

GEF IWC9

9th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference

Groundwater Clinic: “How to make visible the invisible? Tools to raise the profile of groundwater from local to global”

Report – UNESCO IHP

Objectives and results of the in-clinic survey

The objective of the session was to answer to the needs and gaps identified by participants in terms of groundwater governance. Two rounds of 40 min starting with a 10 min presentation of Ms Alice Aureli, Chief of Section ‘Groundwater Systems and Settlements’, UNESCO IHP, took place. More than 20 participants attended each round, with full positive answer to the question “Has the clinic session helped increase your understanding of the pre-identified challenges and your subsequent capacity to implement appropriate tools and solutions?”.

Main messages coming from clinic discussion, gaps participants identified during the clinic and possible way forward

- Despite groundwater resources are extensively used and have a vital role to sustain the environment, they are “invisible” to policy-makers and there is a lack of governance or policy specifically dedicated to groundwater.
- The need of basic raw data, such as water table level, was highlighted by several participants (“you have to measure to manage”). The opportunity to have monitoring supported by the GEF IW process was discussed. In particular, despite the general approach for the TDA, which should be based on the existing data at the start of the project, in many cases there is a lack of data for transboundary aquifers and monitoring is crucial. A conclusion is that there should be a balance between “monitoring as a long-term responsibility of countries” and “lack of basic information”.
- The issue of data sharing and information exchange was identified as key, both at the level of interaction between countries (in that case, it is necessary to have the information at the political level) and at the local level, where locally-based project can have difficulty to have access to data, including from governmental sources / ministries. Engagement with local authorities was recommended.

- In terms of tool to improve the integration of groundwater in GEF IW project, the following were identified:
 - Isotopic studies;
 - Demonstration through pilot cases and capacity-building (considered as essential to make groundwater visible at the political level);
 - Maps and online information management systems;
 - Use of data and conclusions of previous projects, such as the Groundwater Governance Project (<http://www.groundwatergovernance.org/>).
- A main tool to identify the status of transboundary aquifers globally is the UNESCO inventory established in the framework of the ISARM Programme, which was recently supported by the GEF IW through the TWAP Project. 592 Transboundary Aquifers, including 366 outside European Union are identified.
- Only 6 agreements between riparian countries are dedicated to transboundary aquifers. Monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2 constitutes an opportunity to raise the interest of countries to establish operational arrangements taking into account transboundary groundwater.
- Further discussions have identified several topics / tools as key for groundwater sustainability, such as:
 - the enforcement of policies and regulation;
 - the necessary involvement of users through users association;
 - transboundary agreements to manage groundwater;
 - the protection of groundwater quantity and quality when developing irrigation projects, and the promotion of equitable use between countries (e.g. case of Nepal and India shared by a participant).

