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UDC 327

THE PERSPECTIVES AND HOLDBACKS OF YOUTH IN HANDLING THE WATER SECURITY OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Water is a scarce resource, which defines the prosperity or the failure of a nation. This valuable resource plays a crucial role in enhancing the socio-economic well-being of a country. On a larger scale, a properly conducted water policy gives a leverage in geopolitical strategy. For instance, in the case of Kazakhstan, one can observe that neighboring countries receive a reimbursement in a defined form for supplying water via transboundary rivers. This tradition was set up during the Soviet era and it is accepted by the stakeholders as a sole solution of the resource distribution. This kind of approach in water resource division may not be in favor of Kazakhstan. For example, during the vegetation period, the Kazakh farmers feel a severe water shortage while during spring and winter there is a grave threat of flooding. According to estimations of international organizations, the expected trends in the growth of water consumption and the decrease in the availability of water resources in Kazakhstan may lead to a significant (up to 50%) shortage of water resources by 2040 [1].

On the other hand, there is a new generation of citizens who manifest their indifference to the ecological condition of Kazakhstan. Although they are eager to apply new approaches in many aspects of life, they do not take part in the decision making process due to their little presence in public institutions and local bodies, including basin councils, or in the system of state water management in general.

Moreover, it is also important to note that in Kazakhstan, unlike neighboring countries with dedicated water management central public institutions, the same public institution, which operates ecological matters and geology, administers the water resource as part of natural resources. Therefore, water security and ecological matters create a shared group of problems, which should be tackled in conjunction.

This article represents the analysis of the current condition of the attitude of youth of Kazakhstan towards water policy and ecology using statistical data and results of sociological surveys. Likewise, it identifies the core problems of low representation of youth in central public institutions and assesses the perspectives of youth participation in decision-making.

To begin with, we should define the term “youth” for the reason that it varies country by country. This term is defined in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On state youth policy” dated 9 February 2015 No. 285-V. According to the Law, in Kazakhstan, citizens from 14 to 29 years are considered as young people [2]. But in order to learn about their quantity, we refer to national statistics. The latest data by the Bureau of National Statistics show that there are 3,739,802 young people residing in Kazakhstan [3]. In the total structure of population, their share is 19.8% [4]. Thus, one can state that every fifth citizen in the country is considered youth.

On the background of the globalization process and the constant development of the information technologies, the new generation in Kazakhstan also catches up with the modern trends. The young people demonstrate their fair level of awareness in many directions of public human activity. One of them is the ecological awareness of youth. The study, conducted by the Scientific Research Center “Youth” in 2021, reveals such a trend among young citizens. Scilicet, in the structure of values, 14.2% of young people chose ecology as one of the most popular trends inherent in Kazakhstani youth now [5]. Thus, ecology became an important matter and ranked 8th place in the top 10 values among youth. However, a year before in 2020, the share of young people who chose ecology as a modern trend among youth was 17.7% and the ecology was in top 5 trends [6]. The downgrade in 2021 is explained by the changes in the methodology of research and the extension of answers for choosing. Nevertheless, the questions of ecology remain topical among young people of Kazakhstan.

In 2021, the results of the global Youth Progress Index were presented. The study covered three main directions of youth life such as Basic human needs, Foundations of wellbeing, and Opportunities. In the first direction, Kazakhstan scored 79.4 points and ranked 67 among 150

countries around the globe [7]. This is to say that Kazakhstan is underperforming in providing youth with quality water and sanitation compared to other countries with similar GDP PPP per capita.

The other sociological survey conducted among youth in 2019 directly covers the water-related questions among young people. Videlicet, less than half of youth in Kazakhstan – 44% – is satisfied with the quality of water they use in their locality. The amount of those who are not satisfied or rather dissatisfied is equal to 19%. In the regional context, the quality of water in their region of residence does not suit the young residents of West Kazakhstan (41.4%), Karaganda (39.2%), Akmola (35.5%) and Kyzylorda (28.4%) regions [8]. Considering these data, one can say that every fifth young citizen of Kazakhstan reports some problems related to water.

The other important thing to draw attention to is that to this day, the territory of Kazakhstan can be conditionally divided into eight water management basins: Aral-Syrdarya basin, Balkhash-Alakol, Irtysh, Ural-Caspian, Ishim, Nura-Sarysu, Shu-Talas and Tobol-Turgai. Among these, only Ishim and Nura-Sarysu basins are formed in the territory of Kazakhstan, while the resource of Aral-Syrdarya basin originates in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Balkhash-Alakol and Irtysh basins are watered from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, Ural-Caspian and Tobol-Turgai basins originate in Russia, and Shu-Talas basin gets its entire water resource from Kyrgyzstan [9]. These facts make Kazakhstan highly dependent on neighboring countries in the sphere of water supply and distribution and puts geopolitical stakes. Consequently, Kazakhstan needs to constantly negotiate in order to unceasingly provide water to the population. In the system of the state management of water resources, we can divide it into four levels: territorial, basin, state and interstate levels. Each level of water management comprises its dedicated institutions and objects (see Table).

Table – System of state water management

Level	Body	Object
Interstate level	Interstate organizations, Joint commissions	Transboundary waters
State level	Government of the RK, Authorized body – Ministry of ecology, geology and natural resources	National water facilities
Basin level	Basin inspections and Basin councils	Water within basins
Territorial level	Akims' offices and maslikhats (region, district, county)	Water facilities of communal property

Regarding the involvement of youth in the system of water management at state and territorial levels, we can refer to statistical data and results of sociological surveys.

According to statistics, in Mazhilis – the lower house of the Kazakh Parliament – there are only 7 young members under age 35, which is 6.54% of total number of deputies [10]. This is to say that the representative scheme among youth is very low. Other statistics demonstrate that 22% of workers in central public institutions and 21.2% of employees in local executive bodies are

young people under age 29 [11]. However, there are no clear figures on the number of young people at managing positions in central public institutions and local executive bodies.

A sociological survey conducted last year among youth demonstrates a low level of interest in working at public institutions. The results revealed that only 13.5% of young people in Kazakhstan are interested in working at state bodies [12]. This might be due to several factors such as the absence of career growth, job prestige, personal desire, etc. The same survey found out that 52.3% of youth choose a job mainly considering its salary. A relatively low salary level makes working at local executive bodies extremely unattractive for youth. For example, a leading specialist of E-G-4 classification at Akims offices of cities of district significance, villages, towns and counties earns between 62 461 and 84 115 KZT monthly [13]. Taking into account the role of local executive bodies in managing the exploitation of water basins alongside Basin inspections [14], the involvement of youth would bring an added value. Instead of that, the youth of Kazakhstan prefer other sectors of the economy with a decent level of salary such as companies in the oil and gas sector (29.1%), small and medium businesses (25.6%), and financial organizations (23.5%).

These and other data demonstrate that the youth of Kazakhstan, although are aware of ecological problems and report on the water problems, for now they are not motivated in resolving the issues at territorial or state levels being a worker of a public institution. One of the main holdbacks is the absence of a decent salary. Other obstructions of youth involvement in the system of state water management may include poor education on water resources, low level of specialist qualification, unclear division of responsibilities between state bodies, etc.

Thus, taking into account the above mentioned, it is important to deepen vertically and to extend horizontally the involvement of youth in public work and decision making at all levels of the state system of water management. Considering the fact that youth in Kazakhstan is dissatisfied with the water quality and is aware of ecological problems, it is momentous to direct them and create favorable conditions to self-realize in the sphere of water policy and management. The medium-term estimates that the number of youth after a decade of decrease will go up again starting in 2023 and will hit its highest points in 2030, make the thesis of youth involvement in water management system more tangible [15].

On the other hand, the world order is constantly changing. This external factor affects the domestic affairs alongside the needs and requirements of people as well. As a member of the world community Kazakhstan does not make an exclusion. In order to ameliorate the interaction of public institutions and people, including youth, many countries are opting for participatory democracy instead of representative one. The participatory democracy is estimated to involve a wider range of citizens in decision-making. It offers larger political representation than traditional representative democracy. Moreover, it consists in the fact that people participate in shaping public policy at every stage – from planning, to development and implementation. It is based on the assumption that the public is the owner of public resources and that it has the best knowledge of real needs and problems occurring in their environment. Thanks to participatory democracy, public governance ceases to be reserved for the exclusive competence of public administration and it becomes open and available to individual citizens and NGOs.

If we consider that the youth is not interested in working at central public institutions and local executive bodies, then the government should invite them to take part actively at basin level. Scilicet, currently there are eight Basin inspections in Kazakhstan. They organize the work of Basin councils and hold consultations with members of the Basin council on the issues of use and protection of the water fund in the territory of the basin, analysis of the recommendations prepared by the Basin council, realization of measures for their implementation, bringing the recommendations of the Basin council to the interested state bodies and water users. This format might be best suited for those youth who are concerned about water resources and ecology.

Implementing the principles of participatory democracy, the government and other stakeholders extract maximum benefit with an outcome of “win-win” for both sides.

Overall, although the youth of Kazakhstan are concerned about water resources management and worry about ecological problems, still only a small number of them are ready to work at public institutions. This phenomenon is explained by several factors such as low salary, absence of prestige and career growth. However, by implementing the principle of participatory democracy, the government may involve the youth in decision making at basin level in Basin councils. The young people might take part individually or create a NGO in order to make their contribution. Likewise, the Basin councils have a full potential of becoming a gateway for youth in directly influencing the decision-making on matters of water management. Further on, the young people trained at basin level will be presenting the interest of Kazakhstan at the interstate level.

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