

# Volunteer opportunity

## RWSN co-Theme Leader: Sustainable Services

### 1. BACKGROUND

The Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) is a network of individuals and organisations that are committed to improving water services for the rural poor everywhere in the world. Being a Theme Leader of RWSN is a commitment to sharing knowledge and good practices, and to share the RWSN vision of “a world in which all rural people have access to sustainable and reliable water supplies which can be effectively managed to provide sufficient, affordable and safe water within a reasonable distance of the home.”

The [Sustainable Services Theme](#) is one of 6 Themes in the Rural Water Supply Network. Sustainable Services means that water users have reliable and affordable access to enough water of sufficiently high quality to meet their daily needs. There are many ways that such access can be achieved, from household self-supply to large-scale water utilities.

The sustainability of rural water services is a constant and critical challenge, requiring skilled individuals with adequate resources and support to ensure the consistent availability of safe water in households. Although community management is prevalent, it has limitations, prompting the development of new management models that prioritise professionalisation. This shift is occurring amidst escalating challenges such as climate change, pollution, shrinking aid budgets, corruption, rising income inequality, violence, and political instability.

The pace of technological progress in revolutionizing rural water services has been sluggish. Nonetheless, strides are being made in solar-powered pumping, small piped systems, and the digitalisation of rural service management. Improvements in operational and financial data systems are facilitating the quantification of life-cycle costs, enabling innovative approaches to covering these costs. The Uptime Consortium, for instance, has illustrated that Results-Based Contracting holds promise in directing subsidies from blended finance trust funds, leading to improved service delivery, transparency, and efficiency.

There is growing optimism among governments and donors about the feasibility and desirability of household piped connections. However, the transition from community waterpoints like kiosks, tap stands, and handpumps to household connections will take time and, in some contexts, may never be viable. Hence, RWSN also has Themes dedicated to household-investment in Self-supply and to livelihood and income opportunities arising from Multiple Use Services of water (MUS).

### Thematic Priorities

- **Systematic institutional strengthening:** sharing lessons learned on strengthening local and national systems, and practical approaches and overcoming tensions between working with the grain of existing social and institutional structures that are likely to be more sustainable, but less inclusive to some marginalised groups.
- **Professionalisation:** Documenting and sharing management models, professional development and management practices, and their enabling systems at local and national levels.
- **Regulation:** engaging with regulators and sharing experiences and identifying good practices in rural and small town regulation on how to balance tensions and trade-offs between competing economic, social, political and environmental priorities.
- **Financing** of life-cycle costs and exploring ways to increasing financial sources and financial viability of rural water services across different contexts.
- **Resilient services:** sharing emerging practices and solutions for increasing the resilience of rural water service providers – with a specific focus on climate resilience, which has been identified by RWSN members as one of their main challenges.

There are overlaps and opportunities to collaborate with the other RWSN themes, for example:

- **Leave No-one Behind:** The role of women as water users, decision-makers, and water professionals; over-coming the multiple barriers to safe water access arising from physical remoteness, disability, ethnicity, language, age, and lack of political or economic influence.
- **Data for Action:** Monitoring and data systems and capacities that can incentivise safety, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of rural water access.
- **Multiple Use Services of water (MUS):** exploring the synergies and trade-offs between household drinking water services and wider water needs for non-potable domestic and livelihood uses.
- **Self-supply:** harnessing the potential of household investment and initiative and managing the trade-offs with water safety and the impact of private supplies on the revenues of formal water operators.
- **Sustainable Groundwater Development:** linking water supply to water resources management; improving the service quality provided by drillers and hardware providers.
- **Water Quality and Safety:** Mainstreaming water quality testing, water safety management and water treatment into all types of rural and small piped water system services.

We are looking for a second organisation to commit to co-leading the Sustainable Services Theme alongside Aguaconsult.

## 2. Theme Leader benefits, role and responsibilities

RWSN Theme Leaders are champions for a specific thematic area of rural water supply. They bring expertise, personal and organisation networks and in-kind resources to help the network achieve the Strategy goals. In return, they (and their organisation) achieve significant visibility in their field, and benefit from additional synergies with other members of the RWSN Executive Steering Committee and other Theme Leaders.

Below are some of the criteria for selecting a RWSN Theme Leader, and the roles and responsibilities of a RWSN Theme Leader. You can find out more about [RWSN’s Governance in the RWSN Governance Protocol 2023-2025](#).

<b>Membership Criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Passion and technical expertise in their chosen theme.</li> <li>b) Well connected with other experts in their field.</li> <li>c) Theme Leaders can be individuals, but the support of an organisation is preferable.</li> <li>d) Active support from their employers, or in the case of independent consultants a willingness to commit time to the next term in exchange for visibility on their chosen theme.</li> </ul>
<b>Joining Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Through an Open Call for Theme Leaders; disseminated by the RWSN Secretariat;</li> <li>b) Contact the Secretariat with an expression of interest;</li> <li>c) Be approached to consider becoming a Theme Leader.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Theme Leaders should identify champions (individuals and/or organisations) in their community and approach them as part of the open call for new Theme Leaders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>d) Expressing interest at General Assembly Meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Term</b>	<p>Theme Leaders will be appointed/ re-appointed for 3 years. No limit on the number of terms that can be served.</p>

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A Theme Leader is expected to:

**Expectations of contributions and activities**

- a) Prepare a work plan with the Secretariat by February each year for ExCom approval that specifies:
    - a. Specific priorities, within their Theme.
    - b. Ideas and wishes for RWSN webinars, e-discussions and publications.
    - c. Conferences at which they would like RWSN apply to coconvene side events, presentations or exhibition stands.
    - d. A budget of in-kind contributions, including staff time, travel, materials and other expenses, such as conference session fees.
  - b) It is the responsibility of the organisations that employ or contract the Theme Leaders to ensure that these individuals have:
    - a. RWSN activities explicitly included in their job descriptions and annual performance plans (where they exist)
    - b. It is expected that each Theme Leader dedicates to his/her Theme at least 8 hours/month.
  - c) Help to identify speakers and panellists for webinars, online events and conferences.
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- d) Identify partners and resources for Theme-related activities, such as training courses, advocacy, publications and research.
  - e) Be responsible for the delivery and reporting of the activities carried out by their designated Theme (as defined in the RWSN Strategy).
  - f) Attend quarterly online Theme Leader Meetings and the General Assembly.
  - g) Contribute updates and material for RWSN newsletters and network updates.
  - h) Theme Leaders may be invited to attend Executive Committee meetings to give an update or provide other inputs, otherwise they may attend as observers only.
  - i) Contribute to RWSN reporting, including in-kind reporting so that the Theme Leader individual and organisation can receive proportionate acknowledgement for their contributions to the network.

- j) The RWSN Secretariat may agree a contract with the Theme Leader up to a value of CHF/USD 5,000 for specific tasks defined in a Terms of Reference. Above this threshold any commitment requires approval of the Executive Steering Committee to ensure no conflicts of interest<sup>1</sup>. Theme Leaders will be expected to report back on these activities on top of Theme activity reporting.

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**Leaving**

- a. A Theme Leader can leave at any time in writing to the RWSN Chair.
- b. Where a Theme Leader is not meeting the commitments stated in their annual work plan and not regularly attending meetings they may be asked by the ExCom to step down or change the representative from that organisation.
- c. Ideally, Theme Leaders for the same Theme should not step down at the same time, to ensure continuity.

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### **3. How to apply**

RWSN places a high value on diversity and encourages application from people from underrepresented backgrounds, including women and individuals from the Global South. For this position, a working knowledge of English is necessary.

Please apply as follows:

- Send your CV along with a 1-page cover letter to the RWSN Executive Steering Committee to introduce yourself and your organisation, and state why you're interested in the Theme Leader position by 23 February 2024. Applications and enquiries should be sent to the RWSN Secretariat ([info@rural-water-supply.net](mailto:info@rural-water-supply.net)).

1 An exception is for Themes where the Secretariat organisation is a Theme Leader. In this case they may use their own funds to sub-contract Theme Leading activities without restriction, however, if financial contributions to RWSN from other parties are to be used then the ExCom approval process holds and the Secretariat should not prioritise their own themes over those led by others.