



International Water Resources Association (IWRA)
XVI World Water Congress

CANCUN DECLARATION

A Call for Action to Bridge Science and Water Policy-Making for Sustainable Development

The XVI World Water Congress convened by IWRA, CONAGUA and ANEAS addressed the issue of “bridging science and policy”.

The Congress calls for urgent mobilization of knowledge generators, governments, donors, professionals and civil society to join their efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Water is one of the most crucial needs for the Earth and all of its inhabitants. The holistic ambition of sustainable development in a changing world needs multidisciplinary knowledge, evidence based policies, involvement and participation of everybody for a more effective implementation of solutions.

The importance of water for development and human well-being was reemphasized in 2015 when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were adopted by the UN General Assembly. One of the 17 goals is to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (SDG 6), and the critical role of water is recognised by addressing water issues in many of the other goals. The High Level Panel on Water (HLPW), co-chaired by President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico and by President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of the Republic of Mauritius, made a call to action for a fundamental shift in the way the world looks at water. In 2015 and 2016, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Convention for Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Habitat III New Urban Agenda, to name a few, also focused on the critical role of water as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Congress stressed the following major issues:

• **“Business as usual” in science, policy and implementation is not an option**

- o The assessment of the current situation and trends illustrate that drastic changes are needed to achieve the SDGs;
- o The 2030 development agenda is a holistic ambition and the SDGs are strongly interlinked: water specialists could benefit from and contribute more to other sectors. They must engage with civil society to assert the role of water in human rights and nature.

• **Stronger efforts for new interdisciplinary knowledge and better knowledge sharing are crucial**

- o In a changing world, with complex interacting systems, science must identify emerging and future challenges. New commitments are constantly needed to generate and share data, information and knowledge from an interdisciplinary perspective, such as the World Water Data Initiative recently launched by the HLPW, and other efforts;
- o Science comprises traditional and modern knowledge, including natural and social sciences, and theoretical and applied sciences, capitalizing on best practices and learning from previous experiences.
- o Education, capacity building and knowledge sharing must be reinforced. As bridging science and policy is a long-term goal, young professionals have a key role in this process.



• **Scientific evidence-based policy making is essential**

- o Science is more than just publishing. Science and knowledge generators have a responsibility to produce and make available their collective expertise to improve policy making and public engagement;
- o Scientists must respond to the needs of civil society and the requests of policy makers through applied research activities;
- o Policy makers must clearly recognize science as a major contributor to evidence-based policies and the public debate.

• **Dissemination of good practices is crucial for fostering implementation of adaptive solutions**

- o Feedback gathered from good practices, especially through integrated water resources management, shows that effective alliances involving scientists, policy makers, major stakeholders and civil society are necessary, feasible, and achievable at all levels.

Time is short until the first review of Goal 6 of the SDGs in 2018 by the High Level Political Forum of the United Nations. The review will clearly reflect that we are not on track to achieve the goals and targets concerning the water sector in due time, and that urgent mobilization is needed.

The Congress solemnly urges:

• **Policy makers and donors:**

- To assimilate science into the decision-making process;
- To finance and facilitate programs and processes to build evidence-based policies.

• **Scientists and professionals:**

- To respond to the needs of civil society and to make new knowledge available for public debate;
- To commit themselves to the implementation of adaptive solutions.

• **Civil society:**

- To adapt its own behaviour to new challenges;
- To share its knowledge of realities and take part in the design and implementation of adaptive innovative solutions.

Cancun, Mexico, 2nd June 2017