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OPINION *PIECE*

Young water professionals called to be active in developing the sector



Young Water Professionals Conference 2013

03 February 2015

*The theme of the fourth Young Water Professionals (YWP) ZA Biennial Conference is challenging all water sector professionals to “**Stop Talking and Start Doing**” something to broaden, enhance and develop the sector.*

This theme actually ups the tempo and challenges water professionals to bring their skills and knowledge to the water sector ‘work bench’ to implement practical and relevant solutions to shared challenges.

The Call for Participation is open and applications and abstracts can be submitted from Monday, 2 February till 28 February 2015. The conference is set to take place from 16-18 November 2015 at the Centre for Science and Innovative Research (CSIR) International Convention Centre, Pretoria, South Africa.

The conference topics are broadly defined into the following categories: Domestic and municipal water and sanitation; drinking water and bulk water supply; industrial and mine water; environmental water, and water resources; capacity building and training; water governance, management and society, and; Inter and trans-disciplinarity in the water sector

The spirit of the event, however, is to include all young people who are passionate about the water sector. The Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) has encouraged prospective participants to share topics that may not fit into any of the above mentioned categories. The conference will explore how different professionals in the sector contribute with their skills, some through research others through practical, on-the-job work.



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Dr Inga Jacobs

Writing in her personal capacity about three years ago on the matter, the then President of Young Water Professionals (YWP) Water Institute of Southern Africa, (WISA), Dr Inga Jacobs, said it is widely recognised that capacity building and sustainable knowledge transfer are critical concerns for several sectors in South Africa, and the water sector is no different.

The loss of intellectual assets is a major threat to effective water management particularly in water-scarce countries such as South Africa where the onus has always been on the scientific community to find technological solutions for sectoral challenges.

The repercussions for the sector include high staff turnover as well as the loss of skills and institutional memory. Young water professionals in South Africa are therefore faced with the threefold challenge of developing their skills, finding mentors to help them do so, as well as grappling with the added responsibility of re-learning knowledge that could have been retained through sustainable knowledge transfer policies and programmes.

Fulfilling the present and future needs of the water and wastewater industries requires the continuous development of a workforce which is both adequate in size, capable in skills and strong in leadership. Recognising that young water professionals (students and professionals in the water sector and under the age of 35, or who attained their most recent qualification within the past five years) are the future of the water sector, the Young Water Professionals (YWP) was established as an international initiative by the International Water Association (IWA). In Southern Africa, the Southern African Young Water Professionals (SA YWP) in collaboration with the Water Institute for Southern Africa (WISA) has been highly successful in providing opportunities for YWPs to meet and communicate, providing career development opportunities for them, supporting employers with the recruitment and retention of YWPs, as well as ensuring that the programme remains relevant.

The Southern African Young Water Professionals programme is entering its 4th year of existence as an official programme. Membership stands at more than 800 students with provincial chapters set up in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng and further afield in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Plans are also underway to launch the Mpumalanga and the Free State YWP chapters this year. Let us support this call with all the energies we possess because Water is Life!

Ike Motsapi



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