

**Fair & Sustainable  
Consulting**



**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

# Evaluation of Young Experts Programme Phase II

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*Disclaimer: Fair and Sustainable Consulting (F&S) has hosted four Young Experts between 2019 and 2022. Prior to submitting a proposal, F&S informed MFA and received the answer that “organisations or consortia remain eligible for the implementation of this evaluation in case they employ (alumni) Young Experts, under the condition that these (alumni) Young Experts are not part of the evaluation team”. In addition, it can be stated that the three evaluators did not have any work engagement with any of the F&S Young Experts and did not engage any of the YEP alumni in the evaluation. At the time of the evaluation, F&S did not host any Young Expert. The F&S alumni were excluded from the random list of Young Experts for interviews or focus group discussion. No staff from F&S was interviewed and no information from the organisation was used for this evaluation.*

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## List of Acronyms

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| BHOS     | Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation          |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease 2019                           |
| DGGF     | Dutch Good Growth Fund                             |
| EKN      | Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands          |
| F&S      | Fair and Sustainable Consulting                    |
| FGD      | Focus Group Discussion                             |
| HO       | Hosting Organisation                               |
| IGG      | Inclusive Green Growth Department                  |
| IM       | Instant Messaging                                  |
| IOB      | Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of MFA |
| KII      | Key Informant Interview                            |
| KIT      | Royal Tropical Institute                           |
| M&E      | Monitoring and Evaluation                          |
| MBTI     | Myers-Briggs Type Indicator                        |
| MFA      | Ministry of Foreign Affairs                        |
| NDA      | Non-Disclosure Agreement                           |
| NFP      | Netherlands Food Partnership                       |
| NIWA     | Netherlands International Water Ambition           |
| NWP      | Netherlands Water Partnership                      |
| NGO      | Non-Governmental Organisation                      |
| ODA      | Official Development Assistance                    |
| RVO      | Netherlands Enterprise Agency                      |
| SDGs     | Sustainable Development Goals                      |
| SC       | Steering Committee                                 |
| TBD      | To be determined                                   |
| ToC      | Theory of Change                                   |
| ToR      | Terms of Reference                                 |
| YE       | Young Expert                                       |
| YEP      | Young Expert Programme                             |

## Executive summary

Fair and Sustainable Consulting (F&S), member of the consortium led by the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), was selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Netherlands to carry out the evaluation of the second phase of the Young Expert Programme (YEP). YEP started 1 January 2013 and its second phase YEP Phase II has been running from 1 January 2020 and will end 30 June 2025.

YEP Phase II placed 371 Young Experts (YEs)<sup>1</sup> until end of June 2024 in the age range of 22 to 36 years (age at the start of YEP employment/secondment) over 14 batches. In this period, 138 unique Hosting Organisations (HOs) placed the YEs over 43 unique countries. Young Experts were divided over the water sector (37.5%), agrofood sector (39.9%), and the energy sector (22.6%).

The objective of the evaluation was to provide insight into the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of Phase II of the programme, to:

- Assess the extent to which YEP Phase II delivers relevant, effective, efficient, and sustainable results.
- Provide recommendations on a possible Phase III of YEP allowing MFA to determine its desirability and feasibility.

### Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Where it concerned quantitative methods, the evaluators used secondary raw data (YEP Programme Bureau survey data and document data base). For qualitative, primary, data, the evaluators used a mix of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The evaluation matrix (Annex 3) gives an overview of tools and data sources used in answering the evaluation questions of the Terms of Reference (ToR).

### MFA policy relevance

YEP Phase II was designed, appraised and approved in the context of “Investing in global prospects - for the world, for the Netherlands”, the overall document of Dutch policy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS policy), published May 2018. The BHOS of 2018 was updated in 2022 with “Do what we do best” (June 2022), following national elections (17 March 2021) and the installation of a new government in January 2022. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, remained the guiding principles for Dutch policy for development cooperation. In addition, MFA has goals for each of the sectors.

YEP reports on the contribution of the programme to the SDGs but this is only based on the number of days worked of YEs and HOs reporting on to what SDGs their work contributes.

**It is recommended to MFA, for a possible new phase, to better define YEP targets, directly linked to MFA targets, and to establish measurable milestones. This implies a larger role for monitoring and evaluation as well. Key cross-cutting policy themes, such as gender and resilience to climate change should be fully integrated in YEP.**

### YEP sectors

The objective of YEP is to support the creation of a new generation of international and national experts on water (since 2013), agrofood (since 2015) and renewable energy (since 2020), as well as stimulating the interlinkages (‘nexus’) between these three sectors. A large majority of respondents of the HO survey indicated that the connection of the three YEP themes has added value for their organisation. 70% gave a score of 6 or more, and 25% gave a score of 9 or 10.

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<sup>1</sup> Young experts can have multiple YEP years. Therefore the number of YEP years exceeds the number of YEs.

It is concluded that the nexus is omnipresent in YEP programme documentation and among programme and donor staff and is given due consideration in the appraisal of proposals for YEP postings. There are mixed feelings among YEs and HOs. Some don't see the added value and focus on one sector, while others appreciate a wider context of interlinked sectors. Commonly YEs and HOs express that their work determines their focus and engagement during YEP and, typically, one of the three domains is more present than the other, even for so-called nexus positions.

The evaluators do not recommend expanding YEP with one or more additional sectors, but **it is recommended to delimit the programme to the main sectors of MFA/IGG's interest**, i.e. the current three sectors (water, agrofood/food security, energy), and a cross-cutting climate theme.

### YEP management and administration

The YEP Programme Bureau coordinates the implementation of the programme and manages the funds. NWP is the lead agency. YEP has a Steering Committee (SC) consisting of representatives of the three sectors, a youth representative and a chairperson. Based on interviews with IGG and sector organisations, the evaluators conclude that the YEP Programme Bureau is performing well.

**For a possible new phase of YEP it is recommended to make one common YEP programme, unlike the current distinction between the three sectors with their separate budget streams.** There would be no longer a need or logic for separate budgets per theme and it would reduce inefficiencies, for example in reporting.

The involvement of NWP, NFP and RVO as sector organisations also represented through employees in the YEP Programme Bureau staff, is considered efficient, as is the hosting of the YEP Programme Bureau by NWP.

Overall, YEP was assessed to be resilient enough in the face of unexpected circumstances. During COVID-19 for example, training sessions were changed to online sessions while visits to the Netherlands were held later. YEP turned out to be flexible when special situations occurred like personal injuries of a YE before starting their placement (placement was adjusted to accommodate recovery). Appropriate response was also seen in cases of instability in a country.

### YEP monitoring system

The YEP monitoring system tracks various elements of the programme's progress. Much information is collected through qualitative results, and then communicated in YEP Effect. Some elements of the programme's ToC, however, are not clearly grasped/reported on. An example of which is the outcome of 'organisations hire more young people because of the good experience with the YEs (rejuvenation)'.

At impact level, the YEP programme is expected to contribute to the SDGs. The monitoring system, however, does not allow for tracking this impact other than through self-reported data by HOs. It may be questioned what more tangible expectations are in relation to the contributions to SDGs and what added value it has to report days worked on the listed SDGs. **It is recommended that YEP monitors and reports on the contribution of YEs to the development targets in the relevant sector(s) of the developing country.**

### Recruitment and employment

HOs explained that YEP plays an important role in their decision to hire young people. And, as the interviews shows, YEP provides a way to HOs to hire new staff with reduced risks (and costs). Once YEs have gained the experience, and training/coaching, they are often retained by the HO as regular staff. Survey results show that HOs on average rate YEP with an 8.6 out of 10 and the opportunity to hire skilled and motivated young people was valued most about the programme. Skills development

and the financial contribution of the programme were ranked second and third respectively. The latter was explained to significantly reduce the risk of hiring young people for a position abroad.

YEP is boosting the professional career of young people in developing countries and in the Netherlands to work in an international context in the water, agrofood and energy sector and programme data show that 87% of the YEs indicated continuing to work in their sector.

Survey results show that YEs on average rate YEP with an 8.8 out of 10. In FGDs, Young experts almost unanimously indicated how YEP was 'life changing' and provided them with 'an opportunity they would not have gotten without YEP'.

It is recommended to open the programme to local HOs that are not registered/do not have an affiliate in the Netherlands. It would prevent Dutch private parties outcompeting local ones and supporting local parties contributes to a more sustainable contribution to the SDGs.

### Young Experts skills development

YEs particularly appreciate soft skill development and coaching. The three most appreciated trainings are (i) MBTI Team Building, (ii) Personal Development Trajectory/Personal Effectiveness Training, and (iii) Intercultural communication/ Cross-cultural collaboration. Most YEs are recent graduates and already familiar with sector subject matter and skills. Therefore, the theme-specific training is less valued. Coaching, YEP network and follow up trainings are seen as more valuable.

For HOs, it is sometimes difficult to grasp how their young expert spends his/her time that is allotted for YEP activities. As a result, they are unsure of what to expect in terms of outcomes at the personal or professional level. Generally speaking, however, HOs explain that YEs, because they are trained and coached contribute to their organisation and that the work they do in the HO contributes to YEs personal and professional development.

### YEP global network

The global network is considered by YEs to be very useful. It helps them find necessary expertise when they travel and to post and find vacancies. The global network performs particularly well for YEs that are based in countries where they have a lot of peers, e.g., Kenya. For YEs in, for example, Laos the opportunities for connecting to peers are much more limited.

In interviews, HOs corroborated the utility of the YEP global network as they saw what it brought their YEs and sometimes also their company. Although 83% of the respondents of the HO survey consider YEP as a useful network (giving a score of 6 or above), most organisations saw the biggest benefits of the network for the YEs, rather than for the organisations.

### Young Expert budget transparency and fairness

After the evaluation of YEP Phase I the Programme Bureau increased its focus on transparent administrative processes and its ability to monitor the implementation of agreements reached. This was done by having contracts with the HOs instead of with the YEs and contractual arrangements were adjusted to strengthen the information flow between the partner organisation and the YE.

The evaluation shows that issues related to the budget's transparency persists. Moreover, the differences in budget for Dutch and national YEs are unclear to HOs and YEs and are seen as unfair as there is not an EUR 8,000 worth of difference between the training and coaching of Dutch vs. national YEs.

**It is recommended that the YEP Programme Bureau further ensures transparency, for instance through tripartite meetings (Programme Bureau, YE and YEP Partner) and more frequently sharing**



**of budgets with YEs by HOs.** Furthermore, as YEP is meant to boost the professional development of its participants, **it is recommended to place the training and coaching budget, outside the budget for individual YEs, also on paper.**

The relatively free use of the budget by HOs may go at the expense of the activities for the YE. It was reported that certain budget lines are not actually used in the same way as they are being reported by HOs. Budget elements that contribute to the personal development of the YEs should be more carefully monitored as it is one of the most concrete outcomes of the programme.

### **YEP tailor-made**

YEP tailor-made makes the YEP training and coaching programme available to organisations that don't qualify for the regular YEP. It is financially not part of YEP Phase II. It has been mostly used by two large companies in the water sector, and occasionally by governmental organisations to attract additional staff in key sectors. It shows that YEP is of sufficient interest to these companies to buy its services without any additional subsidy.

YEP tailor-made is a valuable addition to YEP. Without using MFA funds it provides an opportunity to the programme to increase the output of YEP in terms of number of YE postings. YEP tailor-made also increases the programme's flexibility, with the possibility to work in MFA non-focus countries.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR), the evaluation of the first four years (2020-2023) of Phase II of the Young Expert Programme (YEP) should help the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to assess whether a new phase of YEP is desirable and feasible. In addition, the evaluation is expected to provide insights that will steer the design of a possible new phase of YEP.

As such, the objective of the evaluation is to provide insight into the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of Phase II of the programme. In the inception period of the evaluation, the objectives were rephrased to:

- Assess the extent to which YEP Phase II delivers relevant, effective, efficient, and sustainable results.
- Provide recommendations on a possible Phase III of YEP allowing MFA to determine its desirability and feasibility.

## 1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Where it concerned quantitative methods, the evaluators used secondary raw data. The interpretation of this data was performed by the evaluators themselves using descriptive statistics. For the qualitative methods, the evaluators opted for key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). A document review was also part of the evaluation approach.

The overview of tools and data sources used in answering the evaluation questions is given in the evaluation matrix, attached as Annex 3. The evaluation matrix was used to extract lists of guiding questions for each of the different categories of respondents: MFA, Dutch Embassies, Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP), Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP), Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), YEP Programme Office, Hosting Organisations (HOs) and Young Experts (YEs). The matrix also indicates which information was to be collected from available documentation.

YEP Programme Bureau gave the evaluators access to its internal drive of all programme related data. While this offered openness and unlimited access to information, it also provided a challenge to select useful information in the vastness of 492 gigabyte of files.

The use of the different tools to collect data from a sample of all relevant stakeholder (groups), allowed for the triangulation of findings. The evaluation was designed to adhere to the IOB evaluation quality criteria.

Impact evaluation was beyond the scope of this evaluation, but qualitative data, like storytelling as recorded by YEP Programme Bureau or anecdotal evidence collected in KIIs and FGDs, was considered.

### 1.2.1 Review of the Theory of Change

As a first step in the evaluation, the evaluators reflected on the programme's Theory of Change (ToC). For easier reflection, the evaluators made some visual adaptations to the ToC (see Annex 2). The revised ToC, in the view of the evaluators, allowed for easier reflection than the original one. The evaluators, in designing their interview guides and topic lists, generally adhered to the causal links established in the ToC, while leaving room for additional and/or other causal links not mentioned.

### 1.2.2 Surveys

YEP Programme Bureau had been doing surveys of YEs and HOs every 1½ to 2 years as part of the YEP M&E Framework. Survey analysis showed that the main evaluation questions to be asked to HOs and YEs (including alumni) had already been asked in the YEP Programme Bureau's surveys. It was

therefore agreed that new, separate, surveys for the evaluation would not add value and that the evaluators would use existing raw survey data for the evaluation.

There is no reason to assume that organisations would respond differently to the YEP bureau than to the evaluators. A potential bias in the survey because it was issued by the YEP bureau, was mitigated by a completely random selection from all HOs and alumni in the YEP database for interviews and FGDs.

The latest YEP Programme Bureau survey for HOs was sent to all contact persons, mentors, and supervisors of YEP Phase II as recent as December 2023. A total of 496 people were invited and 89 (18%) of them completed the survey online. The results were made available to the evaluation team as raw data. The YEP Programme Bureau has analysed the results too (Alumni survey 2023 - YEP Programmes) but used the inputs from 61 respondents<sup>2</sup>.

The latest YEP Programme Bureau survey for YEP alumni was sent to about 600 alumni (Phase I and II). 146 alumni completed the survey, 49 of whom were active in Phase II of the programme<sup>3</sup>. From this, 18 have identified as a Dutch YE, and 31 as national YE. Response from YEs participating in YEP tailormade are not part of the 49 respondents.

The response rate by both groups was quite low. This increased the risk of bias as certain groups may be more eager to respond than others. This was mitigated by triangulating the results with other sources of information.

### 1.2.3 Key informant interviews

The list of key informants interviewed (anonysed) for the evaluation is given in Table 1.

Key staff from the YEP Programme Bureau was interviewed, as well as the chairman of the steering committee. IGG staff responsible for the relevant sectors were interviewed from MFA. Interviews with RVO, NFP and NWP were specifically with people not directly involved in YEP, to get a perspective from the energy, agrobusiness and water sectors respectively. Representatives from EKN were interviewed from Ethiopia and Kenya, because (i) these embassies had direct experience with YEs and (ii) both countries have been hosting a relatively large number of YEs. Other stakeholders included YEP coaches and trainers, and representatives of NEDWORC Foundation and OneWorld.

Selection of YEs/alumni started with creating a new list of YEs from the “Metabestand YEP II”, putting all YEs from batch 19 to batch 32 in random order. Starting from number 1 on the new random list, a list of eight YEs was built, ensuring a mix of criteria is represented as described in Table 1. The exact process of constructing the list of random YE interviewees is described in Annex 4. A similar process was followed for the selection of HOs and is specified in Annex 5. It is stressed again that the selection of interviewees and FGD participants was done independently by the evaluators, from the total pool of HOs and YEs of YEP phase II.

**Table 1: Overview of key informant interviews**

| Organisation           | Who  | Number of interviews |
|------------------------|--|----------------------|
| YEP Programme Bureau   | Programme Manager, Project Managers (3), Training Coordinator, Finance Officer | 6                    |
| YEP Steering Committee | Chairman   | 1                    |

<sup>2</sup> When adding the alumni from YEP tailormade, the survey outputs totalled 60 individuals. It is therefore unclear what made the difference between total number of respondents considered by the evaluators and by the YEP Programme Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> Participants from batches 19 - 28 completed the alumni survey. Batches 29 - 32 were still active. Active YEs were invited to a specific FGD of active YEs alone.

|                                |   |           |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------|
| MFA                            | Policy Officers IGG   | 3         |
| RVO                            | Team manager for global Public Goods: Energy and Climate Change at RVO and the former project coordinator YEP Energy  | 2         |
| NFP                            | Coalition Builder   | 1         |
| NWP (non-YEP Programme Bureau) | Chairman Supervisory Board  | 1         |
| Young Experts                  | Randomly selected from database.<br>A mix of Dutch/national, male/female, water/agrofood/ energy, YE/Alumni, 1- or 2-year trajectory, continued in sector yes/no                      | 8         |
| Hosting Organisations          | Randomly selected from database.<br>A mix of Dutch/non-Dutch organisations, hosting Dutch /national YE, private company/NGO/other, active in water/agrofood/energy, mentor/supervisor | 8         |
| Other stakeholders             | EKN Addis Ababa<br>EKN Nairobi<br>YEP coaches and trainers (2)<br>NEDWORC Foundation<br>OneWorld (careers and employment)   | 6         |
| <b>Total</b>                   |   | <b>36</b> |

The response rate of YEP alumni and HOs invited for interviews was rather low. Several of the invited HOs and YEs indicated they were not available to participate in the evaluation. This led to a prolonged period needed to complete the intended number of interviews. The gaps were filled by reserve informants, already identified during sampling.

### 1.2.4 Focus Group Discussions

Five FGDs were held with YEs to collect rich(er) data on a few selected relevant topics. The FGDs included 3-5 participants per session, selected randomly from the YEP database. All FGDs were held remotely through MS Teams. Topics for discussion with the YEs/YEP alumni were:

- Importance of YEP experience, including training/coaching, for YEs professional career (would it be different if YEP didn't exist?).
- How did YEP impact your professional development?
- How did you experience the admin related topics within your secondment?
- Importance/usefulness of the YEP Global Network.
- YEP Tailor made; how does it compare to the "regular" YEP?
- Did COVID-19 and/or instability in your country of deployment affect your work? How did YEP respond/assist?

**Table 2: Overview of Focus Group Discussions**

| Focus Group           | Number of FGDs | Number of YEs | Written response |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| YEP alumni - Dutch    | 2              | 8             | 1                |
| YEP alumni - National | 3              | 14            | 2                |
| YEs (active)          | 1              | 3             | 3                |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>5</b>       | <b>31</b>     |                  |

The response rate of YEs invited for FGDs was rather low. Several of the invited YEs indicated they could not participate in the FGD. The gaps were filled by reserve informants, already identified during

sampling. Selected YEs for FGD who indicated non-availability were given an opportunity to contribute about their experiences by e-mail. That way the minimum anticipated number of FGD participants was still reached.

The selection process of random Young Expert participants for FGDs is described in Annex 4.

### 1.2.5 Data analysis

As indicated earlier, to answer most evaluation questions, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analysed. Qualitative data were extracted from surveys and were collected by the evaluators directly through interviews and FGDs. For all KIIs and FGDs, meetings notes were recorded in a standardised format for easy comparison.

Qualitative data, extracted from surveys and document review, were processed and displayed in tables and graphs.

Where different sources of information were used to answer evaluation questions, data triangulation was applied. Data were analysed independently per source and convergences or divergences were identified to come to corroborated results.

## 1.3 Evaluation process

The evaluation started with two separate kick-off meetings with MFA, on 8 January 2024, and YEP Programme Bureau, on 15 January 2024. Table 3 summarises the evaluation process.

**Table 3: Summary of process of YEP Phase II evaluation**

| Dates                      | Main activity  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 8 January 2024             | Kick-off meeting with MFA  |
| 15 January 2024            | Kick-off meeting with YEP Programme Bureau                                       |
| 26 February - 1 March 2024 | Interviews with YEP Programme Bureau   |
| 12 April 2024              | Inception report approved  |
| 17 April - 15 May 2024     | Primary data collection through interviews with YEs/alumni, HOs, MFA and others. |
| 23 April - 1 May 2024      | FGDs with YEs/alumni   |
| 30 May 2024                | Submission of draft report   |
| 10 June 2024               | Draft report presentation to evaluation reference group                          |
| 19 July 2024               | Final report   |

## 1.4 Limitations

The evaluation made use of the surveys issued by the YEP programme bureau. The response rate was rather low for both the HOs and YEs survey. The results from the surveys may therefore have a bias as it captured the opinions and judgements of a few respondents only. The consultants have mitigated this by triangulating the information through interviews with randomly selected HOs and YEs. Interviews with sector organisations have also provided a more nuanced view on the perspective of sector organisations (i.e. HOs).

## 2. YEP programme in brief

### 2.1 Principles of YEP

The objective of YEP is to support the creation of a new generation of international experts on water (since 2013), agrofood (since 2015) and renewable energy (since 2020), as well as stimulating the interlinkages ('nexus') between these three sectors. YEP set out to rejuvenate the water and agrofood sectors and is expected to build up capacity in the energy sector. In addition to these three themes, YEP tailormade offers organisations the opportunity to purchase YEP's training and support outside MFA-funded programme.

YEP facilitates Dutch organisations with the recruitment of young professionals for a period of minimum one to maximum two years. It does so by providing financial support as well as access to training, coaching and the YEP Global Network. In doing so, YEP not only supports the creation of a new generation of international experts, but also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by building a network of alumni that supports effective development cooperation and foreign trade in specific developing countries.

YEP is open to all countries that are eligible for the Dutch Good Growth Fund (DGGF). However, priority is given to the 23 countries from the DGIS focus regions plus the five countries outside the focus regions with whom the Netherlands will continue to have an active development relationship<sup>4</sup>.

YEP Phase I ran from 1 January 2013 till 31 December 2019. YEP Phase II started 1 January 2020 and will end 30 June 2025.

YEP Phase II aimed to cater for 278 national YE years and 282 Dutch YE years, before a financial top-up was agreed on (see table 5). After approval of the top-up, 358 national YE years and 318 Dutch YE years were expected (there were no specific numbers mentioned for YE individuals). The Programme Bureau invites the water, agrofood and energy sector twice yearly to submit proposals for YEP positions. These proposals are assessed by the Programme Bureau and for the awarded proposals YEP candidates are sourced. Once agreement is reached on the YEP candidate and extensive coaching and training programme is offered before and during the YEP assignment.

### 2.2 Evaluation of YEP Phase I

An independent external evaluation of Phase I of YEP 2013 - 2018 by Ecorys and the Erasmus University Rotterdam was completed in November 2018 and the report was made publicly available at the government.nl domain. The evaluation concluded that the combination of personal development with field experience in a Dutch organisation in an international development context was the main added value of YEP to the water and agrofood sectors. The evaluation was less outspoken about the assumption that there are insufficient international job opportunities for YEs and about the linkages with MFA policies. The evaluation flagged lack of accountability and transparency regarding the personal budget available to YEs.

Most relevant proposed actions towards YEP Phase II were:

- YEP will develop a new Theory of Change model, to be approved by the steering committee.
- It will save the officer finance approximately several days a year when YEP Water & YEP Agrofood are integrated in one administration.
- The first coaching session will be attended by the coach, supervisor and mentor of the YE. During this session the coach will also touch upon the PDP and the budget.

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<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Palestinian Territories, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen.

- Security training will be adjusted by involving the national YE more with their knowledge on their countries.
- A new training on storytelling has already been added to the latest training programme to challenge YEs to actively think of their contribution to development impact and how to give insight in this.
- YEP will add the supervisors in the cc when sending out the preparation plan to the YEs.
- YEP will ask the participating organisations to indicate how the YEs have contributed to the project goals/SDGs.

## 2.3 Main characteristics of YEP Phase II

### Placements and proposals

YEP Phase II placed 371 YEs over 14 batches<sup>5</sup>, which ran from 2020 to 2024 (last batches running until 2025). YEP Phase II placed YEs in the age range of 22 to 36 years (age at the start of YEP secondment). Batch sizes varied between 22 and 30 participants. In this period, 138 unique HOs<sup>6</sup> placed the YEs over 43 unique countries. YEs were divided over the water sector (37.5%), agrofood sector (39.9%), and the energy sector (22.6%), as can be seen in figure 1 below.

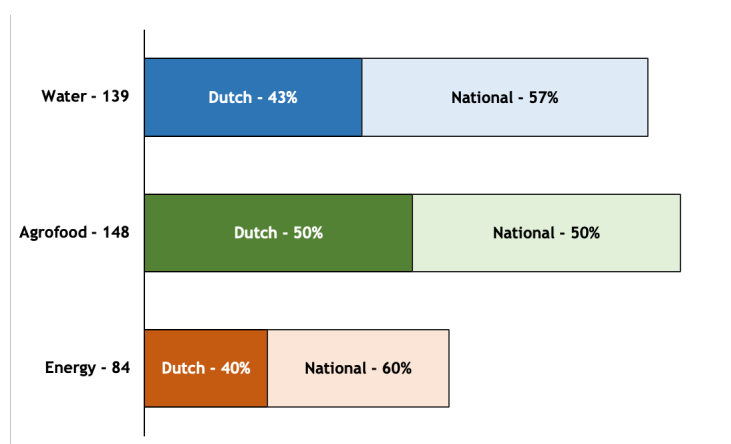


Figure 1: Division of Young Experts per sector; YEP Phase II

Looking at how Dutch and national YEs were placed across the three sectors; it shows that Dutch YEs were relatively less equally divided than their national peers.

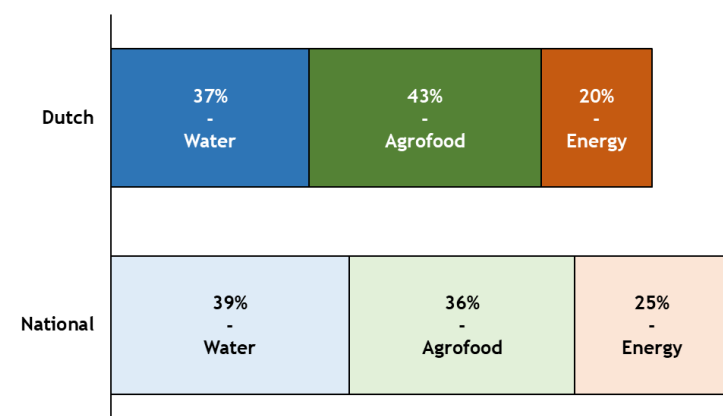


Figure 2: Division of YEs across the three sectors, based on their nationality

<sup>5</sup> Batches 19 - 32, excl. YEP tailor made. Source: YEP metabestand, May 2024,

<sup>6</sup> Consultants' own adaptation of "aanvragers", with corrections of differently spelled organisation names in 'Metabestand'

YEP placements followed proposal submission by HOs for a YEP subsidy and in Phase II, 691 proposals were submitted. From this, 290 proposals were for a Dutch YE, and 401 were for national YEs. No clear reasons were identified for these differences, though HOs have indicated that it remains financially more challenging to hire a Dutch employee (this is elaborated on in section 3), compared to a national employee. National employees were also said to be kept in the organisation, in case an application for YEP did not materialise into a YEP subsidy. For Dutch employees, the acquisition of a YEP subsidy was sometimes conditional for a young employee to join the HO.

The YEP infographic and annual reports showed how many Dutch versus national proposals were received for each batch (see table 4). Some patterns were observed regarding the proposal submissions for YEP placements. In more recent batches a larger number of national proposals were submitted, compared to Dutch proposals. Only Batch 19 saw a larger share of Dutch YE proposals (25 vs. 18). Other batches that stood out were batch 21 (8 Dutch vs. 29 national), and batches 31 (13 Dutch vs. 25 national) and 32 (21 Dutch vs. 31 national) which were both taking place in 2024. Overall, from batch 19 to 32, a total of 290 Dutch proposals were submitted versus 401 national proposals.

**Table 4: YEP proposal submissions and placements per batch**

| Batch no. | Proposals submitted <sup>7</sup> |       | Placements <sup>8</sup> |       |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
|           | National                         | Dutch | National                | Dutch |
| 19        | 18                               | 25    | 10                      | 13    |
| 20        | 29                               | 24    | 12                      | 10    |
| 21        | 29                               | 8     | 17                      | 13    |
| 22        | 23                               | 13    | 12                      | 13    |
| 23        | 40                               | 31    | 13                      | 16    |
| 24        | 27                               | 25    | 15                      | 12    |
| 25        | 38                               | 29    | 16                      | 14    |
| 26        | 28                               | 21    | 14                      | 13    |
| 27        | 21                               | 18    | 16                      | 14    |
| 28        | 25                               | 15    | 16                      | 8     |
| 29        | 30                               | 21    | 16                      | 10    |
| 30        | 36                               | 26    | 16                      | 13    |
| 31        | 25                               | 13    | 13                      | 11    |
| 32        | 32                               | 21    | 17                      | 8     |

The 138 HOs hosted 1 to 18 YEs over the course of Phase II (see table 5 below). From these organisations, 51 placed only national YEs, 34 placed only Dutch YEs, and 53 placed both national and Dutch YEs.

**Table 5: Number of YEs hosted by unique Hosting Organisations, YEP Phase II**

| No. of YEs hosted    | No. of HOs |
|----------------------|------------|
| 1 - 3 YEs            | 108        |
| 4 - 6 YEs            | 22         |
| 7 - 10 YEs           | 4          |
| 10+ YEs <sup>9</sup> | 4          |

YEs were placed in 43 unique countries, with a heavy focus of placement in countries in Africa (292 YEs placed, i.e. more than 3/4). There are some countries where relatively quite a few more Dutch YEs were placed than national YEs, such as Uganda, Ghana, and Tanzania. Kenya, Mozambique, India, Nepal, South-Africa, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Benin and Mali is where relatively more national YEs were placed, compared to Dutch YEs, as can be seen in figure 3.

<sup>7</sup> Source: YEP Infographic  
<sup>8</sup> Source: YEP Metabestand  
<sup>9</sup> Ranging from 13 - 18 YEs.



When splitting per sector, Kenya is the country where most YEs were placed for all three sectors. For the energy sector, the spread across countries is least diverse covering 26 countries<sup>10</sup> with 1/3 of the YEs seconded in Kenya. Agrofood YEs were placed in 31 countries and YEs in the water sector were found in 30 countries as well. A list of countries with most YEP secondments per sector, is provided in the table below.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a logical result from the less available budget for the Energy sector (see table 6), compared to the other sectors.

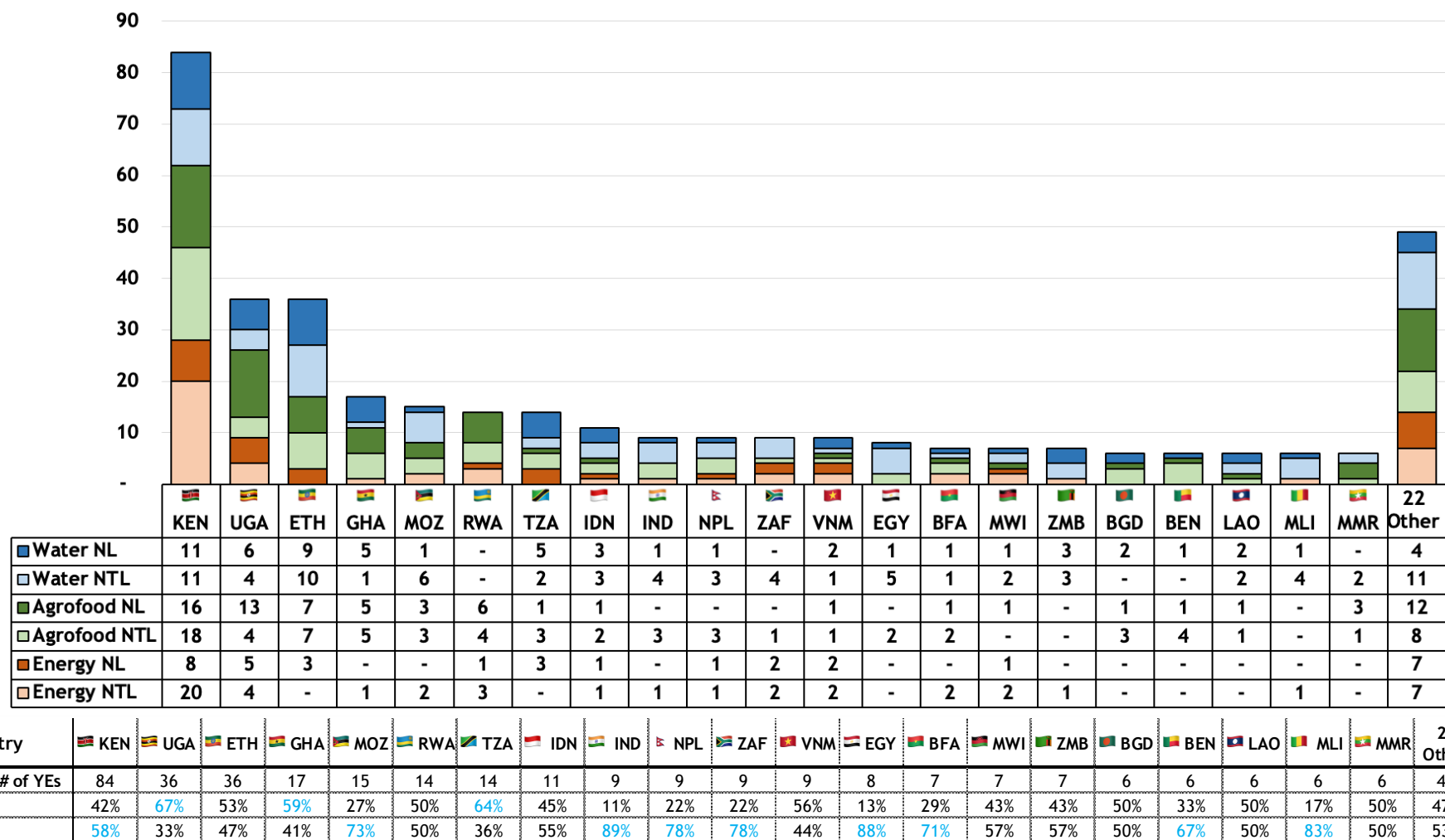


Figure 3: YE placements per country, sector, and shares of Dutch and national YE per country<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Country codes are per ISO 3166-1

Across the 14 batches, there was variation of how many YEs were placed per sector. The programme strives a 50-50 participation of Dutch and national YEs. Overall, the division of Dutch and national YEs was 168 and 203 respectively, i.e. a 45% to 55% division. A 50-50 share amongst Dutch and national YEs happened quite well for the 14 batches with exceptions for batches 28, 29 and 32 (see figure 4 below).

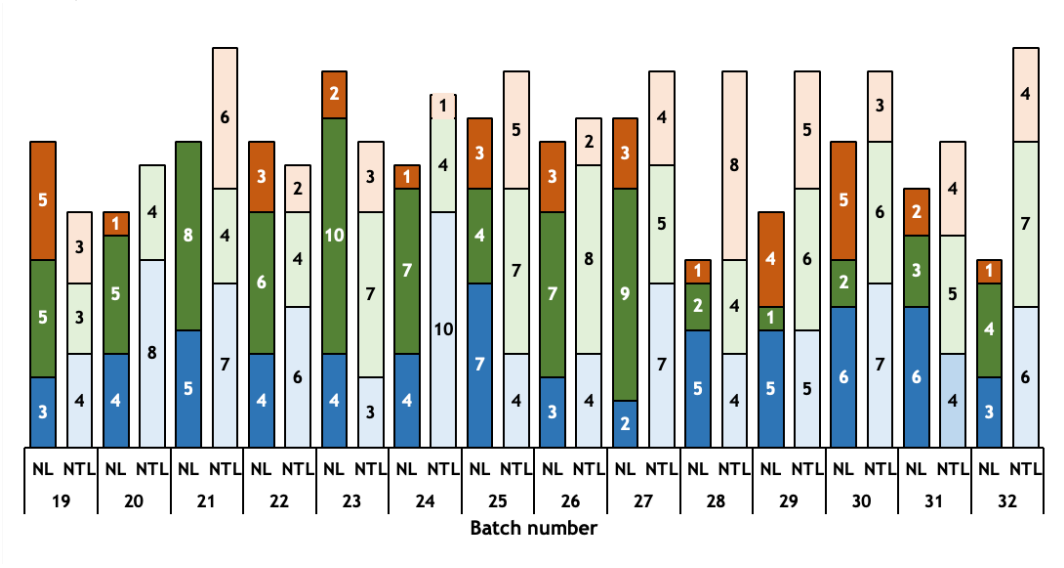


Figure 4: YE placements per batch, sector and Dutch vs. national<sup>12</sup>

From the 371 YEP placements, it was an almost 50-50 division of men vs. women who participated. From all 371 YEs, 51% was male and 49% was female. Figure 5 below shows the division of men and women YEs per sector (left graph) and when set off against Dutch and national YEs (right graph).

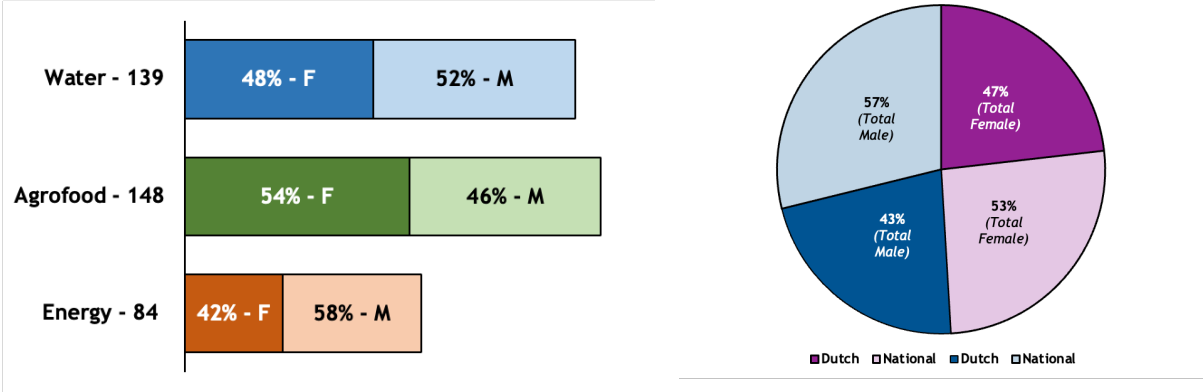


Figure 5: Female/male YEs across sectors and nationality

<sup>12</sup> Blue-color = Water; Green-color = Agrofood; Orange-color = Energy

The budget for YEP Phase II is given in Table 6.

**Table 6: Budget of YEP Phase II, after top-up**

| Theme                             | Amount (EUR)      | Note   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Water                             | 8,079,015         | Excluding evaluation   |
| Agrofood                          | 8,439,765         |  |
| Renewable energy                  | 4,654,701         |  |
| <b>Sub-total</b>                  | <b>21,173,481</b> |  |
| Expected third party contribution | 19,398,240        | Mainly in-kind by the benefitting sectors. Figures are until 9 July 2024 |
| <b>Total YEP Phase II budget</b>  | <b>40,571,721</b> |  |

Source: YEP Phase II Appraisal Document and Amendment for financial top-up from MFA

## 2.4 Relevant policies of MFA

### BHOS policy of 2018

YEP Phase II was designed, appraised and approved in the context of “Investing in global prospects - for the world, for the Netherlands”, the overall document of Dutch policy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS policy), published May 2018.

The BHOS policy promotes four closely connected objectives:

- preventing conflict and instability.
- reducing poverty and social inequality.
- promoting sustainable and inclusive growth and climate action worldwide.
- enhancing the Netherlands’ international earning capacity.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, as agreed by the United Nations, are the international guiding principles for the BHOS policy. The BHOS policy further aims for:

- an innovative approach in support of the SDGs.
- working closely with civil society, businesses, and knowledge institutions.

The BHOS policy includes concrete targets for water, sanitation and hygiene, aiming to reach 30 million people with safe water and 50 million people with improved sanitation by 2030. To ensure these services are delivered sustainably, strong institutions and (local) capacity are needed. In addition, in 2019, MFA, together with three other Dutch ministries active in the water sector, set a goal of “increasing water security for over a hundred million people worldwide by 2030”: the Netherlands International Water Ambition (NIWA). The strategy pillars of the NIWA are:

- Strengthening local ability to achieve results.
- Applying an integral approach to water security.
- Putting forward the Netherlands as a Centre of excellence.

The three goals of the food and nutrition security policy are (i) eliminating the hunger and undernutrition of 32 million children, (ii) doubling productivity and income for 8 million smallholder farmers, and (iii) making 8 million ha of agricultural area more sustainably used. Strengthening the enabling environment for food security, in terms of knowledge, land rights and policy, is part of these goals.

Energy is inextricably linked to many of the SDGs, including poverty eradication, food security, health, education, job creation and the empowerment of youth and women, as well as climate and is therefore central to the achievement of both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Energy transition is also an important element of the Dutch Africa strategy 2023-2032. The

Netherlands sees chances for closer collaboration with African countries, to make use of their renewable energy potential. This should stimulate local economies and create employment in the sector.

In line with the BHOS policy of 2018, the Youth at Heart strategy was devised, with the objective to invest in the skills of young people, who otherwise can't get an education or find work, and those who attend school but learn very little or have jobs that do not pay a living wage.

The Youth at Heart policy contains three principles that are a call to action for the private and public sector to invest in the prospects of young people and to work in partnership with young people:

- Principle 1: Build a more relevant, sustainable and effective enabling environment for education and work systems for young people, that recognise their rights and will.
- Principle 2: Involve young people at all levels in decision making processes that will affect their lives.
- Principle 3: Partner with young people to build a better, more resilient world for all generations.

### **BHOS policy of 2022**

The BHOS of 2018 was updated in 2022 with “Do what we do best” (June 2022), following national elections (17 March 2021) and the installation of a new government in January 2022. It reconfirms that the Netherlands will invest more in the combination of foreign trade and development cooperation. The policy also reaffirms emphasis on addressing root causes of poverty, terrorism, irregular migration, and climate change, as well as on achieving the SDGs. The policy calls for more focus in development cooperation. Extra investments are foreseen in climate change, among others. And the policy will focus on subjects where the Netherlands has particular expertise, like water and agriculture.

Dutch expertise and capacity are to be coupled to local organisations, to enable Dutch (development) organisations to achieve more progress in sustainability and digitisation transitions together with local players.

## **3. Evaluation findings**

Findings from the literature review, survey, interviews and focus group discussions are presented in four sub-chapters. These findings focus on YEP from the perspective of the programme bureau, how YEP ties in with BHOS policy and the perspectives of young experts, and hosting organisations respectively.

### **3.1 YEP programme administration**

The YEP Programme Bureau coordinates the implementation of the programme and manages the funds. NWP is the lead agency. It provides information to both YEs and Dutch organisations (companies, knowledge institutions and NGOs) on their expected respective roles and responsibilities, including application processes, contracts for YEs, etc. (see also Section 2.1).

YEP also has a steering committee (SC) consisting of five people. These are representatives of the three sectors, youth (or the YEs)<sup>13</sup> and a chairman. The steering committee meets just three times per year and functions more like an advisory board. From the interview with the chairman, the evaluators learned that additional available time, e.g., in the form of a programme director for 1-day a week, would benefit the support they could provide to the management bureau. And, so it is felt, that this would be warranted given the size of the programme. The limited time available currently makes that a significant portion of the advisory activities takes place outside of the allotted time.

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<sup>13</sup> A YEP alumnus is included as “youth representative” to ensure that the SC feels connected to the programme and its participants.

During the first period of YEP Phase II the Programme Bureau saw an increase in interest, leading to an increase in good quality applications. Responding to a growing number of questions and assessing many high-quality applications, in combination with facing higher training costs led them to discuss the budget with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2023 the overall budget for YEP was topped up, allowing them to continue placing a maximum of 30 YEs per batch.

**Budgets for Young Experts**

YEP avails a maximum budget of EUR 40,000 per year for each Dutch YE and EUR 12,000 per year to each national YE. The Programme Bureau noted that the difference in available budget is explained in the employment costs HOs typically make for Dutch and national YEs. HOs have lower employment costs for National YEs than Dutch YEs. HOs are expected to contribute a 50% share at minimum when submitting the YE budget to the Programme Bureau. HO budgets submitted can be above and below EUR 40,000 or EUR 12,000 per year for Dutch and national YEs respectively. When the HOs contribution is less, then the Programme Bureau’s subsidy amount will be less too. The YEP subsidy to HOs is used as follows:

**Table 7: Utilisation of YEP subsidy per YE (in EUR)**

| YEP Subsidy   | National      | Dutch         |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Personnel costs of young expert (including salary, social security charges and local expenses)  | 10,000        | N/A           |
| Secondment costs (including travelling expenses, insurance, medical expenses, transport of household effects, accommodation and host country allowance) | N/A           | 30,000        |
| Training and development (including supervision, preparatory training in the Netherlands, network development and coaching)                             | 2,000         | 10,000        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>12,000</b> | <b>40,000</b> |

The training and development budget component is fixed and cannot be changed. The Programme Bureau is keeping this amount from the subsidy. HOs are expected to provide a 50% own contribution. The Programme Bureau charges HOs (Dutch YEs only) EUR 1,500 annually as a contribution to the Programme Bureau.

With the Programme Bureau retaining the annual training and development costs from the total YEP subsidy, YEP provides EUR 30,000 and EUR 10,000 cash subsidy to the HO per Dutch and national YE respectively. These amounts are paid in two instalments. A first instalment is 95% of the subsidy amount and is thus EUR 28,500 and EUR 9,500. A second instalment is transferred after submission to and acceptance by the Programme Bureau of the progress reports, which are due one month after the end of a YEP year.

Article four of Appendix 1 in the HO and NWP contract states that the total advance to the HO for Dutch Young Experts is EUR 27,000. This is EUR 1,500 less than the 95% and is the result of the annual EUR 1,500 HO contribution to the Programme Bureau. The Programme Bureau confirmed that to reduce administrative hassle, the first instalment transfer is EUR 27,000, with which the contribution to the Programme Bureau is automatically settled.

**Use of the training and development budgets**

There is quite a big difference in training and development budget between Dutch and national YEs. The Programme Bureau mentioned that this is necessary to offer a training package for all YEs which on average costs around EUR 6,000 per year per YE. Slight differences in costs between Dutch and national YE are that Dutch YEs start their YEP training programme at a different location in the Netherlands (Veessen) than national YEs and there is a difference in coaching hours. According to a

YEP coach, in the first YEP year, Dutch YEs receive 12 coaching hours and national YEs receive 8 coaching hours. In the second year, the coaching hours are the same for Dutch and national YEs.

The motivation provided for this EUR 8,000 difference between Dutch and national YEs was that it is already hard for HOs to meet a 50% share (i.e. EUR 12,000 own contribution per year), which is relatively much compared to the usually lower employment costs for national YEs.

The financial arrangements for YEs were discussed in the individual interviews as well as the FGD's and two issues came to the fore: transparency and fairness.

### Transparency of YE budgets

On transparency, Dutch YEs mentioned having received insight in their budget from the start and were offered the possibility to discuss and even shift budget items while for national experts the budget set up remained unclear.

The YEP Programme Bureau indicated to having made several changes to create more transparency, especially since this was a point of concern raised in the evaluation of phase I as well. After the evaluation of phase I, the Programme Bureau focused on, amongst other things, transparent administrative processes and its ability to monitor the implementation of agreements reached with HOs. Additionally, the Programme Bureau introduced admin hours for YEs and their supervisors and mentors to go over the budget and other arrangements at the start of the YEP journey. From phase II onwards, the Programme Bureau signed contracts with the HOs instead of with the YEs and contractual arrangements were adjusted to strengthen the information flow between the HO and YE. This is reflected in the new paragraph in Appendix 2 of the contract between HOs and the Programme Bureau:

*Additional Provisions stating “Since YEP is a subsidy programme, transparency about the proposal and budget submitted and approved is obligatory. The YEP partner shall share the Project Proposal and budget format as approved by YEP with the Young Expert before the starting date of the YEP contract and provide all necessary explanation to the Young Expert. In addition, the YEP partner shall share the progress report (if applicable) and determination report including the realisation of costs with the Young Expert before submitting them to YEP and provide all necessary explanation to the Young Expert”.*

This paragraph was introduced in August 2022. The evaluators learned that the current SC was instrumental in these final steps taken towards more budget transparency for YEs as they, contrary to the previous SC, backed sharing of budgets with YEs.

Despite these efforts however, daily practice does not seem to show that there is sufficient transparency for everyone. Interviewed national YEs and remarks made in the YEP alumni survey, indicate that they had little understanding of the budget components or how the budget was put to use by the HO. National YEs indicated that it was left to them to get clarity on the budget and that it was up to them to complain when their company was not coming forward, or even paid less or ignored the training budget. This was mentioned as disappointing and a blemish on the YEP programme but was not reported as being voiced to YEP by YEs. The updated article in the annex of HO and YEP contracts, has not prevented YEs to be less aware about the YE budget. In fact, from FGDs and KIIs, national YEs indicated to not know or have seen the budget before. Though the article quoted above states that the HOs are required to share the budget with the YEs, this is not always the case. The Programme Bureau is not necessarily enforcing HOs to share planned and realised YE budgets with the YE. To date HOs are thus not held accountable if they do not share the realised budget with the YE.

In one extreme, it was found that a case of fraud occurred with a national YE who had to sign two different contracts of which only one corresponded with the YEP conditions and the one with lower amounts turned out to be his actual payment. This was reported by the YE and was indicated as a blemish on the programme. The YEP annual report of 2022 does refer to this incidence as well. The

Programme Bureau handled this situation well where the HO paid back the YEP subsidy, they were not eligible for. This case shows that the Programme Bureau has proper procedures in place, which was endorsed by MFA experts and external accountants, to deal with complaints and conflicts. Yet it still highly depends on the YE to bring this forward and putting him or herself in a vulnerable position.

Another aspect of the YE budget, inviting a lack of transparency in the view of the evaluators, is the threshold of EUR 2,000 under which HOs do not need to justify expenses made with evidence. For national YEs, this is compounded by them being reluctant to discuss or challenge HOs on the budget. Instances were reported for both national and Dutch YEs where the HO reported a significant share of realised costs below the threshold of EUR 2,000. This threshold was chosen to avoid HOs having to provide proof of and the Programme Bureau having to check, every single minor expense such as bus tickets or invoices of petty cash expenditures. If need be, for instance in case of doubt or when serious complaints are made, additional checks can be and will be performed by the YEP Programme Bureau.

### Fairness of YE budgets

On fairness, a recurring issue and point for improvement mentioned in almost every interview is the difference between the budget for national and Dutch YEs. During FGDs and interviews, some first-hand experiences were shared while almost every YE mentioned issues experienced by fellow YEs related to the budget. When asking interviewees (HOs and YEs) why the training and coaching budget has a difference of EUR 8,000, no conclusive answers could be provided. Some interviewees realised for the first time that this difference is big and reported to be unaware why it has to be this big as in their experience, the difference in training and coaching is not EUR 8,000 worth.

HOs and YEs have reported this difference as unfair. Coaches interviewed also indicated that a difference in coaching hours is not desirable. It is understandable from the point of view that Dutch YEs are embarking on a completely new lifestyle in a foreign country and thus will need more guidance when performing their YEP secondment. Yet when considering an inclusive and fair YEP programme, the differences in coaching (less hours) and budget (seemingly less money availed) cannot be justified. Since the YEP training and coaching contributions are not reflecting the true value of the coaching and training the YEs receive, it could be argued to remove these differences altogether.

Transparency and fairness related concerns are coming together in how a HO is using the YE budget during the secondment period for personal development of the YE. HOs are given quite some room to design the budget as they see fit and this may come at the expense of the activities for the YE<sup>14</sup>. An example is the budget line for a training towards personal development. This may be paid from the YEP contribution, or from the HO own contribution. The evaluators were informed that these budgets were reported to be used towards a training, while at times they were not used at all. As the training was supposedly under EUR 2,000, an invoice was not needed. Another instance is where the HO claims having provided mentor days (typically a big part of their own contribution), but they may not have lived up to providing those mentor days to the YE. Compromising on this, whilst still reaping the financial benefits from it as a HO, may not be desirable for the YEP programme either.

For both Dutch as well as national YEs the agreement covers, as said earlier, a period of one to maximum two years and the financial contributions are made by YEP and the HOs. The conditions regarding payments including advances and reporting follow the same logic, but the amounts indicated for personnel costs and training, however, differ.

### COVID-19 and instability

Part of YEP Phase II was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in restrictions on travel and physical meetups. The first training weeks and return training weeks, which are usually held in the Netherlands, could not take place for some batches. Instead, trainings were held online making it possible for YEs to start the programme and to continue almost as usual. Post-pandemic, the batches that had no opportunity to do the trainings physically in the Netherlands, were provided

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<sup>14</sup> It should be stated that some HOs felt the rules for the budget to be quite restrictive.



the opportunity to visit the Netherlands at the end of their YEP period. For some, this was their first time to meet their peers in person. YEs indicated to understand the situation and said that YEP did a good job, given the circumstances. However, a commonly stated strength of the programme, under normal circumstances, is the interaction YEs have with one another during the first weeks and this was said to be missing in the fully online YEP experience. Some YEP alumni indicated that the bonding between batch members was not very strong. Another notable change during the COVID-19 pandemic were the coaching requests of YEs. Coaches continued offering valuable support but dealt with queries that are specific to the realities of the pandemic, such as how to motivate co-workers and oneself, now that everyone works alone at home. Additionally, a sense of loneliness could emerge, and the support of coaches was said to have helped the YEs reflecting on all this to help them learn how to deal with this.

In cases of instability in the country, YEP allows Dutch YEs to move to another country if the HO has an office there too. Alternatively, the Dutch YE may travel back to the Netherlands and work remotely, until the situation is considered safe again. A no-cost extension of up to six months is offered, allowing the HOs to offer a stay abroad beyond the initial end date of the secondment. This was appreciated by YEs as they were keen to finish their YEP placement and trainings. HOs were also satisfied with this level of flexibility from the Programme Bureau and remarked that the Programme Bureau is there to help HOs adequately in such situations. In countries with severe or prolonged security issues YEP works exclusively with national YEs, and very few examples of HOs mentioned that they forfeited operations in such countries all together. In these cases, the YE moved to safer place to finish his/her YEP placement. Due to political unrest in several countries where placements take place or can take place a 3-day safety training is being offered for Dutch YEs and local situations are closely monitored. This has increased the security for outbound YEs, who are typically at higher risk during such situations.

### 3.2 Policy and sector perspective

YEP II is a public-private partnership (between MFA, NWP, NFP and RVO) which is entirely in line with the BHOS policy of 2018, which calls for close cooperation with civil society, businesses and knowledge institutions. To bring the achievement of the SDGs closer, DGIS recognises the need to work in partnerships and stimulate the development of new technologies. The BHOS policy also sets out to make Dutch knowledge on water security, climate change resilient agriculture, sustainable energy, and circular economy available to developing countries. This will contribute to the three pillars of the policy: poverty reduction, climate action and international trade.

#### Water sector

The water sector is where YEP started, with the aim of rejuvenating the sector. The rejuvenation agenda of YEP was reported to be far less urgent these days. HOs reported that YEP offers a great opportunity for talent to be acquired and letting them grow in the organisation and sector. Yet HOs interviewed noted that it is more important having a continuation of boots on the ground who understand what it takes when working in an international environment. The sector has young people and continues to attract young people. Instead, retaining young people is considered to be the main challenge. Dutch YEs in their twenties or early thirties may find the sector attractive and would be happy to have an experience abroad but when they start families, a different lifestyle becomes more appealing in which living abroad is not a priority. Besides these changing priorities, salaries are typically lower compared to those offered in other sectors. Rather than rejuvenation, the sector would be helped by initiatives to retain young people as there is a lack of people that have between 10 and 30 years of experience. Experts with this level of experience are typically not considered in YEP. These are arguments to consider a different ratio of YEs, with more national YEs. This is valid for all sectors of YEP.

Over the years, the sector has changed in how Dutch - international relations are. It is currently no longer the case that the Dutch are the experts that need to be flown in because of too limited expertise in developing countries. Solutions in-country, offered by national experts are there as well. YEP brings the Dutch and international businesspeople closer together by letting national YEs learn

how to deal with Dutch businesses, whereas Dutch YEs learn how to work in an international context. This was considered very relevant and useful for the sector.

Regarding countries where water sector organisations operate, it was mentioned that companies have good businesses in non-ODA countries and that the risks associated of working in fragile and volatile areas (perception of ODA countries) are not always worth it. Some businesses are thus no longer keen to work in the poorest countries, therewith leaving the water sector in ODA countries to NGOs and UN organisations mostly. YEP could, however, benefit from an engagement with water sector companies and learn where opportunities are and how YEP can be of help to seizing these opportunities.

### Agrofood sector

Agrofood was added as the second sector during the first phase of YEP. Since then, YEP has been relevant to the agrofood sector as it provides a good opportunity for young people to work, as a Dutch YE, in the sector abroad with Dutch companies and NGOs and, as a national YE, with Dutch companies and NGOs in their own country. HOs indicated that YEP helps lower the financial risks of hiring new young employees, especially Dutch new employees as their employment costs are typically high (e.g. higher salaries, costs related to permits for employment abroad, and secondary benefits such as housing costs, flight costs, etc.).

The agrofood sector has and will continue to have a great need for experts. For national YEs, YEP is of great added value as young professionals have the necessary technical skills for working in the sector but learn a lot on soft skills through YEP. The programme was said to be of great value on this part particularly for national YEs. Amongst Dutch YEs, the interest to work in the sector was said to be high but finding a place to acquire international experience is not evident. YEP helps Dutch young professionals find job openings in this sector, therewith gaining valuable experience. The private sector especially is often first in need of more experienced international experts whereas YEP gives young professionals the opportunity to start acquiring this experience. What was observed as well is how Dutch YEs continue in the sector but may do this from the Netherlands or other non-ODA countries. In that regard, it was remarked that the placement of national YEs is more direct for the countries where the YEP placement takes place.

The figures in Section 2.3 shows that during Phase II there is still ample appetite from organisations in the sector as well as of (candidate) YEs as Agrofood is the sector in which most YEs have been hosted. These YEs, as they have an increased capacity through training and coaching, contribute to SDG2 as their work reduces malnutrition, contributes to sustainable land-use and increased productivity. As a large share of them continues to work in the sector post-YEP, they contribute to the sustainable increase of capacity in the agrofood sector.

### Energy sector

The renewable energy theme was added to YEP for increased climate action, also through cross-fertilisation with the other sectors. According to the Activity Appraisal Document, it makes YEP 'significantly' relevant for the policy agenda on climate (40% climate relevance). The pool of young international experts created by the YEP programme, should lead to knowledge development, sharing and innovation, which will have positive effects on climate change adaptation.

The energy sector is relatively young, compared to the water and agrofood sectors. The need for and work done to get renewable energy has increased significantly in the past two decades. The addition of YEP Energy is logical. RVO has the goal to provide 100 million people of energy, which includes making the energy transition happen. In Asia and Africa this means, amongst others, replacing the use of charcoal with sustainable alternatives. To achieve this, it was said that capacity needs to be build up in the sector. YEP was appreciated for contributing to new professionals entering the sector.

The relative short period in which energy is getting attention, also means that the need for rejuvenation is almost non-existent. Young people joining the sector is relevant but is relevant for the sustainability of any sector.

YEs entering the sector through YEP, were found to be loyal to the sector as it is a growing sector with new opportunities for business arising. National YEs were said to be more inclined to start their own business in the energy sector after YEP, having seen what opportunities there are during their YEP secondment.

The need for capacity build-up in the sector was also a plea for expansion of YEs in the programme. In this phase, 18 YEs per year can be supported but doubling this number would be possible when looking at the number of YE applications received. Moreover, there is still a greater pool of possible HOs to tap into. RVO would like to promote YEP, for example, to organisations participating in trade missions and this may include non-ODA countries such as Japan or Australia. For the trade agenda, engaging in such countries would not do harm and YEP does allow YEs to gain skills that are useful for the sector, far beyond the secondment or YEP lifetime. Yet the MFA development budget has a clear focus and would typically not support the use of development funds for supporting business activities in non-ODA countries.

### Water-energy-food nexus

The intention of YEP II is to contribute to the SDG goals in the three sectors mentioned above as well as to the interlinkages ('Nexus') between water, food and energy. YEP II intends to stimulate integration of the themes water, food security and agri-food.

The Nexus is an integral part of YEP and the importance of connecting these themes to be able to grasp and address most important challenges is endorsed by MFA and YEP staff. To a lesser extent, YEs and HOs do so too, but they also struggle with explicating the character and purpose of the nexus within YEP. While they are fully aware that YEP incorporates YEs from different backgrounds that represent the three sectors, they do not immediately experience what it means to be part of a nexus programme. Both YEs and HOs explain that the nature of the work of the YE with the employer determines whether another sector than the one (s)he works in is of importance. When asked, YEs showcased a certain appetite for engaging with the other themes, e.g. through training, but explained that this happened only in a very limited fashion.

For staff at IGG, the Nexus should be more of an everyday reality as IGG incorporates these three themes (and climate). YEP, though, is the only programme in which these respective budget flows are truly mixed. That might explain why IGG too found it difficult to make concrete what the Nexus should be in everyday practice.

## 3.3 Young Experts' perspective

YEs, next to HOs, are the main beneficiaries of YEP and its Phase II alumni valued the programme as a whole with an 8.8<sup>15</sup>. YEP kick-starts the careers of young professionals in the sectors water, agrofood and renewable energy. The international development and trade sector, in which organisations depend on tenders for work, faces limited space for young people to develop themselves and become international development experts. YEP Programmes, through the subsidies and guiding track, allows young people to grow in this sector and build confidence.

### Recruitment and employment

Figure 6 below shows categories of results that are extracted from the survey question "*tell in max 250 words your personal story if (and how) the YEP programme acted as a game changer in your personal and/or professional life*". The figure shows how soft skill development and boosting confidence were important for national YEs, whereas Dutch YEs indicated to value the opportunity to live and work abroad. The FGDs pointed this out too, where national YEs indicated how having a coach and certain training sessions were experiences that they never had before in their life. Dutch YEs value the soft skill development in the program too but are more familiar with personal development in the broadest sense (i.e., in their educational career, or through personal development).

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<sup>15</sup> Source: YEP infographic

YEP contributed to the professionalisation of the YEs, especially through training and utilising of skills that were not trained in the past. Working abroad on another continent (for Dutch YEs) or with a Dutch company (for national YEs), meant new experiences for which YEP gives the YEs skills through training and coaching to deal with this. Moreover, YEs mentioned in FGDs how discussing new situations and challenges faced with peers (fellow batch YEs) helped them to deal with such situations. Some quotes that illustrate these findings are provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Quotes YE on YEP experience (source alumni survey 2023)

| Dutch Young Experts   | National Young Experts  |
|---|---|
| <i>"I had been wanting to make the step to working abroad for a while. YEP provided me the opportunity to set my first steps abroad,..."</i>  | <i>"YEP proved to be a game-changer in my personal and professional life, significantly impacting my confidence in a positive way."</i>   |
| <i>"It has made my dream come true to live and work in Africa. The YEP position has given me a lot of opportunity to develop my professional skills and build a new life abroad."</i>   | <i>"Preparing personal development goals, the coaching sessions and mentorship program were new to me and really helped boost my growth professionally and in my personal life."</i>  |
| <i>"Working in [African country] exposed me to unique challenges and opportunities." "I gained hands-on experience in tackling social and technical issues, learned to adapt to different cultural contexts, and develop problem-solving skills that are important for my career growth."</i> | <i>"YEP assisted me to become a better version of myself, assertive and with an ability to take up leadership roles."</i>   |
| <i>"YEP made it possible for me to move to [Asian country] and to explore economy/waste/plastics opportunities in [Asian country]." "Without YEP, the financial risk would have been too big for my company."</i>   | <i>"YEP was very instrumental as it was an eye opener to knowing my strength and weaknesses and how to relate to colleagues and supervisors or managers. Also YEP helped me to understand and relate with other people of other nationality."</i> |

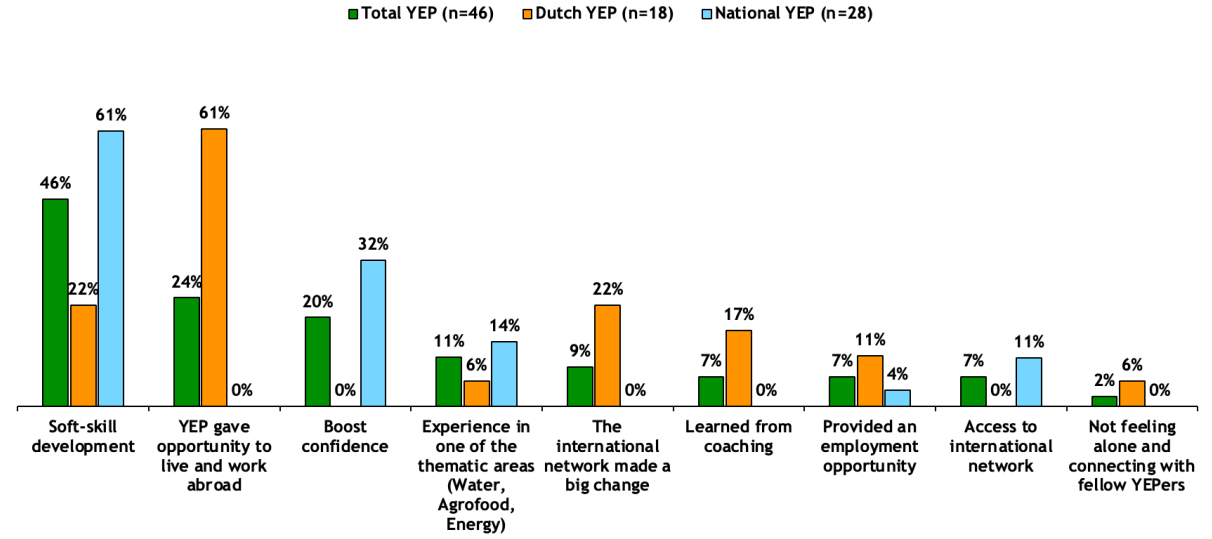


Figure 6: Young Experts' response to question on game changer

## Skill development

When reviewing the survey's responses for the question "Which training during your YEP-secondment has benefitted you the most? Choose max 3", it became clear that trainings around personal issues/ other personalities were most appreciated. Appreciation for trainings between Dutch and national YEs is similar, especially when looking at the three most appreciated trainings, namely 1) MBTI Team Building; 2) Personal Development Trajectory/Personal Effectiveness Training; and 3) Intercultural communication/Cross-cultural collaboration.

Other trainings were not mentioned by Dutch YEs as having benefitted them the most. None of the Dutch YEs chose 1) Project management/Project planning; 2) Intercultural facilitation and conflict management; 3) Harvard negotiation; or 4) The Hero's Journey (n=14)<sup>16</sup>. For national YEs, these were still trainings that were said to benefit them. For example, 21% of national YEs appreciated The Hero's Journey (n=19), 19% of national YEs appreciated project management/ project planning, 16% chose Intercultural facilitation and conflict management having benefitted them the most, and 13% appreciated the Harvard negotiation training.

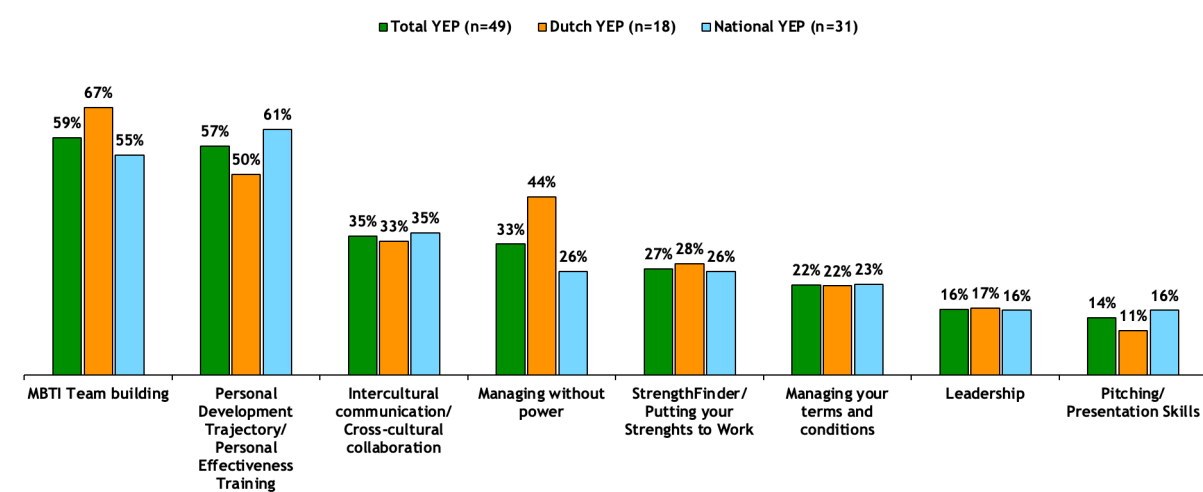


Figure 7: Young Experts' response to question on most benefiting training

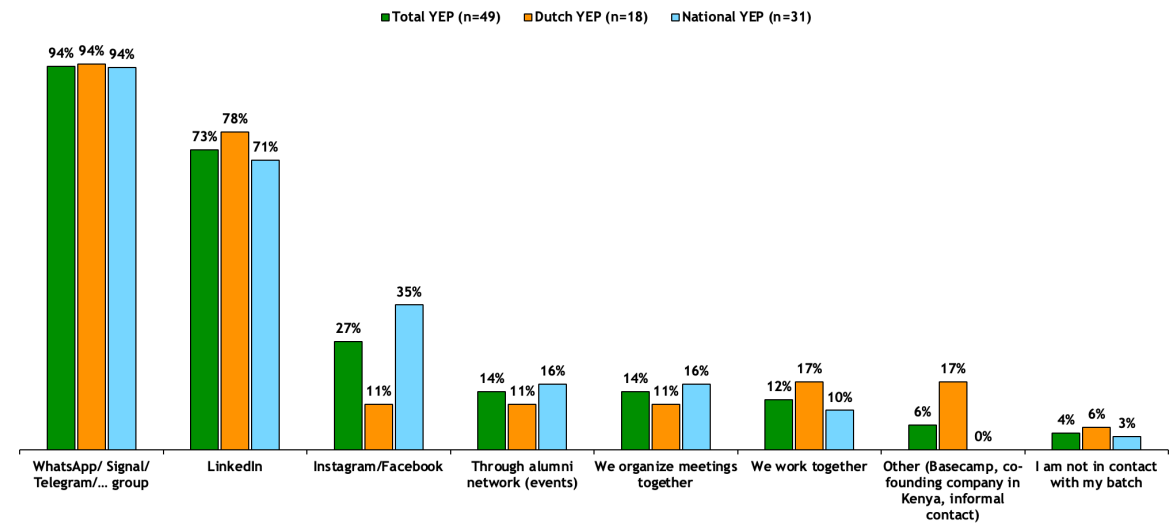
## YEP global network

From the FGDs with YEs (alumni), the evaluators learn that the global network is considered to be very useful. YEs detail that the network helps them finding necessary expertise in other or similar fields which they put to use in their work directly (e.g., a gender expert to give a presentation to colleagues). The network also facilitates YEs (alumni) connecting to develop new programmes in the countries in which they are based, or even in other countries. When YEs travel to other countries for their work, e.g., from Kenya to Rwanda, they look for YEs based in that country to show them around or link-up and discuss business-related matters. Finally, the network is also used to post vacancies and recruit new staff for open positions.

It seems that being part of the global network is one of the main features of YEP. One disclaimer is that the global network performs particularly well for those YEs that are based in countries where they have a lot of peers, e.g., Kenya. For YEs in, for example, Laos or Senegal, the opportunities for connecting to peers are much more limited.

The global network is tapped into through various means. In the alumni survey, respondents indicated how they are in contact with their batch (see Figure 8 below). Almost everyone indicated to stay in touch through IM apps, and many use LinkedIn too, to stay connected. Alumni network events were far less used.

<sup>16</sup> Only for batches 20 and 21



**Figure 8: Share of respondents in contact with their batch's peers**

The alumni survey asks respondents how often they attend alumni events, organised by the alumni board. Most Dutch respondents indicated to never visit the events, rarely (less than once in two years) visit the events, or sometimes (1 time per one or two years) visit the events. Two national YEs indicated to always attend these events, yet four national YEs mentioned not being aware of these alumni events. Overall, it can be said that the network events are being visited but that it is not something for many to participate in. In the interviews we held, it became clear that this was especially the case when only a few YEs were found in each country.

### 3.4 Hosting organisations' perspective

YEP places YEs at companies, NGOs and knowledge institutes that are contributing to the BHOS goals, for example through employment in value chain development projects, but which also allow synergies between the aid & trade agenda, such as companies that introduce new services for (small-scale) farmers (*from Activity Appraisal Document*).

#### Recruitment

For Dutch YEs, HOs can either suggest their own candidates or make use of YEP's recruitment. In case of the latter, YEP will suggest selected YEs to interested HOs. Suggested candidates (Dutch and national) are found in the country where the YEP placement will be or were mentioned as being based in the Netherlands first. For the latter, YEs were either employed already by the HO, or were newly recruited (possibly depending on the acceptance of the YEP application).

The HO survey indicated that the biggest added value for the HO to participate in YEP was the opportunity to hire young people (by 42% of the respondents). About half of the respondents prefer to work with national YEs. The two main reasons are (i) an organisational policy or preference to work with local staff and strengthen local capacity, and (ii) the cost of getting a Dutch YE is too high compared to the local YE. On the other hand, organisations that apply for a Dutch YE mention the subsidy as a main reason, as it makes it more affordable to recruit a young Dutch expert. About one-third prefers a combination of a Dutch and a national YE, as the cooperation strengthens the capacity of both.

In all HO interviews, the financial opportunity YEP offers to have a YE in their organisation was mentioned as a key factor to have a young professional in their organisation. The survey results also indicate the importance of the financial benefit as it ranked as the third reason to participate in YEP (23% of respondents). During interviews with the HOs and with YEs, YEP was referred to as accessible ("easy") money to finance a new recruit (mostly for national YEs) or necessary money for the organisation to (take a risk to) expand operations (especially for Dutch YEs). The YEP subsidy for

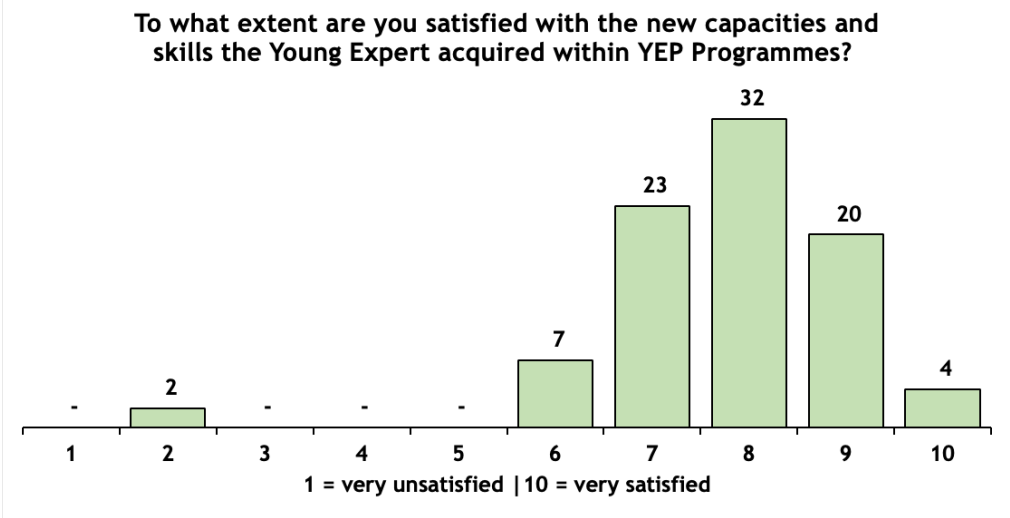
national YEs was found helpful but without it, young employees were said to have been retained (or hired) as well still as this was, financially seen, well manageable. The YEP subsidy for Dutch YEs was much more a necessity. One HO noted that, after reviewing the financial implications of having a Dutch YE, it was still not possible to hire one. Other HOs indicated having difficulty to retain Dutch YEs after the YEP secondment, due to the high costs for salary and secondary benefits. The employer is thus still required to cover significant costs since Dutch minimum wage is being expected for organisations hiring Dutch experts through their Dutch organisation. The YEP subsidy cannot be used for Dutch YE salaries and is therefore only to be used for other costs such as secondary benefits (e.g. housing, international flights, expat insurances), admin and project-related costs. For smaller organisations in particular, such a commitment can be quite the challenge given that they face regular uncertainty in the contexts in which they operate. Moreover, in smaller organisations national management may frown upon the relative high salary and fringe benefits a recent graduated Dutch young professional receives, compared to a well-experienced national manager contributing far more to the organisation than the YE will during his/her YEP placement.

When asked whether HOs intend to hire more young professionals (outside of YEP) because of their experience with YEP, 85% answered affirmative. However, looking closer into the comments, it appears that about one third would (continue to) hire young people anyway, not because of the YEP experience. This was confirmed in the HO interviews, especially for national YEs as discussed above. About 10% indicated that they would prefer to hire YEs through YEP. On the other hand, as long as YEP is available, 89% of respondent HOs indicate they intend to hire more YEs through YEP.

YEP does not foresee in (Dutch) YEs spending some weeks at the start of their posting in the Netherlands with the company that they are going to work with before working abroad. This was in some cases considered to be a challenge as YEs may be working alone or in a small team abroad. This mandates that they can work independently and thus that they are familiar with the company they work for. Such experience was thought to be built with more ease in the Netherlands than while they are abroad.

**Skill development and innovation**

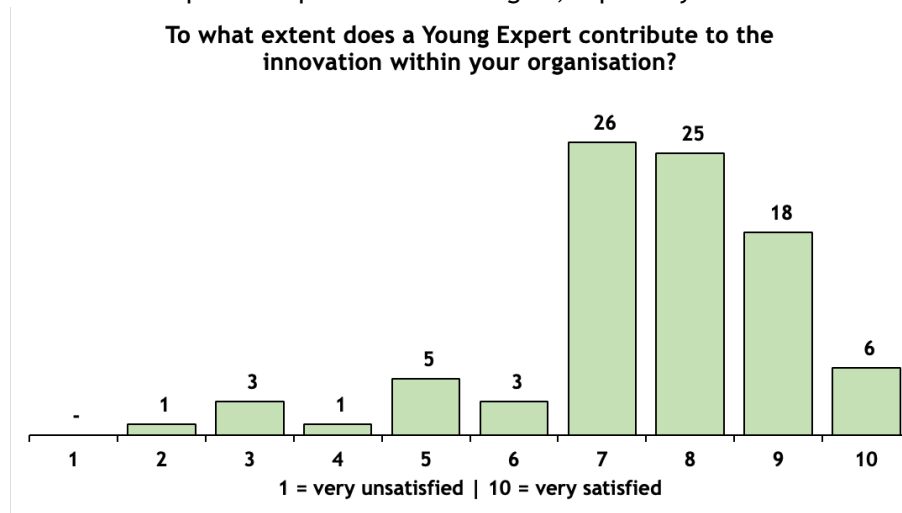
Skills development was the second ranked reason to participate (by 30% of the respondents) as indicated in the HO survey. Surveyed HOs indicate a very high level of satisfaction with new capacities and skills that YEs acquire within YEP (see figure 9). Only 2% gave a score below 6 and 64% give a score of 8 or above. Most mentioned by HOs is notable personal development of the YEs, followed by skills development and communication skills. One HO expected more management skills, and another one mentioned an attitude problem with the YE.



**Figure 9: Hosting Organisations response on skills development**

Almost unanimously, interviewed HOs with national YEs appreciated how YEP had provided their new national recruits an opportunity to visit the Netherlands and to develop skills they did not learn during their academic career. On the one hand, organisations enjoyed contributing to skills development and saw it as a benefit to their organisation, on the other hand they appreciated the skills development by YEP of the YEs in their organisation. The offer of YEP on training and coaching for skill development is considered satisfactory by interviewed HOs, though the effect of it was not always visible. HOs having had more than one YE noticed variation in how the training and coaching changed YEs. Some YEs did not visibly learn much or apply what they learned, whereas other YEs thrived and developed themselves rapidly. HOs recognised that it is up to the YE on how they use the coaching and training, which was also remarked by the HOs in the survey that gave low scores on satisfaction with skill development.

A few cases mentioned YEs bringing back the lessons learned. This was said to happen quite frequently during daily operations where YEs would help their co-workers to approach their work differently. In other occasions, YEs would organise in-house training sessions on topics they learned during YEP (no specific topics were mentioned by the interviewed HOs). Bringing the lessons learned to the organisation, can be considered innovation too as new approaches or techniques are entering the company by means of the YE. The HO survey also showed that a large majority (89% giving a score of 6 or above) of the respondents indicated that a YE contributes to the innovation within their organisation (see figure 10 below). Organisations that attribute innovation to the YE, mentioned furthermore a positive spirit and new insights, especially in IT.



**Figure 10: Hosting Organisations response on innovation**

It was also mentioned by several organisations that YEs are already familiar with the topics and skills given at the first trainings (see sub-section 3.3 for YEs' experiences). What follows (coaching, YEP network, follow up trainings) is more valuable. Some organisations mentioned that the technical skills learnt and applied are often less relevant for their specific work and could be more tailored around the private sector needs. Another observation was that it is not always clear to the mentor what is covered as part of the trainings.

45% of the responding HOs gave suggestions for skills or competences that deserve more attention. There was a large variety of suggestions, often dictated by specific situations or requirements. These are the skills and competences that were mentioned more than once (with between brackets the number of organisations that mentioned them):

- Attitude/ethics (8)
- Project management (6)
- Financial skills (5)
- Hard technical skills (5)
- Business acumen/culture (4)



- Pitching/presentation (4)
- Communication skills (4)
- Personal development (3)
- Report/proposal writing (3)
- Training skills (2)
- Networking (2)

Remarkable is the number of suggestions to give more attention to attitude/ethics of YEs. HOs mentioned some culturally insensitive behaviour, lack of initiative, insufficient work ethics, management style and poor judgement of communication style. These are also related to the suggestions to improve communication, presentation and writing.

For HOs, it is sometimes difficult to grasp how their YE spends his/her time that is allotted for YEP activities. As a result<sup>17</sup>, they are unsure of what to expect in terms of outcomes at the personal or professional level. The YEP Programme Bureau, so the evaluators understand, is quick to point to the respective YEs to inform their HOs. Those YEs may, however, hold-off discussing that as they feel these issues are personal.

Alternatively, the YEP Programme Bureau refers to the website to understand YEP's focus. HOs understand that coaching, may be concerned with highly personal issues and do not aim for interfering in that process. Nonetheless, the evaluators have heard from multiple HOs that this lack of transparency can be to the detriment of the working relation between them and the YE. These are manifested when YEs pull out of tasks to work on YEP commitments; when YEs are convinced that they are making progress on certain work-related skills together with the coach but when feedback from the employer is not asked; or when a coach and YE come to the conclusion that the work or organisation is not a good match but do not engage in discussion with the HO to see if that can be overcome.

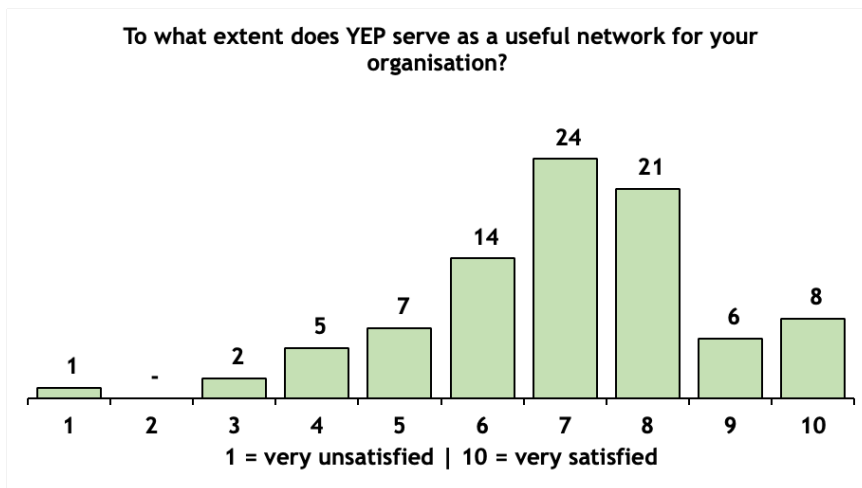
### YEP global network

In interviews, HOs, corroborated the utility of the YEP global network as they saw what it brought their YEs and sometimes also their company. In the survey, 17% of respondents indicated (being the fourth reason) the network being the reason to participate in YEP. A share of 45% of the HOs responded that their involvement in YEP led to collaboration with other YEP partners. About a third of these mention that they established partnership with other organisations because of YEP. In other cases, collaboration with existing partners was elevated because of exchange with YEP. YEP events have also brought organisations together. Organisations that have not established collaboration with other YEP partners mentioned that either they didn't look for it or already worked with some of them, regardless of YEP.

83% of the responding HOs consider YEP as a useful network for their organisation (giving a score of 6 or above). Nevertheless, in comments to this question, most organisations saw the biggest benefits of the network for the YEs, rather than for the organisations. A few of the very high scoring organisations make active use of the YEP network for building partnerships. This was also reflected in the HO interviews where none of the HOs indicated to actively link or work together with other HOs from the YEP network. Some reasons as to why this was the case, was the lack of time to actively pursue this. HO respondents (8%) suggested to organise more networking events for organisations. Similar numbers of respondents suggested more/better networking possibilities in country, and/or online networking events.

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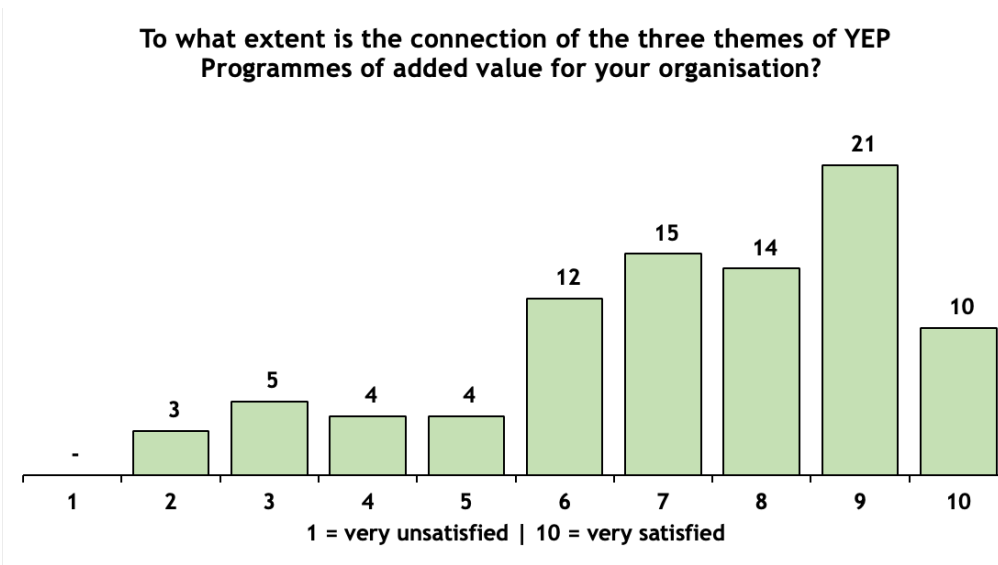
<sup>17</sup> YEP Programme Bureau responded that HOs are regularly informed by them, e.g in the preparation mail. The contract also contains an article about time allocation and before the start the Programme Bureau organises a supervisor call.



**Figure 11: Hosting Organisations response on YEP global network**

**Water-energy-food nexus**

Figure 12 shows that a large majority of respondents indicate that the connection of the three themes (Water, Agrofood and Energy) of YEP is of added value for their organisation. 70% gave a score of 6 or more, and 25% gave a score of 9 or 10.



**Figure 12: Hosting Organisations response on YEP nexus**

Organisations that gave a low score (below 5) explained that the connection between themes was not important, because they either work in one theme only, or they would work cross-sectoral anyway, regardless of YEP.

Organisations that gave a high score (above 6) are usually working in two or more sectors (often water and agriculture) and therefore appreciate the connection of the YEP themes. Another observation was that the themes themselves, or the connection between them, are less important than the personal development of the YEs.

When asked whether YEP should get involved in other sectors or topics, on top of the current three (water, agrofood and energy), HOs answered as follows:

- Climate: 66%
- Digital: 31%
- Circular: 28%
- Gender: 24%
- Health: 18%
- Humanitarian: 8%

Clearly a majority of organisations recommends adding YEP Climate to the programme. There were twelve more themes mentioned, but none of these got a score above 2%.

## 4. Evaluation conclusions

In this chapter conclusions are drawn for effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability. The presentation of conclusions follows the logic of the evaluation questions as formulated by the commissioner in the ToR.

### 4.1 Effectiveness

#### Adjustments following the evaluation of YEP Phase I

The independent external evaluation of YEP Phase I in November 2018 came up with concrete recommendations, in particular to improve the linkages with MFA policies and to increase accountability and transparency regarding the personal budget available to YEs.

In its response to the evaluation the YEP Programme Bureau reported that several of the recommendations were already implemented, like improved knowledge sharing in implementing organisations and the sectors, engaging in more systematic lobby work regarding job opportunities and improved monitoring of stakeholders.

YEP Phase II has indeed evolved from YEP Phase I and has learned lessons along the way. Energy was added as a third theme to the programme and the nexus has taken more prominence. There is more room for optional courses that differentiate from the common programme, and it is more tailored to needs and interests of the YEs. The training programme was extended and YEs have a wider choice of training courses.

To improve the link to MFA policies, YEP gives more attention to its contribution to the SDGs. Although there was a change of government in the Netherlands in the course of YEP Phase II, producing a new BHOS policy, there was no major shift in regions or themes, and the SDGs remained its main objective. The main rationale of YEP is to rejuvenate and innovate key sectors of MFA policy, so YEP contributes indirectly to achievements made by the Dutch actors in the sectors. YEP asks the participating organisations to indicate how the YEs contribute to the SDGs, but it remains difficult to link YEP output directly to contribution to SDGs. Anecdotal evidence of contributions by individual YEs to SDGs was given by the YEP Programme Bureau and several respondents of the evaluation.

The issue of accountability and transparency regarding the personal budget to YEs was raised in the evaluation of YEP Phase I and was still persistent in the evaluation of YEP Phase II. In its management response to the Phase I evaluation, YEP Programme Bureau only mentioned that it would become compulsory to share the budget with the YEs. This is clearly insufficient to address the issue. The YEP Programme Bureau is convinced they made improvements on transparency to the YEs, but the evaluation shows that many HOs are still not transparent towards the YEs about the budget. There is still dissatisfaction about budget transparency, and it leads to uneasiness among YEs.

#### Water-agrofood-energy nexus

The intended impact of YEP Phase II is a positive contribution to selected SDGs relevant to water, food and energy as well as to the interlinkages ('nexus') between those. YEP II elicited to aim to

stimulate the integration of these themes because important issues can only be addressed when the three sectors are all taken into consideration. As such, the nexus between water, agrofood and energy is an integral part of YEP Phase-II <sup>18</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the evaluator's engagement with the YEP Programme Bureau and MFA shows that interviewed staff endorse this view. MFA staff, furthermore, explain that this nexus is found in other programmes and policy outside of YEP too.

For YEs as well as HOs, the utility and purpose of this nexus approach is less clear. They are aware of YEP's incorporation of these three themes through positions and the backgrounds of young professionals. And they also acknowledge that a (limited) number of technical trainings are available for those that are interested. However, they find that the content of their work determines their focus and engagement during YEP and, typically, one of the three domains is more present than the other, even for so-called nexus positions. HOs, in the view of the evaluators, are even less concerned with nexus as a concept in YEP.

The nexus is omnipresent in YEP programme documentation and among programme and donor staff and is given due consideration in the appraisal of proposals for YEP postings. There are mixed feelings among YEs and HOs expressed in interviews and FDGs. Some don't see the added value and focus on one sector, while others appreciate a wider context of interlinked sectors.

### **YEP contribution to the continued availability of international expertise in the water, agrofood and renewable energy sectors**

The original intent of the YEP programme was to rejuvenate the sectors. While this might have been relevant when the YEP programme started (2013), to date this was reported as a less pressing issue. The sectors of water and agrofood are well established and have people with years of experience in it and are said to continue to attract young people too. This was found to be less the case for the energy sector. The sector is, when compared to water and agrofood, younger and is also the most recent addition to YEP, starting only in Phase II. The need to build capacity in the countries is high and there are international business opportunities in these places for Dutch companies. Letting YEs enter the sector through YEP, builds up a network which Dutch businesses may benefit from now, or in the future.

YEP is a starting point for young people to work in an international context and interviewees reported a high retention rate in the respective sectors. This is supported by the data gathered by the YEP Programme Bureau where 87%<sup>19</sup> of the YEs have indicated to stay within the sector in which they performed their YEP secondment. Interviewees pointed out how YEs, especially national experts, are keen to stay in the sector by either starting something on their own, or by accessing a job at a new employer in the same sector.

The understanding that rejuvenation/capacity building is needed in the three sectors, is one of the grounds for establishing YEP. And, as the above sections show, YEP is succeeding in facilitating entry and retaining of young people. The evaluators, however, have not found a quantification of the "deficit of young people" per sector. The lack of which, makes that it is more difficult for the programme (or the evaluators) to establish the extent to which YEP has contributed to resolving this issue. While the evaluators understand that such an exercise comes with its own challenges, they recommend executing some sort of sector analysis to inform targets in future programming, e.g., x number of water YEs are needed over the coming 5 years.

### **Contribution of YEP training and coaching to Young Experts' professionalisation**

The YEP training and coaching make a significant contribution to the professionalisation of YEs, according to the YEs themselves. This is endorsed by sector organisations but was less convincingly conveyed by interviewed HOs who say that this strongly depends on the willingness of the YE to apply learned lessons.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example the activity appraisal document, YEP's 5-year plan, etc.

<sup>19</sup> YEP Annual Report 2023, p 9.

In FGDs, YEs almost unanimously indicated how YEP was ‘life changing’ and provided them with ‘an opportunity they would not have gotten without YEP’. Differences were observed how the YEP programme contributes to this for Dutch vs. national YEs. (Alumni) Dutch YEs indicated to have learned a lot in relation to intercultural work and experiences (as found in the alumni survey as well). They learned quite a lot already during their educational career on topics like time management, project management, or presentation skills. For national YEs, YEP helped them boost confidence, taught them how to manage their work (incl. how to manage a work-life balance) and it helped them develop soft skills (as found in the alumni survey).

HOs explained, in some cases, that a strong connection between the aims and the planned for trajectory of professional development of the programme and the planned secondment is lacking. As a result, it was difficult to ensure that work activities played into the strengths or newly acquired skills of YEs. This stood in the way of the YE and HO gradually working towards a more responsible (e.g., middle-management) position. For YEs, the disconnect between the secondment and their professional development, made asking for and receiving feedback on their professional growth more difficult. The evaluators also learned about instances in which YEs climbed up in position both during and after their YEP secondment. This is a clear indication that the above challenge is not felt by all participants.

The effort invested by the YEs on YEP activities (which is expected to be eight hours per month), was said to not always be clear for the HO. And in a few situations, the HO would also not directly see what the added value was of the coaching or training. It is acknowledged that this may vary per YE with some being keener to apply the lessons learned in their work than others. And, importantly, some YEs are keener to communicate about these issues than others. Nonetheless, the evaluators learned that HOs struggle to fully grasp the benefits of coaching, what the coaching entails and how it is beneficial to the HO. It remains opaque for the HOs. Making a clear link of how the training and coaching helped the YE become a better professional, is therefore not that straightforward to indicate.

The YEP survey amongst HOs indicates a good level of satisfaction amongst HOs for the progress YEs made. The HOs rated the level of improvement YEs made as satisfactory, 96% of the time (n=88). Only three HOs indicated to not be satisfied with the progress their YE made, providing a 2 and a 3 (on a scale of 10) for level of satisfaction of the YEs new skills and capacities. On average, the HOs scored the extent of satisfaction with new skills and capacities the YEs acquired with the YEP programme with a 7.7 out of 10. This is notwithstanding the observation by interviewed HOs who say that the usefulness of capacity strengthening depends on the willingness of the YE to apply learned lessons.

### Suitability of YEP training and coaching

The question in the ToR is to what extent the YEP training and coaching programme matches the capabilities that organisations in the field ask of their employees. The survey shows that HOs are very satisfied with new capacities and skills that YEs acquire within YEP. Only 2% give a score below 6 and 64% give a score of 8 or above. In their explanation, most highlighted the personal development of the YEs, followed by skills development and communication skills.

From the interviews with HOs, the evaluators learned that YEs are appreciated for their well-developed soft skills, their ability to work independently (also during COVID) and their management skills. Given that some HOs also had fewer positive experiences, and YEP involves a selection process too, it is not easy to attribute the positive skills/capacities to the training and coaching alone.

From the YEs, the evaluators learned that they felt to have made significant progress in their personal development and professionalisation. The national and Dutch YEs both emphasised that, through YEP, they learned a great deal about intercultural communication (differences) and what to expect in the (organisational) culture/context in which they work.

### Added value and innovation to Hosting Organisations

The survey shows that the overwhelming majority of HOs surveyed (89%)<sup>20</sup> report that young employees contribute to innovation in the organisation, predominantly innovations related to IT. It is not entirely clear whether these innovations commonly extend to state-of-the-art technical solutions in the organisations' respective domains e.g., remote-sensing applications that were previously not used to monitor drought.

Added value of YEs to HOs, besides innovation, was demonstrated through a few examples. These include the ability of YEs to contextualise and localise solutions, their drive and the enthusiasm they bring to the workplace, and sharing lessons learned with co-workers. Importantly YEs are reportedly frequently used to explore and build new business opportunities. As YEs come with a subsidy which reduces the financial burden for employers, they can dedicate significant time to the structuring of new operations/branches. Given that it concerns business development, expected rewards are often uncertain. Thus, regular employees cannot invest an equal amount of time as they are too expensive. The fact that YEs can, is a frequently mentioned added value.

### Use of the YEP Global Network

The YEP Global Network is large and has more than 910 alumni<sup>21</sup>. YEs most often indicated they continued engaging with their peers from the same batch. They also kept in touch with their peers in the same country but were getting less frequently in touch with YEs (alumni) in other countries from other batches. The strength of the network in the countries, depends strongly on the size of the network there. Interaction amongst YEs was especially high in countries like Kenya and Ethiopia (63 and 30 placements respectively<sup>22</sup>) but less in countries like Senegal (2 placements<sup>23</sup>).

The HOs invest far less in the YEP Global Network. It is through their own YEs that they may get in touch with other organisations, but a frequent exchange as YEs have is less visible.

For the implementing partners, the YEP Global Network is used quite often. Representatives of the organisations reported to tap into the network when they, for example, visit a certain country or when they need to get into a given sector in a specific country. The accessibility of the YEP alumni database is highly appreciated and makes it easy to connect with people everywhere across the world.

Through the interviews with IGG staff, the evaluators learned that the YEP global network is occasionally involved in country-visits by IGG staff and others. In those cases, the network offers a good opportunity to touch base on relevant topics with youth that know the context.

### Involvement of, and added value for, Dutch embassies

There are a few cases where Dutch embassies had a YE working within the embassy, through the tailor-made YEP. Unlike interns, who are generally placed for up to six months, the YEs worked for two years as staff members. They were usually very much appreciated, bringing state of the art sector knowledge.

Embassies are not involved in the selection or deployment of YEs in their countries and can therefore not really judge their impact.

Embassies sometimes call on YEs in their countries. For example, in Kenya, EKN organises a YEP day to get input on important themes in preparation of its Multi-Annual Strategic Plan. YEs are invited to tap into up-to-date knowledge and to get a youth perspective. In Ethiopia YEs are invited to the semi-annual Dutch water meet up. Several Dutch embassies organise special events for YEs in their country. In addition, embassies actively advertise for YEP, e.g. for start-ups and civil society.

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that this includes scores between 6 and 10, with an average of 7.3.

<sup>21</sup> YEP Phase I, YEP Phase II (incl. active YEs), and YEP Tailormade

<sup>22</sup> Placements in batches 19 until 31

<sup>23</sup> See above

It can be concluded that Dutch embassies are at least involved in pointing interested organisations in the direction of YEP. Added value comes from the possibility to easily engage with young professionals when needed.

### **Functioning of the YEP monitoring system**

The YEP monitoring system tracks various elements of the programme's progress, such as selection and recruitment figures, grading/appreciation of the YEP activities (training, coaching, etc.), networking events, or YEs' retention rate in the sector after YEP secondment. Much information is also collected through qualitative results, and this is then communicated in YEP Effect. Some elements of the programme's ToC, however, are not clearly grasped/reported on.

For example, it remains rather ambiguous how YEP results in the outcome of 'organisations hire more young people because of the good experience with the YEs (rejuvenation)'. HOs are not monitored how many young employees they hire, post a YEP secondment. More YEs placed in the same HO could be an indication of satisfaction by the HO with young employees but could also be an indication that the YEP subsidy is well accessible, or that the HO is not sufficiently convinced that bearing the risks associated with hiring a new young employee all by themselves, is possible to do. Indications are there that this is the case for hiring Dutch young professionals, whereas hiring national young professionals seems to continue despite YEP.

Additionally, at impact level, the YEP programme is expected to make a "contribution to the sustainable development goals (focus on 2, 6, 7, 13, and 17)". The monitoring system records this by letting the proposals for secondments indicate to what SDG the YE's project contributes. It is quite hard to verify whether this is realised. Indirectly, the YEs may have their contribution to the SDGs, but the validity of reporting on these goals in this way is questioned. Post-secondment, YEP does not check whether the days spent at the HO match the SDGs as indicated in the proposal. This is also not expected to be verified as it would be quite an arduous activity to do for both the HO and the YEP Programme Bureau. Instead, it may be questioned what more tangible expectations are in relation to the contributions to SDGs and what added value it has to report days worked on the listed SDGs.

## **4.2 Efficiency**

### **Institutional set-up**

From the interviews with both IGG and YEP Programme Bureau staff the evaluators learned that a simplification of the institutional set-up of the programme, particularly its dependence on three different budget streams corresponding with the three YEP sectors, would be welcomed. One inefficiency resulting from having to deal with three different budgets, is that the programme's results need to be disentangled into three separate programmes for reporting purposes. This is not considered to be efficient.

The evaluators also learned that the way in which the YEP budget is structured per phase and batch allows for limited deviation in terms of YEP's composition. This extends towards both the share of Dutch and national YEs, as well as representation of each sector. To that end, the evaluators suggest two changes in a possible Phase III (in Chapter 5).

Other elements of the institutional set-up, including the involvement of NWP, NFP and RVO as sector organisations also represented through employees in the YEP Programme Bureau staff, were not considered to be too complex or inefficient. Based on a broad satisfaction by YEs and HOs about the functioning of the Programme Bureau, the evaluators conclude that cooperation between those organisations (when needed) is efficient and that hosting of the YEP Programme Bureau staff by NWP is efficient too.

### **Performance of YEP Programme Bureau**

Based on interviews with IGG and sector organisations, the evaluators conclude that the YEP Programme Bureau is performing well. A single point of criticism relates to YEP's managing and

communication of its budget, in particular YEP communicated a request for a top-up to finish the final batches of Phase II late.

The evaluation process, in which the evaluators engaged with HOs and YEs, also touched upon how they viewed the role of management bureau. The evaluators learned that HOs, in some cases, would like to see more involvement of the YEP bureau, e.g., in communicating timely what commitments the YEs would have related to the programme; when these activities are expected to take place; how much time and effort the YEs are expected to invest and what that is expected to result in. The latter would help to align expectations in terms of professional growth, and for example, what type of increasingly more responsible tasks would accompany that.

YEs, in the interviews and FGDs, were predominantly very pleased with the programme and support from the YEP Programme Bureau. Given the continuation of issues related to the budget, however, the evaluators see a need for YEP management to take a more active role in ensuring that YE and HO are on the same page.

In the interest of efficiency, YEP opted not to demand invoices for expenses under the EUR 2,000 threshold. The programme argues that the potential risk for the programme by not checking these expenses does not justify the effort required for checking these invoices (working on a basis of trust). Nonetheless, the evaluation shows that there are instances in which costs are added to the expenses for trainings that are in fact not provided to YEs<sup>24</sup>.

A review of some budgets for YEs shows that the majority of HOs' own contribution amount consists of mentor-days. While the evaluators understand that mentoring of inexperienced employees is an investment, they deem it unlikely that mentoring would really amount to a maximum of 20 days per year. As the own contribution of HOs is matched by YEP (up to 50% of the total budget) the decision to allow mentor days to make up such a significant part of the own contribution, influences the extent to which resources are efficiently spent. Overall, the evaluators found that HOs feel budgetary rules are too restrictive, while YEs find that these rules allow the HOs too much room for presenting costs that are not truly spent on their YEP programme. The evaluators do not have a strong recommendation in this regard, as stricter rules risk disincentivising HOs from offering positions.

### **YEP and labour market**

According to the Dutch YEs interviewed, YEP makes working abroad in the three sectors possible for more young professionals. The programme, therefore, contributes to the realisation of a life experience that they would not have without YEP. The evaluators assess that this statement holds despite (recent) changes to the balance between supply and demand on the labour market. For national YEs, YEP provides an opportunity to gain working experience in an international setting, together with training and coaching which would otherwise be hard to access.

The HOs too, explain that YEP plays an important role in their decision to hire young people. And, as the interviews shows, YEP provides a way to HOs to hire new staff with reduced risks (and costs). Once YEs have gained the experience, and training/coaching, they are often retained by the HO as regular staff.

Some HOs mentioned that they would have likely hired young professionals without YEP support too. The decision to do so, however, is sped-up by YEP as a result of the reduced risk. Moreover, the HO survey data show that, based on the experiences with YEP, HOs are likely to hire (more) young people with 79 out of 88 responding positively. As the programme does not monitor whether HOs recruit more young people outside of YEP, which would be the best indicator to see the effect YEP has on the sectors' recruitment/own rejuvenation activities, it is difficult to assess the veracity of this survey-result. Tentatively though, the evaluators assess that it is likely that without YEP some HOs would

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<sup>24</sup> The evaluators are unable to quantify the extent to which this happens.



also hire young professionals to work abroad. However, the evaluators also conclude on the basis of their engagement with HOs and YEs, that without YEP certain positions would not have materialised.

YEP contributes to rejuvenation of the three sectors, which said to be less of an issue for the water and energy sector. Rather, the NWP representative (water sector) interviewed indicated that retaining people is far more challenging. For the energy sector it was said that rejuvenation is not an issue. Instead, building capacity in the sector is much more urgent and needed. Overall, by facilitating the entry of new people and contributing to their professional capacity the public contribution to YEP is of added value in the current labour market.

### YEP tailor-made

YEP tailor-made makes the YEP training and coaching programme available to organisations that don't qualify for the regular YEP, because they are already funded by the Dutch government. Organisations then pay for the training and coaching programme and don't receive any subsidy towards the Young Expert. YEP tailor-made is financially independent of YEP and as such not the focus of this programme evaluation.

Governmental organisations, especially Dutch embassies, have been making use of YEP tailor-made to attract additional staff in key sectors. At least one major company in the water sector has made use of YEP tailor-made to employ batches of YEs and offer them a tailor-made training and coaching programme through YEP. It shows that YEP is of sufficient interest to these companies to buy its services without any additional subsidy. Another advantage of YEP tailor-made is that organisations are not bound by the list of MFA focus countries.

### YEP vis-à-vis similar initiatives

The ToR asked for an assessment of how YEP stacks-up against other "similar" initiatives, i.e.: JPO, AMID and the Dutch government trainee programme. A thorough reflection on perceived efficiency of these other programmes proved to be impossible within the YEP evaluation. These programmes are not easily compared as their aims, expected outcomes and financing modalities differ significantly.

YEP, for example, is funded through a PPP framework and contributes to the Netherlands' impact on SDGs. As such, the Dutch MFA finances YEP to the tune of approximately EUR 21 million. AMID on the other hand, does not require such investments by the government as participants pay a tuition fee and employers pay for their salaries. From interviewing Nedworc, which manages the JPO programme on behalf of MFA, the evaluators learned that the full costs for the placement of JPOs in multilateral organisations are borne by the Dutch government through its ODA budget. This programme is also meant for Dutch nationals or nationals of a developing country, but they will be employed by an UN agency to further their professional career during a 3-year period. JPO works similarly to the YEP approach in that there are vacancies to which junior professionals can apply. The application assessment, however, is executed by the UN agency and the professional will also be hired by the respective agency.

In the Appraisal Memorandum for YEP Phase II, it is stated that the costs for one YE are less than 30% of those for one JPO<sup>25</sup>. From a Dutch government perspective, it is a breeding ground for professionals within UN organisations and the programme supports the further implementation of SDGs. Since target countries are often not financially able to set up such a JPO, there are other donor countries, such as the Netherlands, that finance places for people from target countries in addition to their own nationals. The idea is that after the JPO period they will further their career with the UN, possibly leaving for a while and then returning or from new job positions can improve the cooperation with

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<sup>25</sup> The BEMO states: "The YEP Programmes has similarities with the JPO Programme that supports young talents to work at the UN. However, thanks to the substantial contribution from within the sector, the annual costs for young experts through the YEP programmes are not even 30% of the costs of a JPO-talent. In addition to being more cost-effective, an added value of the YEP Programme is that it pays more attention to training and personal development. Also, the fact that YEP experts start in diverse batches (different sectors, different types of organisations, both Dutch and local young experts), stimulates cross-fertilisation and creates strong networks."

the UN. The Rijkstraine programme is entirely unrelated to Dutch BHOS policy and aims and would therefore be very difficult to compare to YEP too.

### 4.3 Relevance and sustainability

#### Validity of assumptions

The assumptions are: *If organisations (YEP partners, and new ones) hire more young people because of the positive experience with YEP (rejuvenation of the sector), & Young Experts invest in, make use of, and benefit from the YEP Global Network of competent, trained professionals, then Young Experts will continue to work internationally within the water, agrofood & energy sectors and thereby form the next generation of professionals because: Young Experts have kick-started their career, learned a lot about themselves, know what they want and how they can develop themselves further, and are therefore motivated to keep working in the sector (future career).*

The programme's ToC states that HOs are assumed to hire more young people because of the good experiences they may have had with YEP secondment. Though true when analysing the Host Organisation survey data, evidence of a greater uptake of young people in the organisation or sector was not recorded or reported on. YEs, as part of the YEP exit process, are requested to indicate what they will do after their YEP secondment. Often YEs indicate to stay with the Host Organisation (25 out of 41 reported this in the alumni survey too), or that they will move to the next employer whom they heard about through their YEP network.

The longevity of the YE's stay in the sector is, however, less clear. Examples are there of alumni becoming mentors for new YEs, but interviewees also reported the YEP secondment being a part of (Dutch) young people's personal bucket list; having lived and worked abroad. The secondment fits the YE's life phase (freshly graduated) and the desire to stay in the sector and/or abroad gets less when families are founded.

The alumni survey also showed how YEs that stayed with the HO made a career move internally. There are examples of YEs moving from a programme officer position in one country to more regional positions covering more countries, or to country management positions as well. At other times, YEs indicated to have been given more tasks in their current job title. Overall, post YEP secondment, YEs would not be jobless for long. From the 41 survey alumni, 33 indicated to have either stayed at the HO, or to have found a job within three months. From FGDs it appeared that organisations are pleased with the work of YEs and therefore offer them follow up contracts or recommend them to other organisations. YEP is a quality brand, all YEs are employed shortly after their YEP contract ends.

#### Alignment with Dutch policies and priorities

Although there was a formal change of Dutch policy for foreign trade and development cooperation, due to a change of government in 2022, the main principles relevant for YEP remained the same. The policy is guided by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, where YEP contributes to SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). The water-agrofood-energy nexus works on SDG 13 (climate action), supporting MFA's objective to promote sustainable and inclusive growth & climate action worldwide.

YEP is further supportive of enhancing the Netherlands' international earning capacity and by working closely with civil society, businesses and knowledge institutions.

The BHOS policy of 2018 included concrete targets for water, sanitation, and hygiene, aiming to reach 30 million people with safe water and 50 million people with improved sanitation by 2030. Simultaneously, MFA aims to contribute to the goal of "increasing water security for over a hundred million people worldwide by 2030", set in the NIWA. The three goals of the food and nutrition security policy are (i) eliminating the hunger and undernutrition of 32 million children, (ii) doubling productivity and income for 8 million smallholder farmers, and (iii) making 8 million ha of agricultural area more sustainably used and strengthening the enabling environment to achieve these. There is no

way to quantify YEP's contribution to the achievements of these goals. It can be concluded, however, that the programme contributes by strengthening institutions and (local) capacity, and several of the YEs have contributed to the achievements to one or more of the goals of MFA policies.

Likewise, there is no hard evidence that YEP contributes directly to multi-annual country strategies of Dutch embassies, and such contributions are also not monitored. Embassy staff are however appreciative of YEs' participation in international development. Multi-annual country strategies in countries like Ethiopia and Kenya, both countries with a very young population, have a particular focus on women and young people.

### **Trends in number and types of YEP applications**

It was found that there is a greater interest to apply for national YEs, than Dutch YEs (see Table 4). Especially since batch 28 (in 2023), the differences became bigger and continue to be big until the most recent batch, batch 32. This has resulted in a greater number of national YE placements compared to Dutch YEs. HOs have indicated that it is financially seen more challenging to hire Dutch YEs, compared to national YEs (also considering employee retention post-YEP placement) which may require reconsideration as to whether a 50-50 balance should still be pursued in a Phase III programme. The way the programme is currently set-up, however, requires for a 50-50 Dutch vs. national YE placement across the programme. The contributions to the YEP training/coaching (EUR 10,000 per year) and Programme Bureau (EUR 1,500 per year) inherent to the placement of a Dutch YE are, however, vital for the programme to be able to run. Revising these contributions, also to make the subsidies fairer (see Section 5 below), should be considered and might include moving to a more equal subsidy amount for Dutch and national YEs.

### **YEP resilience to unforeseen circumstances such as COVID-19 and instability in some countries**

Reflecting back on the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was found that YEP acted well and adapted itself according to the new realities. YEs and other interviewees were understanding of the situation and had no complaints about YEP's management. Coaches supported YEs with these new realities and were appreciated for their role during these challenging times, by YEs. However, the full YEP experience under normal circumstances could not be fully emulated. YEP's physical meetings, and especially the first training weeks, create a sense of togetherness amongst batch members and this was missed when online trainings were provided. The programme exerted efforts to keep YE interaction alive but could only do so much, given the fact that physical meetings were no longer possible. YEs and other stakeholders know that YEP could not do anything about this and are therefore not judging this as a shortcoming of YEP and the Programme Bureau.

Overall, YEP turned out to be flexible enough when special situations occur like personal injuries of a YE before starting their placement (placement was adjusted to accommodate recovery) or the COVID-19 period.

### **YEP sectors**

The expansion of YEP to other sectors is a topic that invites a lot of reaction from YEP stakeholders, including participants. From these exchanges, however, does not emerge a clear-cut candidate for expansion. While climate was mentioned as an additional theme, so were SRGR/gender, (access to) finance, digitalisation, and entrepreneurship. Because of that, the evaluators do not recommend expansion to include any specific additional theme for a possible Phase III. If YEP continuous with a new phase and is to receive funds through IGG, and the three budgets are streamlined into one, all projects relevant to IGG could be eligible. Even if they are not tied to any of the three themes specifically. As climate is the fourth cluster within IGG, climate relevant projects would make good candidates.

Besides an expansion through the inclusion of new themes, two other potential opportunities were brought up by respondents. The first one departs from the understanding that YEP is a cost-effective way to build the Netherlands' visibility in relevant sectors. This contributes to the Netherlands being seen as frontrunner in certain sectors in particular countries, e.g., water in Ethiopia. Some

stakeholders, therefore, suggested expanding the programme to include non-ODA countries too (up to a certain share of the total), provided that YEP accesses finance from other sources such as other ministries or through YEP tailor-made. The major benefit of this would be that it allows additional relevant HOs that are not active in ODA countries, to become part of the network. And their participation would strengthen the YEP global network. In addition, this expansion would benefit HOs and the Netherlands too, as YEP as a proof-of-concept programme puts the spotlight on these HOs.

Alternatively, it was suggested to expand the programme by allowing local private sector and other institutions to apply for YEP. While this may reduce the relevance of YEP for Dutch HOs, it was explained to contribute to the sustainability of results. After all, these parties are even more so than Dutch HOs, embedded in local contexts. Expertise, therefore, is even more benefit the countries in which YEP is implemented.

## 5. Recommendations

In light of a possible next phase of YEP, the following recommendations are made:

### Link to MFA objectives

There is a need to better link YEP to the relevant MFA policies and objectives. While an attempt was made in YEP Phase II to link YEP directly to the SDGs, this continues to be on a high level of abstraction. Furthermore, the mechanism through which YEP is expected to impact the SDGs lacks elaboration and rigorous monitoring of such impact is neigh on impossible. YEP would be able to demonstrate its impact better if its targets were more directly linked to MFA targets, which exist for each of the sectors, were better defined and were accompanied by tangible milestones. The above requires a more prominent role for monitoring and evaluation, also on outcome level rather than on outputs. Key cross-cutting policy themes such as gender and resilience to climate change should be fully integrated in YEP.

### Further integration of themes, delimitation of IGG themes

Among respondents in this evaluation there is no broad support for expansion of YEP to specific sectors beyond water, agrofood and energy. Some respondents argued that, because the programme is functioning well and succeeds in kick-starting the (international) career of young professionals and the strengthening of innovation and technical capacity in specific sectors, it could serve as a model to be expanded to other sectors. Some suggestions for additional sectors were made, but there is no real clout for one particular sector. Other informants, still agreeing with the success of the current model, argue to consolidate the implementation of YEP in the three current sectors. It is therefore recommended to delimit the programme to the main sectors of MFA/IGG's interest, i.e. the current three sectors (water, agrifood/food security, energy), and a cross-cutting climate theme.

It is recommended to have one single programme encompassing the three to four themes. Consolidating the three budgets into one YEP budget allows for more flexibility in terms of the number of YEs per sector. This flexibility contributes to efficiency as it allows for adapting to both sectoral demands and the supply of available projects and candidates<sup>26</sup>.

YEP tailor-made is a valuable addition to YEP. Without using MFA funds it provides an opportunity to the programme to increase the output of YEP in terms of number of YE postings. YEP tailor-made also increases the programme's flexibility, with the possibility to work in MFA non-focus countries.

### Monitoring

Building on the above suggested link to MFA targets, the evaluators recommend sector analyses to inform quantitative targets for YEP. This means that an analysis is needed on where and how water,

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<sup>26</sup> Sectoral needs are currently not considered, as the programme does no take stock of, e.g., the number of (additional) YEs needed in the sector to realise policy goals.

agrofood, and energy experts can contribute to identified MFA targets. Based on this analysis, YEP can set a quantitative target for the contribution to this objective for YEP.

The evaluators also recommend for YEP to monitor at the outcome rather than the output level. A concrete example of which could be to monitor whether HOs showcase an increased appetite for hiring young people outside of the YEP framework as a result of their positive experience within YEP. Such findings inform on possibly systemic changes in the sector that contribute towards YEP aims.

### Young Experts' budgets

The lack of transparency in how budgets are used by HOs as well as the differences in budget between training budget for national and Dutch YEs continue to provide fertile grounds for discontent, rumours and mistrust. The evaluators suggest the below changes to the budget practice in a possible phase III to resolve or reduce these issues.

The evaluators recommended that the Programme Bureau enforces the budget and its exhaustion to be shared with YEs. A small number of meetings organised to that end (one at the start, one half-way and one at the end) in which the three parties (HO, YE and Programme Bureau) participate are the most straightforward way of guaranteeing that. While the evaluators understand that this is a significant time investment, they deem it necessary to find a way to put an end to these issues.

The evaluators did not assess the extent to which funds for which no invoices are required are being used in ways that do not contribute to YEP's objectives. Nonetheless, as they have heard of multiple instances in which this appeared to have taken place, they recommend mitigating measures. Suggestions include to make it known that a certain number of budgets will be audited per batch/year, as this may reduce the incentive to use funds inappropriately. Another measure could be to have YEs and HOs sign-off on expenses towards, e.g., training, mentor days etc. that are covered by HOs' own contribution. The evaluators also recommend the programme to critically reflect on the expected amount of mentoring time and set a ceiling.

Regarding the fairness of the YE budgets towards national versus Dutch young professionals, the evaluators recommend placing the part of the budget that is reserved for training and coaching outside of the budget for the individual YE, also on paper. As the HOs have no say in how this budget is being utilised and the different budgets for the Dutch and national YEs are being averaged anyway, it would be much clearer if the total sum of money for these activities is separated from the rest of the budget.

The training and coaching budgets should be amended, as current national YE training and coaching budgets do not cover their training and coaching costs. The participation of national YEs, therefore, depends on the inclusion of a sufficient number of Dutch YEs whose training and coaching budget is larger than needed for their YEP trajectory. Allocating sufficient training and coaching budget to each YE contributes to flexibility and efficiency. The budget for training and coaching does not need to be part of the budget per YE, as they or their HOs have no say in how that budget is being used. An option is to take out that part of the subsidy, lowering the required own contribution of the HOs who sometimes struggle to match the total amount.

Regarding the remaining difference in budget (EUR 30,000 and 10,000 for Dutch and national respectively), two alternative approaches are recommended. First, it is recommended to make the budgets come closer to each other by reducing the budget for a Dutch YE. The budget for a national YE can stay the same or can be increased. Secondly, it is recommended to encourage HOs to apply for Dutch/national positions. Such positions are regarded as very valuable for the HOs and the YEs themselves. YEP could, in this scenario, finance the dual placement, rather than having budget differences, based on nationality.

### Expansion of YEP to local HOs

Currently, HOs organisations that are not registered/do not have an affiliate in the Netherlands are excluded from the programme. While there are good reasons for this precondition, there are also some for opening-up the programme to local HOs. Two of these arguments are unpacked here to inform a discussion on whether these recommendations are feasible or desirable.

The first argument for including local HOs is that, in the view of the evaluators, it would be rather undesirable if Dutch private parties are outcompeting local ones fuelled by subsidies that are earmarked as funds for development cooperation. Should MFA really subsidise a Dutch renewable energy company to make it possible for them to second a Dutch young expert to Rwanda if that results in them outcompeting Rwandan companies that have similar objectives?

The second argument is that, as the ultimate aim is to contribute to the SDGs, supporting local parties whose activities do that, is likely more sustainable. After all, these companies are sure to stay in the context and the capacity that YEs bring is even more likely to be retained in those contexts where the Netherlands aims to make an impact.

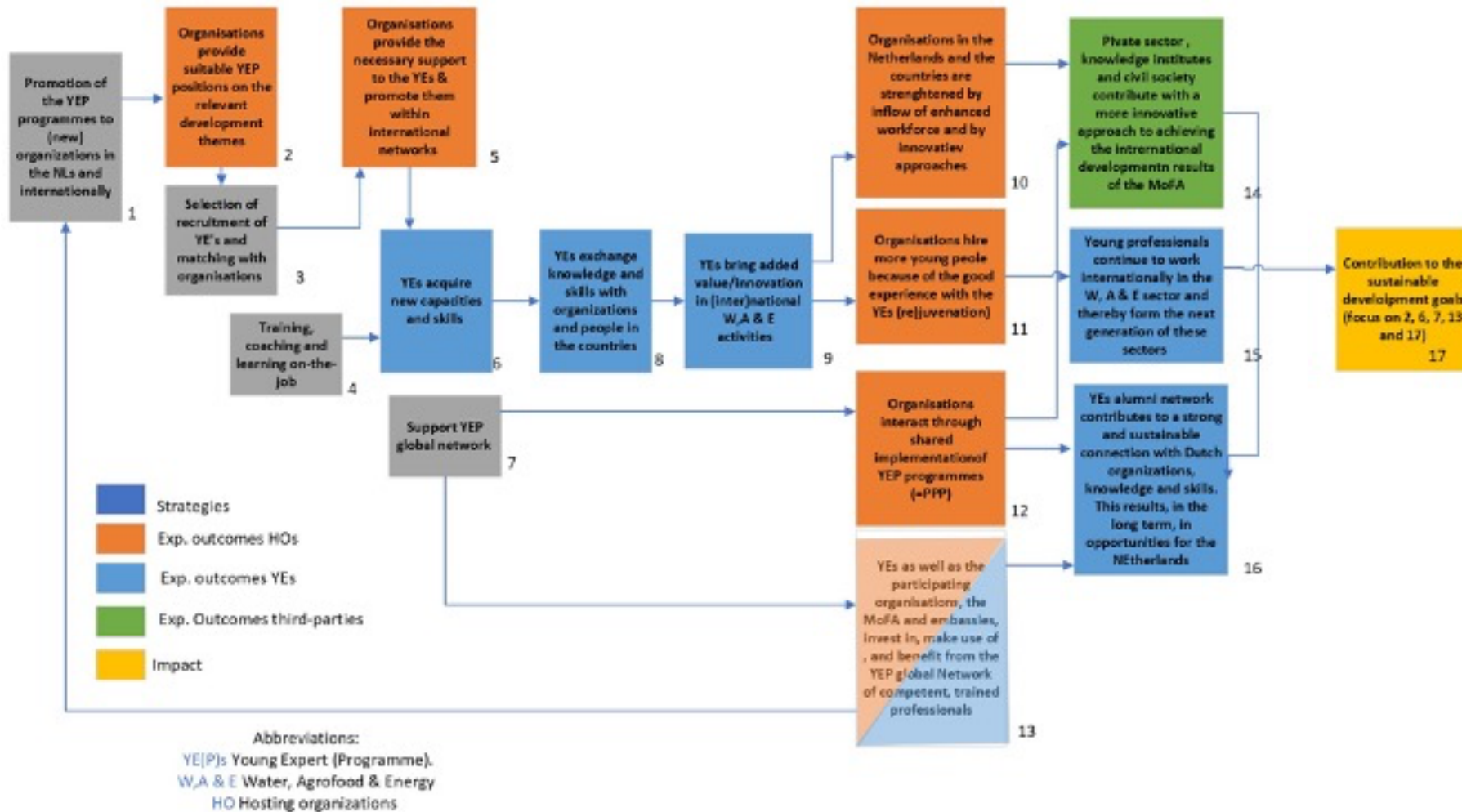
### Discourage making use of YEs repeatedly

YEP aims to sustainably increase the appetite of HOs to hire young people and HOs are reporting that they are more likely to hire young people after their experience with YEP. Therefore, it makes sense to discourage organisations from making excessive use of YEs through YEP. A small number of experiences, after all, should result in the realisation that young people, if they get the right amount of coaching and training, are a valuable addition to the organisation. Repeatedly making use of YEs through YEP, especially if those are not retained, is not an indication of that. And, even if they are retained, the programme could question the HOs motivation and whether funds would be better spent elsewhere. The evaluators recommend exploring if progressively lower YEP contributions, or reduced tariffs for YEP tailor made, therewith making it more attainable for a larger crowd, are feasible and desirable options.

## **Annex 1: Terms of Reference**

See separate PDF.

## Annex 2: 'Remodelled ToC'



\*This ToC, remodelled by the evaluators, closely resembles the original one. As described in section 3.2, some visual aids have been introduced to make it easier to interpret and reflect on portions of the diagram. In an updated ToC, the consultants would make more assumptions explicit to allow for testing and adapting the programme.



## Annex 3: Evaluation matrix

| Nr. | Evaluation question  | To do   | Source   | Tool  |
|-----|--|---|--|---|
|     | <b>Effectiveness</b>   |   |  |   |
| 1   | To what extent have the recommendations of the evaluation of YEP Phase I and the according adjustments of the programme led to improvements in the implementation of YEP Phase II? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List the recommendations</li> <li>Assess management response</li> <li>Assess response in Phase II project document</li> <li>Ask this questions to YEP mgt and BuZa</li> </ul>              | YEP managing office, SC, programme (financial) documents and reporting + others depending on adjustments made, | Document review, inception meeting, KIIs + possibly survey and FGDs |
| 2   | To what extent is the water-energy-food nexus reflected in and stimulated by the (set-up of the) different components of YEP?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the water-energy-food nexus</li> <li>Assess how this is reflected in Phase II project document</li> <li>Ask this questions to YEP mgt and BuZa</li> </ul>                         | Programme (including MEL) documents, YEP managing office, MoFA, NWP, NFP, RVO                                  | Document review, KIIs   |
| 3   | To what extent does YEP contribute to the continued availability of international expertise in the water, agrofood and renewable energy sectors?                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extract numbers of Young Experts in the three sectors</li> <li>Ask this question to hosting organisations</li> </ul>   | MoFA, hosting organisations  | KIIs, FGDs  |
| 4a  | To what extent does the YEP training and coaching programme contribute to young experts' professionalisation?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the training and coaching programme</li> <li>Analyse data from Young Experts surveys</li> <li>Analyse data from post-training surveys</li> <li>Interview Young Experts</li> </ul> | Young Expert (alumni), hosting organisations, coaches  | KIIs, FGDs  |
| 4b  | To what extent does the YEP training and coaching programme match the capabilities that organisations in the field ask of their employees?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the training and coaching programme</li> <li>Analyse data from organisations surveys</li> <li>Interview hosting organisations</li> </ul>  | Young Expert (alumni), hosting organisations, coaches  | KIIs, FGDs  |
| 5   | What added value and innovation do young experts bring to their organisations?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse data from organisations surveys</li> <li>Interview hosting organisations</li> </ul>  | Hosting organisations  | KIIs, FGDs  |
| 6   | To what extent do organisations, young experts and MoFA invest in, make use of and benefit from the YEP Global Network?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the YEP Global Network (is not clearly defined)</li> </ul>  | Young experts, MoFA, hosting organisations, YEP programme bureau   | KIIs, FGDs, surveys   |

|    |  |  |  |                       |
|----|--|--|--|-----------------------|
|    |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask this question to Young Experts, hosting organisations and BuZa/EKN</li> </ul>   |  |                       |
| 7  | How are the Netherlands Embassies involved in the programme and what is the added value of YEP for the embassies?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask this question to YEP mgt, BuZa and EKN</li> </ul>   | YEP managing office, MoFA, Embassies   | KIIs                  |
| 8  | Does the YEP monitoring system provide good data for the evaluation of progress and results?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the YEP monitoring system</li> <li>• Assess the system</li> </ul>  | YEP managing office, MEL documents, programme periodic reporting                       | KIIs, document review |
|    | <b>Efficiency</b>  |  |  |                       |
| 9  | To what extent is the institutional set-up of the programme (including the partnership agreements and budget flows) efficient, given the expansion of YEP over the past 10 years?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a complicated question</li> <li>• Look into partnership agreements and budget flows</li> <li>• Ask YEP mgt and BuZa about budget flows</li> </ul> | ToC, periodic reporting, financial documentation, MoFA (IGG), YEP managing office, NWP | Document review, KIIs |
| 10 | How is the YEP managing office performing in terms of efforts and expenses and what recommendations could be made with regards to effectiveness and efficiency?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask this question to YEP mgt and BuZa</li> </ul>  | YEP managing office, MoFA, NWP, hosting organisations, Young Expert (alumni)           | KIIs, Surveys         |
| 11 | To what extent is the public contribution to the YEP programme (still) additional in the current labour market? Would the young experts also be employed and seconded abroad without this programme, and thus without MoFA co-funding? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should come out of surveys and interviews with hosting organisations and Young Experts</li> </ul>  | Hosting organisations, young expert (alumni), (applied) universities                   | KIIs, surveys         |
| 12 | To what extent is YEP Tailor-made of added value to the overall YEP programme? How does the YEP managing office perform in terms of separating YEP and YEP Tailor-made while preserving the synergies?                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe YEP Tailor-made</li> </ul>   | YEP managing office, hosting organisations   | KIIs                  |
| 13 | How does YEP compare to other related initiatives in terms of efficiency, such as the UN's JPO programme, the AMID programme and the Trainee programme of the Dutch Government?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe other YEP-like initiatives</li> <li>• Compare them??</li> </ul>  | YEP managing office, MFA   | Document review, KIIs |
|    | <b>Relevance and sustainability</b>  |  |  |                       |

|    |  |   |  |                                      |
|----|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| 14 | To what extent are the underlying assumptions of YEP, as identified in the ToC (Annex I), still relevant and do they still hold?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the assumptions</li> <li>• Analyse validity</li> <li>• Depending on analysis, ask stakeholders</li> </ul>   | Hosting organisations, young experts, YEP managing office, ToC, (applied) universities | Document review, KIIs, surveys, FGDs |
| 15 | How does YEP align with (a) the current policies and priorities of the Dutch government, especially the latest BHOS policy note (2022); and (b) the multi-annual country strategies of Ethiopia and Kenya? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extract relevant sections from policy docs, BEMO and MACSs</li> <li>• Ask BuZa and EKN</li> </ul>  | MoFA, policy documents, embassies  | Document review, KIIs                |
| 16 | Which trends can be seen in terms of the number and type of YEP applications being received between 2020-2023?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get these data from YEP</li> <li>• Ask YEP mgt??</li> </ul>  | YEP programme documentation, YEP managing office                                       | Document review, KIIs                |
| 17 | To what extent is YEP resilient to unforeseen circumstances such as COVID-19 and instability in some of the countries where young experts work?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check progress reports</li> <li>• Ask YEP mgt</li> <li>• Ask Young Experts and Hosting Organisations??</li> </ul>  | YEP managing office, hosting organisations, Young expert (alumni)                      | KIIs, surveys                        |
| 18 | How does YEP distinguish itself from other related initiatives, such as the UN's JPO programme, the AMID programme and the Trainee programme of the Dutch Government?                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See Q13</li> </ul>   | Young experts, MoFA, YEP managing office   | KIIs                                 |
| 19 | Would an expansion of YEP to include new themes, or a shift in focus to other themes, be desirable (please build on results evaluation YEP Phase I)?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check YEP I evaluation report</li> <li>• See BuZa policy documents for potential new themes</li> <li>• Ask YEP mgt and BuZa</li> <li>• Ask Hosting Organisations?</li> </ul> | Hosting organisations, MoFA, NWP, NFP, RVO   | KIIs                                 |

## Annex 4: Random selection of Young Experts / alumni

The basis of the random list of Young Experts / alumni is the “Metabestand YEP II”, made available to the evaluators on the YEP shared drive.

The meta file contains data on 352 Young Experts, starting from Batch 19, i.e. from the start of YEP II. The file contains most necessary information on criteria to be used for ensuring a representative sample:

- Dutch or national Young Expert
- Male or female
- YEP theme
- YEP batch
- 1-year or 2-year trajectory

Using the =RAND() function of MS Excel, a random number was given to each Young Expert, after which the list was ordered by random assigned number, thus creating the new random Young Expert list.

The first eight Young Experts were selected for interviews, as long as they represented a cross section of the criteria mentioned above. When a person on the list no longer contributed to a fair distribution, (s)he would be put next in the reserve list.

The result of this process is presented in the following, anonymised, table.

**Table A.1** Young Experts selected for interview (anonymised)

| Random rank     | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-----------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 1               | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 23    | 2          |
| 2               | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 21    | 1          |
| 3               | Local    | F   | Agrofood | 23    | 2          |
| 4               | NL       | M   | Water    | 31    | 1          |
| 5               | Local    | F   | Water    | 21    | 2          |
| 6               | Local    | M   | Water    | 24    | 1          |
| 12              | NL       | M   | Energy   | 19    | 1          |
| 15              | Local    | F   | Energy   | 19    | 2          |
| <b>Reserves</b> |          |     |          |       |            |
| 7               | NL       | F   | Water    | 23    | 2          |
| 8               | Local    | F   | Water    | 31    | 1          |
| 9               | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 31    | 1          |
| 18              | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 27    | 1          |
| 19              | Local    | F   | Energy   | 24    | 2          |
| 20              | Local    | M   | Energy   | 28    | 1          |

The same random Young Expert list was used to extract groups for FGDs. The Young Experts shortlisted for interviews were excluded, to prevent overlap of Young Experts between interviews and FGDs. Three groups of FGD participants were made: Dutch YEP alumni, national YEP alumni, and active Young Experts (from batch 29, Dutch and national).

**Table A.2** Young Experts selected for FGDs (anonimised)  
FGD1 - Dutch alumni 1

| Random rank | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 10          | NL       | M   | Water    | 26    | 2          |
| 22          | NL       | F   | Water    | 22    | 1          |
| 28          | NL       | F   | Water    | 21    | 2          |
| 29          | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 27    | 2          |
| 31          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 21    | 2          |
| 33          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 22    | 2          |
| 39          | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 25    | 2          |
| 58          | NL       | M   | Energy   | 25    | 2          |
| 59          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 26    | 2          |
| 86          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 27    | 1,875      |

FGD2 - Dutch alumni 2

| Random rank | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 44          | NL       | F   | Water    | 26    | 2          |
| 60          | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 19    | 2,5        |
| 61          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 26    | 2          |
| 64          | NL       | F   | Water    | 21    | 2,5        |
| 67          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 24    | 2          |
| 69          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 19    | 2          |
| 70          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 27    | 2          |
| 71          | NL       | M   | Energy   | 28    | 2          |
| 74          | NL       | F   | Agrofood | 27    | 1          |
| 75          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 27    | 2          |

FGD3 - Local alumni 1

| Random rank | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 23          | NL       | F   | Water    | 22    | 2,3333     |
| 24          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 20    | 2          |
| 26          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 22    | 2          |
| 34          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 19    | 1          |
| 36          | NL       | F   | Water    | 23    | 0,92       |
| 37          | NL       | F   | Water    | 21    | 2          |
| 38          | NL       | F   | Water    | 24    | 2          |
| 41          | NL       | M   | Energy   | 28    | 1          |
| 42          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 27    | 2          |
| 45          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 21    | 2          |

FGD4 - Local alumni 2

| Random rank | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 47          | NL       | M   | Water    | 26    | 1,03       |
| 48          | NL       | M   | Agrofood | 24    | 0,96       |
| 49          | NL       | M   | Water    | 25    | 2          |

|    |     |   |          |    |      |
|----|-----|---|----------|----|------|
| 53 | NTL | M | Agrofood | 26 | 2    |
| 56 | NTL | F | Energy   | 23 | 2    |
| 57 | NTL | F | Energy   | 29 | 2    |
| 62 | NTL | F | Water    | 26 | 1,33 |
| 66 | NTL | M | Water    | 26 | 2    |
| 72 | NTL | F | Agrofood | 25 | 2    |
| 73 | NTL | M | Water    | 28 | 1    |

FGD5 - Active YEs (batch 29+)

| Random rank | NL/Local | M/F | Theme    | Batch | Trajectory |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|------------|
| 13          | NTL      | M   | Water    | 30    | 1          |
| 16          | NL       | M   | Water    | 30    | 1          |
| 17          | NL       | M   | Water    | 29    | 2          |
| 25          | NTL      | M   | Energy   | 29    | 2          |
| 27          | NTL      | F   | Agrofood | 30    | 1          |
| 35          | NTL      | M   | Energy   | 30    | 1          |
| 40          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 29    | 2          |
| 43          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 30    | 1          |
| 46          | NL       | F   | Water    | 31    | 1          |
| 50          | NL       | F   | Energy   | 29    | 2          |

## Annex 5: Random selection of Hosting Organisations

The “Metabestand YEP II”, made available to the evaluators on the YEP shared drive, is also the basis of the random list of Hosting Organisations.

The meta file contains data on 132 Hosting Organisations, which each hosted one up to neighteen Young Experts in YEP II. The file contains most necessary information on criteria to be used for ensuring a representative sample:

- Private company/NGO/other (including knowledge institutions)
- Hosted Dutch of national Young Expert
- Male or female
- YEP theme
- YEP batch

Using the =RAND() function of MS Excel, a random number was given to each Hosting Organisation, after which the list was ordered by random assigned number, thus creating the new random Hosting Organisation list.

The first eight Hosting Organisation were selected for interviews, as long as they represented a cross section of the criteria mentioned above. When an organisation on the list no longer contributed to a fair distribution, it would be put next in the reserve list. The result of this process is presented in the following, anonymised, table.

| Random rank     | Type of org. | #Y EP | Sector          | Batch           | NL/Loca l | M/F |
|-----------------|--------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----|
| 1               | Company      | 3     | Agrofood        | 24, 25, 27      | NL        | F   |
| 2               | Company      | 2     | Energy          | 25              | l         | M/F |
| 3               | Company      | 1     | Agrofood        | 25              | Local     | F   |
| 4               | Company      | 5     | Energy          | 24,25,26,29, 30 | NL/Loca l | M/F |
| 5               | NGO          | 1     | Energy          | 23              | NL        | M   |
| 6               | Company      | 1     | Agrofood        | 20              | Local     | M   |
| 7               | NGO          | 3     | Water           | 23,27           | NL/Loca l | M/F |
| 9               | Other        | 1     | Water           | 20              | Local     | F   |
| <b>Reserves</b> |              |       |                 |                 |           |     |
| 8               | Company      | 3     | Agrofood        | 19, 20, 31      | Local     | M   |
| 10              | Company      | 1     | Energy          | 21              | Local     | M   |
| 11              | Company      | 2     | Water           | 20              | NL/Loca l | F   |
| 12              | NGO          | 2     | Water           | 19, 29          | NL        | M/F |
| 13              | Company      | 5     | Water           | 22,23,25        | NL/Loca l | M   |
| 14              | NGO          | 6     | Agrofood/wat er | 23,24,30, 31    | NL/Loca l | M/F |
| 15              | Company      | 7     | Water           | 23,26,27,28,3 1 | NL/Loca l | M/F |
| 16              | Company      | 1     | Energy          | 27              | NL        | M   |

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