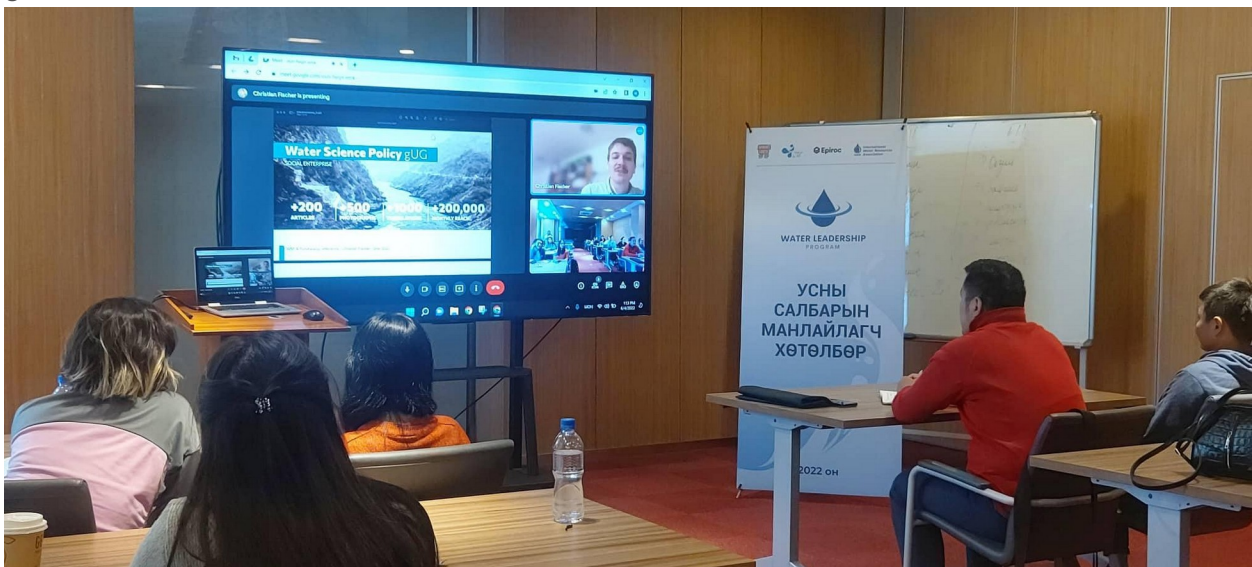


Mongolia Water Leadership Program 2022.



The very first Mongolia Water Leadership Program took place in hybrid notion, facilitating presenters and experts from the local and international geographies. The objective of the program was to add value to the sustainable water management discourse by providing science based communication on water. The participants of the program had the opportunity to not only enhance the knowledge around the water nexus but also to have open dialogue from the academy to advocacy, to bridge sectors, continents, and generations.



For Mongolians, water was always in a privileged position, due to its various implications. Despite the substantial improvement in water resources management and sanitation, with the continued paradigm of a growing population and climate change, the water crisis is still the most pressing challenge to the Mongolians. Moreover, according to the UNDP, one of the main reasons for Mongolia not being able to attain the SDG6 goals, is the lack of staffing and capacity among water sector professionals. This is attributed to poor governance, stemming from a lack of knowledge around the value of water. As a result, almost 60% of the whole population of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia is still detached from the safe access to drinking water and sanitation, which in return negatively impact the livelihood and the environment of living. With these rationales, the Water Leadership Program is intended to provide a platform for youth engagement from various sectors to address and discuss the issues related to sustainable water



The program has drawn inspiration both from the vibrant forward thinking participants and guest speakers, by catalyzing youth engagement in advancing value in equity, innovation, and sustainable advancement within the water sector. During the 6 month period, the program has provided to the 20 selected participants 18 thematic sessions and three site visits. The highlight of the program was the site visit at the Taishir Hydropower Plant which is situated in the western part of Mongolia. The thematic sessions centered around four key focus areas: i) urban water security: water supply and sanitation issues of Ulaanbaatar; ii) climate change and water related risks; iii) water governance and policy; iv) groundwater management and conservation. Following highlight the key issues and concerns among the participants identified whilst the program conduction:

Lack and insufficient capacity and human resources in the water sector in Mongolia. According to the World Water Development Report 2016 over 78% of the global jobs are

water dependent. In stark contrast, the Mongolia Water Authority 2020 report accounts only 206 water professionals operating in the state organizations. On the national scale, only four universities provide programs and degrees in the water sector, from which only around 60% of the graduates choose to work in the water sector. This directly confluence the lack of water professionals at the managerial level as well as the poor performance at the decision making. For this, there is an urgent need for establishing cross sector effort by introducing and promulgating water professions and education. For this, the government shall start promoting the water sector's attractiveness, more importantly the vitality, among the educational organizations.

Data availability and lack of universal and reliable platform for acquisition of data.

One of the concerns that was putatively addressed and given rise to was the issue of unattainable and unusable data. The already published datas are simply precarious to derive and generate useful interpretations. Globally, the digital transformation in water sector is a discourse which is progressively asserted throughout all levels of water operators, where Mongolia is largely lagging behind. There is an urgent need for Mongolia to develop and introduce the all accessible data platform, which in return will enhance the transparency, efficiency in utility operations and service delivery and overall net gain. Two out of four presentations from participants for the Water Leadership Program closing ceremony have proposed to develop such platforms, which speaks about the urgency of such platforms.

Water related natural disasters and its implications.

The occurrence of flooding caused by heavy rainfall has increased in intensity and frequency as a result of climate change and is the most damaging type of natural disaster in Mongolia. In the urban context, flooding events result in large economic losses every year. The heavy rain can be attributed to oversaturated soil; however, the flood events are a clear sign of the mismanagement of the rapid urban expansion. The Ulaanbaatar flood events are man-made disasters. The lack of effective drainage systems, unregulated constructions, and land-use changes without consideration of the natural topography all contribute to the flooding events. Due to their locations and disconnection from central utility systems, the marginalised groups of the city are the most vulnerable and prone to disaster events, affecting their health and economic well-being. Apart from floods, disasters related to the events of dzud lead to substantial economic loss. Dzud events have a substantial effect on the livestock population, and overall internal migration in Mongolia. . Official reports and studies describe many cases in which herder communities have no choice but to leave their homes due to natural disasters driven by climate change—such as drought and dzud, which cause substantial loss of livestock, the main source of income for the herder community. Due to the lack of job opportunities needed in order to improve living conditions in rural areas, the community is forced to migrate to the capital city, to seek educational and employment opportunities. The expectation of better living conditions is far more elusive than the reality, which suggests the lack of knowledge among rural communities regarding

the urban labour market and bureaucracy. There is an urgent need to develop a balanced policy that reduces urban-rural development disparities.

Participation and role of youth in water sector.

On the global scale, youth participation in water sector discussions and decision making is highly encouraged. Youth are empowered and boasted to speak up and make drastic changes in tangible issues more than ever. The expertise brought by the participants express willingness to have more visibility and strong part taking in decision making and management in water related issues in Mongolia. The very first step towards youth engagement is to understand and identify the values bring to the table within youth itself. For this, to creating continuity is crucial, by organizing more platforms and ideas to collaborate and communicate.

The biggest milestone of the program was collecting the voices and common understanding, acknowledging and addressing the hurdles and the advantages of youth operating the water sector. The collaborations and gathering through the program has shown the solutions outweigh the problems itself and the youth of Mongolia strongly posit for advocating transparency, cooperation and resilience in the water sector.

With this post I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the co-organizers, Water for All Foundation, EPIROC LLC and International Water Resource Association, Water Science Policy for their support!

Sincerely,
Nomundari Erdene