

# Summary of the RWSN Roadmap E-discussion



17 - 31 MAY 2021

RWSN SECRETARIAT

Organised, moderated and summarised by Aline Saraiva Okello and Elodie Feijoo Seara (RWSN Secretariat), with the support of Sean Furey (RWSN Director)

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# Summary of the RWSN Roadmap e-discussion: 17 – 31 May 2021

## Introduction

The **RWSN Roadmap** is a plan for the evolution of the network in the coming decade. RWSN members, partners and friends were invited to take part into a consultation process on the future of the network: via a survey, comments on the Roadmap's website, and via an e-discussion. The detailed RWSN Roadmap is available [here](#), and its Executive Summary [here](#). The 2-weeks e-discussion, from 17 to 31 May 2021, focused on two aspects of the Roadmap: decentralising of RWSN, and the pathway to follow to increase the impact and financial sustainability of the network.

- **Week 1: Should we develop regional hubs and/or national chapters?**

Extending the reach and scale of RWSN, and ensuring leadership from the Global South is critical to ensuring that everyone has access to a safe drinking water supply. This means catering for more languages and generating geographically relevant content. Decentralising RWSN through regional hubs and country chapters is one possible pathway to follow. The first week of the e-discussion focused on the potential decentralisation of RWSN and the related opportunities and challenges to consider.

- **Week 2: Should RWSN shift towards being a network for**
  - **Individual**
  - **Organisations**
  - **Training and professional development**

In the second week of the e-discussion, increasing the impact and the financial sustainability of RWSN was at the core of the discussion. For this, three different pathways were explored – network of individuals, association of organisations, and network for training and professional development – with a key question in mind 'how to have the biggest impact with limited resources'.

We would like to thank all the participants who took part in the e-discussion and contributed to make it a vibrant and constructive exchange. The list with their names is available in the Annex.

## Summary of week #1 : Decentralising RWSN

The discussion was kick-started with the following questions:

- 1) What type of activities would you like to see happening at the regional/country level?
- 2) What are the pros and cons of opening regional hubs/country chapters?
- 3) What practical advice or recommendations do you have for a decentralisation process?
- 4) If you are yourself a member of another network with decentralised hubs at regional or country level (Eg. IWA, IAHS, SuSanA, GWP, RésEAU, WYPW, Capnet, etc), what key challenges and successes can you share with us?

## **Decentralising or not?**

There were diverse opinions on decentralizing RWSN. Some members encouraged the creation of regional hubs and suggested establishing a secretariat and a steering team for each region; for others the setting up of formal structures was a no-go to avoid duplication with existing networks. Various suggestions were made as alternatives to chapters/hubs:

- Keeping the current structure but allow for national/regional discussions on specific topics and in case of specific event, with lead discussants from the country/region.
- Working through existing networks with staff having a percentage of work time allocated to RWSN work.
- Collaborating with existing networks on specific activities such as capacity building.
- Merging with existing networks.
- Mapping existing networks to see gaps geographically and evaluate their vitality.
- Participating in regional events to extend the reach of RWSN, with regional presenters and attendees to pull more expertise from the region.

## **Examples of several countries were mentioned:**

- Malawi: three WASH related national networks; recommendation to communicate and see how to strengthen them, as most members overlap.
- Tanzania: existing WASH networks are RUWASA and TaWaSaNet; the members (INGOs, development agencies, CSO's) pay annual fees to ensure sustainability
- India: has some strong country networks, such as SuSanA India.
- Papua New Guinea: a national coordinating forum has been dormant since 2019 – RWSN could reach out and support/revitalize it.

## **Opportunities**

- High demand in terms of capacity building at country/decentralized level
- With more active RWSN members at regional/country level, the engagement of Government professionals will increase
- More participation of local members in RWSN activities and in projects from governments/organizations
- More engagement from the region in RWSN topics
- Opportunity to partner/collaborate with other donors/NGOs

## **Challenges/barriers to decentralisation**

- Lack of political will/commitment, lack of funding, lack of coordination and/or conflicting approaches, lack of time, and lack of knowledge sharing.
- Ongoing confusion about the differences between various global collaborations or networks: what we do and what we do not do and/or how we relate to one another (or not), plus what being a member or partner of each network means.
- Getting distracted by not having a clear focus on the kind of service categories that RWSN wants to provide:

- Information overload for members and service recipients
- Not finding the necessary (voluntary) support for coordination and professional management of regional hubs
- It might be difficult to oversee and keep control on regional hub activities, to not lose track of the strategic focus of the organization
- Membership engagement and understanding what members want from the network is important and difficult. Members' needs may range from professional development to networking.
- Balancing individual and corporate memberships is a challenge. Members paying fees should get value for money e.g. access to journals, mentorship, forums etc. Some members want to be members of an association only as long as they are working for a water-related organization/utility and want their employers to shoulder the associated costs. Other members are only interested in professional development and networking and are willing to shoulder associated costs themselves.

### **Types of activity that should happen at country/regional level**

- Promotion of in-country collaboration of various WASH stakeholders at all levels by providing services like the development of an in-country actors mapping (including the private sector)
- Providing guidance and information on state-level policies and guidelines with a focus on service level monitoring
- Promotion and identification of in-country entry steps and opportunities of how to strengthen the WASH systems in the countries
- Webinars
- Regional forums (workshops maybe for a start e.g. workshop on rural water supply, on groundwater, on private water supply, on solar pumping etc) and events
- Join regional learning and discussion events organized e.g. by the Millennium Water Alliance or Agenda for Change to make RWSN known to a wider audience and make sure everyone knows that it's a resource open to anyone

### **Practical advice and recommendations for decentralisation process**

- Come up with clear TOR/standards for organizing and coordinating the regional hubs by introducing common service categories that apply for all countries/regions.
- Support the existing weak and struggling national and regional networks to be up and running.
- Have a flexible approach, which might change from country to country, according to the existing context and opportunities present in a specific country. For the Tanzania context, for example, knowing that an existing network is in operation, we could start a discussion on how RWSN can somehow join and cooperate and bring added value to the existing network (TaWaSaNet).
- Go to more stakeholders (private, regulators, universities, local operators): Organize events, build capacity of actors, develop partnerships and links with other networks and organizations, develop strong links with actors present in countries such as UN agencies,

INGOs in the sector (ACF, OXFAM, SI, etc.) and financing institutions (ADB, FADES, BM, ...), include more local networks of young people and women.

- Start with having regional/country representative(s) who can work for RWSN on a part time / home-based arrangement to pilot the decentralisation process.
- Don't compromise on the overall goal and objectives of RWSN and define do's and don'ts before setting up the regional hubs. For example: How and to what extent to engage the private sector? How to deal with corruption and mis-management and other HR-relevant aspects at country level and on the same hand keep and ensure the necessary support and commitment of governments and local service authorities?

## Summary of Week #2: Increasing impact and financial sustainability

During the second week, participants were asked to choose among three pathways where RWSN should focus most of its energy, and to explain why.

1. **Focus on being a network of individuals:** Peer-to-peer sharing and mentoring spaces, and global Information hub where trustworthy guidance and evidence is discoverable.
2. **Focus on being an association of organisations:** Work with organisations to raise the professionalism of their staff, partners and programmes and take on a much stronger advocacy role for rural water organisations and issues.
3. **Focus on being a network for training and professional development:** Develop and run specialist, world-class online and face-to-face training, mentoring and continued professional development in partnership with local organisations. Provide a quality-controlled framework for 3rd party training and education partners.

### All the three together - complementarity

It was highlighted several times that the three pathways are not contradictory but rather complementary. All three are really important, for various reasons and for different people, and it would be desirable for all to happen. RWSN should be as inclusive as possible and remain a mixed network of individuals and organizations, from global to local levels, and play a role in strengthening the capacities and skills of its members through the dissemination of information that is simple, useful and accessible to all in several languages. While following the three pathways in parallel, RWSN could increase its impact by participating in global, regional and national exchanges through focal points and members. This would be an opportunity for RWSN to play a positive role in increasing access to quality and sustainable services. The network could develop partnerships with international sector organizations and donors to build sector capacity and support operators in countries and regions.

### Arguments to focus on being a network of individuals

There are already many networks/collaborations that focus on organizations, while the added value of RWSN compared to other networks is its openness: anyone is free to become a member and engage in the discussions. It would thus be more impactful for RWSN to focus on individuals. The difference from entities like the Millenium Water Alliance or Agenda for Change is that RWSN is a

resource both in terms of a place people go when they need help or information and also as a forum where people can post questions or ask for ideas about a specific challenge.

### **Limited resources - need to focus**

Considering the limited resources of RWSN, the key question is *what should RWSN focus on, in order to use its limited resources to the greatest effect*. Over the past years, RWSN's key impact has been on: generating content of high quality (field notes, directories, analysis documents, etc.); facilitating discussions at international level on selected and focussed topics; providing a space for ad-hoc questions and discussions; and organizing the RWSN Forums. All of this from a neutral (technically, politically, institutionally) point of view, maintaining high quality and non-commercial nature. For some participants, by focusing RWSN limited resources on training and professional development, pathways 1) and 2) would follow, making the 3) pathway the one to follow. A network for training and professional development would allow to:

- Bring discussions more into local and national contexts
- Increase impact from the bottom up
- Work to raise professional standards and competences, thus enhancing the quality of work done on the ground

### **Arguments to focus on being a network for training and professional development**

Two different sub-pathways were mentioned within the option of 'being a network for training and professional development': certification and informal standards.

#### *1. Certification process of professional trainings/standards*

RWSN could become an international institution, complementing existing national ones, which certifies the professional standing and competence of those working in the sector. We could imagine that one of the conditions placed by governments, local governments, NGOs and others on employment in this sector was those applicants for jobs either have such certification or are working towards it. RWSN would be providing the knowledge products, mentoring and counselling to get increasing numbers of professional workers so certified. Continuing professional development would also be enabled by RWSN.

#### *2. Establishing informal standards and benchmarks*

An impactful role for RWSN could be to make discussion spaces available, to facilitate discussions, to signpost to successful experiences, to establish benchmarks or best practices, and to come up with recommendations for other actors.

- Example: Skat Foundation has been developing materials for professional training and carrying out training workshops. In the case of drilling professionalisation, this has led to the development and roll-out of several online courses, over two years benefiting about 200 people from 50+ countries. Apart from the training as such, a coaching/tutoring component is part of these courses, to make sure content learned is actually applied after the training.

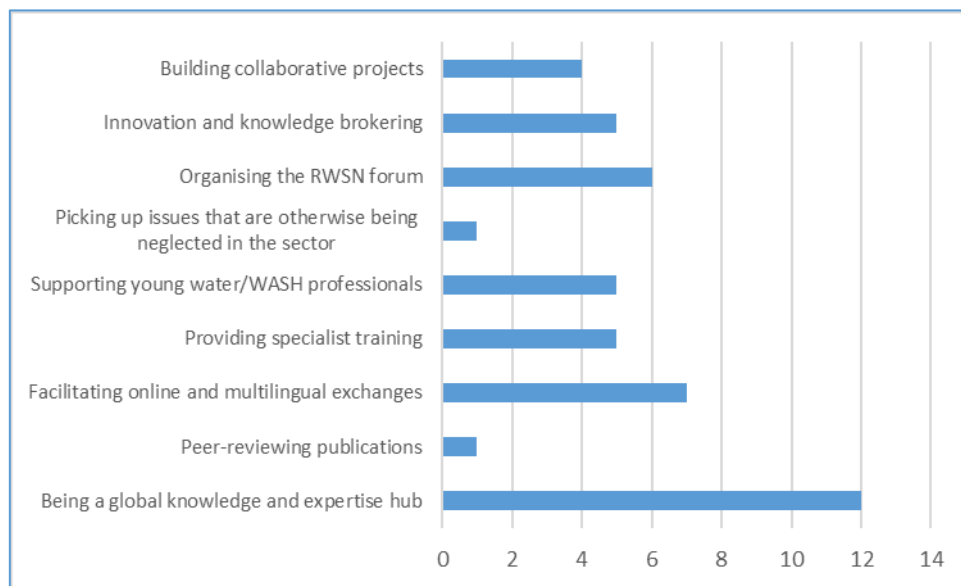
## Challenges of training and professional development pathway

The two main challenges linked to increasing the impact of training and professional development are: securing funding and scaling-up. One-off tiny initiatives do generate results (people trained, standards raised, careers enhanced, etc.), but the impact is difficult to measure, and the efforts are hard to sustain. An interesting option would be to work with government agencies. The example of Tanzania was mentioned by a participant: working closely with RUWASA (government agency for rural water and sanitation in Tanzania) allows to make sure this is the start of a process which is carried forward by the local actors and then rolled out across different regions if successful. RWSN might be the place to document such experiences, to get additional expertise on board, but also to improve content and methodology of such training, to engage with more actors, and to share experiences made.

## Activities RWSN should focus on for increased impact and financial sustainability

Before closing the e-discussion, participants were invited to choose from the below list 2-3 activities that RWSN should focus on. From the 16 answers received, the selected top three activities were:

1. Being a global knowledge and expertise hub; 2. Facilitating online and multilingual exchanges; 3. Organizing the RWSN forum.





## Annex: List of e-discussion participants

Name	Organisation (where known)	Organisation	
		Type	Country (when known)
Themba Gumbo	Cap-Net UNDP	iNGO	South Africa
Yasmina Rais El Fenni	Global Water Partnership	iNGO	Sweden
Sean Furey	Skat Foundation	iNGO	Switzerland
Chandrasekaran Jayaraman	WATSAN ENVIROTECH PRIVATE LIMITED	Private Sector	India
Muthi Nhlema	Baseflow	Private Sector	Malawi
Alec Shannon	WASH Agenda for Change	iNGO	USA
Leon Cizungu	Centre de recherche agro-ecologique "CRAE"		Democratic Republic of Congo
Dr Martin Kouame	Eau et Assainissement pour l'Afrique	NGO	Ivory Coast
Osayomwanbo Osarenotor	University of Benin	Academia/NGO	Nigeria
Dr Lovemore Dhoba	National Coordination Unit (NCU)-WASH Sector	Government	Zimbabwe
Mark Wolfsbauer	UNICEF	UN	Papua New Guinea
Harold Lockwood	Aguaconsult	Private Sector	United Kingdom
Al-hassan Adam	WaterAid	iNGO	United Kingdom
Matthias Saladin	Skat foundation	iNGO	Switzerland
Auguste Landry Kamegne Kamto	Environnement, Votre Sustainable Environment	NGO	Cameroon
Charles Mnyororo	Management Action	NGO	Tanzania
Mathieu Métois	Inter Aide	Government	France
Nitya Jacob	SuSanA	iNGO	India
Alexander von Hildebrand	Consultant	Private Sector	Portugal
Devendra Singh Dhapola	UNICEF	UN	India
Stephan Simon	Welthungerhilfe	iNGO	Germany
Giorgio Colombo	Istituto Oikos Onlus	NGO	Tanzania
Anthony Reid Harvey	TAM Ceramics	Private Sector	USA
Alpha Ntayomba	Population and Development Initiative (PDI)	NGO	Tanzania
Mohamed Abdawa	UNICEF	UN	Mauritania
Richard Carter	Richard Carter & Associates Ltd	Private Sector	United Kingdom
Julia Gathu	Drilling for Life	Private Sector	Kenya
Henk Holtslag	SMART Centre Group	iNGO	Netherlands