Webinar of WGI's Working Group on "Best Practices"

25 November 2016 – 14h30-16h30 CET

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Key Highlights

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Introduction

1.   The Secretariat opened the meeting by recalling that the objective of the Working Group on Best Practices is to collect, peer-review and scale-up water governance practices to support the implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance, which represent the major outcome of the first three years of the WGI's activities. These practices will be presented to the extent possible in the forthcoming OECD *Water Governance at a Glance* publication, to be launched at the 8th World Water Forum (March 2018, Brasilia) and will also be compiled in an online database. This work started a year ago and relied on a scoping note formulating ten guiding questions, followed by discussions at a first webinar (25 April 2016) and a break-out session at the 7th WGI meeting (23-24 June 2016, The Hague). At the time, members of the Working Group advised the Secretariat and coordinators to carry out three sets of activities focusing on i) scoping the expectations for practices; ii) taking stock of existing databases on practices/case studies; and iii) pilot-testing the draft template to collect practices.

2.   This 2nd webinar aimed to collect comments and views from the members of the Working Group on the draft note circulated prior to the meeting that consolidates the outcomes of the above-mentioned activities. In all, 27 members participated in the meeting (see list in Annex I). The webinar was structured around 3 blocks, one for each activity, which started with a short presentation by the Working Group co-ordinators (OECD, SUEZ, SIWI and WIN) followed by a tour de table for participants to react to the questions raised in the agenda (see Annex II). Overall, participants congratulated the co-ordinators for the survey's interesting results, the inventory's informative take-away messages, and the useful insights from pilot-testing the template. They underlined that together, these outcomes provide a sound basis to move forward with collecting and reviewing practices and designing a useful database.

Highlights from discussions

Insights from the Short Survey on water governance practices

3.   OECD [Delphine Clavreul], with the support of SUEZ [Joannie Leclerc], introduced the main results of the short survey that was carried out between 27 October and 9 November 2016 to scope the expectations and needs of decision makers and stakeholders for water governance practices. The survey was developed iteratively with 15 volunteers from the Working Group and consisted of 10 multiple-choice, ranking and open questions to be answered in 10 minutes. In all, 164 responses were collected, both online (83%) and via a Word template (17%), 28% of which came from WGI members while 9% of responses were submitted anonymously. Respondents were mostly representatives from academia, civil society and central governments. The presentation focused on 3 topics addressed in the survey (the full results from the survey are available in the background note circulated to the participants):

- *Type of practices*: the survey revealed that most respondents are interested in **evolving** practices, but also seek practices that are **vetted**, which is in line with the objective (and value added) of the Working Group to peer-review practices rather than just collecting and uploading them following a self-sourcing approach. To a lesser degree, respondents are interested in world-renowned solutions.

- *Background information*: the results showed that respondents primarily look for information on lessons learned from **failures**, evidence of **impact** on water governance, and lessons learned from **success**. They are also interested in the water functions concerned with the practices (e.g. services, resources, floods, droughts etc.), indicating that contextual/background information is critical, if not a prerequisite, to determine whether the practices are **applicable / replicable** in other places.

- *Main shortcomings of databases*: respondents criticised that practices are usually **not detailed enough**, or too descriptive rather than analytical, and that databases are **not user-friendly**. The survey also highlighted that there is a lack of databases that focus specifically on water **governance** issues and which provide practices that are reviewed or vetted by experts.

4.   All participants agreed that the survey was thorough and that the results were very informative, and congratulated the Secretariat. Some participants pointed out that responses to the survey might be biased given the over-representation of certain categories of stakeholders (i.e. academia, civil society) as compared to others (e.g. business, donors, etc.) and that some information related to one question sometimes contradicted findings from other questions. For instance, respondents indicated on one hand their interest in evolving practices, and on the other hand they seek practices with evidence of impact. The discussion raised the following points that can help guide the collection and peer-review process of practices:

- Developing the database should be considered as a **learning experience** that should help build a **common understanding** of what implementing the OECD Principles entails (e.g. in terms of capacity, etc.) among decision makers and practitioners, but also which **drivers** actually boost change of water governance systems at large beyond evidence and examples on individual principles.

- Determining what makes a practice "**good**" should be at the core of the Working Group's reflection on the database. In addition to the Working Group's peer-review process, it could be envisaged that users of the database also be allowed to "rate" practices after reading them or that members of the WGI themselves be clustered around thematic groups in charge of reading, commenting and clearing the practices to be collected around similar topics (e.g. fragmentation, policy coherence, integrity, regulation etc.).

- Several **evaluation criteria** were mentioned as being potentially useful to assess whether a practice is "good". First, the Working Group could check if the practices have been the subject of published material and/or scientific papers. Also, the potential for replicability of each practice should be an indicator of selection. In this sense, the analysis of replicability should look both at the initial context of the practices and the context for adapting the practices (i.e. enabling factors). The review process could also rely on multi-stakeholder panels that would discuss practices in a dynamic way and provide different perspectives. Ultimately, the practices could be assessed against the water governance indicators once these are developed and agreed on, which implies that in a few years some of the collected practices be assessed against a clear evaluation framework.

- The value-added of the database will rely on its ability to provide information on "less successful" experiences, particularly on the **factors of failure**. It will require raising interest and creating incentives to encourage stakeholder to share their failures (e.g. submitting practices with some degree of anonymity), which may require different channels than those used thus far (namely Chatham house rules in close-door meetings of the Working Group)

- The survey highlighted the importance of the "**peer-to-peer phenomenon**", whereby stakeholders value the source of the practices and tend to favour practices coming from colleagues because they are generally interested in the same type of information. The process of reviewing practices within the WGI should also contribute to creating a community of practice and of exchange on water governance.

- It will be critical to create the **right, yet simple, framework** for bringing the practices together in a practical way. Therefore, it was advised that the database should:
  - Strive to focus on a **small number of practices** on water governance, which are comprehensive, thorough, reviewed and discussed among WGI members rather than trying to encompass hundreds of practices which may not be useful for the sake of numbers.

o Ensure that beyond practices related to each of the 12 principles, there are also practices that concern **cross-cutting issues** (e.g. conjunctive water management) but also look at the drivers for change, the political economy of reform, the framework conditions for policy improvement, and that are relevant for **different types of stakeholders** namely not just public authorities.

o Cluster information on the practices to highlight their potential for **replicability**, e.g. background/context; description of the initial situation (i.e. starting point); progress achieved (i.e. to represent the dynamic reality); outcomes, etc. It was underlined that the focus should be on replicating the *process* of implementing the OECD Principles, which may entail innovating/adapting to different/changing circumstances.

o Present practices in a **homogenous way** (i.e. standardised format), which the template should help do.

o Include **different levels of detail** so as to be helpful for different types of stakeholders (e.g. regulators, business, etc.), to provide enough information but not to overwhelm the reader. This may require a specific interface whereby users could have access to the meta-information on the practice in a short paragraph and/or with data visualisation, and then click where relevant to get further information/details in a second stage.

Inventory of existing databases

5.   SIWI [Jenny Gronwall] introduced the inventory, which brings together 37 databases, 28 of which are water-specific. These databases i) were identified through desk research and suggestions of Working Group members; ii) range from showcasing only 4-5 practices (e.g. UN-Water Best Practice Awards platform) to including thousands of cases (e.g. 6th World Water Forum Platform of Solutions); and iii) are relatively recent (2010-2016). A set of proxies was used to assess the databases, looking in particular at whether practices were "digested"; whether users could submit their own practices (self-sourcing) and leave comments; and whether databases had search fields, maps or multiple languages available.

6.   The analysis highlighted some pros and cons across the databases inventoried. Strengths relate to having practices that are **processed, reviewed, organised coherently, and interactive** (i.e. offer the opportunity to ask for further information, or contact the protagonist/practice provider). Weaknesses relate to having practices that are **too long, unclear, mono-lingual, and of different quality** within a same database. This exercise helped to draw take-away messages in term of:

- *Content of the database*: the database of water governance practices should be clear and consistent, with a format that provides key highlights from the practices as well as further details for interested readers, and which structures practices according to the OECD Principles they relate to, and an extra layer cutting across the Principles to look at horizontal themes and change dynamics.

- *Design of the database*: the database should have an advanced search engine and propose English and French as the minimal available (OECD official) languages. Other languages could be made available depending on in-kind contribution from case promoters or WGI members (as it was done for the translation of the OECD Principles in 16 languages). The choice of including these functionalities, and the costs incurred will also guide the choice of interface (e.g. Wiki format such as the [Restoring Europe's River platform,](#) other open sources, etc.).

7.   Participants agreed that the Working Group should focus on developing the *content* of the database then discuss the *design* and functionalities with a realistic view of the resources needed (i.e. time, money, etc.). They also shared the following points:

- The database should be on **open source** and the Wiki format is one good option to have a standardised/homogenous format. However, the open source may hinder practice providers from sharing lessons from failures and the Working Group should think of creative incentives and different ways of communicating on the database in order to examples of practices that have not worked (e.g. Chatham house rules during peer-review discussions/meetings).

- **Storytelling** will be a critical part of developing the database to ensure that there is a sound narrative that brings all practices together and guides the users. As an example, it was suggested to focus on telling the "story" of putting governance into practice and highlighting the drivers of change in water governance to trigger interest from potential users. It would imply making clear distinctions between water governance challenges, opportunities for improved governance, suggested measures to enhance governance, intended outcomes, lessons learnt from the assessment of impacts, etc.

- Practices could be peer-reviewed and presented in the database under **thematic clusters**, either according to the 3 pillars or the 12 topics of the OECD Principles. Some members of the WGI could be grouped under such clusters based on their expertise and be responsible for preparing the discussions on the practices submitted, vetting them and drawing lessons from them to prepare the discussions at each WGI plenary forum every six months.

- In terms of functionalities, the database should i) allow users to **contact practice providers directly** and to **leave suggestions** of improvement (e.g. "suggestion box"); ii) include a **search engine** (e.g. according to the various information fields of the template for collecting practices such as water functions, level of government, successes, failures, etc.); and iii) **be updated** on a regular basis.

- Given that many WGI members have their own online platforms, the database could act as a "**hub**" or "**meta-database**" drawing from the knowledge and cases that already exist in such platforms rather than starting from scratch, and to avoid duplications and inefficiencies. Promoters of cases that have already been submitted in the past through these channels and considered relevant for the WGI database could be contacted by the platforms' managers to fill in the water governance template as well. WGI members' platforms could also be a useful pool to collect/identify evolving practices.

- It was considered that the database on water governance practices be decentralised and hosted by WGI members (e.g. GWP made a proposal in that direction).

8.   During the discussion, participants concurred that the Working Group should carefully consider what resources are needed to develop and maintain the database, and invited several WGI members with experience in setting-up and managing online platforms to share some lessons, including pitfalls to avoid, during the Working Group's break-out session at the 8th WGI meeting (12-13 January 2017, Rabat):

- GWP's [IWRM Toolbox] was recently the subject of a survey on users' experience, which results will be shared with the Working Group.

- [Water Right Makers] aimed to build an online community of practice among stakeholders working to the implement the human right to water. However, the first version of the website failed to

support the intended dynamic and peer-to-peer approach, leading the NGO to develop a new prototype that is compatible with new technologies and smartphone apps.

- WIN will share some insights on the challenges of managing its online platform, in terms of mobilising resources and keeping it up-to-date over time.

- IWA will share its experience with the Water Wiki and particularly the importance of targeting the right audience when developing the functionalities and deciding the type of information to be included in the database.

Pilot-testing the template to collect best practices

9.   WIN [Teun Bastemeijer] introduced the 7 practices selected from Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa and Latin America to pilot-test the template for collecting practices. These practices concern various water functions (e.g. water quality, water and sanitation services, flood management, etc.); are set at different levels of government (national, regional, basin and local); and have different levels of maturity, ranging from long-standing to innovative cases.

10.   Pilot testing the template helped shed light on a number of shortcomings. While all practices were presented as relevant for more than one OECD Principle, the pilot testers provided **little evidence on how** the practices illustrated the implementation of these Principles. Also, pilot testers had difficulties to demonstrate the **progress achieved** through their practices. Therefore, it was suggested that the template be revised to leave more room for practice providers to specify in what ways their practices are relevant for the OECD Principles and to be more explicit/specific on their implementation process, which implies being familiar with the Principles before filling-in the template, which should not be taken for granted.

11.   Participants who pilot-tested the template shared some insights:

- While the template is relatively **easy to fill** if the provider has the information readily available, it is nevertheless **time-consuming**. Thus, the Working Group should think of **incentives** to encourage the submission of practices (e.g. visibility/acknowledgement of practice providers, etc.).

- The template should cover the issue of **periodicity** to know whether practices are recurrent or one-off experiences.

- The template's information fields are too open. For instance, it was suggested that the template be more specific regarding the **impacts of practices** on different types of stakeholders, particularly water users/customers. Practice providers would benefit from having **detailed guidance** on how to fill-in the template, including on making clear links with the OECD Principles, providing information on the **enabling factors** of the practices; and giving an indication of the **time required** to fill in the template. The guidance could showcase an example of how the template should be filled.

Next steps

12.   Participants were invited to convey any additional written comments on the draft note by **2 December 2016** before the revised version is sent to all WGI members. At the 8th WGI meeting, to be held in Rabat on 12-13 January 2017, delegates will have the opportunity to discuss the role of the Working Group moving forward, in terms of peer-reviewing practices and building the storyline for the database. An item on best practices will be included in the plenary given that both working group breakout sessions will run in parallel in the afternoon of day 2, which may complicate the participation of some.

Annex I: List of participants

Name	Institution	Position
Andrew Ross	Australian National University	Visiting research fellow / consultant
Annette Jantzen	Aqua Publica Europea	Policy and Communication Officer
Aparna Sridhar	The Nature Conservancy	Policy Advisor
Carolina Latorre	IWA	Programmes Officer
Christina Christopolou	CEEP	Member of the CEEP Water Task Force
Claire Grandadam	Water Integrity Network	Communications Coordinator
Elsa Favrot	ENGIE	Governance and Dialogue Manager
Enora Philippe	The Nature Conservancy	Executive Assistant, Freshwater Latin America
Eunkyoung Kim	Permanent delegation of Korea to the OECD	Environment delegate
Fiona Parker	Shephed and Wedderburn	Analyst - Regulation and Markets
François Brikke	Global Water Partnership (GWP)	Senior Network Officer
Gari Villa-Landa Sokolova	AEAS	Head of International Affairs
Gonzalo Delacamara	IMDEA Water	Senior Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Water Economics Group
Jenny Gronwall	SIWI	Programme Manager
Joannie Leclerc	SUEZ	Governance and dialogue manager
Julissa Kiyenje	GWOPA	Research Consultant
Kevin Collins	Open University	Expert
Luke Wilson	Center for Water Security and Cooperation	Deputy Director
Maggie White	Water Right Makers	President, Co-founder
Marcus Heiss	Austrian Asso. of public services and enterprises	Water Supply Expert
Michael Eichholz	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	Policy Advisor
Sarah Hendry	University of Dundee	Senior Lecturer
Scott Rodger	Shepherd and Wedderburn	Analyst - Regulation and Markets
Sophie Richard	AgroParisTech	Head of Water Management Section
Susana Neto	University of Lisbon	Researcher
Tadashige Kawasaki	Network of Asian River Basin Organisations	Secretariat
Teun Bastemeijer	Water Integrity Network	Chief Advisor

Annex II: Agenda of the webinar

1. Insights from the Short Survey on water governance practices (35 min)

- Introduction (5 min)
- Discussion with participants (20 min) :
  - Are there critical questions not covered by the Survey and previous webinar which require attention?
  - Which method/criteria to peer-review and select best practices?
  - How can we ensure that best practices are "replicable"?
- Reactions/responses from the co-ordinators (10 min)

2. Inventory of existing databases (35 min)

- Introduction (5 min)
- Discussion with participants (20 min) :
  - Is there any relevant database not included in the inventory which requires attention and why?
  - Who should host the Database? Under which format (e.g. Wiki, etc.)?
  - How should the Database be moderated (i.e. submission of practices, comments/feedback from users)?
- Reactions/responses from the co-ordinators (10 min)

3. Pilot-testing the template to collect best practices (35 min)

- Introduction (5 min)
- Discussion with participants (20 min) :
  - Is there anything missing in the Template or any way it can be further simplified?
  - Which incentives can be set for submitting best practices?
  - How can we link the selection of best practices to the work on water governance indicators?
- Reactions/responses from the co-ordinators (10 min)

4. Ways forward (15 min)