GEF IW:LEARN

Welcome Guide

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IW:LEARN 5

Welcome Guide

Introduction

Welcome to GEF IW:LEARN, a global project and a service dedicated to fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, capacity development and partnership-building within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters (IW) focal area. Our goal is to support the GEF IW project portfolio in addressing common challenges related to the management of shared transboundary waters and their ecosystems, including river basins, lakes, groundwater, Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) and the ocean.

As a key connector among diverse stakeholders – such as project teams in executing agencies, implementing agencies, government project counterparts, decision makers, civil society, academia and the private sector - GEF IW:LEARN serves a global hub for learning, exchange, capacity development and innovation on transboundary water management.

GEF IW:LEARN has grown from a pilot project in the early 2000s into a dynamic knowledge management hub and an essential cross-cutting service for the GEF IW portfolio. Over the years, it has curated knowledge from more than 500 IW projects, transforming lessons learned into best practices, methodologies, and practical tools. By fostering learning, networking, and partnerships, IW:LEARN enhances the collective impact of the portfolio.

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As a central knowledge platform, IW:LEARN hosts over 5,000 resources, including project results and flagship IW publications. It offers a suite of services ranging from knowledge management and capacity development to website and communication toolkits. The platform connects the IW portfolio through virtual and in-person training, twinning exchanges, and thematic dialogues. It also amplifies outreach of project news and achievements via monthly bulletins, targeted communications, and social media channels.

To date, IW:LEARN has delivered significant results, including over 60 global and regional training workshops, 37 project twinning exchanges, 12 regional transboundary dialogues, and 10 biennial International Waters Conferences (IWCs)—the portfolio's flagship learning event.

As a new member of the IW community, you are joining a vibrant network of practitioners eager to share experiences and learn from one another. IW:LEARN is here to support you in navigating common challenges, connecting with peers, and accessing the tools, solutions, and best practices developed across the portfolio. Your insights and contributions are valuable in shaping this collective knowledge, helping to advance sustainable management of transboundary water resources and their ecosystems worldwide.

GEF IW:LEARN

The Welcome Guide

This guide serves as your introduction to GEF IW:LEARN, outlining the wide range of services available to support your GEF IW project. It highlights ways to actively engage, contribute to knowledge exchange, and replicate successful approaches across the portfolio and beyond.

As you explore the opportunities within IW:LEARN, we invite you to become an active part of this global community, working together to promote the sustainable management of international waters.

Welcome aboard! Together, let's shape the future of international waters management!

1. ABOUT GEF IW:LEARN?

1.1. What is IW:LEARN?

IW:LEARN stands for the GEF's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network. It is a global knowledge sharing platform dedicated to collecting, curating and disseminating best practices, lessons learned, and innovative solutions across the GEF IW portfolio.

Beyond knowledge exchange, IW:LEARN develops practical guidance, methodologies, and capacity-development tools to help projects translate knowledge into tangible results with positive impact on the ground.

As a central hub for collaboration, IW:LEARN connects projects, practitioners, and regions, through a diverse range of activities that provide targeted support for improved management of shared transboundary water systems. Additionally, it links the GEF IW projects to global processes and frameworks, and key regional and basin-level partners, ensuring they remain connected to broader international efforts.

1.2. What are IW:LEARN's Mission and Vision?

The mission of IW:LEARN is to facilitate the knowledge exchange, foster collaboration, and provide resources that empower stakeholders within the GEF IW focal area, strengthening the impact of the GEF IW portfolio.

IW:LEARN envisions becoming the globally recognized and trusted platform that catalyzes positive change in transboundary water management by promoting collaboration, innovation, and sharing of experiences among stakeholders within the GEF International Waters and beyond.

1.3. What are the key objectives of IW:LEARN?

IW:LEARN aims to strengthen the impact and sustainability of the GEF International Waters (IW) portfolio by enabling projects to leverage collective knowledge, build partnerships, and align with global best practices. Its key objectives include:

- **Enhancing Knowledge Management: Collects, curates, and disseminates lessons learned, best practices, and innovative solutions to improve transboundary water management.**
- **Supporting Capacity Development: Provides training, methodologies, and guidance to empower stakeholders in effectively implementing GEF IW projects**
- **Promoting Innovation & Best Practices: Supports the adoption of proven approaches while embracing new tools and methodologies.**
- **Facilitating Collaboration & Peer Learning: This role connects project teams, practitioners, and decision-makers through exchanges, dialogues, and knowledge-sharing events.**
- **Supporting the GEF International Waters Focal Area Strategy: Supports the portfolio to align with evolving priorities and improve cooperative management of existing and new shared freshwater and marine ecosystems to achieve long-term benefits.**
- **Strengthening Regional & Global Integration: Links GEF IW projects to international frameworks, regional governance processes, and key partners to promote coordinated action.**

Further to these, in its 5th phase of IW:LEARN focuses on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and addresses priorities such as the blue economy, integrated resource management from ridge-to-reef, protected areas, and climate resilience.

1.4. Who are we?

IW:LEARN is funded by Global Environment Facility (GEF), implemented by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and executed (Phase 4 and 5) by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO IOC).

IW:LEARN runs in cycles and it is currently in its 5th phase, from 2022 to 2026, also known as **IW:LEARN 5.**

Implementing modalities of IW:LEARN 5

The current phase IW:LEARN is delivered through the Project Coordination Unit (PCU), with guidance by the Project Steering

Committee (PSC). As in every GEF IW project, the PSC formally supervises all activities undertaken by the PCU, providing strategic direction, guidance, and assessment to maximize the project's execution delivery, relevance, and impact on its beneficiaries. The PSC of IW:LEARN 5 includes the Development Partners, UNDP and UNEP, the Project Executive (GEF Secretariat), the Executing Agency, IOC/UNESCO and 2 IW project representatives on rotating basis.

Project Coordination Unit (PCU)

The PCU, headquartered at UNESCO IOC in Paris, plays the central role in project coordination and implementation. It comprises of the Project Coordinator, the Project Manager and the Administrative Assistant, while further experts support specific functions, such as Knowledge Management, Communications and IT services.

The contact details of the PCU, are as follows:

• PCU: pcu@iwlearn.org

• Konstantina Toli, IW:LEARN Project Coordinator, konstantina@iwlearn.org

• Claudette Briere Spiteri, IW:LEARN Project Manager, claudette@iwlearn.org

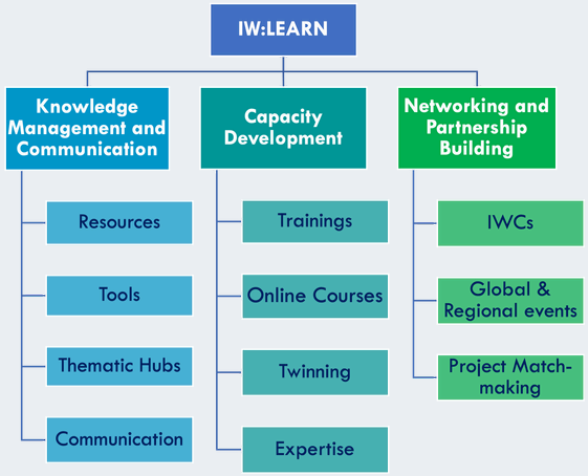
• Malek Ameri, IW:LEARN Administrative Assistant, malek@iwlearn.org

• Maria Camila León, Knowledge Management and Communications, maria-camila@iwlearn.org

• Sofia Tzavella, Project Support Specialist, sofia@iwlearn.org

2. WHAT DOES IW:LEARN OFFER?

IW:LEARN offers three main lines of service: i. Knowledge Management and Communication; ii. Capacity Development and iii. Networking and Partnership Building. The full structure is presented in the following diagram.



2.1. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

2.1.1 Resources

The IW:LEARN website is a comprehensive repository, serving as a valuable resource for both current and past GEF IW projects. This platform facilitates the access to the Project Database, Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), Strategic Action Programme (SAP) Databases, methodologies, manuals, notes, and many more relevant resources. Through these resources the IW:LEARN website acts as a hub for knowledge-sharing, enabling stakeholders to explore and contribute to the collective understanding of transboundary water management initiatives. Note that the TDA and SAP databases are currently being updated.

I. Project Database
II. TDA Database
III. SAP Database

IV. Methodological approaches:

- TDA/SAP Methodology (latest version published in 2020)
- Methodological Approach for the establishment and sustaining of a Regional Dialogue and Community of Practice on Transboundary Water Resources Management

V. Methodological Approaches coming up during the period 2025-2026:

- Enhancement of the TDA/SAP Methodology to integrate Source-to-Sea management considerations
- Guidance on how to use Nexus investments to reinforce Strategic Action Programs, including supplemental guidance in the TDA/SAP Methodology
- Integration of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Blue Economy in the TDA/SAP
- Enhancement of the TDA/SAP Methodology to integrate gender mainstreaming considerations.

VI. Manuals and Guidance:

- Project Management Manual
- Public-Private Partnerships Guidebook
- Mainstreaming Climate Guidance
- GEF Guidance to Economic Valuation of Ecosystem Services in IW projects

VII. Experience and Results Notes:

- Experience Notes help the transboundary water management community share its practical experiences to promote best practices and lessons learned. Experience Note is a case study that describes a project experience or innovation. It usually consists of three to six pages and provides details about successful practices, approaches, strategies, lessons, methodologies, etc., that emerge in the context of transboundary water management. They cover a range of topics related to project management, stakeholder involvement, technical issues, demonstration projects, and more. You can create and submit your IW:LEARN Experience Note directly here.

- Results Notes are targeted aggregations of key results of projects in terms of stress reduction, process, and change in environmental status in a concise way. Further guidance on the production of a GEF IW Results Note is available here.

VIII. Synthesis Reports: They further distill and integrate the key findings of the projects and outcomes from project reports, summarizing and interpreting the information and drawing conclusions for other types of readers, including policymakers.

Experience, Results Notes, and Synthesis Reports are available under Documents and can be filtered by region, waterbody thematic tag, and language. They can also be found on the respective project's profile page and via the Portfolio Visualization Tools.

IX. Other useful resources:

- GEF policies
  GEF Strategy for KM & Learning
  GEF Policy on Communication and Visibility
  GEF8 Programming Directions
  GEF Brand Guidelines

- GEF Geospatial platform

2.1.2. Tools

The IW:LEARN website offers a suite of powerful tools to elevate water resources management and amplify the impact of GEF IW investments. Furthermore, it offers a suite of tools to support the implementation of GEF IW projects.

I. Website toolkit: The Website Toolkit offers support for developing a dynamic content management system that is connected to and searchable through IW:LEARN's International Waters Information Management System. This network provides access to high-quality data and information and ensures that it is disseminated to a broader community of stakeholders. The Website Toolkit aligns with the GEF IW Website guidelines, which give GEF IW projects consistent guidance for designing and redesigning their project websites. A central feature of these guidelines is a comprehensive checklist that distinguishes between mandatory and recommended items. Mandatory items are non-negotiable and must be implemented to meet IW:LEARN compliance requirements, while recommended items are optional but represent best practices for enhancing functionality, user experience and overral impact

By adhering to these guidelines, projects can ensure their websites meet IW:LEARN standards while maximizing effectiveness and accessibility.

II. Marine toolkits: Marine Toolkits were developed by the GEF-funded LME:LEARN project (2016-2019) to assist GEF projects and others working in marine-related focal areas to improve their capacity to prepare and manage their respective projects effectively. They are targeted knowledge-sharing and programmatic guidance products to support GEF Large Marine Ecosystems (LME) projects, as well as other GEF Intercoastal Management (ICM), Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) projects:

- Data and Information Management
- Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Policy Toolkit
- Environmental Economics for Marine Ecosystem ManagementToolkit
- Large Marine Ecosystems Strategic Approach Toolkit
- Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Toolkit
- Large Marine Ecosystems Governance Toolkit
- LME Scorecard
- LME Project Cycle Toolkit

2.1.3. Thematic Hubs

Thematic hubs offer curated collections of resources, tools, information, and documents as a dedicated one-stop-shop on various themes:

- Marine Hub
- Groundwater and Conjunctive Management Hub

- Gender Hub
- Private Sector Engagement Hub
- Economic Valuation of “wet” ecosystems Hub

Thematic hubs coming up in the period 2025-2026:

- Nexus Hub
- SIDS Hub
- Communications Hub

2.1.4. Communication and Outreach

IW:LEARN actively supports communications by building the capacities of the projects on communicating effectively, and outreach of project results and achievements by curating and disseminating compelling stories and information through the monthly IW Portfolio Bulletin featuring these also on the website and all social media channels. Furthermore, a dedicated section on iwlearn.net features the latest news and important events for the GEF IW: LEARN water community.

I. Portfolio Bulletin: This dynamic platform consistently highlights the latest developments, achievements, and events within the GEF IW community. Whether it is a concise update, a brief story, or a comprehensive feature, all contributions are warmly welcome to make this bulletin a vibrant source of updates for the entire community. The IW:LEARN comms team sends a call for contributions with themes and submission deadlines every month. The story submission template is available here.
(Sign up to our newsletter here)

- News
- Stories
- Events : Webinars and Global Outreach

In the current phase, IW:LEARN launched a series of Communications Webinars with its partners ICPDR and GRID-Arendal, the IW:LEARN Comms Lab Series, which aims to support the portfolio to improve their communications skills for increased outreach and enhanced impact. Furthermore, a Communications toolkit was developed and disseminated among the vibrant IW Communications community, with practical guidance and tools to improve and amplify the project communications.

IW:LEARN captures the achievements and impact of the GEF IW projects in various formats, including features in social media, compendiums of best practices, and other publications. The most recent visualization tool, showcasing the impact of GEF IW projects on the ground is the GEF IW:LEARN Story Map.

You can find IW:LEARN online presence here:
https://linktr.ee/iwlearn

If you want us to reshare your content, please tag us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X.

2.2 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development is a core function of IW:LEARN, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and long-term impact of GEF IW projects worldwide. Through a multifaceted approach, IW:LEARN offers tailored

opportunities for learning, knowledge exchange, and skill-building to strengthen stakeholder capacities in transboundary water management.

2.2.1. Trainings and Workshops

IW:LEARN facilitates regional experience-sharing and training workshops for GEF IW projects and partners in the Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America—Caribbean regions. These workshops are based on cross-cutting themes facilitated by IW:LEARN project partners.

2.2.2. Online Courses

As part of the GEF IW:LEARN's capacity development initiative, free online courses are offered on iwlearn.net. These courses are developed by IW:LEARN, LME:LEARN, and partners. Explore topics such as transboundary freshwater governance, Large Marine Ecosystems Assessment and Management, Sustainable Tourism and Stakeholder Networking for SIDS and more.

2.2.3. Twinning

IIW:LEARN facilitates learning exchanges, known as twinning, among GEF IW and other partners. These exchanges provide practical solutions to common management and technical challenges while fostering collaboration among project teams. Twinning typically involves on-site visits, where one project exchanges within another to share knowledge, expertise, and best practices.

2.2.4. Expertise

IW:LEARN is currently compiling rosters of experts from the International Waters Community to respond to portfolio needs for expertise.

2.3 NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

2.3.1 IWCs

The GEF IWC is the signature learning event for the GEF International Waters portfolio of projects and partners aiming to facilitate cross-sectoral and portfolio-wide learning and experience sharing. The latest edition, IWC10, convened nearly 400 participants, including GEF IW project managers, institutional stakeholders from beneficiary countries, non-governmental and civil society organizations, transboundary and regional management institutions, UN agencies, Development Banks, Intergovernmental Organizations, and the private sector. Collectively they represented more than 90 active GEF IW projects, from 72 countries and various GEF Agencies.

2.3.2. Global & Regional events

IW:LEARN supports participation in global and regional dialogues and policy meetings, such as the World Water Forum, the Stockholm World Water Week, the UN Ocean Conferences, and others, to showcase portfolio results via side events and exhibitions, as well as to build partnerships between GEF interventions and with actors outside the focal area.

2.3.3. Project Matchmaking

Project Matchmaking is an envisaged service by IW:LEARN 5 building on the concept of the Learning Exchange Service Centre (LESC), launched in IW:LEARN 4. LESC served as a market place for coordinating and sharing learning activities offered by our partner network and GEF IW projects, while the project matchmaking service will help identify partners and knowledge providers to support existing and new projects.

3. HOW CAN YOU ENGAGE WITH IW:LEARN ?

All GEF IW projects allocate 1% of their overall budget for portfolio learning and sharing. This fund allocation should be utilized for:

- Participation in IWCs: Recommended minimum attendance of the GEF IW project manager/coordinator and two project country representatives.
- Participation in regional and global IW:LEARN workshops,
- Elaboration of at least 2 Experience Notes,
- Cost-sharing of other IW:LEARN activities, as needed.

3.1 How are projects expected to contribute:

I. Fulfill obligations by sharing essential documentation, significant reports, and key knowledge management products:

- Essential documentation: PIF, Project Document, Mid-term and Terminal Evaluation Reports
- Technical and management documents: TDA/SAP, etc.
- A minimum of two Experience Notes.
- Knowledge management products developed by the project.

II. Contribute to the Portfolio Bulletin by sharing compelling stories, noteworthy news, and details about upcoming events. Anyone may easily sign up to receive the bulletin monthly here and find previous issues here.

III. Regularly update contact of the project PCU and important updates and changes in the project status.

3.2 How can projects engage:

- Actively participate in IW:LEARN training sessions, workshops, conferences, and events. Projects are invited to make their own presentations at workshops and may also suggest other partners to invite to the workshop or consultants to present on various topics.
- Foster exchanges with the IW:LEARN PCU and connect with peers.
- Engage in the IWCs: co-organise sessions, contribute to other sessions, feature results and innovations in the exhibition area, submit films and other outputs in the competitions, etc.
- Participate and contribute to regional training sessions, including by featuring their experience and expertise on various themes.
- Explore twinning exchanges and collaborate on proposals. Projects participating in twinnings are asked to complete a Mission Report and Experience Note after their exchange.

- Utilize available tools, including project visualization and Geonode for project-related data and spatial information.
- Contribute to manuals, methodologies, and guides, providing inputs, feedback, and suggestions and contributing case studies or documentation.
- Project managers and GEF IW staff are invited to give feedback and suggestions on the Project Management Manual or submit case studies, example ToRs, or other documentation supporting the information in the manual to be included in the document library.

IW:LEARN is a unique service for the GEF IW portfolio. Engage with IW:LEARN to amplify your impact, exchange knowledge, and be part of a thriving global community!

IW:LEARN Project Coordination Unit (PCU) at IOC/UNESCO

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Website: https://iwlearn.net

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