



AquaFed Working Group – Utility Workforce

Terms of Reference

November 2024

Introduction

Some of the biggest challenges facing utilities are human resource issues, in particular, recruitment and retention. It is well-known that utilities around the world face an ageing workforce and very few numbers of skilled young people wanting to work in the sector.

This Working Group intends to have a variety of workstreams to help our members and all utilities with their recruitment and retention challenges. There will be a mixture of knowledge sharing of best practises and specific work; contribution to development training and mentoring programmes and campaigning work to encourage young skilled professionals into the water utility sector.

There are a wide range of stakeholders that would welcome both the outcomes of this work but also to participate in it. The Working Group is a huge opportunity for AquaFed and our partners to accelerate our recent collaborations about supporting young professionals and women in utilities.

Objectives

- To highlight best practices in utility recruitment and retention and members' expertise.
- To deepen understanding from utility managers around specific career needs from staff in various job roles.
- To address specific issues around recruitment and career development of women and young professionals.
- To support utilities to appeal to young skilled professionals (workforce of the future), including how to form partnerships with education sector – schools, universities and training colleges.

Method of operating and accountability

- The Working Group should meet once every 4-6 weeks on conference call.
- The AquaFed secretariat will be the secretariat for the group.
- Working Group members should propose specific projects and actions.

Working group membership

- AquaFed members
- Other external partners

Participants

The Working Group would need members with the following skills and interests:

- Utility managers
- Human resources
- Training
- Youth representatives
- Women's NGOs
- Gender equality experts
- Regulators

Initial ideas for the Working Group

The Working Group could start by discussing and formulating an AquaFed view on some key questions:

- How are our members dealing with recruitment and retention challenges?
- Which particular job types are the most challenging to find skilled people?
- Is there a mismatch between the types of skills young people have and what we think are actually needed?
- How are members managing gender equality and in particular supporting potential and actual women leaders?

This workforce issue will be interesting to members and stakeholders and we expect that AquaFed will develop its own range of communication activity including webinars and events. It is an opportunity for AquaFed to creatively address an issue – for example could it organise an annual awards programme to celebrate existing talented utility professionals? These are questions that can be discussed in the Working Group.

There are also other forums which the Working Group can contribute to, including:

- World Bank Equal Aqua programme

This offers tools, resources, and services to support gender equality efforts among water institutions around the world. The Working Group could usefully contribute with our own webinar programme and regularly publish the knowledge that we have collected. This information will also support the World Bank's technical assistance to utilities.

- UN World Water Development Report 2026 and UN 2026 Conference

These are crucial opportunities to promote members' existing work on gender equality and women leadership. The Report will be a place for members to highlight case studies of success in supporting women in employment but also in service delivery. The Working Group should also lead AquaFed's work to create a programme that demonstrates progress on women leadership, between now and the 2026 Conference. The drafting of the report starts in January 2025.

- **Water Rising Institute's Water Women Project**
The Institute's Water Women Project aims to address gender gaps and needs in private operators. This currently includes a survey looking in depth at company policies, procedures and other initiatives that demonstrate their commitment to gender equality. The Working Group could help share the survey as well as provide expertise.