

**UNEP GEMS/Water Programme
Fourth Steering Committee Meeting
Monday July 3rd, 2006
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
on the margins of
UNESCO-IHP Intergovernmental Council
Minutes**

Present

Dr. Salif Diop, UNEP-DEWA (chair)
Dr. Richard Robarts, Director GEMS/Water Programme (co-chair)
A. Szollosi-Nagy, Director, ADG UNESCO Water Science Division
A.K. Nakarigakis, UNESCO, Windhoek, Namibia
Prof. M. Zalewski, Director, International Centre for Ecology, Academy of Sciences; Poland
Dr. E. Craswell, Executive Director, Global Water System Project, Germany
M. Bonell; Former UNESCO Senior Programme Officer
E. Naah, Regional Coordinator, UNESCO, Nairobi
S. Puri, UNEP DGEF, Liaison office in Paris - UNESCO
L. Hiwasaki, Assistant Programme Specialist, UNESCO - Paris

Apologies

Dr. Jean-Marc Faurès, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
Wolfgang Grabs, World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
Dr. Jamie Bartram, World Health Organization (WHO)
Dr. Pradeep Aggarwal, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
Dr. Veerle Vandeweerd, UNEP-GPA

Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee will consist of representatives from GEMS/Water, UNEP, WHO, UNESCO, WMO, IAEA, and FAO, while an invitation to UNDP remains outstanding. It will meet each year in association with UN-Water and be chaired jointly by GEMS/Water and UNEP. This Committee will focus on GEMS/Water's role in, and contributions to, UN water programmes. From this perspective it will provide overall strategic advice and direction. The SC will also ensure that GEMS/Water fits UNEP's terms under the MoU, i.e., GEMS/Water works within the framework of DEWA, set out a strategic vision to 2008 and facilitate strategic issues and linkages with UN bodies.

1.0 Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Dr. Diop, UNEP, and Dr. Robarts, GEMS/Water, jointly opened the meeting, and welcomed participants to the fourth Steering Committee meeting.

In his introductory remarks, A. Szöllösi-Nagy, ADG UNESCO, made some key points, including:

- The need for a closer relationship and cooperation between UNESCO/IHP and GEMS/Water Programme;
- The need for closer linkage with WWAP and WWDR process as well as with Ecohydrology Programme with GEMS/Water Programme
- The importance to increase the scientific aspects of the WWDR in close cooperation with GEMS/Water Programme;
- As the new European Centre for Ecohydrology is opened in Lodz, Poland, to ensure continued collaboration with UNEP GEMS/Water Programme;
- In response to A. Szöllösi-Nagy remarks, R. Robarts ensured that there will be a continuity in terms of cooperation between GEMS/Water Programme and UNESCO/IHP in particular in the framework of the Ecohydrology Programme and activities; the reason why this MOU was signed between UNESCO-IHP and UNEP GEMS/Water Programme.

2.0 Roundtable Introduction of Members

Representatives were invited to introduce themselves, and introductory information was shared. The essential component of the Steering Committee is that its members enable strategic linkages and coordination related to GEMS/Water's role in the UN system.

3.0 Third Meeting of the Steering Committee

The previous Steering Committee meeting took place in Addis Ababa in December 2003. Proceedings of the meeting were recorded in minutes, which were distributed in spring 2004.

4.0 2002-2007 Strategic Business Plan v.3

Dr. Robarts presented an overview of the revised Business Plan, including a status report on its implementation and activities. The purpose of the update was two-fold: to inform members of recent activities, and to seek endorsement of proposed strategic direction and forward agenda.

- The key reasons why GEMS/Water remains essential for water assessments that are increasingly global in scope is that the key environmental issues become more global in nature, and there is an urgent need to alleviate poverty in the developing world;
- Increasing numbers of participating countries to GEMS/Water Programme – the number of countries not participating is now smaller than the number participating;
- Increasing GEMS/Water activities related to capacity building and youth involvement in current activities e.g. in Egypt and LAC regions;
- A new turn with GEMStat and the availability of global water quality database to participating countries, including a suite of web based services, series of metadata and statistical data;

- The increasing integration of water quantity and water quality and the possibility for countries to develop their own statistical data management;
- The possible linkage with Google Earth in order to get better geographical locations of various monitoring GEMS/Water stations; and
- The need for raising additional resources in order to run more efficiently the overall GEMS/Water Programme.

In terms of outlook, R. Robarts underscored the need that GEMS/Water should remain a science-driven programme within the UN system, and its main activities will continue to be in demand. At the same time, in anticipating future trends, the programme will need to re-orient itself to become:

- Focused far more on assessments and research (to produce authoritative reviews and analyses and demonstrate that the value GEMStat in assessing global environmental change) than just data collection;
- Provide data gateway function more than a data warehouse
- Be interoperable at international levels;
- In addition to statistics from national governments, include raw data from NGOs (i.e., universities), designated as Collaborating Focal Points; and
- The need for a greater diversity of data (pathogen data in partnership with WHO, biological data including toxicological data, a broader range of organic data, sediment quality data, etc) and increase timeliness of the data, since assessments based on data older than a year have limited value.

The point was stressed that participation in GEMS/Water is voluntary and at no cost. While there is universal agreement that we need more and better data to address the urgent environmental issues that face the world, there is still a lack of commitment on the part of too many countries to actively fulfill their simple commitments to GEMS/Water – a means to rectify this situation is needed.

The main points of discussions that followed were focused on:

- The need to move from data gathering to research/science – recognition as an authoritative centre on global water issues;
- The need for sustainable long term funding for GEMS/Water Programme – decreased dependency on a single (Canadian) government source;
- The IHP offer in terms of a closer cooperation on research and monitoring
- The need for a more holistic approach, e.g., interventions on the interface of surface/groundwater measurements, including research in terms of flux measurements;
- Suggestions to increase cooperation with GEF and to consider water quality problems related to megacities, dams, near-shore marine environments to, amongst other things, the assessment of disasters, and management impacts, laboratory checking, data assessment, increased relationship with IGRAC and issues related to capacity building needs in developing countries; and
- The question of the data format was raised as well by participants.

R. Robarts provided a series of responses to those questions raised and considered some of the issues raised as useful guidance and recommendations to consider in the future of the GEMS/Water Programme.

5.0 UNEP-NWRI/Canada 2002 MoU

UNEP and Canada agreed in their 2002 Johannesburg MoU that the UN GEMS/Water Programme Office would be headquartered at the National Water Research Institute (NWRI), upgrading the status from “collaborating centre” in Canada. The Canadian government committed CDN \$1.5 million over three years to the General Trust Fund under UNEP.

A brief status report of the MoU and update was provided. Implementation is in progress. Further details will be provided in the future, as implementation activities get further developed.

6.0 Second Technical Advisory Group Report

UNEP convened the second GEMS/Water TAG meeting, 2 to 4 May 2005 at International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. Opening remarks were made by Werner Burkhart, Deputy Secretary General, IAEA, followed by Pradeep Aggarwal, Isotope Hydrology Section, IAEA, and Kshitij M. Kulkarni, also of the Isotope Hydrology Section, IAEA. The meeting brought together technical and scientific experts from 11 UN counterparts and other partners.

Much appreciation was expressed to Dr. Burkhart and to IAEA for their support and for hosting this meeting and the following indicators workshop.

The TAG meeting discussions led to the accomplishment of three central objectives:

1. Agreement and support for the direction and core activities articulated in the new strategic business plan; and the approach is sound, from a scientific and technical perspective.
2. Ideas and new projects to develop alone or in partnership with other organizations – especially new technologies and database sources.
3. Commitment from members to promote GEMS/Water through their respective networks and partners.

Details and plans for fulfilling these objectives are being compiled in the second *Technical Advisory Paper No.2: Goals and Targets for Global Water Quality Assessment*, with commitments and follow-up recorded in the minutes. These two documents are the main products of the meeting. The Third TAG meeting is scheduled for September 2006.

7.0 International Agenda, UN Activities

The international water agenda and commitments are influencing GEMS/Water's policies and priorities. For example, UNEP has given GEMS/Water responsibility for coordinating water quality indicators work, and leading on the ecosystem component of the WWDR. GEMS/Water is an observer of UN-Water. However, this high-level agenda has not derailed GEMS/Water's ongoing collaborations with UN agencies, at the operational level.

For example, GEMS/Water coordinates station and data collection issues with the Global Runoff Data Centre of WMO, which collects water quantity data and information. Both programmes promote each other.

Extensive collaborative partnerships are undertaken under the auspices of UNESCO. The largest activity area involves training with UNESCO-IHP, and this has been strengthened with the new MoU. There are also the International Sedimentation Initiative, the Ecohydrology programme, and the International Science Initiative, all with UNESCO.

Another UN agency with strong partnership links with GEMS/Water activities is IAEA. The Analytical Methods Dictionary contains a contribution on IAEA radioisotope methodologies. IAEA also contributed funding to enable the participation of 15 developing countries in the Performance Evaluation study.

The WHO is another collaborating agency. The WHO is linked to human health and pathogens work as they relate to water quality.

There are collaborations within the UNEP Secretariat, including but not limited to the GEO, AEO, Water Policy, GRID-Arendal, DEWA-NA, as well as within the UNEP water family, such as UCC-Water, GPA, etc.; in which GEMS/Water provides water quality information. There are regional initiatives, for example with ILEC on African lakes; the Vulnerability of African water resources to environmental change Study, and a groundwater workshop which took place in Capetown last December.

UNEP and other SC members should help promote GEMS/Water to the international community, and identify new ideas and projects of mutual and common benefit.

8.0 Financial Status

The General Trust Fund for GEMS/Water was established under the auspices of UNEP in 2002, with an initial contribution from Canada of \$1.5 million over three years. There is effort underway to ensure that the Canadian commitment is secured for the long term. While other sources would be beneficial, it will be difficult to get other countries to contribute to the fund.

Financial resources have been gratefully received from UNESCO and IAEA.

9.0 Recommendations/actions to be Taken

For the follow-up in terms of continuing funding of GEMS/Water Programme through the Government of Canada, a letter will be drafted for UNEP Executive Director's signature.

Follow-up of further strengthening GEMS/Water Assessment and monitoring activities and publications. The first draft of GEMS/Water e-Atlas of Global water quality is scheduled before the end of August 2006.

A closer cooperation with UN agencies and other key partners was recommended:

10. Closure

The next Steering Committee meeting should take place in approximately 18 months' time, co-located with another meeting related to UN-Water. All the participants were thanked for their contributions, particularly UNESCO-IHP for hosting the meeting.

**UNEP GEMS/Water Programme
Steering Committee
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