

Webinar of WGI’s Working Group on “Best Practices”

25 April 2016 – 4 to 6pm, CEST

Highlights from Discussions

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Background

1. The webinar gathered 29 participants from 13 countries (see list of participants in Annex I) to kick-off the activities of WGI's working group on best practices led by OECD, SIWI, WIN and Suez. The objective was to scope the activities to be carried out over 2016-2018 and seek guidance from members on the proposals made by the Secretariat to that effect. Prior to the meeting, a draft scoping note was shared with registered participants to frame the discussions on how the identification, collection and dissemination of best practices can support the implementation of the *OECD Principles on Water Governance* in interested countries, basins and cities through peer-to-peer dialogue and bench-learning. The webinar started by a short presentation on the objective, composition and role of the Working Group, as well as a summary of the scoping note prepared ahead of the meeting with a particular focus on 10 questions to be addressed prior to starting the work:

- What can/should be considered a best practice and by whom?
- Beyond showcasing best practices, how to learn from failures as “pitfalls to avoid”?
- What does already exist and where can the WGI bring value?
- What do stakeholders and decision-makers need when searching for best practice?
- How to collect best practices?
- What is the best way to showcase best practices (by principles, scale, water function, etc.)?
- Is replicability an issue?
- How to disclose the information?
- How to make sure that best practices are fact-based and how to check the information?
- What timeframe?

2. The participants were then invited to react one-by-one to the questions posed by the Secretariat in the Agenda (see Agenda in Annex II). Overall, strong support was provided to the proposals made by the co-ordinators in the scoping note. In addition, several valuable suggestions were made to fill some of the gaps or issues overlooked. Several calls were made to foster, to the extent possible, the synergies between the working group on best practices and the working group on indicators, arguing that the implementation of the OECD Principles relies on both legs concomitantly.

Key insights from discussions

A call to clarify the terminology: best practices, good practices, best-fit, solutions

3. Several participants invited the Secretariat to clarify the terminology to avoid the risks of interpretation of what “good” or “best” means. There was consensus on the broad approach proposed in the scoping note to collect world class examples and to capture as much as possible attempts and processes at reforming governance. Some participants stated that “best” practices involved if not a judgmental value, the implicit understanding that there is an assessment framework (e.g. set of criteria and indicators) against which a given practice can be considered among the “best” ones. It was also stated that what may be good or best in a given territory may not so in other circumstances. Participants therefore called for a more nuanced or neutral wording, and several proposals revolved around “**best-fit**” to address the place-based concerns, “**practices**” without qualification, or “**solutions**”. The last two options would also allow capturing responses to a given problem that governance, as a means to an end, is intended to solve. In addition to inviting the working group to develop a clear framework for collecting practices, some participants suggested that a two-fold approach may be needed to collect in the first instance a wide range of examples/illustrations for each of the 12 principles, and consider in a second stage the assessment or distinction of those considered “good” or “best” once the water governance indicators are developed and in place.

The need to capture examples from what works, but also pitfalls to avoid

4. Participants concurred that the working group should also strive to capture “failures” or “poor experiences” in water governance, for decision-makers and stakeholders to draw lessons from them. Given the reluctance to share such experiences, the wording should be turned into a more positive language, e.g. “**pitfalls to avoid**” or “**challenges**”, or “**difficulties**”. These testimonies should be captured as part of a broader reflection of a process or journey to improve governance frameworks over time. Starting from the identification of **governance gaps** could also be a good way to identify “**solutions**” that worked in a given context, at a particular scale and/or with a range of stakeholders. The rationale is primarily to shed light on an improvement or learning process keeping in mind that solutions, which arise in specific places/time/context/situations run the risk of being considered and adopted without consideration of the context.

Peer-reviewing and discussing practices to be collected can help fact-checking

5. Also linked to the question of terminology was the need or not for a peer-review to ensure that data provided by informants are correct and fact-based. It was noted that if the exercise of collecting practices relied on **self-sourcing** from a range of stakeholders at different levels, they could not be qualified as “best” or “good” by default as no “selection” would be made as long as they match the different criteria to be stated in the template. The group agreed that in the first step, the objective is to collect as many practices as possible to inform different experiences and policy options for each of the 12 Principles. This implies a rather large database to be built over time, hence the difficulty for the secretariat and coordinators of the working group to check the validity of every practice submitted. While the “**ethical**” nature of the exercise of supplying unbiased information with honesty was emphasised not to jeopardise the credibility of the exercise, the group converged that avoiding to use the words “best” or “good” would also prevent a situation whereby featuring a given practice in the database could be considered by the informant as a “label” or “certification” by the OECD or WGI. Participants converged that the objective of the working group should go beyond “collecting” practices but also to provide avenues where these can be discussed. Such a peer-review, in addition to helping draw lessons from experience in terms of what a practice is intending to address, appears as a good mechanism to **cluster practices** that address similar types of challenges, thus somewhat contributing to **fact-checking**. Ultimately, the final recipient or reader is also well-placed to judge, beyond the peer-review.

Practices should be disclosed and searchable by principle, water function and scale

6. Participants agreed that the systemic framework of the **12 Principles** should be guiding the data collection and disclosure in order to support their implementation. In addition, and given the specificities of sub-sectors, the practices should also be searchable by **water management function** (e.g. flood protection, drinking water supply, wastewater treatment, hydropower, irrigation, etc.) and by **scale** in particular at national, catchment and city/metropolitan levels. Some suggested that practices could also be disclosed **by block** in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and trust/engagement, especially as many will likely cover a range of principles rather than one only. A way forward could then be to sort out practices by principle when the link is pretty straightforward, while ensuring it is also searchable for another principle when the interconnection is strong. For practices reflecting a cross-cutting experience on water governance, snapshots by blocks, scale, function should be considered. In any case, an effective way of **tagging** the practices for users to easily find them in the forthcoming database is needed and identifying relevant **keywords** should enable easy searching.

Practices should relate to process, outcomes and instruments on water governance

7. The working group agreed to a broad approach whereby the experience reflected on each or several of the Principles could relate to a **policy-making process**, a specific **governance instrument**, or tangible evidence on the **impact** of a governance practice on water-related **outcomes**. It was noted that such outcomes should feature the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development as the ultimate goals of public policies. It is however likely that practices relate more often than not to process rather than outcomes since measuring outcomes in terms of governance improvements is more difficult than measuring contributions to the process in terms of transparency or accountability for instance. It was suggested that the template to be prepared specifies the **criteria for informants** to have a clear idea of the scope of experiences to be collected. To a certain extent, practices relating to outcomes could be collected more easily when the **impact indicators** are developed and available since the OECD usually collects data for a given indicator together with tangible evidence and examples underpinning the statement on indicator. These additional practices could therefore also feature in the database at a later stage.

The trade-off between context-dependent practices and their potential for replicability

8. Participants concurred that the context of each practice would need to be taken into account, especially given that the Principles were built under the premises that there is **no one-size-fits-all** response to water governance gaps, but a **menu of options** that should feature place-based considerations. Given that what may have worked in a given place or sector may not be appropriate for another case, the question of **replicability** and potential for scaling-up such practices holds its importance. Ultimately, some practices could be inspirational for others and the mechanisms of collecting and **clustering** them by Principle is also much likely to facilitate **peer-to-peer dialogue** among those considering that a given practice is relevant to their own case. The whole undertaking would then also **provide an interface** whereby informants could contact each other and discuss bilaterally the details behind practices to see whether they are replicable in whole or part. Similarly, attention was drawn on the fact that some practices that had been considered as “best” worldwide and for decades are nowadays challenged, if not questioned. For instance, water abstraction charges in German lands have been presented for decades as a good economic instrument. However, the actual economic instrument is the set of sustainable agricultural practices funded with the collected revenue of that charge, rather than the charge itself. Another example is the development of water use right markets in Chile and Australia. Such markets can be presented as an international best practice in terms of fostering agricultural development, through providing legal security to right holders and clear incentives to use water efficiently and in a productive way. However, in both cases the environmental outcomes of water trading can at best be said to be disputable, leading to several reforms in Chile and an even more ambitious one in Australia. Such considerations also mean that what may be considered a good practice now can be a bad one in five years. This is why a **“menu” approach** whereby part of a solution, rather than its whole, may fit elsewhere, should be promoted.

The 12 Principles are all interconnected, and so will be the practices

9. Several participants wondered how a practice related to one principle could be used to illustrate another principle and, on the other hand, how to take into account the fact that a given practice having **positive consequences** on a given principle could have **negative consequences** on another. This comes down to addressing the **interconnectedness** between the 12 principles and the need for a systemic approach to the “water governance cycle” so that decisions taken in a given area do not work against water policy goals at large. While tagging and keywords can facilitate the **cross-referencing** to practices relating to more than one principle, the issue of integration and **unintended consequences** of

a given practice on another principle needs serious thoughts from the working group. Typically, this is a question that could be raised to informants within the submission template to be prepared, in order to capture lessons from negative spill-overs on a given area of governments and stakeholders attempts at bridging a governance gap in another area. This would also contribute to draw attention on the possibilities of things not working together the way they intended, thus contributing to the **learning process**. The counterfactual is also essential in terms of trying to understand what the **consequences of inaction** could have been. Since the consequences of practices depend on the context in which they are implemented, this discussion is linked to the question on replicability. The interconnectedness issue is also well-reflected in principle 3 on policy coherence, which provides a good window to include reflections on potential conflicts between different actions taken to address different principles. Lastly, the peer-review mechanism could be used to make sure that any discussion on a specific principle fits in the broader picture of water governance while considering the impacts or linkages with the 11 other principles.

Drawing lessons from attempts to collect practices is needed to shape the reporting system

10. A valid question is to what extent decision-makers and stakeholders need **new skills** to report on their practices and use the database to **guide public action** towards better water governance. The working group should support them at going beyond simply providing and reading the information and actually making sense of practices. This requires that ultimate recipients i) understand the situation they are in and what help they need and ii) understand how the practices database might help. A nice metaphor illustrating this could be “*It's no good having the tools to fix a bicycle if you don't know what's wrong with your bicycle!*”. The working group should also strive to work in that direction so that the data collected doesn't end in a shelf or web-based repository without triggering concrete action. To that end, some guidance or “**best practice of best practices**” would be useful building on a literature review or interviews with institutions or stakeholders that have developed such platforms or one-stop-shop mechanisms in the past. It was proposed that the secretariat carries out some desk research to see if papers have been published on this especially by the scientific community and that members of the working group share any template or framework they may have at hand, which could be inspiring to this collective undertaking.

Understanding the needs of stakeholders and decision-makers searching for best practices

11. All participants agreed that getting as close as possible to the needs of ultimate users (decision makers, utilities, local authorities etc.) was essential. The scoping note suggested identifying a sample **target group of recipients** who could provide a **reality check** on what format and information would be useful to them. This can be done in different ways including through targeted **interviews** with selected recipients or a short **survey/questionnaire** among WGI members and beyond to collect suggestions and views on the best way the information could be presented or disclosed. A particular added-value of the WGI would consist in clustering the information provided in a consistent and user-driven way. It was also advised to systematically address the question of costs of a given governance practice when collecting the information so that governments and stakeholders can figure out what practices are financially viable and provide positive impacts to society at the least cost. **Regional platforms and networks** are also important vehicles to tailor the dissemination of the information to regional or stakeholder specifics.

A number of events provide opportunities to collect and disseminate practices

12. Several participants showed willingness to **contribute actively**, in particular through their own **networks and events**. AECID offered to collect practices and host regional meetings to discuss them

in **Latin America**, using for instance the Annual Conference of Ibero-American Water Directors. SIWI also suggested making a bridge with the **Middle East**, especially given the regional summit of the Middle East Program in 2017. WIN will be organising a sub-regional integrity forum in **Ethiopia** addressing water integrity and governance, which could contribute to the undertaking. An informal meeting at the **World Water Week** could help fine-tune the template/framework for collecting practices. A workshop or a special session could be held during **IWRA's World Water Congress**, in Cancun in May 2017, half-way through to the **World Water Forum** of Brasilia, 2018. The European Network of Water Regulators (WAREG) and Aqua Publica Europea can both help collect information from their members and tailor their needs. The 2017 **Istanbul International Water Forum** could host a side event to discuss practices collected. WGI working group and plenary meetings will also feature peer-to-peer discussions on practices, in synergy with the discussions on indicators. Many participants offered in-kind contributions to collect data, “fact-sheets” and snapshots to be prepared.

Building upon existing best practices databases to design a fit-for-purpose template

13. Participants all agreed that a **simple and common “template”** was needed for informants to contribute in a way that is comparable. The template prepared in 2015 by the working group on stakeholder engagement of the WGI to collect 69 case studies on the topic could be inspirational. Similarly, AECID is also currently developing a best practices template for a study on sustainability of water and sanitation projects in rural areas, which can serve as a reference. Looking at **research projects** that are ongoing is also instrumental since many provide “catalogues” of interventions, for example on river restoration practices (e.g. REFORM Project: REstoring rivers FOR effective catchment Management; Natural Water Retention Measures Platform; SPARE Project: Strategic Planning for Alpine River Ecosystems)¹. The Danube Water Programme is also collecting good practices projects on river basin management, drinking water, benchmarking customer surveys and indicator-based assessment of countries and utilities of the Danube region, which can be of help. The Institute of Water is starting to think about developing a compendium of best practices for water management and regulation in the UK. A priori, practices should focus on water governance, but to the extent possible evidence of their applications in **other sectors** would also be relevant. In terms of the level of “completion” of a given practice, it was suggested to also include **practices in progress** especially when it is about a learning or incremental process to bridge a governance gap. Although it was advised to consult stakeholders and decision-makers to identify their needs, participants suggested a number of must-have prior to collecting data : including a **definition of governance**; enquiring on the **costs, benefits and financing options** of a given solution or practice, including in terms of **time and capacity** to put it in practice.

Fostering strong synergies between the working groups on best practices and indicators

14. Participants pointed out the **strong connection** between the working groups on practices and indicators, which should be reflected in the scoping note. Many agreed that it would have been ideal to opt for a sequential approach whereby one would first develop indicators and then use them to identify and collect shortcomings and best practices. Given that both working groups are **working in parallel**, synergies should be drawn throughout the activities and opportunities for cross-learning should be provided. While “best” practices could be tagged at a later stage with indicators completed, the current proposal is to have a **two-fold approach** building on the **complementarities** of both working groups.

¹ Other examples of research projects providing “catalogues” of interventions can be found at the following links: <http://base-adaptation.eu>, <http://econadapt.eu>, <http://aquacross.eu>, and <http://www.feem-project.net/epiwater/>.

The first objective is to collect evidence on how cities, basins, countries have bridged governance gaps, to provide for a water governance **solutions platform** in the coming year. A more **medium-term** objective could consist in assessing whether these practices/solutions have delivered intended **outcomes**, which can only be done once the indicators are developed. The lens of indicators' development is therefore what connects both working group. A sequential approach can therefore be used to i) collecting solutions, actions, initiatives, policies that stakeholders and countries are using for each of the principles and ii) enlarge the dataset later to report back on what is considered to be “best” based on the indicators agreed upon.

Finding the best way to showcase practices

15. Several participants highlighted that a **web-based platform** would be most appropriate to showcase best practices, but this comes at a cost. The latter should therefore be included in the scoping note, or at least an estimate of the **funding** needed so as to catalyse some voluntary contributions from potential champions within and outside the WGI. While an online database would be an added-value and contribute to **broaden the base** of recipients and targets, this should not oversee the critical need for regular **discussions and experience sharing** around the globe on practices collected as this is the best way to learn and adjust as need be. A creative **use of technology** could help illustrate the interconnectedness of principles and the multiple types of consequences that practices may have in different contexts. A quick **stock-taking of existing databases**, their traffic, pros and cons, could also help be cost-effective. Such a review could be done by a member of the working group willing to volunteer and report back to other members with a short note and related guidance.

Next steps

16. Three types of follow-up activities were proposed and participants are invited to signal to which one they want to contribute more directly in the coming 4 weeks

- SIWI and the Secretariat will develop a draft **template to collect practices**, building on the examples that members of the working group may have come across or developed/ used for similar purposes. A first draft could be discussed at the 7th WGI meeting (23-24 June) and fine-tuned at the Stockholm World Water Week;
- Volunteers from the working group and the Secretariat could join efforts to develop a **compendium/ inventory** of existing best practices databases (be they water-related or not) and a synthesis note on their strengths, weaknesses and structure. A first stock-taking could be presented at the 7th WGI meeting in June.
- Volunteers from the working groups and the Secretariat could develop a **short questionnaire to identify the needs** of stakeholders and decisions-makers when searching for best practices and provide guidance to the group accordingly. This would also imply identifying a target group of respondents, within and/or outside the WGI. A first draft of the questionnaire, along with a preliminary list of targeted respondents, could be discussed at the 7th WGI meeting in June.

ANNEX I : LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

IN PERSON IN OECD PREMISES

First name	Last name	Institution	Position	Country
Callum	Clench	International Water Resources Association (IWRA)	Executive Director	France
Alice	Colson	International Water Resources Association (IWRA)	Project Officer	France
Elsa	Favrot	ENGIE	Environment project manager	France
Laura Amelie	Braun	Permanent delegation of Israel to the OECD	Water and SME Adviser	Israel

ONLINE

Milo	Fiasconaro	Aqua Publica Europea	Executive Director	Belgium
Annette	Jantzen	Aqua Publica Europea	Policy and Communication Officer	Belgium
Mia	Garofalo	Central Europe Energy Partners (CEEP)	Representative in the WGI Best Practices working group	Italy
Christina	Christopoulou	Central Europe Energy Partners (CEEP)	Member CEEP Water Task Force / Policy Advisor of BDEW	Germany
Sarah	Hendry	University of Dundee	Lecturer, centre for water law policy and science	UK
Nick	Haigh	UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs	Lead Analyst, Floods and Water	UK
Andrea	Mancini	Water Industry Commission for Scotland	Senior Analyst	UK
Katherine	Russel	Water Industry Commission for Scotland	Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs	UK
Manfred	Eisenhut	Austrian Association for Gas and Water	Head of Water Department	Austria
Nidal	Salim	Global Institute for Water Environment and Health (GIWEH)	General Director	Switzerland
Ian	Barker	Water Policy International	Managing Director	UK
Kevin	Collins	Open University, UK	Senior Lecturer	UK

Osman	Tikansak	Turkish Water Institute	Expert	Turkey
Tadashige	Kawasaki	Japan Water Agency / Network of Asian River Basin Organizations	Deputy Director	Japan
Scott	Rodger	Shepherd and Wedderburn	Analyst – Regulation and Markets	UK
Teun	Bastemeijer	Water Integrity Network	Chief Advisor Strategy and Programmes	Netherlands
Johanna	Sjodin	Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)	Programme officer	Sweden
Hakkan	Tropp	Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)	Managing Director, Knowledge Services	Sweden
Pilar	Avello	Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)	Integrity Specialist	Sweden
Joannie	Leclerc	Suez	Dialogue and governance manager	France
Gonzalo	Delacámara	Madrid Institute for Advanced Studies (IMDEA)	Senior Research Fellow, Coordinator of the Water Economics Group	Spain
Maria del Mar	Requena Quesada	Spanish Cooperation – Water & Sanitation Fund (AECID)	Technical Assistance	Spain
Natalia	Gullon	Spanish Cooperation - Water and Sanitation Fund (AECID)	Technical Adviser	Spain
Sophie	Richard	AgroParisTech	Head of Water Management Unit	France
Lifeng	Li	World Wildlife Fund International (WWF)	Director, Freshwater	Switzerland

EXCUSED

Maggie	White	Eau Vive - Water Right Makers	Founder of WRM and Board member of Eau Vive	France
Lucy	Bolton	Ministry for the Environment	Manager	New Zealand
Gordon	Downie	Shepherd and Wedderburn	Solicitor	UK

ANNEX II : AGENDA OF THE WEBINAR

- **Setting the scene** by OECD Secretariat (15 min)
 - Objective, composition and role of the Working Group
 - o Collect, scale up and disseminate best practices
 - o Share lessons from best practices
 - o Suggest further guidance based on lessons
 - Presentation of the 10 proposals from the scoping note

- **First round of discussion** with participants on the content and scope coordinated by OECD Secretariat (50 min)
 - Do you agree with the approach and strategy proposed in the note?
 - Is any item missing in the scoping note?
 - Which criteria should be used for best practices selection?
 - Which best practices repositories on water governance are you currently using and what are their gaps?
 - Which elements should be included in the questionnaire to collect best practices?
 - Should best practices be disclosed
 - i) For each of the 12 Principles?
 - ii) By block (effectiveness, efficiency, trust/engagement?)
 - iii) By water management function (drinking water, flood management etc.)?
 - iv) By scale?
 - How do you see your contribution to the development of snapshots proposed in the note?
 - How can (and should we?) check the content of the information submitted as a “best practice”?

- **Reactions/responses from the co-ordinators** (20 min)
 - SIWI
 - Suez
 - WIN
 - OECD

- **Process, timeline and tasks** (35 min)
 - Group discussion on who can do what and how
 - Timeline
 - i) 25 April – 27 May: tasks of the working group for the coming month and call for volunteers
 - ii) Draft best practices framework to be discussed at the 7th WGI meeting (23-24 June)
 - Wrap up