

Highlights

18th meeting of the OECD Water Governance Initiative (WGI)

5-6 July 2023
Paris, France



Summary of outcomes

Overview

On 5-6 July 2023, the OECD Water Governance Initiative (WGI) held its 18th meeting at the OECD Headquarters in Paris, France. The meeting gathered 56 onsite and 59 online practitioners, policymakers and representatives from major stakeholder groups (see the [agenda](#), [list of participants](#) and [slides](#)). The meeting aimed to:

- Present and discuss key messages from ongoing work on the blue economy in cities, water governance and circular economy in Latin America, and water governance in Africa;
- Share knowledge and experience on the latest water governance research and policy reforms;
- Update delegates on the WGI's contribution to global agendas (UN 2023 Water Conference, COP28, etc.); and
- Prepare the WGI's deliverables for the 10th World Water Forum (18-24 May, Bali, Indonesia), notably the Toolkit for the local implementation of OECD Principles on Water Governance.



Key takeaways

- 1. Globally, there is an urgent call for better water governance.** Climate change, demographic growth and urbanisation reinforce the need for effective and inclusive water governance. The WGI will play an active role in the [10th World Water Forum](#) in Bali, Indonesia (18-24 May 2024), especially in relation to the “Governance, cooperation and hydro diplomacy” topic. The [Global Commission on the Economics of Water](#) underlined the need for international collaboration to support water justice, sustainability, and food-energy-water security policies.
- 2. Water is a vector for sustainable development and a connector across policies.** The [Cities and Regions for a Blue Economy](#) project argues that blue economy resilience goes hand in hand with water resilience and that a systems approach is needed between ocean and freshwater resources policies to overcome challenges, such as water pollution. In Latin America, applying circular economy principles to water management also has great potential for preserving water resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- 3. Local policy makers need to be empowered to walk the talk.** African Mayors Rohey Malick Lowe (Banjul, Gambia) and Dieudonné Bantsimba (Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo) shared their views on the implementation of the [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#), one of the outcomes of the OECD and the UCLG-Africa [Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#). In addition to supporting the work of the Roundtable, the WGI will co-produce a -Toolkit for the local implementation of the [OECD Principles on Water Governance](#). The Toolkit will complement the [OECD Water Governance Indicator Framework](#) (2018) and the [OECD Guide on How To Assess Water Governance](#) (2022) as part of the implementation strategy of the Principles.
- 4. It is not just about money: transparency and accountability matter in water investments.** Enhancing the integrity of water regulators and operators can have multiple benefits for water users and service providers, for instance in terms of boosting return on investment, engaging stakeholders, and increasing the level of trust of the community. However, increasing transparency alone is not a guarantee of integrity, which also requires accountability. WIN has developed several [tools to improve integrity management](#) for regulators and large and small operators at different stages of the investment cycle.

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Day 1: 5 July 2023

Welcome and opening remarks

1. **The Chair, Barbara Pompili** welcomed delegates to the 18th meeting of the OECD Water Governance Initiative (WGI), and the four new member having joined the WGI's Steering Committee: Juan Antonio Guijarro, Director of Institutional Relations, Aquae Foundation; Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary-General, United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLG-Africa); Jennifer Molwantwa, CEO, the Water Research Commission South Africa; and Sophie Erfurth, Doctoral Researcher, University of Oxford and member, Water Youth Network (WYN).

2. In her opening remarks, **the Chair** highlighted that while the water landscape has changed significantly over the past decade, with many achievements (e.g. a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal on water, the [OECD Principles on Water Governance](#) and heightened awareness of the role of water in climate change policy), water is not yet high enough on the political agenda, despite floods and droughts making the headlines more and more frequently. In OECD countries, water challenges are often seen as mere sectoral, infrastructure and financing challenges, but growing water insecurity in traditionally temperate regions is putting increasing emphasis on the need for robust *governance* responses. The water community must now take its messages beyond the water sector to make sure that decisions taken in other policy sectors (e.g. agriculture, industry and urban planning) are water-wise, using innovative approaches (e.g. circular and blue economy) and involving all relevant players (e.g. local governments, businesses, civil society and the scientific community) to bridge silos. The Chair congratulated WGI members for a decade of work summarised in the [OECD brochure on the 10 years of the WGI](#), launched in March 2023 in a dedicated event at the margin of the UN Water Decade Conference, in New York City, United States.

3. **Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Secretariat** shared updates on recent OECD work of relevance to the WGI. The annual [OECD Ministerial Council Meeting](#) (MCM, 7-8 June, Paris, France) held under the theme "Securing a resilient future: Shared values and global partnerships" launched the [OECD Economic Outlook](#), which projects global GDP to grow by just 2.7% and 2.8% in 2023 and 2024 respectively – the lowest level since the 2008 global crisis, excluding the COVID-19 pandemic, with implications for government spending and investment on water, amongst others. Other announcements from the meeting including the OECD signing a new country programme with Ukraine and opening a new office in Kyiv; a strategic framework for cooperation with the Indo-Pacific and Africa as part of OECD's global outreach strategy; and the formal kick-off of the accession process to OECD membership for five countries (Brazil, Croatia, Bulgaria, Peru and Romania), some of which have been subject to WGI work on water governance as is the case of [Brazil](#) and [Peru](#). The MCM also adopted 12 new legal instruments, including the [OECD Recommendation on Regional Development Policy](#), which makes an explicit reference to the OECD Principles on Water Governance and falls under the remit of the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee that oversees the WGI. Another major event, the [Summit for a Global Financing Pact](#) (22-23 June) co-hosted by President Macron (France) and Prime Minister Mia Motley (Barbados), aimed to lay the foundation for a new international financial system addressing the triple challenge of inequality, climate change and biodiversity. In this vein, the OECD has just issued a report for the G20 on [Financing Cities of Tomorrow](#) that links Argues that massive investment in infrastructure will be needed to accommodate urban population growth by 2050, and to adapt infrastructure to climate change and benefit from the digital

transition. This report explores three ways to meet this challenge. Firstly, it outlines how new forms of urban planning can help to mobilise private finance for inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban investment. Secondly, it explores how leveraging private investment can help to strengthen cities capacity to support needed investment in a tighter fiscal environment. Finally, it considers the potential opportunities and challenges for mobilising sustainable finance – green, social and sustainable bonds and loans, sustainability-linked bonds and catastrophe bonds – for infrastructure investment by City Governments. .Aziza Akhmouch reminded delegates of the launch in February of the OECD [Inclusive Forum on Carbon Mitigation Approaches](#), convening 600+ senior officials, 100+ countries and 9 international organisations to reduce carbon emissions by facilitating access to international and comparable data and information. She concluded with the latest external engagements from the Chair and Secretariat aiming to connect water with urban and sustainability challenges, including a meeting with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to discuss the WGI's contribution to a forthcoming collective initiative on water and climate to be presented at COP 28; and the OECD Roundtables on the [Circular Economy in Cities and Regions](#) (5-6 June, Tallinn, Estonia), and on [Cities and Regions for the SDGs](#) (20 April, Brussels, Belgium), in addition to the forthcoming participation in the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (10-19 July, New York City, United States).

4. **Loïc Fauchon, President of World Water Council** provided a special contribution on the role of the WGI towards the [10th World Water Forum](#) to be held in Bali, Indonesia (18-24 May 2024). He reminded delegates that the world is grappling with the consequences of over a century of water mismanagement, with a need to reconnect water with nature and provide solutions for the billions of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation worldwide. To encourage better use of water resources, action on three fronts is needed: i) increasing supply with a range of options (groundwater, transfers, desalination, water reuse and water reserves) while protecting water resources and being cautious of unintended consequences (e.g. of unsustainable groundwater use and of the environmental impacts of desalination); ii) managing water demand by leveraging digital tools to improve efficiency and avoid leaks, while fostering behavioural change for sustainable water use; and iii) leaving water for the environment and planning ahead to ensure water for food. Mr Fauchon argued that if water is not provided as a basic right alongside education and health, we will not be successful in “leaving no-one behind”. In the context of climate change, urban and demographic growth, three levers of water policy need to be actioned simultaneously: governance, knowledge and finance. Work on governance should be intrinsically linked to knowledge and finance and provide insights on how policies can be transparent and understandable by all. Coordination across national, basin and local levels of government, who play a complementary role in water management (as do urban and rural areas), should be strengthened. Loïc Fauchon concluded by recalling the longstanding collaboration between the OECD and the World Water Council, which continues to count on the WGI to advance the governance theme on the road to and at the 10th World Water Forum.

WGI contributions to the 10th World Water Forum

5. **Endra S. Atmawidjaja, Indonesian Ministry of Public Works and Housing** and **YoonJin Kim, 10th World Water Forum** thanked the OECD WGI for the invitation and support in the preparatory process of the [10th World Water Forum](#) under the theme “Water for Shared Prosperity” (18-24 May 2024, Bali, Indonesia). Following the kick-off meeting and the first stakeholder consultation meeting (15-16 February), the 2nd stakeholder meeting will be held in Bali on 12-13 October to further structure the political, regional and thematic processes and related sessions at the Forum:

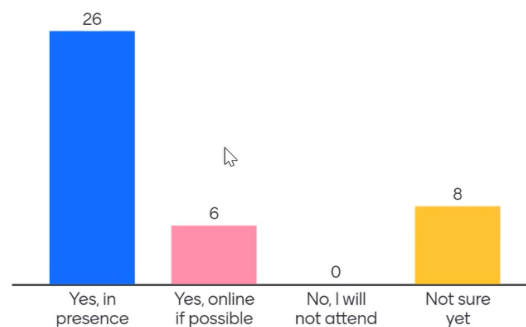
- The political process aims to enhance political commitment to water policy across levels of government. It has five segments: Heads of State, parliamentarians, ministerial (in cooperation UNESCO), local authorities (in cooperation with UCLG) and basin authorities (in cooperation with INBO).

- The regional process will seek tailored solutions to regional water challenges. It is divided in five regions: Mediterranean (Mediterranean Water Institute), Asia-Pacific (Asia-Pacific Water Forum), Americas (under discussion) and Africa (under discussion). Each region will produce and identify their own priority issues to be included in the Regional Reports to be presented at the Forum.
- The thematic process will raise substantive challenges and options of solutions through multi-stakeholder discussions. It has six sub-themes: water security and prosperity; water for humans and nature; disaster risk reduction and management; governance, cooperation and hydro-diplomacy; sustainable water finance; and knowledge and innovation. Each sub-theme includes several topics (outlined in a [concept note](#)) relating to common challenges and enablers across sub-themes and for which working groups will produce a conceptual paper.

All three processes will be interlinked: the thematic and regional processes will interact with each other and feed into the political process. In terms of next steps, the coordinators for the regional and thematic processes will be selected by end July; sessions finalised by January 2024; and the first draft programme of sessions at the Forum will be shared in March.

6. Through a Mentimeter poll, most delegates confirmed that they planned to attend the 10th Forum.

Are you planning to attend the 10th World Water Forum in Bali, Indonesia?



7. **Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Secretariat**, reminded delegates that the WGI itself was created as a follow-up to the 6th World Water Forum (Marseille, 2012). Since then, each Forum has been an opportunity for the WGI to put governance in practice by co-producing a common outcome, but also to enlarge the base of the WGI as each Forum has resulted in new members. Aziza Akhmouch provided an overview of past WGI contributions to World Water Fora. The 6th Forum set up 6 different governance priorities, of which several WGI Steering Committee members were in charge (e.g. ASTEE, SUEZ, WIN, SIWI, INBO, etc.), and concluded with the definition of targets and indicators for each priority as well as the consolidation of a community of experts around water governance (Good Governance Core Group). The 7th Forum (2015, Daegu, Korea) launched the [Daegu Multi-stakeholder Pledge](#) to ensure backing for the then-draft OECD Principles on Water Governance, which were approved two months later by the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee and at Ministerial level, in addition to reports on [stakeholder engagement](#) and the [governance of water regulators](#). The 8th Forum (2018, Brasilia, Brazil) reported on progress in the report [Implementing the OECD Principles on Water Governance](#) presenting 60+ evolving water governance practices and an indicator framework to help with self-assessments of water governance. In addition, a Water International Special Issue on [The OECD Principles on Water Governance: From policy standards to practice](#) was launched providing examples of the implementation of the Principles in Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and South America. The 9th Forum (2022, Dakar, Senegal) launched the [OECD Guide on How To Assess Water Governance](#) and the special issue of Water International on [Measuring the Impacts of Water Governance](#), and advanced thematic priorities on Africa and local authorities with the

launch of the [OECD / UCLG-Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#) and the [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#).

8. The **OECD Secretariat** and the **French Scientific and Technical Association for Water and the Environment (ASTEE)** specified that several members of the WGI Steering Committee had submitted expressions of interest for coordinating topics under sub-theme 4 “Governance, cooperation and hydro-diplomacy”. The Secretariat offered to coordinate topic iii (cross-sectoral dialogue and cooperation) and iv (stakeholder involvement and public participation) and expressed willingness to coordinate sub-theme 4 (governance, cooperation and hydrodiplomacy) as a whole to ensure connections with other relevant topics (e.g. finance and knowledge) that were part of the governance discussions in previous Fora. The Secretariat reminded delegates that the Toolkit for the local implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance is the foreseen “public good” co-production output of the WGI to the 10th Forum, as discussed in the [WGI Strategy Paper 2022-2024](#).

9. The **Water Integrity Network (WIN)** and the **Water Youth Network (WYN)** asked how the organisers would ensure cross-pollination between the different sub-themes and processes. **WYN** emphasised the need to involve stakeholders beyond the water sector itself (e.g. agriculture). The **OECD Secretariat** highlighted that there were usually three coordination levels at World Water Fora: i) between topic groups within each sub-theme; ii) between sub-themes within the thematic process; and iii) between the thematic process, the regional process and the political process. All previous hosts of World Water Fora and the World Water Council had put in place the infrastructure and spaces for dialogue to ensure all three levels of coordination. The Forum organisers confirmed that there would be regular exchanges across all levels of coordination and that further details would be shared in due course.

10. Members reacted to the presentations and shared information on their planned involvement in the 10th World Water Forum:

- The **International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO)** recalled that at the 9th World Water Forum, INBO and partners had launched the [Dakar Action Plan for Basins of Rivers, Lakes and Aquifers](#), which promotes integrated water resources management (IWRM) at basin level as a solution to achieve SDG 6 and adapt to climate change, with over 100 signatories from 50 countries. INBO and partners also launched the declaration “[Water and nature](#)”, connecting water and nature communities of practice. INBO will strive to support the follow-up of this plan at the next Forum, including through coordinating the basin segment of the political process of the 10th World Water Forum.
- The **National Water and Sanitation Agency (ANA) of Brazil** was invited by the World Water Council to coordinate the Latin America regional process towards the Forum and expressed its eagerness to do so in coordination with peers. The lack of access to clean water and sewage treatment, exacerbated by informal settlements, insufficient investment and climate change, is still a prominent and growing challenge in Brazil and other countries and could be subject of dialogue across regions (e.g. with Asia-Pacific). The foreseen OECD Toolkit can help regions, basins and municipalities overcome related governance barriers.
- The **International Water Resources Association (IWRA)** has submitted a proposal to be a topic coordinator on water quality, smart water management and technological innovation. IWRA has been running a multi-year project on smart water management in urban environments in partnership with K-Water and the Asian Water Council, which also involved pilot testing its smart water cities index in the city of Semarang, Indonesia.
- The **Water Integrity Network (WIN)** submitted a proposal to be a topic coordinator on integrity and transparency, titled: “Develop and enforce transparent and accountable institutions and legal frameworks, and promote integrity and strengthen equity at all levels and amongst all players, incl. gender equality, youth involvement, and respect of minorities’ and local communities’ rights”.

- The **Water Research Council (WRC) of South Africa** expressed willingness to actively contribute to the thematic and regional processes of the Forum in partnership with the OECD WGI and broader African water sector. WRC submitted several expressions of interest across sub-themes, for instance on sub-theme 6 on “Knowledge and innovation” to ensure the sustainable supply of drinking water through innovative technologies and governance mechanisms, emphasising integrity and transparency.

Update on the Global Commission on the Economics of Water

11. **The Chair** introduced the Global Commission on the Economics of Water (GCEW), which was convened by the government of the Netherlands to redefine the way water is valued and governed as global common good. The Commission is co-chaired by Professor Mariana Mazzucato, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Professor Johan Rockström, and Singapore Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, and its Secretariat is hosted by the OECD Environment Directorate. In 2024, the GCEW will present evidence and pathways for changes in policy, business approaches and international collaboration to support climate and water justice, sustainability, and food-energy-water security.

12. **Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for Water of the Netherlands**, presented the GCEW, which is composed of representatives from government, academia and science, businesses and the financial sector. In March 2023, the Commission published the report [Turning the Tide: a Call to Collective Action](#) in an attempt to transform water from a global *tragedy* into a global *opportunity* to steer policies and collaboration towards efficiency, equitable access and conservation of water. The GCEW's call to action is underpinned by seven points: (i) Manage the water cycle as a global common good, (ii) Adopt an outcome-focused, mission-driven approach to water, (iii) Cease under-pricing and support more efficient and equitable use of water, (iv) Include non-economic values in decision-making to protect nature, (v) Establish just water partnerships for investment in low-middle income countries, (vi) Seize opportunities to strengthen storage systems, reducing water footprints, and shifting agriculture, and (vii) Reshape multilateral water governance to prioritise sustainability and support capacity building. Urgent action is needed to address the water crisis, considering the economics of water, the valuation of the global hydrological cycle and the costs of inaction. This requires (i) developing new partnerships between government, businesses and civil society, (ii) creating new approaches to pricing, subsidies, governance, and finance, and (iii) addressing new focus areas, especially agriculture, irrigation, recycling and industrial processes. The Commission's final report, to be issued in 2024, aims to complete the sustainability trilogy that began with the [Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change \(2006\)](#) and the [Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity \(2021\)](#). The UN Water Conference (March 2023) marked the start of the conversation and set high ambitions, while the 10th World Water Forum (May 2024) is seen as an opportunity to test the Commission's messages before completion of the deliverable(s). Other important milestones include the World Bank-IMF spring meetings (April 2023), the High-level Political Forum (July 2023), the SDG Summit (September 2023) and the Climate Ambition Summit (September 2023).

13. During the tour de table discussion, WGI members reacted to the work of the Commission:

- **WIN** suggested that the points on governance and finance in the report could be picked up by the coordinators of the governance and finance sub-themes of the thematic process of the Forum. The Commission could also address more explicitly the extent to which corruption drives unsustainable water management, beyond water mismanagement alone.
- **Let's Talk About Water (LTAW)** encouraged the Commission to consider communication as a major tool for spreading their work more effectively, referring to the past communication success of the SDGs, and suggested leveraging tools such as simplified language, colourful imagery, marketing, branding, and small films to convey the urgency of the topic.

- The **Israeli Water Authority** expressed willingness to share experience and knowledge, particularly at COP 28, as Israel has served as a water laboratory for many of the topics discussed.
- **Peter Gammeltoft, independent expert** acknowledged that the report highlights problems but lacks detail on the solutions. For instance, global governance of water is not as effective as it could be more proactive and engaged agencies including at UN level are needed. He stressed the importance of valuing natural capital, although despite efforts by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), biodiversity has continued to decline. Beyond increasing financing levels, achieving SDG 6 requires improving the financial absorption capacity of local authorities and addressing concerns about integrity and transparency in private sector involvement in water and sanitation.
- **ASTE** emphasised that governments alone cannot “turn the tide” on existing water challenges as recently mentioned in an article “[Can measuring the impact of water governance turn the tide](#)” co-authored by several WGI members in a [special issue](#) of the Water International Journal. ASTEE highlighted the need to connect economics and governance, including place-based considerations, and the connection between all economic sectors and water.
- **WYN** stressed the importance of establishing a link between the work of the WGI and the Commission. While stressing the importance of valuing water across the water cycle, WYN acknowledged the limitations of economic evaluations of water across different end users (e.g. households and irrigators). In this respect, the WGI can contribute to finding local solutions and diverse approaches for different settings and end users.
- **The European Commission** recalled the positive reception of the "Turning the Tide" report at the UN 2023 Water Conference and expressed interest in future reports and cooperation with the Commission, in particular to understand the intersection between the water, energy and food crises and how to address them simultaneously with integrated governance structures, emphasising the importance of avoiding decisions that negatively impact one sector while benefiting another, including harmful subsidies.
- **Dutch Water Authorities** asked how realistic it was to assume that the seven calls to action in the report would generate change, especially considering the continued focus on economic growth in policy discussions.
- **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Africa** highlighted the importance of the “common good” approach in protecting and sharing water resources and suggested exploring the connection with water as a human right. Regarding water affordability, potentially conflicting messages on under-pricing water and phasing out subsidies should be revised.
- **The Ministry of the Environment, Finland** raised the need for sustainable water use in the products, goods, and services consumed across international value chains and emphasised the importance of zooming in on private-sector water stewardship actions. Finland suggested promoting actions that reduce water consumption both domestically and internationally.

14. **Henk Ovink** thanked WGI delegates for their valuable insights and suggestions and reiterated the Commission’s interest to get closer and collaborate in the near future. He stressed the importance of understanding both the challenges and the opportunities of improving water management. Some countries have successfully harnessed innovation, but these initiatives need to be scaled up globally. He acknowledged the link between the work of the Commission and the WGI and emphasised the need to ensure the long-term continuity of the process. He announced that after more than eight years, he would be stepping down from diplomatic roles as of September.

15. The **Chair** agreed with the need to strengthen links between the Commissions and the WGI and underlined the willingness of the WGI to work together and support the political outreach to a broader range of policymakers at national and international levels.

A systems approach to a sustainable blue economy in cities, regions and basins

16. The **Chair** introduced the [OECD Cities and Regions for a Blue Economy project](#) within the context of the priority on “water governance for the climate transition” in the [WGI Programme of Work 2022-24](#). She thanked ICLEI, INBO, Resilient Cities Network and UCLG-Africa as WGI members supporting the Secretariat in the development and dissemination of the OECD Global Survey on Localising the Blue Economy.

17. **Juliette Lassman, OECD Secretariat** shared insights from the survey and project, which aims to support cities, regions, basins and national governments develop sustainable blue economies at local level through learning, sharing best practices, measuring progress and guiding action. She then highlighted that the project is complementary to broader [OECD work on the ocean economy](#), which relies on databases (e.g. [OECD Sustainable Ocean Economy database](#)), standards (e.g. OECD Principles on Water Governance) and internal coordination networks and committees. Beyond the OECD, there has been growing international momentum for a sustainable blue economy reconciling economic growth with ecosystem preservation, but to date there has been limited consideration of the role of local governments and the link between ocean health and freshwater health. To bridge this knowledge gap, the OECD Survey on Localising the Blue Economy gathered information from 76 cities, regions and basins across 33 OECD and non-OECD countries. Three key messages from the project were amplified by survey results:

- Economic resilience requires water resilience. Although survey respondents recognise the blue economy as both an economic and an environmental agenda and highlight that the main threats to the blue economy are related to water, water security remains a blind spot of local blue economy strategies.
- Ocean health starts with freshwater health. Although the main impacts of the blue economy according to survey respondents are source-to-sea issues (e.g. waste generation and plastic pollution), marine and freshwater strategies and decision-making entities remain siloed and uncoordinated.
- Cities and regions play a key but untapped role in the blue economy due to their prerogatives on spending, investment and policy areas affecting water quality and quantity (e.g. waste management, land use planning). Despite the growing number of subnational blue economy strategies, national ones often overlook the role of local authorities for implementation.

The project advocates for a resilient, inclusive, sustainable and circular (RISC-proof) blue economy that is resilient to water-related risks; inclusive of local communities; sustainable environmentally; and circular to reduce waste. At subnational level, survey results show that the main roadblocks to achieving a RISC-proof blue economy are the lack of financial resources, technological challenges, and an unclear allocation of roles and responsibilities in blue economy policymaking. Future priorities identified by subnational governments include creating further jobs, fostering collaboration to leverage synergies between blue economy sectors and others (e.g. urban planning, water, waste, energy), and enhancing resilience to climate change. As a first step, the Secretariat launched the [Multistakeholder Pledge on Localising the Blue Economy](#) at the UN 2023 Water Conference with nine recommendations focused on people (e.g. capacity development), policies (e.g. freshwater-ocean coordination) and places (e.g. “city-basin” approaches). The next milestones include the launch of a synthesis report at the [UN Ocean Decade Conference](#) (April 2024, Barcelona, Spain) and the presentation of city, region, and basin profiles at the 10th World Water Forum.

18. During the tour de table discussion, WGI members reacted to the findings and shared their latest research or ongoing activities linked to the blue economy:

- **Peter Gammeltoft, independent expert** enquired about contact with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regarding the impacts of floods, droughts and water pollution on fisheries and related sectors, emphasising that over a billion people globally rely on coastal fisheries.

- **ANA Brazil** asked how to foster cooperation between freshwater and marine decision-making entities within existing legal frameworks, and expressed willingness to bridge silos with other organisations since ANA only has a mandate for water and sanitation.
- **Action Against Hunger (ACF)** raised that freshwater is not yet part of the agenda of the UN Ocean Conference 2025 to be hosted by France. The issue has been brought to the attention of the French government, with no response yet.
- **Deltares** suggested to clarify the definition of the blue economy, especially regarding the inclusion of both marine and freshwater environments. Deltares' work on the blue economy comprises the [Framework for sustainable investments in the Blue Economy](#) and synergies could be explored with SIWI's [Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management](#) and the Dutch [Alliance for Global Water Adaptation \(AGWA\)](#).
- **Aquae Foundation** highlighted the importance of maintaining and supervising coastal water quality due to the impact of water pollution on economic activities such as tourism. The Aquae Foundation has been working on this issue for some time and is now considering the development of nature-based solutions to mitigate the impacts of heavy rainfall on urban and coastal areas. Barcelona and the Canary Islands as examples where progress has been made.
- **INBO** co-developed with the International Water Association (IWA) a [Handbook on Basin-connected Cities \(2022\)](#), which aims to support decision making in strengthening the connection and integration of cities with their basins. The handbook includes 30 case studies illustrating water governance across city, regional and basin levels, and new case studies are welcome to add to this work. This handbook was launched at the [9th World Water Forum](#) (March, 2022, Dakar, Senegal) and presented at the [IWA World Water Congress and Exhibition](#) (September 2022, Copenhagen, Denmark). INBO facilitated the dissemination of the OECD survey by incorporating a city-basin lens and involving 15 partner basin organisations and will continue to engage relevant stakeholders.
- **Catalonia, Spain** highlighted the importance of the blue economy for the region, especially due to the impact of climate change in the Mediterranean. The government of Catalonia recently announced the allocation of EUR 7.2 million to the development of research competences in oceanography in the region. Over the next seven years, around EUR 18 million are expected to be invested to monitor maritime currents and maritime heatwaves, and to enhance the management of fisheries and maritime security.
- **Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)** confirmed that the results of the OECD survey echoed SIWI findings on links between freshwater and seas, stemming from work on integrated governance approaches, cooperation and diplomacy and source-to-sea management, including the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management. SIWI emphasised the need for a holistic approach within source-to-sea systems and the consideration of upstream and downstream interests in decision-making and planning, particularly in urban areas. Current approaches to the blue economy do not address the burden that land-based and upstream activities place on coastal and ocean ecosystems downstream. Multi-level governance arrangements, coordination mechanisms and interventions such as clean-up activities, nature-based solutions and reducing upstream waste flows are needed. SIWI is committed to championing the "source-to-sea" approach in global agendas and expressed interest in continuing discussions with the WGI and ongoing collaboration with the [UNECE working group on IWRM](#).
- **Ian Barker, independent expert** referred to the current UK debate related to policy, service delivery and water quality sparked by the finding that every river in England was failing its water quality standards under the EU [Water Framework Directive](#). Public awareness and concerns about river water quality and pollutants like microplastics, antimicrobial-resistant bacteria and pharmaceuticals have increased as a result. Water companies are being blamed for pollution due to inadequate investment in sewage networks and wastewater treatment. Five issues summarise

the debate: (i) understanding the impact of wastewater discharges on freshwater and the marine environment, (ii) develop appropriate criteria for wastewater discharge standards, (iii) understanding how to prioritise investments, (iv) the affordability of required investments (estimated between GBP 50 billion and several hundred billions), and (v) the environmental risks associated with delaying action. There is a dilemma, as the problem of pollution is known and suspected to have significant impacts on health and biodiversity, but the cost of addressing it is a major concern.

- **Japan Water Forum** highlighted the importance of the blue economy for sustainable development and challenges faced in finding suitable case studies from Japan. Rapid changes in the coastal area and unique architectural and engineering aspects make it difficult to find common ground among different Japanese regions. Effective partnerships and case studies from other countries are needed to enhance understanding and address governance gaps towards sustainable blue economies.
- **University of Lisbon** underscored the importance of institutional and legal frameworks in achieving spatial integration between coasts, freshwater and land, particularly in countries with extensive maritime space such as Portugal. Tools like the European Union's Maritime Spatial Planning can help manage trade-offs within the marine environment, but tools to integrate freshwater and coastal environments are lacking, especially across different jurisdictions. Shedding light on institutional and legal obstacles to integration would help tackle inland and internal threats to the ocean.
- **UCLG-Africa** emphasised the link between the blue economy and the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which aims to decouple the economy from pressure on natural resources, and highlighted the importance of the [Noumea Convention](#) in boosting the blue economy, particularly in coastal areas where local governments have concerns relating to mangroves and algae. UCLG-Africa pointed to the experience of Morocco, where a [blue economy programme](#) is underway to structure various sectors such as tourism and fisheries in a holistic and equitable manner.

19. **Oriana Romano, OECD Secretariat** emphasised the project's systems approach, analysing integrations across policies and analysing trade-offs related to ocean and freshwater, economic and environmental aspects, water risks and climate and biodiversity. She called on WGI members to suggest case studies and she noted potential cases as result of the discussion, such as Japan, Morocco, the United Kingdom, Catalonia, Spain and the province of West Flanders, Belgium.

20. Connecting to broader OECD work, **Shashwat Koirala, OECD Development Cooperation Directorate** presented the [Sustainable Ocean for All](#) initiative, launched in 2019, which aims to foster a sustainable ocean economy for the benefit of developing countries. The initiative focuses on five areas of work:

- Country diagnostics and blue recovery hubs assess the opportunities and challenges of the ocean economy in specific countries, considering economic trends, governance, and financing. Diagnostics have been conducted in Antigua and Barbuda, Cambodia, Indonesia and Kenya, with further African country diagnostics to come in collaboration with the African Development Bank.
- Global and thematic analyses, including a global stocktake of economic trends in the ocean economy, policy tools, challenges, and the financing landscape. Studies have been conducted on topics such as plastic pollution and the unique challenges faced by small island developing states.
- Tracking development finance for the ocean economy to increase transparency and understanding of financial flows. The initiative has developed a methodology to estimate the amount of official development assistance (ODA) targeting the ocean economy. Figures are released annually on World Ocean Day.
- Mobilising private finance by exploring innovative financing mechanisms and policy levers that encourage private investment in sustainable ocean-based activities.

- Providing guidance for impactful development cooperation that supports sustainable ocean economies, with the goal of establishing a common understanding among development cooperation providers about what constitutes impactful support in this context.

WGI contributions to global agendas and water-related research

21. The Secretariat and Steering Committee members shared updates on major water-related events.

22. **Oriana Romano, OECD Secretariat** provided an update on the WGI's contributions to the [UN 2023 Water Conference](#) (22-24 March, New York City, United States). The Conference gathered close to 10 000 people for the first UN conference on water in 47 years, this time including civil society and emphasising water as a connector across policies such as environment, biodiversity, food, and energy, beyond questions of access to water services alone. The conference resulted in 700 commitments to the [Water Action Agenda](#) and the agreement to nominate a UN Special Envoy on water in 2024. In the margins of the conference, WGI members gathered to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the WGI, whose 10 key messages are summarised in the brochure [Ten years of the OECD Water Governance Initiative](#). The Secretariat also launched the [NYC Multi-Stakeholder Pledge on Localising the Blue Economy](#) with WGI members ICLEI, INBO, Resilient Cities Network and UCLG-Africa, as well as 20 [city and region profiles](#), as part of the Blue Economy project. Overall, the OECD contributed to 20+ sessions. The WGI Chair participated in the Global Commission on the Economics of Water special event on [The Economics of Water: Transforming Governance to Secure a Sustainable, just and prosperous future](#). The side event [A city-basin approach to water security in Africa: Solutions and commitments](#), co-organised by the OECD and UCLG-Africa (UN 2023 Water Conference, 24 March), called on local authorities to sign the [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#) adopted by the [OECD/UCLG-Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#).

23. **Gustav Thungen, SIWI** shared the latest news on [World Water Week](#) (20-24 August 2023, Stockholm, Sweden and online) hosted by SIWI, whose theme this year is *Seeds of Change: Innovative Solutions for a Water-Wise World* with the aim of rethinking water management practices, focusing on innovative governance models. It serves as a springboard between different international processes and helps to accelerate global water action, highlighting the crucial role of water to achieve all SDGs. Drawing on the latest scientific knowledge and experiences from around the world, the event aims to explore how water can be a powerful tool to address the water crisis, global heating, biodiversity loss, poverty, and other water-related challenges. The 2023 World Water Week will follow up on topics raised during the UN 2023 Water Conference to help various stakeholders make commitments to the [Water Action Agenda](#). To make all voices heard and tackle discrimination, 99% of the event will be available online for free. SIWI will also host the Water Pavilion at COP28.

24. **Stephanie Laronde, INBO** highlighted the increasing importance of water in international agendas since [COP27](#) (6-18 November 2022, Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt) and emphasised the importance of basins, rivers, and aquifers for IWRM, avoiding the pitfalls of a narrow sectoral approach. Since [COP21](#) (12 December 2015, Paris, France), INBO has contributed to all UN climate conferences, and ahead of [COP28](#) (30 November-12 December, Dubai, United Arab Emirates) INBO will prepare the official high-level event on water of the [Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action Agenda](#). INBO also plans to organise an official UNFCCC side-event dedicated to the incubation and financing of water and climate projects in partnership with the [Sahara and Sahel Observatory](#) (OSS) and other partners. INBO will also be a partner of the Water Pavilion. INBO and the forthcoming Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union invite WGI members to [EURO-RIOB 2023](#) (16-19 October 2023, Valencia, Spain), which will mark the 20th anniversary of the Europe-INBO International Conferences. It will bring together EU Member States, national and regional water administrations, hydrographic district authorities, basin organisations and

stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive, its "daughter directives" and other policies, directives and regulations linked to climate change and the preservation of biodiversity.

25. **Joannie Leclerc, SUEZ** introduced SUEZ company as both a longstanding and newly restructured entity since parts of its activities were taken over by Veolia in February 2022. SUEZ operates in 40 countries, providing drinking water for 68 million people and sanitation services for more than 37 million people. The company has 40 000 employees, generates EUR 9 billion in sales and holds more than 1 700 patents in the water and waste sector. The company's strategy focuses on territories, technologies, and digital services that provide the most value to environmental issues. SUEZ developed a [Sustainable Development Roadmap 2023-2027](#) which includes 24 commitments closely monitored by the CSR Committee of the SUEZ Board of Directors. It encompasses climate, nature, and social issues and structures commitments around three levers.

- Sustainability (“sobriété”) focuses on reducing environmental pressures and aims for a 10% reduction in water withdrawal volumes from the network by 2027 through new economic and contractual models. In addition, the company strives to improve the treatment of micro-pollutants and micro-plastics, offering customers solutions to enhance wastewater and water quality. Digital tools and water reuse technologies can also help support consumption reduction goals.
- Energy self-sufficiency aims to harness the potential of wastewater treatment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from water activities by 40% by 2030. SUEZ plans to double its investment in research and development (R&D) to support these ambitions.
- Vigilance remains key throughout the value chain. SUEZ collaborates with thousands of suppliers and subcontractors, assisting them in managing environmental and social risks while maximising their societal contributions. Ensuring resource quality and addressing climate change impacts are prioritised through formalised investment plans. Moreover, SUEZ aims to raise awareness of water scarcity challenges and engage in dialogue with customers and stakeholders to collectively implement solutions. Risk mapping for customers and educational initiatives, including training programs, are integral components of the roadmap.

26. Members shared updates on past and forthcoming water governance events, projects, initiatives and research.

- **LTAW** presented [Mayors Make Movies](#), an initiative to promote wider engagement and participation in water policy and science through short film production amongst mayors, youth and filmmakers in cities across the African continent. The goal is to bridge the gap between policy and science. A [film](#) produced in collaboration with the Mayor of Vannes (Brittany, France) was projected at the meeting.
- **The Global Water Partnership (GWP)** participated in 30+ events at the UN 2023 Water Conference, notably promoting the [International High-Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa](#), which aims to mobilise at least an additional USD 30 billion annually by 2030 to implement the programme and close the water investment gap in Africa. GWP also launched the sourcebook [A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships \(MSPs\) in Water Management](#) (2022), the [Rethinking Collective Action](#) initiative with WaterEquity, and held a side-event on [Multiple values of water for better decision-making](#). GWP took part in 46 commitments to the Water Action agenda, including one on healthy rivers and oceans. GWP showed great interest in the innovation theme of World Water Week 2023, where it will take part in 16 sessions, and is leading a reflection on how to operationalise innovation within the context of [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#) with UN-Water. GWP has developed a water innovation agenda and is working together with UN-Water towards the World Water Week to hold a session on how to operationalise innovation in the context of SDG6. GWP suggested that the WGI could increase the focus on innovative governance themes.

- The **University of Lisbon** published an article co-authored by Susana Neto and Mirella Motta e Costa: [Exploratory analysis of the water governance frameworks regarding the OECD principles in two river basins in Brazil and Portugal](#), which aims to identify critical dimensions for an adequate assessment of water governance, and drivers for water policy improvement in both countries. A webinar with the researchers is planned to discuss water policy implementation processes.
- **WIN** is preparing the [Water Integrity Global Outlook 2024](#), which will examine integrity risks in water and sanitation sector finance and the way integrity can be strengthened at different levels: in public financial management, within the sector, and in individual projects. With a view to being solutions-oriented, WIN called on WGI members to provide case studies demonstrating how improved integrity and anti-corruption practices substantially impacted the use of funds in the sector (see the [open call for case studies](#)).
- **ACF** stressed that although water was mentioned for the first time in the final declaration of a climate COP at COP27, it was only in the context of climate adaptation and not mitigation. Nature-based solutions were also mentioned, but there was no specific mention of freshwater ecosystems. ACF emphasised the need to keep water high on the agenda for COP28, which is foreseen to primarily focus on the energy transition.
- The **University of Arizona** explained that the state of Arizona (United States) is regularly hit by severe flash floods from the Colorado river, intensifying media coverage at local, national and international levels. The role of indigenous peoples in water governance is a priority for the University of Arizona, as illustrated by the session on [The Role of Indigenous People in Governing Shared Waters](#) at the UN Water Conference and through engagement in sessions on indigenous water-related topics with the Australian Water Partnership at World Water Week 2023. The [Water Resources Research Centre Annual Conference](#) will be held at the University of Arizona on 11-12 July 2023.
- **ANA Brazil** was involved in more than 16 side-events and 13 bilateral meetings at the UN 2023 Water Conference. ANA organised a side-event to present a tool to map pollution rates in water sites with the US Geological Survey, and presented the state of the play of sanitation in Brazil in the session [From goals to results: the scenario of water resources and sanitation in Brazil](#). ANA invited WGI members to the 1st Latin American Water Forum (21-22 November 2023, Aracaju, Brazil) co-organised by ANA Brazil, the Brazilian Network of River Basin Organisations (REBOB), the Latin American Network of River Basin Organisations (RELOC), the Brazilian Water Resources Association (ABRHidro), the Brazilian Groundwater Association (ABAS), the Brazilian Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering (ABES) and UNESCO. During these two days, participants will discuss how foster integrated water resources management in coordination with climate change, innovation and environment priorities.
- **Aquae Foundation** plans to attend the [Smart Cities Expo World Congress](#) (7-9 November, Barcelona) to raise the profile of water in the debate on cities of the future, in line with the commonly agreed need for more coordination and cross-sectoral approaches to water management.
- The **Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)** invited WGI members to sign up for the [World Water and Sanitation Workforce Initiative](#) and emphasised the need for sufficient capacity and vocational training fill the capacity gap in the water and sanitation sector. WfWP has established a mentoring coalition to ensure young women are recruited and stay in water-related jobs. WfWP stressed the importance of learning how to ensure funds reach the ground at local level: to this end, WfWP and GIZ are developing a plan for future work to be shared with the OECD Secretariat in the coming weeks. WfWP suggested having an inventory of WGI members' commitments to the UN Water Action Agenda to support collective efforts towards the implementation of solutions for water.
- **WYN** joined the [Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture](#) with FAO at the UN 2023 Water Conference and participated in the 43rd FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023, Rome, Italy) panel discussion on flood risk management focusing on decentralised systems, smallholder farmers and

protecting vulnerable communities. WYN also contributed to the World Bank report [The Hidden Wealth of Nations: The Economics of Groundwater in Times of Climate Change](#) (2023).

- **IWRA** reminded members of the [XVIII IWRA World Water Congress](#) (11-15 September, Beijing, China) gathering practitioners, professionals and various water stakeholders, to be hosted in partnership with the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources, under the theme “Water for Humans and Nature”.
- **Peter Gammeltoft, independent expert** thanked LTAW for the video, which put local water management in perspective. He also emphasised that water lacks the “measuring stick” that exists for climate, i.e. the 1.5°C target, and pledged support for the development of long-term targets that UN agencies could help establish.

Water reuse and circular economy in Latin America

27. **Sergio Campos, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** highlighted that the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region is gradually transitioning from a linear to a circular economy, particularly in the fields of solid waste management, health, plastics, electronics, wastewater management, energy, mobility, mining, and buildings. Several countries (e.g. Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Peru) have taken steps towards a circular economy through national initiatives, with several co-benefits in terms of public health, environmental sustainability, socio-economic development and climate action. The circular economy can help address regional challenges such as providing access to water and sanitation services, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable, and minimising waste discharge into the environment. However, current waste management practices and low levels of investment remain prominent barriers. To achieve SDG 6 and apply circular economy principles to water and sanitation would require an annual investment of approximately USD 15 billion in the region, three to four times more than the current level. Similarly, a shift to circular waste management would require an annual investment of USD 4 billion, six times the present investment. The IDB has developed a [sector framework](#) for water and sanitation that positions the circular economy as a key vehicle for water security. The framework prioritises access to water and sanitation, water security, public utility efficiency, operations and maintenance and finance.

The IDB collaborates with public and private players to promote innovation, regulation, and capacity-building. In 2020, the IDB assisted Pacific Alliance countries (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru) in developing a [sustainable plastic management roadmap](#), and joined a circular economy coalition led by ministers from Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Peru. The IDB also supports national circular economy projects, for instance through a loan to the Dominican Republic, in partnership with the Japanese International Cooperation Entity and the Spanish Cooperation Agency, to close landfills and improve waste recovery by including informal waste pickers in the process. Another example is the [Atotonilco wastewater treatment plant](#) in Mexico, which has treats approximately 60% of the wastewater generated in the metropolitan area of Mexico City, making it the world's third-largest wastewater treatment plant in terms of capacity. The plant can irrigate up to 90 000 hectares of land, benefitting around 60 000 farmers, and its biogas energy recovery enables the plant to be 60% self-sufficient. The IDB is also involved in several other projects, including [OLAS](#), [Water Funds](#), [Transboundary Waters](#), [HidroBID](#), [Source of Innovation](#), [Optimal Sanitation](#), [Waste Data Hub](#), Too Good to Waste, [GIRSU Rating](#), Circular Economy Accelerator, [Latitud R](#), and [#SinDesperdicio](#).

28. **The OECD Secretariat** announced an upcoming collaboration with the IDB on water and circular economy in ten selected Latin American countries, with a focus on reducing water consumption, water reuse, and transforming water into secondary materials and energy. A synthesis report will summarise the results of a survey based on the OECD Principles on Water Governance that will be peer-reviewed at the 19th meeting of the WGI. The final report will be presented at the 10th World Water Forum (May 2024).

29. During the tour de table discussion, delegates commented on IDB's initiatives:

- **Aquae Foundation** concurred with the situation in LAC depicted by the IDB and presented the example of the wastewater treatment plant of [Aguas Andinas](#) in Santiago (Chile), which converts sludge into bio-stimulants, bio-fertilisers and compost and produces energy for the city's gas network. In terms of water reuse, Mexico is reusing water for agricultural purposes and restoring wetlands, while Peru is channelling urban wastewater for use in the mining industry. The Foundation is also involved in projects that use bio-waste to produce feed for poultry farms and aquaculture, and that produce biomethane and biogas in landfills in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. The technology and tools required for circular water solutions already exist, but the real challenge is to tailor solutions to local contexts and accelerate the transition by involving all potential stakeholders who can add value.
- **ASTEER** agreed with the progress made on wastewater treatment in LAC and highlighted that involving players outside the water sector was a key challenge encountered by ASTEE in wastewater projects. Good governance, especially connecting water and waste with different sectors, is key to advance circular wastewater treatment.
- **Israel Water Authority** pointed to government regulation as the main barrier to wastewater treatment in LAC, arguing that existing regulations do not support circular economy practices and the use of treated wastewater. Innovative projects often require developing new regulations, resulting in significant project delays and cost overruns. Improving regulations and government support in LAC would result in lower costs and greater reuse of treated wastewater.
- **ANA Brazil** voiced interest in the OECD-IDB project and raised that in many parts of Latin America, access to water is still the main issue on the agenda, with wastewater treatment and the circular economy often remaining secondary issues. Finding ways to combine circular economy and water access would be critical to advance on both agendas in Latin America.

30. **Jorge Carbonell, OECD Global Relations and Cooperation Directorate (GRC)** presented OECD's broader work on the green and just transition in LAC. Established in 2016, the OECD Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Programme has four key priorities in the region: increasing productivity, fostering social inclusion, strengthening governance, and promoting environmental sustainability. As part of this programme, the OECD is organising the [1st Ministerial Summit on Environmental Sustainability](#) in San Jose, Costa Rica on 5 October 2023, under the theme "Economic Resilience: Green and Just Transition" and gathering Ministers from various sectors, as well as international organisations, the private sector and civil society. The summit will include two panels: one on the green and just transition, and another on priorities for climate mitigation and adaptation in the region. Three ministerial sessions will cover the topics of i) Promoting sustainable economic, social and environmental development through trade and investment, ii) Leveraging LAC's biodiversity for jobs and business creation, and iii) Fostering sustainable ocean economy. Building on workshops and policy dialogues, one of the major outcomes of the summit should be an action plan with priorities and cross-cutting recommendations to advance climate adaptation and mitigation efforts in the region. The plan should consider integrated governance approaches, financing, technology transfer and gender equality, with a particular focus on water policies and circular economy.

Water governance in Africa

31. **Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Secretariat** and **Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi, UCLG-Africa** updated delegates on OECD and UCLG-Africa work on water security in African cities. As a follow-up to the 2021 report [Water Governance in African Cities](#), the [OECD/UCLG-Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#) was launched at the 9th World Water Forum and concluded with the adoption by mayors of the [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#). The Roundtable aims to

i) share knowledge, experience and best practices on local policies for water security; ii) set the foundation for an Observatory with scientific data and knowledge on water security in African cities, especially on SDG 6 and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities; iii) facilitate the uptake and implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance at local level; and iv) foster dialogue between local authorities and stakeholders to drive synergies and build consensus on a multi-dimensional approach to water.

Since the 9th World Water Forum, African Mayors have met on several occasions, such as the [Africities Summit](#) (17-21 May, Kisumu, Kenya), the [UCLG 7th World Congress and Summit of Local and Regional Leaders](#) (10-14 October, Daejeon, South Korea) and climate [COP27](#) (6-18 November, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt), which focused on climate adaptation through “localisation” and access of local and regional authorities to climate finance. The Secretary-General of UCLG-Africa took part in additional high-level events such as the [African Climate Week](#) (29 August-2 September, Libreville, Gabon) and the [African Ministerial Conference on the Environment](#) (12-16 September, Dakar, Senegal), which acknowledged the importance of water issues in the proceedings. At biodiversity [COP15](#) (7-19 December, Montreal, Canada), UCLG-Africa sought to link water-related challenges with biodiversity ones at local level. Jean-Pierre stressed the importance of engaging with mayors and local leaders directly to gather information rather than relying solely on online surveys. He suggested to organise the next meeting of the African Mayor’s Roundtable at the [Africa Climate Week](#) (4-8 September 2023, Nairobi, Kenya).

32. **Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul, Gambia** emphasised water scarcity and access to water as priorities for economic development and wellbeing. The city of Banjul faces a significant influx of migrants, making the provision of drinking water services challenging. Inadequate data on flood occurrences in the city further prevents effective water service delivery when floods occur. In Gambia, water services in urban areas are provided by the central government’s water utility, and city administrations are not involved in water management, even for distribution and quality control. Nevertheless, the Mayor works with UCLG-Africa and the government of Morocco to improve access to safe drinking water in rural areas around Banjul, especially to support vulnerable groups such as women, children and people with health conditions. She underscored that gender inequalities are exacerbated by water scarcity issues, given women and girls’ socially designated role as being responsible for the time-consuming task of fetching water, and urged WGI members to provide support and take action.

33. **Dieudonné Bantsimba, Mayor of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo** explained that several urban districts of Brazzaville lack access to drinking water services. Since the water supply system is managed at the national level, the municipality is constrained to drill boreholes through decentralised cooperation to provide clean and safe drinking water in deprived areas. The city is also tackling sanitation and wastewater treatment challenges by implementing sewage collection systems and wastewater treatment plants, with the support of the [Interdepartmental Syndicate for the Sanitation of Greater Paris](#) (SIAAP). However, such initiatives need to be scaled up further to ensure sanitation for all, especially vulnerable populations suffering from health issues due to exposure to wastewater. In addition, Brazzaville is subject to strong rainfall, leading to floods and soil erosion in low-lying areas. This in turn results in the forced migrations of affected individuals, who the city struggles to support adequately. To tackle soil erosion, the city has introduced an urban forestry strategy. Innovative financing mechanisms, multi-level coordination and decentralised cooperation are needed to address the intersecting challenges of access to clean water, wastewater treatment, floods and population displacement.

34. During the tour de table discussion, delegates reacted to the presentations and shared their respective work in the region:

- **INBO** highlighted the role of basin organisations as forums for dialogue between national and local governments. INBO and the International Office for Water (*OiEau*) are carrying out two projects in Africa: one aiming to revitalise cross-border basin organisations in the continent, focusing on governance, planning, financing, knowledge and capacity-building; and another focusing on implementing IWRM in the Sanaga basin in Cameroon, in partnership with the French

Development Agency (AFD) and the Rhine-Meuse Water Agency. Cross-sectoral approaches involving a wide range of users, practitioners, institutions and disciplines are essential to INBO's projects, especially for pump maintenance and training. INBO underlined the importance of building capacity among managers and users of pumps to ensure sustainable water management.

- **ACF** stressed that overcoming water access issues requires good water governance. ACF is engaged in water governance studies in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast, Madagascar and Nigeria, with the aim of understanding and improving water governance practices to enhance access to water, especially among vulnerable populations. The Advocacy for WASH initiative of the [WASH Roadmap](#) has developed a [Call to Action](#) for survival and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene, to encourage governments to commit to supporting the most vulnerable populations with water and sanitation services.
- **WRC South Africa** highlighted growing demand in South Africa for networks or communities of practice of local water managers, considering the pivotal role of local governments in water service provision. Nevertheless, there is a lack of peer learning and engagement within existing structures, which the Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security could potentially help address. **UCLG-Africa** responded by emphasising the importance of having a political voice as well as building capacities. To meet these expectations, UCLG-Africa has established professional networks of experts specialised in different thematic areas within the city administrations (e.g. human resources and financial management) and may consider having a dedicated network for city water managers.
- **Dirk van der Stede, independent expert** asked how African local authorities are including SMEs in water management, to unlock economic opportunities from water management at local level. **Dieudonné Bantsimba, Mayor of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo** responded that Brazzaville manages boreholes in collaboration with small local or international companies (NGOs) to resolve issues of clean water access, wastewater treatment, forced displacement etc. and develop economic opportunities through job creation. Yet, the scale of these operations remains insufficient, hence the need to cooperate with partners in other towns to unleash the economic potential of water management. **UCLG-Africa** pointed out the challenge of regulating the interface between official and informal water service providers, especially in African cities where approximately 60% of the population accesses water through small, local private-sector providers.

35. **Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Secretariat** concluded with insights from OECD's work on decentralised development cooperation. Collaboration with the OECD [Development Assistance Committee](#) (DAC) on city-to-city partnerships has created opportunities for peer to peer learning and collaboration on urban water security across the global North and global South countries. OECD tracking of [official development assistance](#) (ODA) at national and subnational levels shows that approximately USD 2.8 billion transit through local and regional governments, although the share of water-related projects remains limited. Over the years and in specific countries such as France, mechanisms such as the Oudin-Santini Law in France have facilitated the uptake of DDC related water projects through enabling local and regional governments and water agencies to devote up to 1% of their revenues to water-related DDC projects in peer cities of developing countries.

Day 2: 6 July 2023

Improving integrity practices for water management

36. **Barbara Schreiner, WIN** reminded delegates that integrity is a key component of the OECD Principles on Water Governance, with a dedicated Principle 9 on integrity and transparency. WIN uses different [tools to improve the integrity of water services providers and regulators](#), including the Integrity Assessment (IA), the Integrity Management Toolbox (IMT), the Integrity Management Toolbox for Small Water Supply Systems (IMT-SWSS) and the Early Investment Integrity Toolbox. The latter, which is still under development, focuses on risks in the very early investment phase (e.g. pre-procurement). Pilot findings show that standardised indicators for data disclosure platforms could foster transparency in this early stage of infrastructure development. The IMT-SWSS aims to improve the performance and regulatory compliance, management and governance of small rural water supply systems. Since its creation in 2014, it has been applied in several countries. It now operates in English and Spanish, with a picture-based version available for communities with illiteracy issues. The IMT-SWSS relies on a participatory process that puts communities and operators in the driving seat to identify priorities to improve integrity and governance, ending with an action plan and coaching for its implementation. Results from Kenya show that satisfaction, trust and perceptions of fairness and greater engagement all improved after using the Toolkit.

37. **Hannah Wuzel, Seecon** shared experience from the implementation the Integrity Management Toolbox (IMT) across six water operators in Albania. Initially, the integrity component was an add-on to an existing municipal infrastructure programme; but as awareness grew among stakeholders involved in the programme, integrity became a core component rather than an afterthought. A baseline assessment and integrity action plan were carried out a few months ago, after which the project team has been monitoring changes in integrity management over time. The tool enhances stakeholder engagement, external communication and transparency, which in turn increases the level of trust of the community. Ultimately, mainstreaming integrity in operators' investment programmes can boost return on investment.

38. **Alejandro Jiménez, SIWI** shared insights on SIWI work supporting integrity within regulators, especially in Latin America (Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras and Peru), through i) implementing the Integrity Management Toolbox among regulators; ii) training regulators' staff on integrity and iii) pushing integrity practices from the regulators' to regulated water operators. Regulators can select integrity indicators they wish service providers to collect and track progress on these indicators. Regulators have a powerful role in promoting integrity as referees and role models for the sector. They can push integrity practices among operators and communicate with water users. Processes with regulators are very formal and can be time-consuming, but once changes are implemented, they tend to stay embedded and enforced.

39. WGI members shared information on integrity initiatives and observations:

- **ANA Brazil** has developed several digital tools (summarised in a [video](#)) that aim to improve water accountability, corporate and regulatory governance and transparency by enhancing internal and external communication. Following the work with the OECD, ANA created a webpage through which Brazilian States can monitor the budget and funds allocated across other States, as well as water risks. ANA also improved external communication by including all the governance

information on the central government website. These initiatives have helped improve transparency both in-house and externally.

- **WRC** raised that regulators tend to communicate more with operators than with society at large. In countries where a large share of the population is served by smaller operators that fall outside the scope of national regulators, an apparently high level of performance of the national regulator can be misleading, since large swathes of the population fall outside its remit.
- **Ian Barker, independent expert** reported that recently, UK regulators required water companies to report on the frequency of storm overflow discharges. Data revealed that discharges were occurring much more frequently than planned due to lack of capacity and poor network conditions, eroding public trust in water companies. Citizen scientists analysed the now-public data and demonstrated to a parliamentary enquiry that several companies may be breaching their permits. Significant investments would be needed to enhance network capacity, but users' willingness to pay has dropped as a result of the crisis.
- The **OECD Secretariat** highlighted the growing trend of multi-sectoral regulators in OECD countries, especially covering other sectors of high natural monopolistic intensity such as energy, waste and telecommunications.

40. WGI members raised several questions:

- **Dutch Water Authorities** asked to what extent the increased satisfaction levels reported in Kenya were due to higher awareness among stakeholders engaged in the toolbox process.
- **IWRA** asked how to overcome methodological issues in measuring corruption, which is hidden by nature.
- The **Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)** enquired about the motivations for operators to apply these toolboxes and asked if they were self-administered.
- The **OECD Secretariat** asked if WIN had evidence on the uptake of the toolboxes by operators and regulators and how WIN facilitates the use of the tools.

41. Responding to questions, **WIN** confirmed that much of the improvement in satisfaction among the community after implementing the toolbox was due to transparency and communication. However, transparency alone is not enough and needs to go hand in hand with accountability to ensure integrity. WIN integrity tools are available online and are user-friendly, with online self-scans available in the form of checklists but WIN also trains facilitators to run the integrity assessments in situ. Faced with the challenges of measuring corruption, practitioners try to measure the *risk* of corruption (e.g. through checklists of measures that can be implemented to mitigate risks) rather than the level of corruption itself. Regarding contexts with a large share of the population served by non-regulated operators, WIN referred to the work by WASREB (Kenya), which is trying to work out how to better regulate small water supply systems. Motivations for operators to implement integrity toolboxes include financing (i.e. when the toolbox implementation is paid for by a third party, such as a multi-lateral development bank) and a "mirror effect" (when other operators undergo implementation and other operators follow suit).

42. **SIWI** confirmed that communication of regulators towards society could be a weak point. Regarding the regulation of small service providers, the Latin American association of water and wastewater regulators ADERASA has a working group on regulating and improving the performance of rural and small water supply operators. WIN, SIWI and Cewas are currently collecting evidence on the application of the Integrity Management Toolbox and should publish a report on this in the next three months. Motivations for utilities implementing integrity toolboxes can also include political changes and scandals, which can create momentum towards improving integrity.

43. The **Chair** congratulated WIN and SIWI on the successful organisation of the session and invited other Steering Committee members to volunteer to do so at the next meeting.

Toolkit for the local implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance

44. **Oriana Romano, OECD Secretariat** reminded delegates that the toolkit seeks to collect water governance practices implemented at local level by national, regional and local governments or other stakeholders to address the OECD Principles on Water Governance. The toolkit will represent the WGI's common deliverable for the 10th World Water Forum (May 2024, Bali, Indonesia). The toolkit aims to provide practical examples and lessons learned to inspire others, drive the adoption of the Principles and foster local action on water governance. It will include practices from a range of stakeholders (public, private and non-profit) at all levels, from OECD and non-OECD countries, with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency and replicability, and will use known resources and vetted practices from WGI members and governments. The timeframe for producing the toolkit is shorter than for previous deliverables due to the two-year instead of three-year gap between the 9th and 10th Forum. Next steps including agreeing on the template to collect practices; selecting and drafting practices; and organising up to three webinars for further discussions and feedback. The draft toolkit will be presented at the 19th meeting of the WGI in January/ February 2024 (tbc) and submitted for a final review from WGI members before the 10th Forum.

45. Delegates shared suggestions and remarks on the content and methodology of the toolkit:

- **SUEZ** insisted on the importance of clarifying the targets and criteria for the toolkit and of focusing on previously vetted or published examples, considering that the Secretariat and Steering Committee will have limited time and resources to screen them, and encouraged WGI members to co-submit practices with partners beyond the WGI.
- **Peter Gammeltoft, independent expert** recognised that most delegates had experience at national rather than subnational level and suggested i) discussing how to access subnational examples in the breakout groups and ii) including national level practices with local implications such as the video showcased by ANA Brazil in the previous session.
- **AgroParisTech** suggested asking for details on context (e.g. socio-economic, institutional, geographical) in the template for collecting practices, to facilitate the possibility of including a meta-level analysis with take away messages/commonalities from collected practices, in order to foster replicability among users of the toolkit.
- **WYN** and **Deltares** suggested that the toolkit could highlight implementation challenges and how they were overcome, and summarise lessons learned from all practices. Rather than labelling certain points as challenges or failures, **ASTEE** proposed to include a new section in the template asking for lessons learnt and suggested improvements for water governance practices.
- **WYN** asked if practices should be limited to cities or could also cover villages, towns, basins and regions. The **Secretariat** confirmed that "local" covered all subnational entities (urban and rural municipalities, regions and basins).
- **Dutch Water Authorities** offered to submit a practice on the [Blue Deal](#) programme, which aims to address global water issues through knowledge exchange between 15 countries, including national and subnational governments. The programme uses the [OECD Water Governance Indicator Framework](#) to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. The **Secretariat** welcomed the suggestion.
- **WRC** considered the relevance of using local examples from Cape Town raised in the OECD report on [Water Governance in Cape Town](#) (2021) for the toolkit, given that the report assessed alignment with the OECD Principles. **ANA Brazil** asked a similar question regarding the inclusion of practices from previous [OECD reports on water in Brazil](#) (2015, 2018 and 2022). ANA asked for clarifications on the submission process for the practices and how they would be selected. The **Secretariat** confirmed that material from OECD reports could be used in the Toolkit and encouraged WRC and ANA Brazil to also share recent developments to highlight how the OECD analysis against the Principles led to concrete follow-up/impacts in the city and country respectively.

- **IWRA** asked if the author of the practices should be WGI members or the national or local authorities in which the practice took place and sought insights on motivating external contributors. The **Secretariat** responded that original institutional sources (e.g. IWRA) should be cited in the toolkit and that local governments should be motivated by sharing experience, gaining visibility (e.g. in international events such as the 10th World Water Forum, where some examples could be showcased) and learning from international peers.
- **GWOPA** asked for clarifications on the vetting process and asked if the aim of the toolkit was to highlight how the implementation of the Principles had improved local water-related outcomes or to showcase local water governance practices. GWOPA questioned the use of the term "toolkit" given the document seems more like a compendium of examples than a guiding resource, and asked if the content would also include a guidance component, possibly incorporating interviews or other formats. The **Secretariat** clarified that the Steering Committee and Secretariat would validate and edit practices collected and pre-vetted by WGI members. The toolkit can both highlight how the Principles have improved local water governance and showcase local actions addressing common water governance gaps. The **Secretariat** also noted the suggested change of terminology and committed to develop a new proposal.
- **ACF** suggested having different entry points for the toolkit (e.g. by level of government, principle or country) and asked if the toolkit would be a dynamic platform with continuous updates. ACF recommended adding a section in the template that would clearly identify the OECD Principles addressed to avoid confusion among those unfamiliar with the Principles. The **Secretariat** suggested starting with a physical document (e.g. brochure) as an output for the toolkit and consider eventually partnering with WGI members to create a more dynamic platform online, which could also be updated over time.
- **LTAW** suggested sharing draft videos on OECD Principles 1 (roles and responsibilities), 2 (scale) and 3 (policy coherence) with WGI members for comments, which could be revised and finalised for the 10th World Water Forum as a follow-up to the [video on the OECD Principles](#) launched at the 9th Forum, building on WGI members' feedback.

46. **Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Secretariat** reminded members that the WGI collected "evolving practices" for the report on [Implementing the OECD Principles on Water Governance](#) (2018). Lessons learned from this exercise led the Secretariat to i) narrow the scope of the template considerably, to save time on editing and avoid fact-checking, and ii) to rely more on members for the vetting or clearance of examples, hence the request for declassified, evidence-based material. The objectives of the toolkit are threefold: i) to showcase the tools and experimentations local authorities can leverage to implement the OECD Principles on the ground (be they issued by local or national, public or private entities); ii) to showcase local innovations that can inspire peer cities, but also other stakeholders and national governments; and iii) to draw lessons learned from successful implementations on the OECD Principles at local level through a meta-level/cross-cutting analysis of common features and take aways.

Breakout group discussions on the Toolkit and reporting back

47. Overall, members were divided in 5 groups of which one on-line. The discussions emphasised the following: ensuring clarity, accessibility, and inclusivity in the toolkit, and fostering an environment of shared learning and collaboration among stakeholders to promote sustainable water management practices.

- **Clarification of criteria:** There was a consensus on the need to clarify several aspects of the toolkit. These included specifying which countries would be included, encompassing both OECD and non-OECD countries. Additionally, there was a discussion about the types of contexts that should be covered, such as urban or rural settings, and the different scales of implementation, including cities, regions, and/ or basins. Members also sought clarity on the scope of water

functions to be addressed, such as water resource management, drinking water, water supply, sanitation, etc. Another point of discussion revolved around defining what constitutes a “good practice”, ensuring a common understanding among all stakeholders. Furthermore, there were queries regarding the adequacy of a 350-word length to effectively describe each practice.

- **Linking practices to SDGs and OECD Principles:** Members emphasised the significance of linking each practice included in the toolkit to specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and the 12 OECD Principles. This linkage was seen as crucial for aligning the practices with broader global objectives and for promoting consistent and coordinated efforts towards sustainable water management.
- **Inclusive approach and diversity of practices:** There was a call to collect practices from different socio-cultural contexts. In this regard, participants suggested involving a wide range of stakeholders from different backgrounds to contribute to the toolkit. There was also interest in expanding the toolkit’s scope beyond the water community to include innovative practices from other sectors like agriculture and industry.
- **Terminology and format:** Members enquired on the most appropriate terminology for the document. Some participants proposed an alternative to the term “toolkit”, such as “compendium of practices”. Regardless of the terminology, there was a unanimous agreement on the need for simplicity in the language used throughout the toolkit. Simplifying the language used in describing the Principles and providing a list of questions to help users identify relevant practices were seen as ways to make the toolkit more user-friendly and accessible to all stakeholders. Suggestions were made to provide concise summaries and keywords for each practice to aid users in quickly identifying relevant information.
- **Validation process and modality:** Members sought clarity on the criteria and procedures that would be employed to validate the practices to be included. Additionally, there was interest in exploring alternative modalities for the toolkit, such as incorporating videos or other multimedia formats to complement the written descriptions of practices.
- **Emphasis on challenges:** Members believed that understanding and addressing obstacles could provide valuable insights for others looking to adopt similar practices. As such, they proposed collect information on challenges faced during implementation, as important learning opportunities.

48. **The Chair** highlighted the overarching need for simplicity and clarity in the template and the toolkit. Examples should be inspiring, highlighting challenges and how they were overcome, and pay particular attention on bridging silos between water and other sectors. **The Secretariat** invited all WGI members to submit at least one practice from their own work for the toolkit.

Closing and next steps

The Chair thanked members for attending the 18th meeting of the WGI, as well as the Steering Committee, the Secretariat and the OECD for hosting the meeting. In terms of next step, the OECD Secretariat will:

- Follow up with the World Water Council towards the preparation of the World Water Forum.
- Follow up with the Global Commission on the Economics of Water to elucidate the contribution of the WGI to its planned consultations and deliverables.
- Follow up with WGI members who expressed the willingness to contribute to the project on the Blue Economy in Cities and Regions.
- Carry out the analytical work on water governance in Latin America (with IDB) and Africa (with UCLG-Africa), seeking the support from interested WGI members.
- Revise the template for collecting inputs for the Toolkit for the local implementation of OECD Principles on Water Governance, based on comments and suggestions received.

The 19th meeting of the WGI will take place in January or February 2024 (TBC) online or in presence. WGI members interested in hosting the 19th meeting are invited to contact the Secretariat.