

SEPTEMBER 2023

HOW TO GUIDE THE CAREERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

IN THE WATER AND SANITATION SECTOR



**Valuing
Water
Initiative**

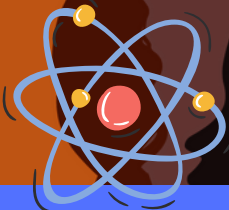


AquaFed
THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF
PRIVATE WATER OPERATORS
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INTRODUCTION



This briefing note summarises research into how young people are recruited and how their careers are developed in water supply and sanitation (WSS) services.

The research is part of the first phase of a project called 'Career Pathways Guidance'.

The project's objective is to create guidance for services providers in the Global South, including utility and WSS services managers, on how to manage young people better, by understanding:

- their motivations and career aspirations
- the opportunities they want
- their preferred ways of working
- the skills that they bring



RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The research presented in this document will be used to create the guidance.

The results of the research reveal a sector that is **mostly failing its young staff and potential recruits**. There are simply **too many barriers put in young people's way even before they are recruited**. WSS employers value young people's skills, but they often **do not develop and nurture them** in any kind of meaningful or structured way.

However, there are also excellent examples of good practice. **There are relatively simple actions by managers that can make a huge difference in recruiting and retaining young people to make water and sanitation services more sustainable.**

The challenges and examples of existing solutions are presented in this document.

The **Career Pathways Guidance** project is led by **AquaFed** and funded by the Netherlands' Government's **Valuing Water Initiative Youth Journey**.

The research was carried out by the **Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)**.

THE RESEARCH PRESENTED IN THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE USED TO CREATE THE GUIDANCE.

WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAREERS IN THE WATER AND SANITATION SECTOR SO IMPORTANT?

The world is facing **ever-increasing challenges in water and sanitation.**

We are **not on track** to deliver many national goals as well as Sustainable Development Goal 6.

To meet these challenges, **it is critical** that the water and sanitation services workforce of now and the future is **equipped and motivated to tackle these problems.**

However, the water and sanitation sector has **unprecedented skills and capacity gaps** and a lack of human resources is **constraining services delivery** ([WHO, 2022](#)).

Young people are **facing many barriers to employment and career progression** in the sector ([Water Youth Network, 2021](#)); in particular, **limited opportunities for capacity development** and a lack of entry level jobs for those without **technical training or education.** This is especially true for **young women** in the WSS sector ([IWA, 2014](#)).

Young people in the Global South are also facing **enormous job security** challenges ([ILO, 2022](#)).

Improving the employability of young people in the water sector is important as a contribution not just to SDG6 but also SDG8.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FACING MANY BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER PROGRESSION.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN THE WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION SECTOR.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH





ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research was carried out by the RWSN and included **two surveys launched in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese)**. These were disseminated widely through the RWSN and Aquafed networks, as well as partner organisations.

The surveys were aimed at:

- 1. Water Supply & Sanitation Services Providers (46 respondents)**
84% of responses from Global South
- 2. Young Water Professionals (177 respondents)**
80% of responses from Global South

The WSS services providers' survey looked at the **programmes and strategies employers use** to attract young people to their organisations, as well as their **expectations regarding the skills, experience, and value of young people**.

The young people's survey **investigated the profile of young people** in the sector, including years of experience, employment status, what they value most in a job and the **biggest barriers to finding work**.

In addition, a desk review of **initiatives aimed at improving young people's recruitment and retention** in the WSS sector was undertaken.

AquaFed and the Rural Water Supply Network would like to **thank everyone who responded to the survey**.

We would also particularly like to thank **AFWASA, AMCOW, AYSA, IWA and the World Bank** for their support in promoting and sharing the survey.

thankyou



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

1. WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION SERVICES ARE AT RISK BECAUSE PROVIDERS ARE FAILING TO ATTRACT AND LEVERAGE THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE



There should be more work opportunities for young people in the WSS sector:

AROUND 1/3 of service providers have never advertised entry-level positions (0-2 years of experience).

40% of service providers employ fewer than 20% of staff under the age of 35.

40% of service providers do not have any specific programmes, strategies or initiatives for recruiting young people (students, graduates or young professionals).



Messages from young people to employers:

YOU ARE LOSING BRIGHT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS BECAUSE YOU PUT TOO MANY BARRIERS IN PLACE.

Create more opportunities for young professionals to enter the sector. There are so few job postings/opportunities available.

MOTIVATION AND MINDSET SHOULD BE VALUED AS MUCH AS TECHNICAL SKILLS/YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WHEN HIRING YOUNG PEOPLE.

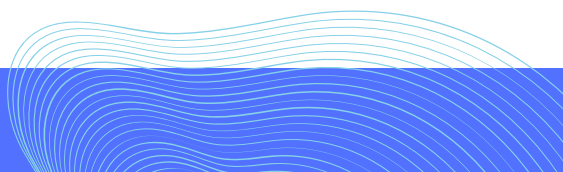
Instead of asking for more experience, give us the experience in the first place.

Quotes are based on the youth survey.

SOLUTIONS:

WSS services providers could use the following strategies to attract and retain more young people:

- On-the-job training programme for students in collaboration with universities and/or training institutes (*Balibago Waterworks*).
- Professional internship programmes.
- Apprenticeships/ professional training (*Sen'Eau & OFOR example*).



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

WHAT ARE WSS EMPLOYERS DOING TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN YOUNG PEOPLE?

"We have our **On-the-Job Training (OJT)** programme for students in collaboration with several universities.

This is an opportunity for students to **gain practical experience and apply their academic knowledge in a professional work environment.**

We have **established partnerships with universities to ensure a smooth and mutually beneficial OJT experience for students and our organisation.**

We also **participate in job fairs organised by universities to connect with new graduates and alumni seeking employment opportunities.**

These job fairs are a platform for us to **meet talented individuals who are eager to start their professional careers."**

Balibago Waterworks System Inc. (Urban and Rural WSS services provider), Philippines.



AN EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE



Vocational training in water supply by Sen'Eau and OFOR (Senegal)

Since 2021, **Senegalese urban utility Sen'Eau has been offering a vocational training diploma, the 'Plumbers' School', in partnership with the centre for Public Works Training and the Financing Facility for professional and technical training.**

It targets young people in **Senegal without any formal qualifications**, including those who have **dropped out of school**. It is **completely free of charge and aims to train 250 young people by 2025.**

Also, the **Senegalese National Rural Water Agency, OFOR, committed to training up to 1000 young people, in 2022, in the operation and maintenance of boreholes in rural areas.**

Main Results:

Two cohorts have undergone training with the 'Plumbers' School' since 2021, with a total of 63 young people (20% women) between 17-29 years old enrolling in the programme.

OFOR has trained 70 young people in the operation and maintenance of boreholes in rural areas.





KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

2. WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION PROVIDERS NEED TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S EMPLOYMENT

Employers need to be more transparent and flexible

FEWER REQUIREMENTS

in terms of years of experience required for the job. 

 This was identified as the biggest barrier by young people looking for work in the sector.

AROUND 50%

of the job opportunities young people obtained are not formally advertised.

MORE FLEXIBILITY

In terms of working conditions (nationality, visa requirements) and location (consider remote or hybrid working arrangements).



SOLUTIONS:

- > Advertise jobs more transparently through job platforms (e.g. [Josh's Water Jobs](#)) and recruit via job fairs like the 'terra.do' website.
- > Donors fund graduate programmes which are flexible on nationality requirements and enable WSS providers to build capacity in the countries in which they operate (e.g. [YEP Programme](#)).

- > WSS organisations provide networking and mentoring opportunities for young people.

Examples include [Agenda for Change](#) and [RWSN's](#) mentoring programmes in the water sector: [Grundfos](#) and [IWA](#) as well as [ARUP](#) support young people to attend networking opportunities and sector events.

Messages from young people to employers:

CAN WSS EMPLOYERS INCREASE EFFORTS TO CONNECT WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGH JOB FAIRS AND OTHER PLATFORMS?

We need you to advertise specific projects & opportunities to engage young professionals.

WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO ADVERTISE CLEAR, COMPREHENSIVE JOB POSTINGS - INCLUDING SALARY INFORMATION, TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF TRAVEL, REMOTE WORK EXPECTATIONS, ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES. WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO SELF-ELIMINATE BASED ON 'REQUIREMENT' SECTIONS, SO CONSIDER HOW EXPECTATIONS ARE PHRASED.

Quotes are based on the youth survey.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Terra.do - Online platform for climate work

Terra.do (<https://terra.do/>) is the largest platform for climate work aims to get **100 million people to work directly on climate by 2030.**

It supports people to learn climate skills, build new professional networks and find new kinds of work in the climate field.

It is designed for both **professionals and climate employers**, as well as **newcomers and people looking to transition into the climate field.**

Terra.do's pillars include:

- career growth (job fairs, job database)
- education (paid training)
- community (free networking events, paid consultations with experts).

Main results:

Their training programmes include 1000+ alumni, from 25+ countries, out of which 60% are working in climate upon programme completion.



Young Sanitation Professionals (JPS) Programme (Brazil)

JPS is a continuous development programme aimed at **awakening the skills and leadership of young people** who work or wish to work in environmental sanitation, **to meet the present and future needs of the sector.**

The programme's strategic objectives are:
1. **Promote** ongoing relationships between young people and seniors.
2. **Support** the career development of young people.

This is done through **conversation rounds, technical visits and training in multiple regional JPS hubs across the country.**

JPS is hosted by the Brazilian Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering (ABES) and is **open to young students and professionals under the age of 35.**

Main Results:

The JPS programme has more than 1280 participants in 20 Brazilian states, and has been ongoing since 2010.

The 2022 census showed that JPS' membership is dominated by women and that more than 50% of the new participants accept the challenge of occupying a leadership position within the programme, validating one of JPS' pillars - the formation of leaders.



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

3. THE WSS SECTOR IS NOT PROVIDING ENOUGH TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Young people occupy a variety of roles in service providers' organisations; their innovative ways of working, digital skills, and technical capacity are highly valued by WSS employers. However...

AROUND 1/3

of service providers surveyed said they were **not satisfied with the training and capacity of young people in their organisations.**



While young people are **open to learning** and place a **very high value on professional development**, training opportunities may be **lacking** or be **'reserved for top management'**.



SOLUTIONS:

- Training organisations or initiatives need to ensure their curriculum is up-to-date and adequate for the needs of WSS service providers by keeping close ties with employers.
- Practitioners and donors can provide more formal professional development opportunities for young people in WSS, such as training and scholarships.
- Service providers can offer more formal and informal professional development opportunities for young people in their organisations such as job shadowing, mentoring and on-the-job training.

Messages from young people to employers:

IF YOU HAVE TIME AND SPACE TO MENTOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION, THEY CAN BRING A LOT IN RETURN!

Please consider offering growth opportunities beyond competitive pay, such as professional development programmes and mentorship.

WE REALLY VALUE EMPLOYERS THAT PROVIDE ONBOARDING AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS' DEVELOPMENT.

Quotes are based on the youth survey.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

University extension course on the regulation of sanitation services - National Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (Peru)

This extension course targets recent graduates or students in their final years of:

- Fluid Mechanics Engineering
- Environmental Engineering
- Law
- Economics
- Civil Engineering
- Sanitary Engineering
- Economic Engineering
- Chemical Engineering

The course trains them on the **regulation, supervision, and standards** of sanitation services. The course is **free-of-charge** and carried out by the national water supply and sanitation authority (Sunass).

The **top students are offered a professional internship at Sunass** and, upon course completion, all participants are **registered within the employer's job bank**.

Main results:

Between 2015-2020, 195 young professionals took part in the course. Of these, 24 are working at Sunass and others are active in different companies or entities related to sanitation services.



Young Water Professional (YWP) Programme (Myanmar)

The YWP Programme provides young graduates in Myanmar (below the age of 35) who have the ambition to become water professionals and leaders with well-defined technical and on-the-job training.

The 11-month programme includes mentoring, coaching, field visits, and training in various technical, social, economic, political, and decision-making aspects of water projects.

It targets students as well as young government employees and is carried out in partnership with the Hydro-Informatics Centre (HIC) under Myanmar's National Water Resources Committee (NWRC).

Main Results:

Feedback from participants included:

- the ability to **solve** complex water-related problems in a practical and integrated manner
- the **recognition** of the importance of working across sectors **collaboratively**
- increased technical and **communication** skills
- **confidence** in undertaking professional roles in the Myanmar water sector.



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

4. WSS SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE NOT ATTRACTING THE BEST YOUNG TALENT, AND MUST DO MUCH MORE TO APPEAL TO YOUNG PEOPLE

2 OUT OF 3

young people are looking for work, which may be higher than in other sectors [1].

Around half of those looking for work are currently employed or self-employed, which shows some level of dissatisfaction with existing employment conditions.

Young people value good compensation and professional development opportunities the most.

Our survey shows that young people predominantly value, by order of importance;

- (1) good pay
- (2) professional development opportunities
- (3) good working conditions
- (4) meaning and purpose before job security, work atmosphere and work-life balance.

This differs from the typical surveys of 'millennials' and 'Gen Z' which often exclude young people from the Global South and where compensation is not as prominent [2].

AROUND 50%

of the young people surveyed who are self-employed are not self-employed by choice, but due to lack of suitable work opportunities.



SOLUTIONS:

- Employers need to understand the priorities and motivations of young people so that they can improve the way they recruit and retain them, and pay particular attention to compensation and professional development.
- WSS sector practitioners and donors should provide professional development and funding opportunities to support young people in the sector who are self-employed, whether by choice or by circumstances.

Messages from self-employed young people:

I'M SELF EMPLOYED BECAUSE I CANNOT SECURE A FULL-TIME JOB. I WOULD OPT FOR FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT IF PRESENTED WITH IT.

The funding for water and sanitation in my country has dropped. I have not been able to secure a role in 2 years.

I am self-employed for not having better opportunities as an employee. Previous jobs always had excessive working hours with pay below the professional salary and hired as inferior positions despite carrying out responsibilities of the profession.

Quotes are based on the youth survey.

[1] LinkedIn Workforce Confidence Study (<https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/gen-z-wants-it-all-at-work-4672449>): 25% of Gen-Z respondents (born after 1997) say they hope or plan to leave their current employers within the next six months.

[2] 2023 Deloitte Gen Z. and Millennial survey (<https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>): While 49% of Gen Zs and 62% of millennials say work is central to their identity, work/life balance is something they are striving for. Having a good work/life balance is the top trait they admire in their peers, and their top consideration when choosing a new employer.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH



EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Young Water Fellowship (YWF)

The YWF Programme is implemented **globally** by Young Water Solutions (YWS) and works with **young leaders and their teams** to develop **new or existing social businesses** that work to:

- improve social or environmental conditions
- improve mainstream gender equality
- reduce youth unemployment at the local level, whilst also addressing SDG 6.

The programme includes:

- (1) a start-up training programme
- (2) tailored business coaching sessions on:

- finances
- communication
- monitoring and evaluation
- team management

- (3) Funding for experts and contractors such as accountants and financial consultants.

The programme is targeted at young entrepreneurs aged 18-35 years.



Main results:

There were multiple editions of the YWF programme, at global, national and regional levels.

From 2020 onward, the focus was shifted on implementing YWF at regional and national levels.

Since 2017, YWF has supported more than 500 entrepreneurs in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector to take their social businesses to the next level.





THE NEXT PHASE: CREATING THE GUIDANCE

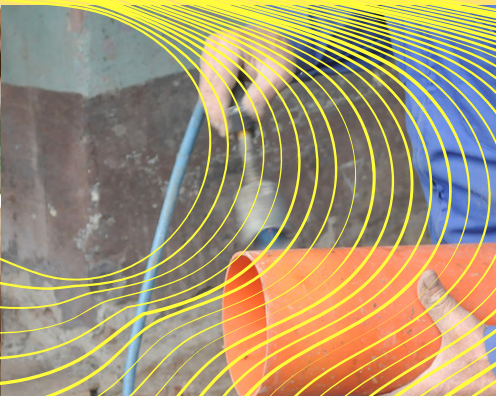


The research presented in this briefing note will be used for the next phase, which is to create the **Guidance for Services Providers** on how to guide the careers of young people.

The key questions to be answered now are:

- **What are the paths into the sector for young people?**
- **Where do these paths lead?**
- **What career outcomes are young people who work in or around our sector looking for?**
- **Where do WSS providers fit into these paths and what should they do to help young people on their career journeys?**

The aim is to complete this phase by the end of December 2023.



FURTHER RESOURCES

[Vocational training in water supply by Sen'Eau and OFOR \(Senegal\)](#)

[Vocational training in water supply by Sen'Eau \(Senegal\)](#)

[Terra.do - Online platform for climate work](#)

[Young Sanitation Professionals \(JPS\) Programme \(Brazil\)](#)

ABES - Brazilian Association of Sanitary and Environmental. JPS Census 2022. Authors: Silva,W; Oliveira, L.

[University extension course by Sunass \(Peru\)](#)

[Young Water Professional \(YWP\) Programme \(Myanmar\)](#)

[Young Water Fellowship \(YWF\)](#)

All the survey reports are available at:
www.aquafed.org

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thankyou

We would like to thank all the young people and water supply and sanitation employers who took part in our surveys.

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