



## Eswatini Youth in Water Initiative

### Background & Introduction

The Joint River Basin Authorities – Project Board (JRBA-PB) is a water governance institution working at a sub-national and river basin level under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy. It was established in 2020 through Section 79 of the Water Act of 2003. It operates as the technical arm of the five (5) River Basin Authorities (RBAs) of Eswatini, which are mandated by the water law of Eswatini to ensure coordinated and efficient utilization and management of water resources to maximise economic, social, and environmental benefits.

In collaboration with the International Union of Nature Conservation (IUCN), implementing parts of the ‘Youth Voice Initiative’, the JRBA-PB and partners have initiated a National Youth in Water Initiative informed by:

- ❖ The aim of improving the understanding, appreciation, and enhanced management of water resources by implementing the UN Valuing Water Principles across various aspects of water-related activities and industries also, building youth capacity, ensuring youth involvement and inclusion in water resources management and governance.
- ❖ Recognition that water is a cross-cutting issue pertinent to all sectors of the economy hence a need for a holistic approach to youth engagement & incorporating young people in the governance and administration of water resources, so they can (actively) work to enhance water management and climate resilience in the country.
- ❖ Outcomes two & three of the VWI<sup>1</sup>, which aims to ensure that local youth action to address water-related challenges in a changing climate is formally recognised and implemented as part of official planning and programme delivery and Youth contribution to local, regional, and global water governance and management-related dialogues is the norm, not the exception.

This endeavour is critical for eSwatini which has been characterised by the lack of opportunities for young people and their involvement in the water sector, perpetuated by social exclusion stemming from community disputes, lack of capacity and resources. In addition, a mono-sectoral approach to water management has been highlighted to significantly constrain

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the capacity for innovation required to enhance water management within the country whilst stifling the creation of additional opportunities within the sector.

The Youth in Water Initiative was activated during the 2023 Eswatini International Trade Fair (EITF) where youth shared their views on how youth can lead innovation for a sustainable future, challenges for young people in the water and how the initiative can be effective. The collective views of the youth are presented on the table below.

<u><i>Young People’s Pain About the Water Sector</i></u>	<u><i>How can youth lead innovation for a sustainable future in the water sector?</i></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social exclusion</i></li> <li>• <i>Community Disputes</i></li> <li>• <i>Inadequate Knowledge</i></li> <li>• <i>Ignorance</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of clean safe water</i></li> <li>• <i>Limited access to water in rural areas</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of skills on innovation</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of knowledge</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of job opportunities</i></li> <li>• <i>Rejection because of lack of education</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of resources</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Water harvesting training.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provision of resources to establish youth led innovative initiatives.</i></li> <li>• <i>Prevent deterioration of watershed</i></li> <li>• <i>Take part in efficient water use.</i></li> <li>• <i>Engage in water research.</i></li> <li>• <i>Leverage AI into water management</i></li> <li>• <i>Take leadership and responsibility in innovative solutions.</i></li> <li>• <i>Take water serious and spread the importance of water conservation</i></li> </ul>
<u><i>Expectations from the youth in water initiative</i></u>	<u><i>How can the youth in the water sector be effective?</i></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Youth empowerment programs</i></li> <li>• <i>Youth engagements</i></li> <li>• <i>Youth water platforms</i></li> <li>• <i>Means of how to use for income generation</i></li> <li>• <i>Establishing and increasing platforms for youth capacity building</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentorship programs</i></li> <li>• <i>Bursaries for training on different aspects of water management</i></li> <li>• <i>Proper awareness on water</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Through capacity building</i></li> <li>• <i>Water indaba / forums</i></li> <li>• <i>Continuous engagement and support</i></li> <li>• <i>Granted space to voice out their opinions (youth should also take up space as the future leaders)</i></li> <li>• <i>Through exposure and participation</i></li> <li>• <i>Engage each other on increasing availability, equitable access.</i></li> </ul>

The youth-led program is focused on addressing water-related challenges through innovation and community engagement. Our core values include youth empowerment, sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity. The goal is to develop a new generation of leaders capable of

building a better future for themselves and their country through a platform that supports personal growth, education, and motivation, enabling young individuals to unlock their potential, develop essential skills, and become catalysts for positive change.

The EYIWI aligns with our national development priorities and is targeting young people between the age of 18-35 in all the four regions of the country interested in water governance issues. The initiatives elements include improving coordination, capacity building, public awareness and advocacy and scaling up innovation and use of (Integrated Water Resources Management) IWRM technologies.

## **Milestones**

### **1. Youth Engagement:**

During the Eswatini International Trade Fair and accompanying workshops, we facilitated discussions where youth shared their perspectives on how young people can drive innovation towards a sustainable future. Topics included challenges facing youth in the water sector, as well as strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the initiative. The JRBA-PB organised a special side event for the youth during the River and Environmental Management Cooperation (REMCO) conference a platform that allowed the youth to inform exchanged knowledge about operational methods and practices. REMCO aims to foster co-learning and to enhance cooperation between the river basin institutions and other water management institutions. Stakeholder consensus is driven through informed comments and recommendations. We also engage the youth through workshops and partnering with other organisations to address water and climate change related issues such as the Youth for water and climate workshop organised in collaboration with Global Water Partnership- South Africa.

### **2. Youth in Water Indaba:**

In collaboration with the International Union of Nature Conservation (IUCN), the JRBA-PB and partners organised an Indaba aimed at implementing parts of the ‘Youth Voice’. The Indaba was the first step towards the empowerment of youth in water resources management and presented a platform for youth to learn about water governance, challenges and opportunities in the field, sectoral and national policies, and statutory institutions in the region. It also aimed at aligning them in the field, with national development plans, and opportunities. We further create a community of practice that spurred the sharing of knowledge between fields, income generation and learning opportunities. Which further facilitate the continuous engagement of youth and cement their voice in the space. This will ensure that youth take the lead in water resources management.

### **3. Youth in Decision Making/ River Basin Authorities Board**

Through the Youth in Water Initiative, efforts have been made to encourage youth participation in decision-making processes. For the first time, youth and women have taken high-level positions, such as Chairman and Vice Chairman, in the River Basin Boards. This initiative aims to empower youth and provide them with opportunities for meaningful impact in the water sector.

### **4. Capacity Building and Other Opportunities for Youth:**

The Youth in Water Initiative focuses on providing capacity building programs and other opportunities to help young people advance in the water sector and make a positive difference. These opportunities include education, mentoring, leadership development, gaining diverse experiences, advocacy, and networking. Through scholarships, internships, mentoring programs, real-world project challenges, and participation in conferences and events, young people in the program have the chance to enhance their knowledge, skills, and connections in the water sector. With the assistance from the JRBA- PB and partners, the youth in water members get first preferences in the internship programs at JRBA- PB and the program is to be rolled out to other organisations in the water sector. The Youth in the program have been given numerous opportunities to participate in programs such as the Wetskills Water challenge programme and WISA when the work on real life cases pertaining water and present their cases to WISA where these cases can be upscaled to bigger projects with a potential funding to support them. We also have a community of practice where the youth register to be part of and information and sharing of experience and any other activities of the Initiative are deliberated through the COP platform. Through our partnership in the Netherlands, a select number of qualified individuals are admitted into the Young Expert Program (YEP) each year.

5. **Networking and Advocacy:** The platform has given the youth a platform to actively engage in advocating for water-related issues that are significant to themselves or their communities. They utilize their voices to raise awareness, educate, persuade, and influence others. Through building strong connections and contacts within the water sector and related fields, they gain access to valuable information, resources, opportunities, support, and collaboration. Additionally, they participate in impactful events that facilitate networking with peers, providing them with a platform to further expand their network and access additional resources for mutual benefit. Members in the community have been offered opportunities including attending UN water conferences.

## Where we are / Next Steps

The Eswatini Youth in Water Initiative ACE (Awareness, Capacity Building, and Education) program aims to accelerate integrated water resource management through capacity building and skills development for increased youth participation in water governance. Considering the critical role of water in various aspects of life, engaging youth in water projects is essential for addressing water challenges and ensuring long-term water security in Eswatini. The program seeks to strengthen the Youth in Water Initiative by enhancing coordination, building youth capacity in integrated water resources management and climate-smart technologies, empowering youth to advocate for policy reforms, equipping youth with resource mobilization techniques, creating awareness, and conducting public outreach activities. The goal is to maximize youth engagement, innovation, and active citizenship in the water sector to contribute to sustainable development and resilience.