



RWSN and Women in WASH Mentoring Programmes

2024 Report

PARTNERS



BACKGROUND

The RWSN & Women in WASH mentoring programmes

RWSN has been running a mentoring programme for the water sector since 2019 in English, French and Spanish. Since the start of the programme, over 1,659 mentors & mentees have been involved in the programme.

Since 2021, the RWSN Secretariat manages the mentoring programme through the platform Pushfar, so that participants can select their own mentor or mentee themselves. This was based on feedback from previous years, where mentees and mentors had sometimes found that their assigned mentor/ mentee was not a good fit for their needs or skills. By letting the mentors and mentees choose their mentoring partner themselves, we hoped it would improve the quality of the mentoring relationship for all parties.

This year, the mentoring program was organized in collaboration with Agenda for Change, featuring a special initiative called Women in WASH, dedicated exclusively to female mentors and mentees. The program consisted of two sub-programs: the Near-Peer Program, designed for women with similar levels of professional experience who want to support and exchange ideas with each other, and the Traditional Program, which pairs a senior mentor with a more junior mentee.

This year, we also collaborated with the Global Water Center, which, among other things, provides specialized training in solar-powered water systems. They actively promoted the mentoring program to their alumni, expanding the initiative's reach to a broader and more technically skilled audience.

At the beginning of the programme, mentors and mentees received a guidance document in three languages (English, French, and Spanish), created by the programme Secretariats to support them in building their mentoring relationship. Additionally, introductory sessions were organized to explain the use of PushFar and provide a comprehensive overview of the entire mentoring programme.

Mentors and mentees were also requested to abide by a Code of Conduct, and to contact the RWSN or Agenda for Change Secretariat in all confidentiality if they felt that the mentoring relationship was not working out, or if they wanted to make a complaint.

In 2024, the program engaged **292 participants**, 70% of whom were women. Of the 140 mentors, many took on multiple mentees to accommodate the high demand, as 194 participants joined as mentees. This flexible mentor-mentee matching system ensured that 57% of mentors supported two or more mentees, demonstrating the program's commitment to fostering inclusive, personalized support.

46% of mentees and mentors paired successfully, with others continuing to seek mentors aligned with their professional interests.

Many mentees registered after the induction in March and April, or even after July, by which time the mentoring program was already well underway, and most mentors had established relationships. As a result, several mentees struggled to find mentors aligned with their professional interests.

The PushFar platform allowed us to effectively monitor the matching process. As of September, 89 matches remain active. Of the 89 active matches, 45 are part of the Women in WASH program, and 44 are in the RWSN program.

Since the start of the program,



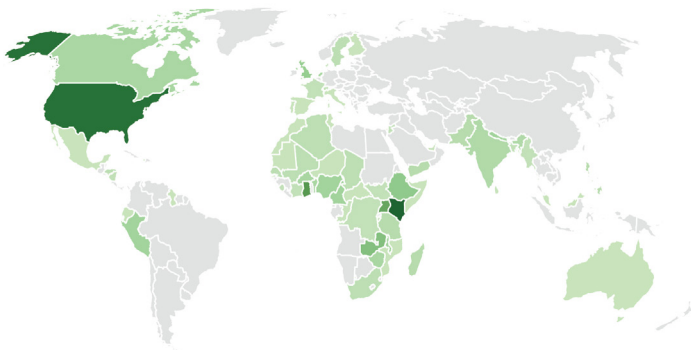
Women

This year, **70%** of program participants identified as women.

The 2024 Mid-Year Assessment

The mid-year survey conducted in August 2024 provided valuable insights into the progress of the mentoring program, as well as areas for potential improvement. A total of 93 responses were collected from the 292 registered participants, with responses spanning three languages—English, French, and Spanish—ensuring diverse perspectives were captured. The survey sought to evaluate participant satisfaction, engagement in program activities, and the overall effectiveness of the mentoring process.

Countries of Mentoring Participants



Out of the 93 participants in the program, 65 responded to the question about which initiatives they were part of. Among them, 27 were involved in the RWSN mentoring program, 11 participated in Women in WASH, and 27 were engaged in both. This distribution highlights the appeal of combining multiple initiatives, particularly for women seeking expanded professional development opportunities.

Regarding focus areas, 22 respondents mentioned that their mentoring relationship was centered on solar-powered water systems, drilling, and groundwater management. These topics were introduced in previous years of the RWSN mentoring program through a partnership with the Global Water Center and supplemented by online courses on drilling and groundwater management.

Survey participants

Our survey highlights the significant diversity within the mentoring program, with participants coming from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. Out of the 49 responses to this specific question, there were representatives from 34 different countries, reflecting the truly global reach of the program. This diverse group of professionals spans various geographical and cultural contexts, enriching the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and making the mentoring program a more impactful and globally relevant initiative.

Gender

This year, the mentoring programme was organized by RWSN and Agenda for Change with a specific emphasis on women, particularly through the addition of Women in WASH program. In terms of gender distribution, the survey shows a strong female representation with 73% women and 27% men participating, highlighting a continued focus on empowering women within the WASH sector. This emphasis aligns with the broader objectives of fostering gender equality and supporting female professionals in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Mentee Feedback

The mid-year assessment revealed generally positive results for mentees. Many reported that the mentoring relationship was highly beneficial, both personally and professionally. This diversity in experiences highlights the unique dynamics of each mentoring relationship and suggests areas where adjustments can be made to further support mentees.

Satisfaction with pairing

The feedback on mentor-mentee pairings was overwhelmingly positive, with:



60%
Highly satisfied



28%
Quite satisfied



12%
Dissatisfied

Mentees praised their mentors for being supportive, engaging in meaningful discussions, and providing valuable insights that helped to enrich their professional journeys:

“My mentor could not have been better. He was truly committed to helping me achieve my goals and making recommendations. He suggested I attend World Water Week and I was able to receive support from him in person at SIWI to meet important people in the WASH Sector. Truly an incredible experience.”

“Regular interactions with my mentor have boosted my confidence in addressing complex challenges and making informed decisions. (...)”

“I learnt new ways of implementing behaviour change programmes in the WASH Sector.”

“My mentor’s career, profession, and exposure aligns with my goals.”

“My mentor is very approachable and shares every available information they come across that may help me gain more insight into WASH and Rural Sanitation. They send opportunities for jobs among others.”

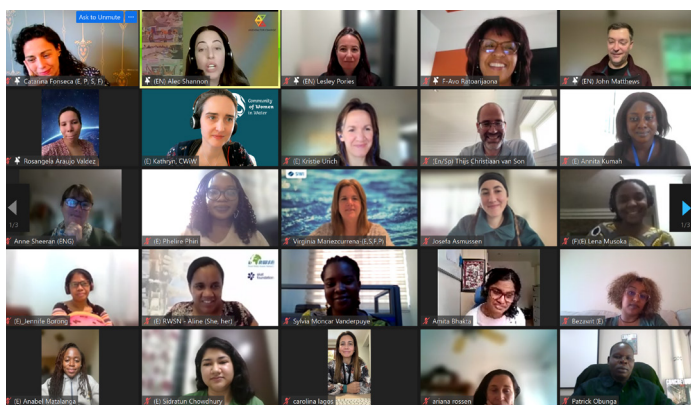
“(...) She also gave me the courage to leave my previous toxic work environment, helping me discern when to leave or stay in an institution.”

Satisfaction with Career Days

Among those who responded to the survey, participation in the May career event was notably high. In particular, the session focused on job searching in the Water and WASH sectors garnered significant interest. This strong engagement reflects the relevance of these topics to our participants, as well as their eagerness to seek growth opportunities within the sector.

Mentees provided insightful suggestions for future sessions, identifying the following areas of interest:

- Funding opportunities for WASH startups
- Professional communication skills
- Balancing family and work life
- How to find a first job after graduating in the water sector
- Resume and letter preparation
- Developing WASH projects as students
- Mid-career changes from professional to academic
- Funding opportunities for WASH startups



Screenshot from one of our May Career Day sessions

Mentors Feedback

For this survey, we received 23 responses from mentors, representing a cohort of 140 participants. Although the sample size is limited, the responses highlight both positive outcomes and challenges in mentoring relationships. When asked, “How satisfied are you with your current mentee(s)?” 69% of mentors reported being highly satisfied, 26% were satisfied, and 4% were not satisfied.

Future Plans



“I have enhanced my writing skills for personal statements while applying for Master’s programs. Additionally, I have researched various funding opportunities for Master’s studies and plan to apply for several, hoping to secure funding.”



“I’m learning how to plan for a career and continue to develop professionally while having a full time job.”

Career Days Feedback

7 mentors attended



5 mentors attended



8 mentors attended



Future topics of interest:

- Research and Development in WASH, WASH and Disability, WASH and Nutrition, Menstrual Hygiene Management
- More emphasis on barriers due to colonial frameworks
- Climate resilient WASH, solar lifting water supply system, publishing the research from WASH projects

Challenges with scheduling

“It would be easier if my mentees took a more active role in setting up meetings (...) The PushFar reminders are helpful, but it would be great if PushFar had a built-in scheduling feature.”

“Many of the mentees that reached out to me are based in the Global South, including the one I mentored. They often lack regular internet access and are unable to attend virtual workshops. It would be helpful to provide resources on how to support these mentees. In addition, culturally specific materials on building careers from unemployment would be very beneficial. Since youth unemployment is a chronic issue in the Global South, more programming should address these particular challenges.”

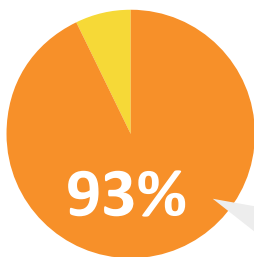
Future networking opportunities

“Having more ‘speed-dating’ type events would allow people to meet quickly. These events would offer a more dynamic approach to connecting mentors and mentees, providing them with brief but meaningful interactions to explore potential matches. Additionally, consider partnering with networks like the African Sanitation Professionals Network and Women in Water to expand the group and reach a wider range of professionals.”

Mentor specific meetups

“Virtual meetups or workshops could allow mentors to share experiences, exchange ideas, and learn from each other. A stronger sense of community among mentors could foster collaboration and increase the overall impact of the program.”

To end on a positive note, **100% of the mentors who responded said they would recommend the mentoring program.** This strong feedback indicates that the program is well-regarded and appreciated by participants. Mentors find value in sharing their experiences and supporting others, while also enjoying the meaningful connections they form with their mentees.



93%

found their mentoring experience **beneficial for personal and professional growth.**



100%

would recommend the mentoring program!

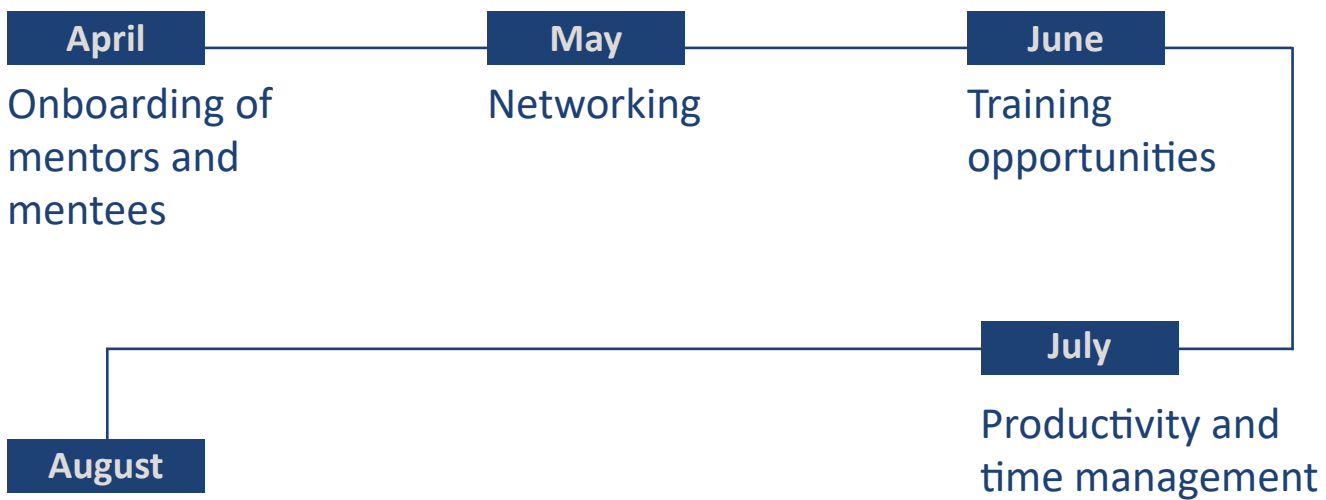
Funding

For the 2024 edition of the mentoring program, RWSN received funding from the Global Water Center to cover basic costs of platform and time to manage the program. Agenda for Change received funding from CARE to implement this second phase of the Women in WASH program, including all management aspects.

Networking and learning

One of the core objectives of our mentoring program is to foster networking opportunities among participants. To support this, we organized several events, including a special networking-focused session. We also partnered with the Community of Women in Water, led by Kathryn Pharr, who played a pivotal role in enhancing the networking aspect of the program.

We also hosted monthly office hours, where part of the hour was dedicated to sharing knowledge on a specific topic of interest of mentees, and part on networking and troubleshooting problems for mentees,



A highlight of our networking efforts was the Women’s Mingle event held in Stockholm. This gathering was designed specifically to encourage women in the sector to connect, share experiences, and build relationships in a traditionally male-dominated field. The goal was to bridge the gender gap and strengthen the network of women working in WASH.

In addition to these events, we created a dedicated LinkedIn group for all mentoring program participants. Unfortunately, keeping the group active proved challenging. Most posts came from the Programme Secretariats, and there was limited engagement or discussions generated by participants.

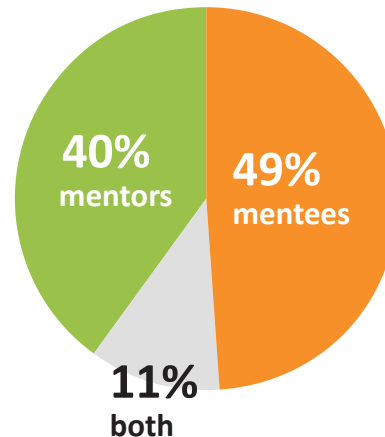


The Women’s Mingle event held in Stockholm.

Annexes

What is your role in the mentoring programme?

N=72



How would you rate the support provided by the Mentoring Secretariat overall?

N=29



The mentoring Secretariats received high marks, with the majority of participants giving them a 4 or 5-star ranking.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your participation in this mentoring programme?

N=29

