



THE WORLD WATER QUALITY ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

April 2024

The World Water Quality Alliance is convened by the United Nations Environment Programme and supported by the Swiss Confederation. It proudly presents its monthly newsletter, YEMAYA, named after the ancient African goddess of the ocean and motherhood. She is associated with fertility, femininity, protection, healing, and childbirth. Her domains are symbolized as water creatures: the seas, rivers, and lakes. She is honoured and revered in the African diaspora, particularly in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and the United States.

We, the World Water Quality Alliance Coordination Team, welcome articles about water quality. Tell us about your experiences. Describe the challenges you and your people face. Talk to our global community; talk to people from around the World. Send your articles to wwqa-coordination@un.org.

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Reflections from UNEA6: Empowering Communities: Enhancing Water Quality Advocacy through Citizen Science & Inclusive Representation



As a citizen science trainer actively engaged in the critical work of ensuring water quality through the monitoring of pollution levels along the Nairobi River working with the World Water Quality Alliance, my experience at the 6th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly was both enriching and enlightening. UNEA6 served as a pivotal platform for global leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to address the triple planetary crisis in which the water crisis is a cross-cutting issue.

At the conference, I learned that the efficacy of citizen science hinges on the principles of data sovereignty and accessibility. Communities must have control over the data they generate, ensuring that it is used ethically and transparently, especially in the assessment of water quality and quantity issues. Moreover, easy access to data is essential for fostering collaboration and informed decision-making at all levels of society. Yet, amidst the discussions and decisions made, the importance of community representation cannot be overstated.

Community members are at the forefront of experiencing the impacts of environmental degradation, particularly concerning water quality. Their firsthand experiences, insights, and local knowledge provide invaluable perspectives that can inform more effective and sustainable policies and solutions. Also, inclusivity in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among communities. When community members see themselves reflected in the discussions and outcomes of global conferences, they are more likely to actively participate in efforts to address environmental challenges within their communities. Moreover, community representation ensures that policies and initiatives developed at such conferences are not only theoretically sound but also practical and feasible on the ground.

In my view the World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) plays a crucial role in ensuring community representation at conferences like UNEA6. As an organization dedicated to promoting water quality and sustainability, WWQA understands that meaningful change can only occur when all stakeholders, including local communities, are involved in the decision-making process. To enhance community representation in such conferences, the organization should actively engage with local communities throughout the planning and preparation stages of conferences, ensuring that their voices and concerns are heard and integrated into the agenda.

WWQA can also facilitate capacity-building initiatives to empower community members to effectively participate in global conferences by providing training on advocacy, communication, and negotiation skills, as well as facilitating access to relevant information and resources. By partnering with grassroots organizations and community leaders, WWQA can amplify the voices of those most affected by water quality issues and ensure that their perspectives are given due consideration in decision-making processes.

Article Contribution by Faith Nangila - Green Generation Initiative, Kenya

Empowering Grassroots Environmental Action: Reflections from UNEA6 and Paths Forward



Introduction

The 6th United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA6) provided a platform for global discussions on crucial environmental issues, policy-making, and multilateral agreements. This report aims to highlight key insights gained from attending UNEA6 and address areas for improvement, particularly in engaging local community-based organizations.

Insights and Learnings

As a community trainer affiliated with the World Water Quality Alliance in leading volunteers to undertake regular citizen science monitoring of water quality around the Nairobi River, UNEA6 offered valuable insights into new negotiation strategies, policy formulation, and the significance of multilateral agreements in environmental governance. The knowledge acquired during the assembly was insightful and easily transferable to the organizations I work with. The clarity of concepts discussed at UNEA6 will greatly benefit the training programs for volunteers involved in citizen science initiatives to raise awareness on monitoring water quality and understand sources of water pollution and solutions to counter this conducted by the World Water Quality Alliance.

Opportunities and Limitations

While UNEA6 was informative and enriching, one notable limitation was the limited opportunities for engagement with local community-based organisations that needed to be accredited. This restriction may have hindered the involvement of grassroots organizations, which primarily work with illiterate communities needing more technical-scientific knowledge. These organizations play a crucial role in on-

the-ground restoration activities and should be given more opportunities to participate in such global forums.

Recommendations

1. **Enhanced Engagement:** UNEA should consider creating more inclusive platforms for non-accredited local community-based organizations to participate in discussions and share their valuable insights actively.
2. **Capacity Building:** Providing targeted capacity-building sessions for grassroots organizations to navigate technical discussions and policy frameworks can empower them to contribute effectively to global environmental dialogues.
3. **Recognition of Grassroots Efforts:** Recognizing and showcasing the impactful work of organizations like the World Water Quality Alliance can inspire greater collaboration and support for community-led environmental initiatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, UNEA6 was a valuable experience that broadened perspectives on environmental governance and policy-making. Moving forward, it is essential to address the limitations in engaging local community-based organizations to ensure a more inclusive and impactful approach towards environmental sustainability.

Article Contribution by Ken Luther - Wetlands Conservation Organisation, Kenya

Ethel Mudenda - Freshwater Project Officer, WWF Zambia Country Office

Briefly introduce yourself and share a bit about your journey in becoming a part of the Citizen Science movement.

My name is Ethel Mudenda, and I am a female of Zambian citizenship. I am the Freshwater Project Officer for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) at the Zambia Country Office.

Becoming part of the Citizen Science Movement started with my desire for humanity to be more responsible for managing the environment. This led me to pursue a bachelor's degree in physical Geography from the University of Zambia, wherein I specialized in hydrology and environmental management. I further pursued a Master of Science Degree in Integrated Soil Fertility Management. The drive was to reduce non-point pollution of freshwater from agriculture by ensuring farmers use soil amendments and organic materials to replace inorganic fertilizers. With my experience as a geography teacher, I am using citizen science to instill pro-environmental behavior in as many people as I can at all levels to manage the environment better.



1 - Ethel Mudenda at Namwala Secondary School, which is part of the Citizen Science Program. Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda

April is celebrated as Citizen Science Month. How do you think citizen science can empower individuals to make a difference in monitoring and preserving water quality?

Citizen Science makes individuals become environmental activists who want to manage and protect their environment sustainably. The sense of ownership for the environment and water resources within their proximity makes them responsible for monitoring water quality. By learning and amplifying their knowledge of monitoring water quality, citizen scientists have become literate in the methodologies they share with their fellow community members. Having furthered their understanding of the negative impacts of poor water quality on livelihoods and aquatic and terrestrial species, citizen sciences have been empowered to become environmental vigilantes who report any pollution suspected or observed in water resources to appropriate authorities, thereby holding polluters accountable. Furthermore, the hands-on participation of citizen scientists makes them gain a deeper understanding of the health of their rivers.

How do you engage local communities in your citizen science initiatives, and what benefits do you see from this collaborative approach?

WWF Zambia leverages partnerships. Thus far, we have worked with the government of the Republic of Zambia to ensure environmental management and sustainability. Specifically, to identify and select water quality monitoring sites, WWF works with the Water Resources Management Authority, whose mandate is to identify, conserve, preserve, and protect freshwater sources and ensure sustainable and rational utilization based on community needs. This is to ensure that the Government adopts the initiative's results to inform the status and, more importantly, management of water resources. WWF Zambia is also working with the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock to engage communities whose livelihoods depend on fisheries and livestock to be more proactive in monitoring the quality of water their livelihoods depend on. By identifying and using the local needs and interests of communities, in this case, fishing and livestock rearing, citizen scientists are motivated to monitor water quality. Finally, WWF Zambia is also working with the Ministry of Education to embed water quality monitoring in their co-curricular activities, thereby engaging primary and secondary school learners as citizen scientists.

Among the benefits of citizen science observed are the following: enhanced data collection through an increased number of participants, geographic coverage, frequency, and timeframe; enhanced and

enriched knowledge from local citizen scientists; enhanced scientific literacy of citizen scientists in methods, techniques, and tools; increased environmental awareness and informed policy decision-making.



2 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



3 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



4 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



5 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



6 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda

Could you share an example of a project or initiative where your work has impacted the water quality or environmental health of communities in Zambia?

Water quality monitoring through citizen scientists in Zambia has positively impacted the environmental health of communities. A point in the case is the water quality monitoring at Shimungalu Fisheries in the Lower Kafue Catchment which revealed an increased presence of algae and the presence of blue-green scum. Based on the known hazards of consuming water with blue-green scum on humans, fish, and livestock, the community avoided using the water and sourced their drinking water from other parts of the river.



7 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



8 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda



9 - Photo provided by Ethel Mudenda

The WWQA BULLETIN BOARD

Sewage leaks put South Africa's freshwater at risk: how citizen scientists are helping clean up.

In South Africa, sewage leakage contaminates freshwater sources, posing a significant community hazard. However, a group of 15 citizen scientists in KwaZulu-Natal province has demonstrated the power of community involvement in preventing such pollution. Through their community water monitoring program, in collaboration with municipal authorities, they successfully prevented raw sewage from entering rivers. These "Enviro-Champs," young unemployed residents from Mpophomeni, initiated the program in 2009 through a partnership with non-profit organizations and local government, inspiring similar initiatives nationwide by 2021.

The Enviro-Champs monitor water quality, report issues, repair leaks, remove litter, and educate their community about waste management and sanitation. Their efforts have been instrumental in addressing sewage spills and leaks, contributing to mitigating water contamination. Research suggests that utilizing

mobile apps for data collection could enhance their impact, allowing real-time reporting to authorities. This grassroots approach highlights the potential for citizen scientists to play a crucial role in monitoring and managing freshwater resources, underscoring the importance of community-driven solutions in tackling environmental challenges.

To delve deeper into this transformative initiative and its implications for South Africa's freshwater crisis, read the full article [Here](#)

Webinar: Embedding Lakes into the Global Sustainability Agenda.

🌟 Big Thanks to Our Incredible Speakers & Participants! 🙏 Our recent webinar on "Embedding Lakes into the Global Sustainability Agenda" was a massive success, thanks to YOU! 🎉 Your active involvement and insightful questions made it a truly enriching experience.

Special thanks to Laurence Carvalho, Tom Jilbert, Will Brownlie, Mike Lurling, and the entire WWQA World Water Quality Alliance Ecosystems workstream team for sharing their expertise on crucial topics like the role of lakes in delivering regulatory services and sustainable nitrogen management. 🌍

Curious to learn more? Dive deeper into the discussion by checking out the full post on LinkedIn [here](#).

Let's keep the momentum going for the betterment of our lake ecosystems!

EMBEDDING LAKES INTO THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

WEBINAR: Nature Based Solutions (Nbs) - Important Management Tool or "Flavour of the Month"?

The two-hour webinar will present a number of short 15-minute presentations addressing Nature Based Solution for lakes from differing perspectives with Q&A. This will be followed by an open discussion with the on-line participants. We are particularly keen to hear about examples where Nature Based Solutions have been used for lake management and the lessons learnt.

PRESENTATIONS and SPEAKERS:

- Laurence Carvalho (NIVA) - Nbs: Solutions for Lakes or Lakes as Solutions?
- Tom Jilbert (University of Helsinki) - Managing catchment and lakes ecosystem processes for lake restoration. The case of Lake Vesijärvi, Finland.
- Will Brownlie (UK - CEH) - Integrated Sustainable Nitrogen Management and Nature Based Solutions.
- Mike Lurling (University of Wageningen) - From Biomanipulation to Buffer strips: The Netherlands' approach.

WHEN: 17 APRIL 2024
TIME: 15:00 - 17:00 CET / 16:00 - 18:00 EAT
WHERE: ONLINE - ZOOM WEBINAR
REGISTER HERE: <https://rb.gy/qtbkth>

REGISTER HERE: 


World Water Quality Alliance

Job Openings

Internship Opportunities at UNEP's Civil Society Unit

We are thrilled to announce internship opportunities within the UNEP Civil Society Unit within the Governance Affairs Office of UNEP. If you or someone you know is passionate about environmental sustainability and eager to make a difference, we encourage you to apply and join us in our mission.

Three internship positions are currently available, each lasting a maximum of six months. The first internship period starts in mid-May/early June 2024 and ends in early December 2024, followed by opportunities from December 2024/January 2025 to June 2025 and July 2025 to January 2026. This is an excellent opportunity for individuals seeking hands-on experience in environmental governance and civil society engagement.

Key Details:

- Duration: Minimum 3 months, maximum 6 months
- Positions Available: 3
- Application Period: April 15th - April 29th, 2024

To apply and learn more about these opportunities, please click on the following link: [Link to apply](#)

WWQA Membership Application Form

The WWQA coordination team has set up a WWQA Membership Application Form to keep our growing membership organized.

We kindly request all members to fill out the form :)

<https://forms.office.com/e/BeF5iRuaP3>

In the May Issue of YEMAYA

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- *International Day of Living Together in Peace*
 - *International Day of Biological Diversity*
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*Unless otherwise indicated, all contributions are by the WWQA coordination team.

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YEMAYA welcomes articles, opinions and audio-visual material related to the issue of water quality. Please send any contribution to wwqa-coordination@un.org with a short 100-word biography, the name of your organisation and a phone number where you can be contacted.