

Report of Youth Engaged in Wetlands at Ramsar COP13

From the 21-29th of October 2018, the Ramsar Convention held its 13th Conference of the Contracting Parties in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This Conference is the major decision-making body of the Ramsar Convention where representatives from all around the world gather with the objective: *“the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”*.

For over a year, the Youth Engagement Thematic Group of the Ramsar Culture Network explored new and enhanced ways of engaging young people around the subject of culture and wetlands. These discussions evolved into the development of a group of young professionals aimed at advancing youth engagement in the Ramsar Convention’s processes – **Youth Engaged in Wetlands**. Driven by the question *“How can we move beyond education to genuinely engaging youth in wetland policy and conservation?”*, the Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW) team set forth for Dubai to participate at the Ramsar COP13.

Thanks to the support of the [World Wetland Network](#), the YEW team ran a series of youth-led activities during the COP13 including the official COP13 side-event *“A vision for YEW – Youth Engaged in Wetlands”* and Visioning Workshop. Acting as a Youth Forum for COP13, these activities enabled the development of a platform for young professionals at the Conference to gather and discuss youth engagement, bringing knowledge and experience from around the world to start building a common vision for youth in the Convention. As the Conference progressed through the week, the young professionals received strong support from COP Participants and greatly benefited from intergenerational exchanges with NGO and government representatives.

YEW activities were made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors: **Conservation Volunteers Australia, MAVA Foundation for Nature, World Wetland Network** and the **Korean Wetland NGO Network**. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our sponsors as well as to all the **Friends of Youth Engaged in Wetlands** that supported this initiative through our crowdfunding campaign. Overall, the Youth Engaged in Wetlands team raised **7,850 AUD** allowing for the participation of the three YEW team members at COP13 to coordinate and lead activities, which are presented hereafter.

The YEW activities were coordinated by Elise ALLELY-FERME (Youth lead and moderator), Lucía GAMARRA (Chief visionary) and José Gabriel MEJIA (Ambassador of Communication). To learn more about the YEW team click [here](#).

What is next?



Back L-R: Elise Allély, Gab Mejia, Sreeya Patnaik, Takuma Satoh, ..., Manouore Awa Njoya, Samantha Kwan
Front: Lucía Gamarra, Anne Valentina Bourbon

“We are here today, and we will be here tomorrow, committed to this urgent mission to save our wetlands”

from Youth Statement at Ramsar COP13

The team of young professionals that met at the Ramsar COP13 are now working to establish the next steps for YEW in preparation for Ramsar COP14. The extended YEW team is committed to building on the rich discussions, energy and contacts that emerged from the COP13, to meet again in 2019 and work towards a vision for youth engagement in wetland conservation and policy making towards a better future for our wetlands.

To learn more about these activities or if you are interested in following and participating in any of the future activities of Youth Engaged in Wetlands, please don’t hesitate to contact us at youthengagedinwetlands@gmail.com.

“A vision for YEW – Youth Engaged in Wetlands” - Ramsar COP13 Side-event #67

24 October 2018 from 19:40-21:00 in Festival Arena

Hosted by the [World Wetland Network](#), the side-event served to showcase and celebrate inspiring examples of young people leading or involved in wetland conservation projects, sharing their culture’s role in safeguarding the world’s wetlands. The side-event gathered **70+ attendees** including COP13 participants and local high school students.

A series of presentations highlighted the diversity of existing youth initiatives on wetland conservation and the different forms that youth engagement can take from practical conservation work to educating other young people on wetlands and their benefits, creating a network to guide research priorities and influencing policy-making. Speakers included:

- **Aysha ALREMEITHI** (UAE) from the Dubai Youth Council
- **Elise ALLELY-FERME** (France and USA) from the Youth Engagement Thematic Group on youth engagement
- **Samantha KWAN** (Samoa) from YouthCAN Samoa on youth in conservation and policy-making
- **Manouore NJOYA AWAWOU** (Cameroon) from the Réseau Africains des Jeunes sur les Zones Humides on youth capacity building and International Youth Program For Wetlands
- **Takuma SATOH** (Japan) and **Sreeya PATNAIK** (India) from Youth Ramsar Japan on youth participation in wetland conservation from Ramsar COP9 to COP13

A discussion followed, led by Lucía GAMARRA, who invited the attendees to reflect on the presentations and on the next steps for youth engagement in wetland conservation and policy-making. The lively and dynamic discussions that ensued with insightful interventions from high-school students from Dubai and participants from the COP proved the great interest of young people and professionals in the subject.

With the backdrop of sounds and images of Australian wetlands provided by [Wetland Wander](#), a celebration of Youth CAN Samoa’s recent Young Wetland Conservation award brought the side-event to a close with many ideas and prospects for Youth Engaged in Wetlands. These discussions then fed into the reflections the next day through the YEW – Visioning Workshop (see page 3).



Group picture of side-event attendees

 **Martha Rojas Urrego** @martharojasu1 · 1h
When young people take an interest in wetland conservation. It means there is a future for #wetlands. Very nicely done @worldwetnet for getting #youthengagedinwetlands and making sure they share their ideas here at #RamsarCOP13

 **WWN** @worldwetnet
Power to the YOUNG people #youthengagedinwetlands. #RamsarCOP13 yeah!!

Acknowledgements: This official Ramsar COP13 side-event was an international initiative developed with the World Wetland Network, Youth Engagement Thematic Group (Ramsar Culture Network), Volontariat Pour l’Environnement (Cameroon), Réseau Africain des Jeunes sur les zones humides (Cameroon), Emirates Nature – WWF, YouthCAN Samoa, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, Youth Ramsar Japan, IUCN – World Commission on Protected Areas – Young Professionals Group for West and Central Africa. Thank you to Wetland Wander for giving us the permission to use their images and sounds. Thank you to Youth Engagement Thematic Group (YETG) members that contributed to developing the side-event.

Visioning Workshop

25 October 2018 from 08:30-13:30 in Sustainable City, Dubai

Building on the examples of existing youth engagement highlighted during the YEW side-event, the workshop was aimed at taking the discussion a step further towards guiding practical actions to progress the role of youth in the Convention. The Visioning Workshop was led by Lucía GAMARRA who drew upon the Collaborative Social Learning framework designed by Val Brown (as taught in the [International WaterCentre's](#) Master of Integrated Water Management) as well as experiences from a workshop run in Brisbane (Australia) by Community Praxis and Joanna Macy's book "Coming Back to Life".

The workshop brought together 13 participants for a 5-hour workshop around the question "How can youth effectively participate in policy-making to support our wetlands?". Through this reflection exercise, the participants elaborated a list of reflections on the current situation of youth engagement and their vision for the future. After exploring some of the enabling and blocking factors of youth engagement, the participants came up with a list of "SMART" actions that each youth member committed to taking as well as an agreement to meet again next year.

A report from the workshop is being prepared and will act as a building block for the development of the YEW strategy.



**Workshop participants exchanging their ideas around "what should be?" for effective youth engagement in policy making
(photo: Gab Meija)**



**Workshop participants celebrate their commitments
(photo: Gab Meija)**

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Emirates Nature – WWF for organizing the room for the Visioning Workshop in Sustainable City, Dubai. Thank you to Dana Kelley and Chris Manning who provided guidance on the Collaborative Social Framework used in the workshop.

Youth statement at the closing plenary of the Ramsar COP13

During the COP13, the initial Youth Engaged in Wetlands team grew considerably as we met dedicated young professionals from around the world that made it to the COP by their own initiative. The young professionals came together through the YEW side-event, Visioning Workshop and between activities to discuss the role of youth in wetland conservation and policy making. The enlarged YEW team also engaged with professionals from government representatives and NGO partners.

As a result of this week, the Youth Engaged in Wetlands team presented a statement during the closing plenary of Ramsar COP13 in front of 1000+ representatives from governments and organizations. YEW with the support of World Wetland Network called on the parties to fully commit to implementation of the resolutions, and to involve youth in policy making and implementation of the convention. Their statement proposed the theme for Ramsar COP 14 as Youth and Wetlands. The full statement presented by Anne Valentina Bourbon and Takuma Satoh is available on the World Wetland Network website [here](#).



COP13 young professionals (Takuma, Lucía, Samantha and Gab) working on the youth message for YEW side-event (photo: Elise Allély)



Anne Valentina Bourbon delivering the Youth Statement accompanied by Takuma Satoh (photo: Denis Landenbergue)

“Cultural approaches to wise use of wetlands – past, present and future” - Ramsar COP13 side-event #33

23 October 2018 from 19:40 – 21:00

Members of the Youth Engagement Thematic Group of the Ramsar Culture Network also participated through presentations and discussions in the side-event “*Cultural approaches to wise use of wetlands – past, present and future*” representing youth and contemporary expressions of culture for wetland conservation. The side-event aimed to celebrate the powerful role that cultural values and communities can play in improving conservation outcomes for wetlands.

José Gabriel MEJIA provided a presentation on “**Visual story-telling in Wetland Conservation**” showcasing his experience as the winner of the International Ramsar photo contest in 2017 which brought him to Patagonia. As a young professional photographer, he promoted the role of youth in delivering conservation actions and changing attitudes towards wetlands.

Elise ALLELY-FERME contributed to the panel discussion as lead of the Youth Engagement Thematic Group. Elise stressed the need to integrate cultural values and ecological values, combining the different sciences, ensuring the long-term management of sites. She also suggested that when promoting stories on culture and wetlands, the perspective of the youth is worth sharing and further exploring.

Read more about the culture side-event and presentations here.

YEW communication

All of the communication for Youth Engaged in Wetlands prior to and during the COP was handled by **Jose Gabriel (Gab) MEJIA**, Ambassador of Communication for YEW. Gab put his photography and communication talent into action for YEW creating a [Facebook page](#) that attracted 368 followers. People around the world were able to follow the activities of YEW throughout the COP with daily updates and highlights. The communication material allowed us to promote the YEW to Conference Participants.



Flyer of the YEW side-event



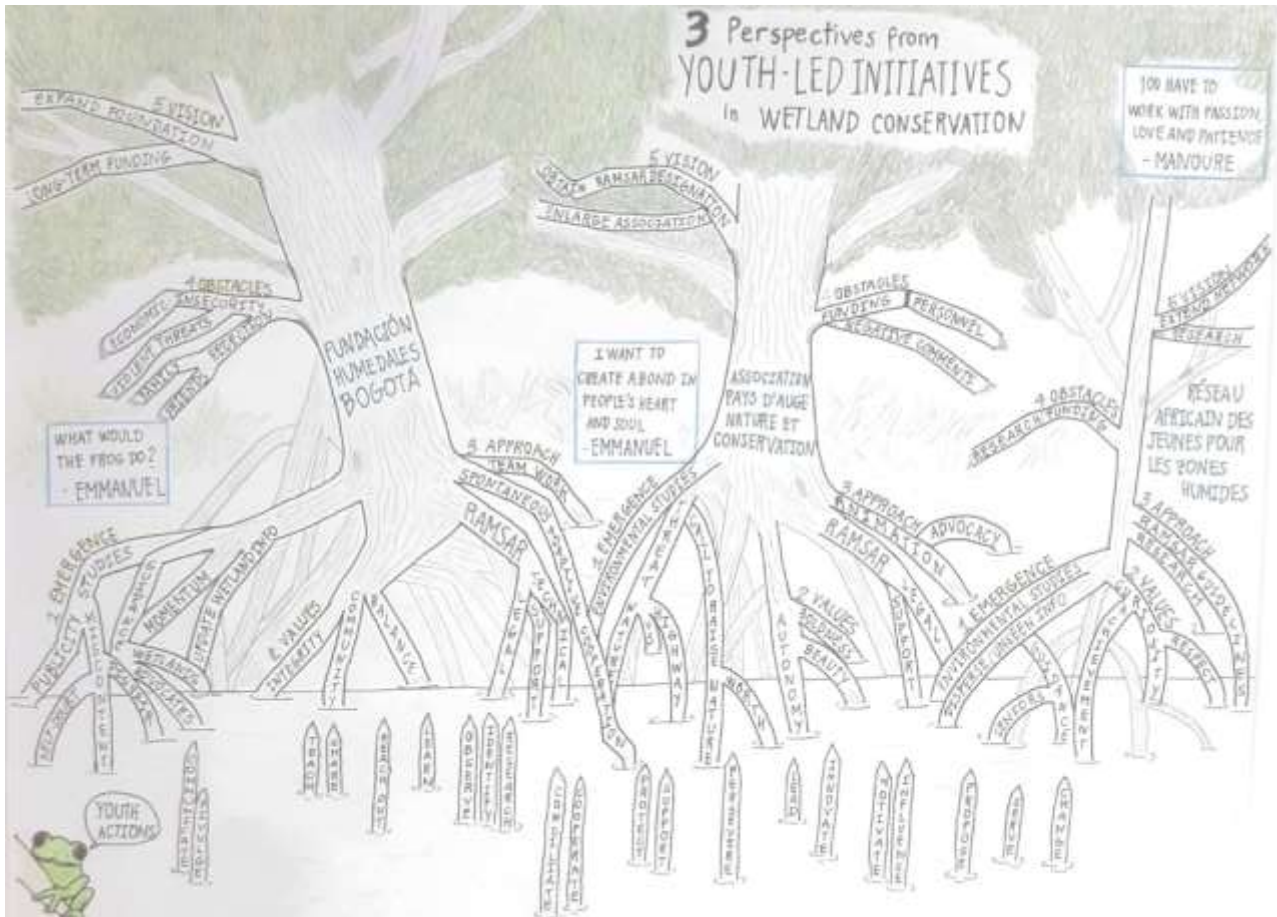
Flyer of the Visioning Workshop

Other activities

Building up to the COP, the Youth Engagement Thematic Group led a [short study](#) on **youth-led initiatives in wetland conservation**. The objective was to increase the visibility of *Youth-Led Initiatives*, defined as actions/projects/groups led predominantly by youth, highlighting their successes, and to share the lessons learned with other youth groups.

Three young professionals who had started an initiative of their own in Cameroon, Colombia and France were interviewed. The short study provided an initial insight into youth's motivations and challenges around wetland conservation. The results were presented through a poster prepared by Lucía, which was showcased in the World Wetland Network exhibition stand at the COP13 venue.

A report of the three interviews conducted will be produced to complement the poster.



Poster: Three perspectives from Youth-led Initiatives in Wetland Conservation by L. GAMARRA

If you are interested in participating or supporting any of the future activities of Youth Engaged in Wetlands, please don't hesitate to contact us at:

youthengagedinwetlands@gmail.com

Thank you!

The YEW coordinating team would like to express our sincere thanks to the World Wetland Network especially Louise Duff and Chris Rostron for their support of YEW – providing mentoring, administrative and fundraising support to the YEW team!

We would like to thank our sponsors that made our participation possible – **Conservation Volunteers Australia**, the **MAVA Foundation for Nature**, the **World Wetland Network**, the **Korean Wetland NGO Network** and all the **Friends of Youth Engaged in Wetlands** that contributed to our initiative through our GoFundMe page: Eleanor Geyer, Wetland Activist, Noora Abdallah, Peter Wegener, Wade Hadwen, Jorge Bustamante, Mark Pascoe, Sarah Rea, Leah Barclay, Fernanda Segami, Fernanda Adame, Jody Nash, Louise Duff, Lew Young, Solongo Khurelbaatar, Marivic Kamikasu, Naomi Riskin, Joselino Bautista, Claire Allély, Little Bear, Didier Allély, Rick Sanchez and, five very generous Anonymous!

A special thanks to our mentors and motivators Denis Landenbergue, Mariam Ali, Chris Rostron, Louise Duff, Dave Pritchard, Tobias Salathé, the International WaterCentre and members of the Youth Engagement Thematic Group for your invaluable support at different stages of development of YEW!