

SA Young Water Professional elected as Vice Young Water Ambassador at International Water Week, Amsterdam

On Monday 31 October, three pre-selected ambassador candidates - Sarah Dickin of Canada, Stephen Nyende-Byakika from Uganda, living in South Africa, and Josanne Derks from the Netherlands - presented their motions to a selective jury and a wide audience of young water professionals and students to become the new Young Water Professional Ambassador 2011 – 2013. Though Stephen was not elected Ambassador, he was appointed Vice Ambassador and Representative for Africa through a debate presented to a jury and a wide audience of YWPs from all over the world.

Dirk Janssen (Young Water Ambassador 2011, Dutch Youth Representative to the United Nations) and Jean Baptiste (World Water Forum) hosted the debate. The three ambassadors-to-be and 'the room' were asked about their solutions about 'water and climate change' and 'water and urbanisation'. The jury consisted of: Richenel Small (Director at Overliggend Waterschap MCP in Nieuw Nickerie, Suriname, Chairman Young Water Ambassador); Barbara Frequin (Owner of Frequin Products); Fons Nelen (Director at Nelen & Schuurmans) and Nathalie Berthelier (Coordinator Roots and Citizenship World Water Forum). First all three candidates pitched why he/she should be the next Young Water Ambassador. After this Henk van Schaik (Cooperative Programme on Water and Climate) presented some of the problems involving 'Water and Climate', for instance, the effect of global warming on your drinking water (warmer pipelines that transport the water) and the lack of freshwater. Furthermore, according to Henk van Schaik, the water cycle needs to be linked to climate change.

Sarah Dickin stressed that education is the key. People learn about water and about the carbon cycle, but the interrelatedness is not thought through. Josanne Derks wanted to put the issue on the political agenda, stating that the water and climate issue must be shared with everybody. 'The room' (people attending and participating in the debate) remarked that politicians may well know what to do, but do not make the right decisions because these decisions are unpopular amongst their voters. But when voters become more aware, they might understand the actions that need to be taken. Stephen Nyende-Byakika argued that people are not realising climate change is happening because it does not affect people on a daily basis, but we all really need to see the bigger picture.

To conclude the jury asked a tricky penultimate question: 'You have a research fund, but you can spend that money either on 'water and urbanisation' or 'water and climate change'. What topic would you choose?' All ambassadors agreed that urbanisation problems and climate change are so closely related that it's hard to choose which problem to be solved first. The final question from the jury: 'How can we avoid people concentrating in one place?' Sarah Dickin argued for a built environment. Stephen Nyende-Byakika wants to find out *why* people concentrate. Josanne Derks wanted to make sure people in the cities can be fed.

After a nervous waiting period, Sarah Dickin was elected Ambassador and Stephen Nyende-Byakika was elected Vice-Ambassador.

Stephen is currently a Lecturer (part-time) of Civil Engineering at Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijpark Campus. He is also an Ambassador of HydroAid, an Italian-based Water for Development

Management Institute, to Uganda as well as a Youth Fellow (Forum Alumni) of the International Telecommunication Union.

Stephen holds a BSc degree in Civil Engineering, MSc Degree in Civil Engineering and PhD. And in his current role is involved in lecturing and research in water resources engineering. His research interest focuses on development of decision support tools for malfunctioning water distribution networks. Stephen says that his greatest strength comes from the gift of teaching and convincing. He can make complicated matters seem simple - his students have helped him understand this. Through teaching he is able to influence young people not only professionally but also in terms of personal development.

Stephen's philosophy is to never give up, for if one does so, one betrays not only oneself but many others. In addition, as Abraham Lincoln also remarked, you cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong, and neither can you enhance brotherhood of man by inciting classic hatred. He says "united we stand and divided we fall" and continues, "my motivation comes from the desire to know and share with others. I feel no satisfaction in reaping for my own benefit, rather I feel joyful to transform character and behaviour."

Stephen says that the IWW was an incredibly positive experience for him personally, as it presented an opportunity to meet like-minded persons who are passionate about water and who are aware of the dangers we face if mankind does not sustainably utilize the available water resources. Sadly though, this enthusiasm does not seem to be universal, as so many people feel that water is an abundant God-given infinite resource which is inexhaustible and should be taken for granted. While he is the IWW Vice-Ambassador, Stephen's primary aim is to reach out to as many youths as possible and share his passion for water through raising awareness on the criticality of water where issues of pollution, exploitation and water-related conflicts and climate change are concerned. He especially aims at growing the interaction of the IWA/WISA Young Water Professionals Programme at the International Water Week, Amsterdam, 2013, alongside strengthening its linkages with other Young Water Professionals chapters, through various outreach programmes across Africa and beyond.

PHOTO:

The three ambassadorial candidates at IWW. Left to right: Josanne Derks from the Netherlands, Stephen Nyende-Byakika from Uganda, living in South Africa, and Sarah Dickin of Canada.