues in the fisheries related businesses.

So far, they have been able to reach more than 30 influential members of civil society, more than 100 members of private sector and top 16 officials in the Department of Fisheries with their advocacy work hand in hand with the fishers.

Mahakali basin: Youth-led conservation



Youths are doing field work
Photo credit: Masud Al Mamun/ CNRS/Oxfam

In Nepal's far-western region, young women and men from four districts of Mahakali river basin are working with women empowerment centers in a citizen science drive to monitor water quality in the river basin in upstream and downstream areas, working out local rules to conserve fishing areas. This initiative is relatively new but is getting momentum fast.

This action is linked with the '[Dhangadi declaration](#)' which was signed among all the local government representatives in the Mahakali basin, for empowering local communities for better management and achievement of community rights on the river resources.

TROSA facilitated the participation of Greenhood Nepal in the River Camp 2019 in Bangladesh. It local science-driven, conservation organisation focusing on the human dimensions of nature conservation in the Mahakali region. TROSA activities with Greenhood Nepal aims to bring youths representatives from across Nepal—with knowledge, opportunities and research—to respond to emerging conservation challenges and to better protect and manage natural resources in the mahakali region.

Inspired by the successful outcomes of River camps in Bangladesh, youth in Nepal have aspired to organize their own River Camp events in the Mahakali basin.

In May 2019, TROSA supported the Provincial Youth Conference 2019, organized by the Nepal Youth Council with collaboration with Nepal's 'Sudurpaschim' or 'Far-West' Province government, ministries of social development and Industry, Forest, Tourism and Environment.

The conference was organized in association with Oxfam Nepal and other private sector stakeholders including Coca-Cola Nepal. The Youth Conference pledged an 11-point declaration that focused on the engagement of youth of the far-western region in various income generating and entrepreneurship, as well as their roles in realizing the Sustainable Development Goal 6 'Clean Water and Sanitation' for riverine communities along the Mahakali river.

LEARNINGS

- If given a chance and adequate exposure and encouragement, youth can play the role of community leaders and opinion makers in changing the mindsets around contentious issues. This is evidenced by exchanges of opinion by youth leaders during youth programs in Bangladesh and Nepal.
- The progressive attitudes of youth can be instrumental in raising awareness on the rights of women and their empowerment, especially in context with riverine issues and women access to water and their participation in shaping policies.
- Youth networks can be powerful conveners to bring together stakeholders and actors like the government, NGOs, civil society and the private sector to a common understanding and secure commitments on cross-cutting issues like water and sanitation, water governance, development and economics. This is evidenced in the 11-point declaration resulting from the Youth Conference held in Nepal in 2019.

About TROSA

TROSA is a five year (2017-2021) regional water governance programme being implemented in the transboundary river basins of Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) in Nepal, India and Bangladesh and the Salween in Myanmar. Adopting a human-rights based approach, TROSA facilitates river dependent communities' participation in water governance and help them uphold their rights to water. As part of this, it also supports and promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships and collective action for inclusive water governance policies and practices at various levels. TROSA is funded by the Government of Sweden and managed by Oxfam.

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Disclaimer: Views expressed in this brief are those of the author and don't represent the views of the Oxfam or Government of Sweden.



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