



**TECHNICAL MEETING ON THE TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING ON
SDG INDICATOR 6.5.2 AND UNDER
THE WATER CONVENTION**
Budapest, Hungary, 16-17 January 2018

REPORT

Introduction and attendance

1. In the course of 2017, the first reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Rivers and International Lakes (Water Convention) took place. In order to maximize synergies and efficiencies, the two reporting processes were carried out together and a reporting template containing a section for the calculation of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and sections with detailed questions to characterize the status of transboundary water cooperation, based on the reporting under the Water Convention, was sent to all countries, both Parties and non-Parties to the Water Convention.
2. The technical meeting on the template for reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention was held on 16-17 January 2018 in Budapest and was hosted by the Government of Hungary. The main objective of the technical meeting was to draw lessons from the first reporting exercise in order to improve the template for future reporting. The meeting discussed possible revisions and clarifications to both the section of the template on reporting on indicator 6.5.2 and the relevant methodology, and the sections of the template for reporting under the Water Convention¹.
3. The technical meeting was attended by representatives from the following countries: Angola, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Chad, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Netherlands, Niger, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovenia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, United States of America and Viet Nam.
4. Two members of the Implementation Committee under the Water Convention also attended the meeting. Representatives of the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC) and International Association for Water Law were also present. The meeting was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

¹ Presentations and other relevant materials of the meeting are available at <https://www.unece.org/?id=47476>.

Session 1 Opening of the meeting

5. The workshop was opened by Mr. Peter Kovács, Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to Water Convention and Head of River Basin Management and Water Protection Department, Ministry of the Interior, Hungary. Mr. Kovács underlined that including transboundary water cooperation within the SDG framework was a major milestone, and that the global opening of the Water Convention – together with Chad’s imminent accession – marked important developments. He also highlighted the importance of building synergies in the reporting under SDG6.5.2 and under the Water Convention was highlighted. Mr. Kovács then intr

6. oduced the objectives of meeting, welcomed all participants and wished them all a productive meeting.

7. In his opening introduction, Mr. András Szöllósi-Nagy, Professor at the National University for Public Service and Chair of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO-IHP, first highlighted the central role of SDG 6 in the whole SDG framework and the importance of good governance of transboundary waters in this context. Mr. Szöllósi-Nagy stressed the expertise of UNESCO IHP in the study of transboundary aquifers, including inventory (around 600 transboundary aquifers identified so far), global assessments and support to Member States in the study of specific aquifers, citing the examples of the Guarani and Nubian Sandstone aquifers. He also depicted several challenges related to groundwater as an “invisible resource”.

8. Ms. Francesca Bernardini (UNECE) then provided an introductory presentation. She explained that the SDG indicator framework had been developed by the UN Member States through the inter-agency and expert group on SDG indicators. Ms. Bernardini noted that all SDG targets and indicators related to water (SDG6) are being co-ordinated through a UN-Water integrated monitoring initiative. She recalled Decision (VII/2) taken at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (17-19 November 2015) by which a regular reporting under the Convention had been established. The similarities between the process of reporting under SDG6.5.2 and the Convention, and the benefits of coupling the two processes were highlighted. Ms. Bernardini then outlined the experiences from the first reporting exercise, both in terms of the process that was followed and the number of responses received from countries. The next steps for 2018 were then highlighted, which included presenting the results of the reporting exercises to the High-Level Political Forum, and the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in Astana, 10-12 October 2018, and the production of several publications. Ms. Bernardini then explained the aims of the objectives of the meeting and the programme for the workshop.

Session 2 Revision and clarification of the section of the template for reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and relevant methodology

Mr. Szöllósi-Nagy introduced the session 2 by highlighting the importance of water to the achievement of all SDGs. The objectives of the session were then outlined, namely to discuss the challenges faced in completing the section of the template related to the calculation of SDG6.5.2; to review the proposed changes to the section as proposed by UNECE and UNESCO; and to review the step-by-step methodology that supports the calculation of 6.5.2.

9. Mr. Aurélien Dumont (UNESCO) then went through the comments that had been received by countries on the template for reporting on SDG6.5.2 and the step-by-step methodology. He noted that several difficulties and common inconsistencies in the SDG calculation could be addressed by enhancing the links between Section I and II of the template, and by introducing additional information in the tables compiling the information necessary for SDG 6.5.2 calculation, such as detailing the four criteria for operationality. The validation process would also greatly benefit from the clarification, especially regarding validation of groundwater aspects, as the integration between river/lake basins and aquifers was poorly represented, which required extensive use of GIS and cross-checking with other data bases when analysing the reports received. Mr. Dumont then explained how the proposed revisions would help to address these inconsistencies.

10. During the ensuing plenary discussions, country representatives expressed their view on the proposed changes to the template for reporting on SDG6.5.2. They welcomed the addition of the columns related to the criteria added in synthesis table on calculation of the indicator, however they also highlighted the importance to only have information related to the calculation of the indicator 6.5.2 not to create any confusion.

11. Several suggestions were made to revise the methodology. However, most countries expressed satisfaction with the existing methodology and noted that to ensure consistency between reporting cycles, and to build upon the extensive deliberations that had led to the adoption of the indicator by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development, improving the clarity of the indicator was preferable at this stage.

12. A group exercise was then initiated by Mr. Dumont. The aim of the group exercise was to review experiences in the use of the step-by-step methodology, and to identify ways in which it might be improved. To have a clearer and more user-friendly step-by-step methodology participants suggested not to make the documents more complex, to reduce the introductory part, to include a glossary with clear and / improved definitions. Participants were invited to send further comments on the step-by-step methodology to UNECE and UNESCO by 15 February 2018.

Session 3 Revision and clarification of the section of the template for reporting under the Water Convention

13. The purpose of session three was to present proposed revisions to the template on reporting under the Water Convention, based on the comments and observations received by countries and experts. The session was split into two parts: a first part on general issues concerning the reporting template and a second part with detailed discussions on specific proposals for modification of the template.

14. Introducing the general discussion on the template, Mr. Seppo Rekolainen, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry from Finland, who chaired session 3, highlighted the need to find an effective balance between comments that were asking for more questions, issues and details to be covered by the template, and other comments aimed at simplifying and shortening the questions in the template. It was also noted that there should be continuity between reporting

cycles, and in this respect, making major changes to the structure and content of the template was not desirable.

15. The Chair outlined the process for finalizing the template under the Water Convention. It was explained that following this technical meeting the revised template would be submitted to the Working Group of Integrated Water Resources Management, 29-30 May 2018, which would have an open-ended participation. The template would then be submitted for adoption to the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties in Astana on 10-12 October 2018 as part of a decision on reporting.

16. The Water Convention secretariat summarized the comments and observations received by countries and others concerning the template. In terms of general comments, it was highlighted that the completion of the template had several benefits. The template proved to be a useful tool to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing national frameworks for transboundary waters, and to facilitate a review of existing agreements and arrangements. The template also proved to be a useful tool by which to assess the implementation of the Water Convention and the effectiveness of transboundary water cooperation. While it was generally recognized that the template could be improved, a further observation was that the structure of the template proved to be sufficiently robust to capture a diverse practice of transboundary cooperation around the world. The significant effort made by countries in completing the template was also noted.

17. The Water Convention secretariat introduced proposed revisions to the template based on the comments and observations received. It was explained by the secretariat that the intention of the revisions was to avoid overlap and simplify questions rather than make any substantial changes to the template. Key changes that were highlighted were the use of consistent terminology, the introduction of more ‘tick box’ answers, and further opportunities to explain answers. A proposal coming from the comments and observations received by countries and others was to develop a guide to completing the template. This was favourably received by the participants of the workshop. The use of a guide was considered to be a valuable tool by which to include definitions, explain the rationale for certain questions, and to provide examples of how the template might be completed.

18. The second part of the session went through the revisions to the template that had been proposed by the secretariat based on the comments received. Efforts were made to reach consensus on the changes proposed by the secretariat. Key changes included: ensuring consistent use of terminology throughout the template, e.g., ‘transboundary basin, sub-basin, part of a basin or group of basins’, ‘agreement or arrangements’, and ‘joint body or mechanism’; requesting Parties to list the aquifers subject to an agreement or arrangement (Section II, question 2 (b)); including a list of options that describe the main difficulties and challenges faced in implementing an agreement or arrangement (Section II, question 2(e)); asking for the frequency of meetings of a joint body or mechanism (Section II, question 3(h)); clarifying the question related to the protection of ecosystems (Section II, question 5)); asking for the frequency of data and information exchange (Section II, question 6); including a list of options that describe the main difficulties and challenges to data and information exchange (Section II, question 6(e)); asking whether there is joint monitoring of transboundary aquifers,

and aquifers in the territory of one riparian that are connected to a transboundary river or lake (Section II, question 7(a)); reformulating the question on stakeholder participation to include a list of stakeholder groups, and to differentiate between advisory roles and decision-making roles (Section II, question 13); requesting countries to describe relevant laws and policy at the national level, rather than list them (Section III, question 1); including a list of sectors subject to national licensing or permitting systems (Section III, question 1(d)); including a list of options that describe the main challenges and achievements in cooperating over transboundary waters (Section IV, question 1 and 2); and including a list of institutions that might have been consulted during the completion of the template (Section IV, question 3).

19. Following the question-by-question discussion on the revisions to the template, the secretariat presented elements of a decision on reporting under the Convention to be adopted at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Suggested key elements of the decision included, linking the process of reporting under SDG6.5.2 with reporting under the Water Convention; stipulating that reporting be carried out every three years and that the deadline for the next reporting round be set for the 30th June 2020; and that the templates for reporting under the Water Convention and SDG6.5.2 should be co-ordinated. Additional suggested elements of the reporting included providing a mandate for the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, with support from the Water Convention Secretariat and UNESCO, to develop a guide to reporting; to explore options for developing an on-line reporting system; and to carrying-out capacity building initiatives, including training workshop, to promote the use of the reports and improve their quality during the next reporting cycle.

Session 4 Review of the process for reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention

20. Mr. Younane Nelngar, Ministry of Water and Sanitation from Chad, chaired this session. He introduced the session's objective, which was to learn lessons from the experience of the first reporting exercise and consider how to improve the reporting process for the next reporting cycle.

21. The representative of UNESCO recalled the reporting process for the collection, submission and validation of the reports. Some of the lessons learned and good practices were highlighted, including the support provided by UNECE and UNESCO to identify appropriate national focal points for transboundary water issues and to mobilise networks at the national level, the coordination demonstrated by countries to gather, collect and report information at national and transboundary levels, the wealth of data not reported before, and the challenge of data availability, especially regarding aquifers.

22. The Water Convention secretariat introduced the aim of developing a guide on reporting under the Water Convention / Sections II to IV of the 6.5.2 indicator reporting template. It was suggested that a guide should limit the time taken to complete, review and revise the reports, improve the quality of reporting and allow for greater comparability across country reports. The secretariat also presented the possible content of the guide, namely an

explanation of key terminology, the rationale for including certain questions, and the provision of examples to guide the completion of some of the more complicated questions.

23. In the ensuing discussion, participants welcomed the possibility to have a hands-on guide to complete the template. Participants also considered that the five months' timeline for submitting the report was adequate, based on the fact that continuous support and information will be provided by the co-custodian agencies to prepare for the next reporting cycle from now. The representative of Niger expressed the possibility to develop an online reporting system similar to the reporting tool used by the African Ministerial Council on Water.

Session 5 Next steps: use of the reports and preparing for the next reporting cycle

24. The objective of session 5 was to discuss the use of reports at the national, basin, regional and global levels. The session started with a roundtable discussion chaired by Ms. Heide Jekel, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. Insights related to the process and value of reporting were shared by several countries, including Brazil, Kenya, Luxembourg and Vietnam. During these interventions it was noted that reporting had proved to be a useful tool by which to assess the current status of transboundary water cooperation at the national level, and in some instances, had enabled a conversation with neighbouring countries. In addition, the Mr. Lammers, a member of the Implementation Committee under the Water Convention, was asked to comment on how the national reports might be used to support implementation under the Water Convention.

25. Following the sharing of experiences, a discussion was opened with all workshop participants on the benefits of the reporting exercise and how the reports might be used. The importance of making the reports publicly available was raised, and it was noted that the reports might then be used by both governmental and non-governmental experts to analyse the current status of transboundary water cooperation, and the implementation of agreements and arrangements. A further point that was highlighted was the importance of countries sharing draft reports during the reporting process. The value of countries exchanging reports with countries that share a particular river, lake or aquifer system was highlighted as a particularly useful practice. The intention of UNECE and UNESCO to run workshops on reporting during the lead up to the next reporting cycle was welcomed.

Closing

26. Ms. Jekel expressed gratitude to participants for their contributions to meeting discussions and closed the meeting at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 17 January 2018.