

Conclusions Policy Dialogue and Consultation
"Political Dialogue on Water and Governance in Higher Education"
February 28th, 2022

Question 1: What should be the present and future role of higher education to favour the wellbeing of humans and sustainability of societies?

Higher education has a fundamental role in society in three areas: training, research and knowledge transfer, and management. In the education, the transmission of knowledge is a priority, in the curricula and in the lifelong learning. The professionals who will contribute to the development of society are nourished by the knowledge acquired.

Furthermore, research is another of the axes of the university. In this sense, it is necessary to emphasize the value of public-private collaboration, of collaboration between training and research centers, in short, the establishment of alliances (SDG 17) to meet the objectives. Investment in R&D&I is fundamental to progress. In addition, the transfer of knowledge and communication and disclosure must be taken into consideration.

On the other hand, the university must be an example of management and efficient work. Making so, it becomes a symbol of how the knowledge transmission is achieved.

Higher education should aim to improve individual and social well-being. It must also focus on sustainability in each of the three areas: social, environmental, and economic.

These objectives can only be achieved through local participation in existing problems.

Question 2: What are the main challenges/problems/gaps in relation to Water and Governance in higher education?

Among the main challenges, we highlight:

1. Lack of education on water matters.

The lack of training in water at all educational levels (primary, secondary, and higher education), as well as a shortage of training programs for teachers at these levels, implies a low awareness of the population about the water problem.

People who have not had some knowledge, either experiential or educational, with the different facets of water, do not manage to feel the importance of this resource, which hinders a culture of water in society in general and in higher education.

In addition, market signals, such as the cost of water, are distorted. Because in most cases water prices do not reflect their scarcity in quantity or quality, there is therefore confusion between value and price.

2. Low funding for higher education programs about water and governance.

Investment and the need for resources are fundamental to be able to move forward.

3. The lack of an overall vision of water that impedes its management and governance.

Water should not be dissociated from other environmental, social and/or cultural factors. We believe that the study of the topic should be conducted from a global perspective and in a participatory manner, including all the stakeholders.

4. Improved co-ordination among educational institutions, public authorities, civil society, the private sector, etc., on the issue of water and governance.

We believe there is a lack of more frequent and participative communication and collaboration among stakeholders in water management. there is a shortage of actual participation cases with different levels of participation.

5. Moving theory to practice

There are numerous documents and manuals that theoretically analyze the problems related to water, many of them produce in universities, but it is necessary to advance to

practice, contextualize and apply it considering the peculiarities of each territory, and the participation of all stakeholders.

6. Better information and data availability and indicators are required to improve management.

In general, information about water and governance is not systematized and channeled through official statistics, as well, there is no strong indicator framework to monitor and evaluate actions taken to improve water governance.

This lack of information also makes it difficult for the university to focus its research on the right direction, because it does not know the map of real problems.

What is not measured, can hardly be managed, and, therefore, cannot be improved.

Question 3: What needs to change or be created to face these challenges within and/or outside of higher education institutions?

1. Develop water education programs with a social and multi-disciplinary perspective.

Universities should integrate water, governance, and sustainability issues into their curricula to train students to manage those resources. The promotion of research into these issues to contribute to informed decision-making in the present and the future.

Programs must be contextualized according to their economic, social, cultural, and environmental context. Student participation in water resource management can be promoted through training and voluntary programs.

An example is the incorporation in the learning of ancestral rites or knowledge related to water, which have been passed out for centuries and which are of great importance for communities, involving this group.

2. Partnering and Collaborative Governance.

According to SDG 17, the cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda, it is essential to create and develop cooperation programs between universities, the public and private sectors, etc.

Universities should establish partnerships with civil society organizations and the private sector to promote the sustainability of water resources; allowing the exchange of knowledge and experiences among different actors, which promotes the development of society. Furthermore, these programs contribute to the training of highly skilled professionals, which translates into better performance of public/private institutions and better well-being of the population.

3. Action is necessary at all levels of education, not just at university.

This would highlight the importance of educating and raising awareness of the water problem at an early age (elementary and secondary education) training teachers at these levels and motivate them to do related work.

In this context, communication, and awareness campaigns (publicity, marketing) are also of great importance.

4. Funds and financial resources.

Increase funding for programs related to water, whether for research or equipment, as well as funding or scholarships for more people.

5. Development of international databases and open access indicators and promoting them.

To improve water governance and support decision-making, efforts should be intensified to establish and promote open international data bases and indicators.

For example, the creation of an open data portal that would provide information on global water governance (including data on legislation, planning, management, and civil society participation). and indicators for assessing the water governance system, identifying what works and what impedes the design and implementation of water policies.

Work should also continue and strengthen efforts to implement and generalize the concept of water footprint. And, in this sense, we think it is essential to combine approaches and methodologies that result in a single official statistic on the subject, which would allow comparisons to be established.