Knowledge Management and Organisational Review of the Global Water Partnership - GWP

Final report

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Executive summary

1   Findings, conclusions and recommendations on knowledge management in GWP

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) aims to integrate Knowledge Management (KM) into all workplans and actions - it has long been considered within GWP that it is not helpful to isolate knowledge management as a specific task. Knowledge management in GWP serves a dual purpose to: i) support GWP's global thought leadership function as well as; ii) provide a function that supports and empowers its network.

GWP has made major efforts to develop their knowledge management system since 2009, currently many of the components are in place but they are not integrated. A stakeholder-based knowledge chain was developed as a framework for knowledge management in 2010 but does not seem to be working as well as it could. Results from a recent Global Water Partnership Organisation (GWPO) staff survey showed that those who responded did not find the knowledge chain to be working as intended. A majority, but not all, of the external commentators shared this observation. There is a widespread recognition that the potential and knowledge of Regional Water Partnerships (RWPs) and Country Water Partnerships (CWPs) is underutilised. Various attempts have been made to strengthen the link but usually from a top-bottom perspective which might explain why it has not yet worked as well as expected. The weakest link is the feedback loop between knowledge users and knowledge custodians with the GWPO/Technical Executive Committee (TEC) who are perceived as the knowledge custodians.

The thought leadership function is mainly exercised through TEC acting as a think tank but the agenda appears neither strongly demand-led nor driven by strategic foresight. Some of the key TEC papers have created the visibility required to be taken seriously at international, regional and national levels and helped to sustain the credibility of GWPs involvement in policy processes at global and regional levels. However, the water agenda is not as straightforward as it once was and in an increasingly more complicated and crowded field, GWP is struggling to be heard. The GWP focus on water security and the 6 themes is a response to these challenges but this focus has not yet revealed a unique niche for GWP. There is a danger of losing leadership on Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) by not taking the opportunity to update and refine it. On the other hand there is also a danger that GWP has opened up a new agenda that is so broad that it cannot compete with or effectively complement other thought leaders and think tanks.

The concept of bringing science and practice together is solid but the Technical Committee interventions are not timely enough. GWP is not a university or research body that is equipped to develop new knowledge. Its role as articulated by the TEC roadmap is to bring science and practice together. The role of linking science and practice addresses an important thought leadership gap that GWP is, because of its network, well positioned to fill.   However, TEC papers are often not delivered early enough to lead thinking on the subject. The new broader agenda demands a greater skill range. With 6 specialist themes many of which require expertise outside of the water sector, the TEC is finding it a challenge to respond effectively from within its own resources.

Other interim findings from the knowledge management assessment include:

- **Integration of GWP thought leadership into other processes is a promising trend** – in recent years GWP has seconded people and devoted resources to integrating water issues into organisations such as WMO and UNFCCC. Although this may not bring high visibility, it has apparently served a very useful purpose and is much appreciated.
- **Support to RWP/CWP in their own knowledge management is carried out through the work planning and reporting systems**. GWP has a system of highly advanced monitoring and evaluation and learning tools, but they are complicated. In its current use it perhaps serves as means of providing accountability to donors, more than as an internal learning instrument. Nevertheless the work planning and reporting systems have a potential for strengthening the feedback and learning loop.
- **KM appears to be conceived as a central function within GWP - a coherent strategy to support and encourage the RWPs and CWPs to develop their own KM functioning is not apparent**. That having been said, there are some isolated cases where certain partnerships and partners have been supported to develop a knowledge management function. The most impressive of these is the effort that GWPO has given to train and coach universities in the use of the ToolBox.
- **Comparatively little is known about the extent and nature of use of KM products and services,** and there seems to be a lack of curiosity at GWP regarding how their KM products and services are used. Fortunately, the newly implemented systematic impact monitoring and evaluation system has the potential and capacity to compile and reveal information on how GWP KM is being used by its critical stakeholders.
- **A recent GWP ToolBox survey, publication data and Internet analysis demonstrated some promising trends.** The ToolBox shows evidence of use and the number of users has steadily increased from 2000 to over 6000 in the last 15 months - perhaps in response to recent social media campaigns. Considerable use is made of the ToolBox and its case studies – particularly by universities. Some find the tool box navigation too complex.

Conclusions and recommendations on knowledge management are summarised below:

Strategic repositioning of GWP as a knowledge organisation	
- Conclusion 1: A rapidly changing context is making new demands on knowledge management that GWP recognise but have not fully adapted to. - Conclusion 2: The focus on water security and the 6 strategic themes provides a foundation but has not yet led to a clear mission and definition of a core business for GWP. - Conclusion 3: Although the choice between analysis and action is seen as central – these options are not mutually exclusive and can be complementary. - Conclusion 4: GWPs knowledge management agenda is not strategically driven.	- Recommendation 1: The new executive secretary should lead a strategic repositioning of GWP and align its knowledge management practices accordingly. - Recommendation 2: Building on the niche and comparative advantage defined in the strategic planning process, GWP should regularly engage in an explicit knowledge agenda setting process.

Enhancing the knowledge chain in GWP	

• Conclusion 5: TEC is not sufficiently connected to the network.
    o *Option 1:* TEC becomes an editorial and advisory board that manages the think tank process of agenda setting and commissions papers on the topics identified.
    o *Option 2*: TEC develops a light network of regional TECs - to the extent possible using or expanding the current RWP steering committees.
    o *Option 3*: GWPO take the lead in KM and chairs the TEC – the GWPO would appoint a full time knowledge manager reporting to the Executive Secretary who would become the chair of the TEC.
    o *Option 4*: The GWPO/TEC and their knowledge management function are merged with one or more other international water think tanks.
 	
• Conclusion 6: Knowledge loops are not closed. Knowledge management is predominantly one directional – from GWPO and TEC to the countries and regions and partners.
 	
• Conclusion 7: GWPs knowledge sharing methods are static and internal learning is slow.
 	
• Conclusion 8: GWP focuses heavily on conceptual knowledge while the demand is moving more towards practitioner knowledge.
	• Recommendation 3: The outgoing chair of TEC should be replaced with an interim chair rather than the final chair until the executive secretary and strategic repositioning is in place.
	
	• Recommendation 4: The feedback loops within the knowledge management cycle and the knowledge chains need to be closed in order to reach rapid feedback and learning for continuous improvement of knowledge products and processes.
	
	• Recommendation 5: Integrate more dynamic, and interaction based knowledge-sharing methods.
	
	• Recommendation 6: GWP should carefully consider what type of knowledge is required by their clients and develop a systematic way to generate that knowledge.

2 Findings, conclusions and recommendations on GWP network operations

The GWP partner network is well balanced between different sectors, with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and the public sector forming a slight majority of partners.

CWPs are highly diverse, and some often driven by individual champions and project activity are highly active, whilst others have become dormant. Where they have been active, CWPs have been the most effective change agents in promoting the uptake of GWP's knowledge products and advancing the GWP objectives of achieving a water secure world. Their mix of government representatives, civil society, expertise from NGOs and research institutions enabled them to use GWP's (and others') knowledge products to develop credible and specific solutions to water related challenges.

RWPs are mainly a combination of government and expert led partnerships that because of their funding are stable and accountable. The RWP secretariats obtain resources from GWP and are accountable to GWPO. Being spread over a number of countries, as meeting costs are relatively high. There is an apparent reluctance to make full use of information and communication technology and face-to-face meetings are preferred.

Regional, country and lower level partnership have demonstrated their potential capacity to add value in a variety of ways including:

• RWPs that share global knowledge and make it accessible at the regional level

- RWPs that support transboundary water cooperation through providing a neutral forum for cooperation, exchange of information and experience
- RWPs and CWPs that take active steps to exchange experience on solving water problems from country to country
- CWPs that work with national authorities in an advocacy and knowledge-sharing role to influence policies and develop solutions.

CWPs work well when they are instrumental in sharing and adapting global knowledge products to solve particular water related challenges at country level e.g. as in the case of the Ethiopia CWP which learned from the Kenya CWP. The CWPs are essential for revitalisation of the partners. It is only through CWPs that the 3000+ member organisations can be vitalised.

RWPs work well when addressing problems common to different countries - an example is the role of the East Africa RWP in supporting the Nile Basin Initiative. However mutual expectations on the role of CWPs and RWPs are not clear. For example, some RWPs have not fully met all expectations of the partners (e.g. to mobilise funding, highlighting that expectations could be misunderstood or unrealistic).

Relevant issues for the network include:

Funding and the incentive environment - With no tasks and no funding, the CWPs can quickly become inactive. The potential for the CWPs to allow non-state actors to engage on a multi-stakeholder platform provides incentives for active involvement. Voluntarism and the unstable incentive environment for both state and non-state actors make the CWPs highly dependent on individual champions. There are different schools of thought on the funding of CWPs. Most would agree that GWP cannot afford, at least at the present time, to systematically fund CWPs and many would agree that such funding could even have counterproductive effects such as capture by powerful elites. Many would recognise that CWPs who are active because of the perceived value of the knowledge exchange taking place are better than those who are active only due to payment. Many would also at the same time relying on individual champions to provide their time free but without at least a minimum of funding for secretarial functions can throttle the voluntary spirit.

Roles for RWPs and CWPs - Both the RWPs and CWPs have an underutilised role in knowledge management chain as outlined in earlier analysis. The RWP and CWP roles and how they play them will need to reflect the very different circumstances they face. There are probably at least 5 different roles that CWPs and RWPs have played in the past:

- Consultation platform – a platform for government to consultant non-state actors and for non-state actors to contribute to the water resources management;
- Advocacy platform – a multi-stakeholder platform for all interested parties to advocate for change;
- A regional and in-country learning and knowledge exchange platform - a platform to disseminate knowledge; learn from global and regional experiences; making special use of the knowledge products and services from the GWP network;

- A neutral broker role – providing a neutral platform to broker knowledge but also bring parties that might otherwise have divergent interests together; and,
- An implementing body for strategic projects - implementing strategic knowledge-related projects where the projects are central to the overall GWP strategy and where GWP/RWP/CWP are best and uniquely placed to implement.

All these roles are potentially valid and tend to be complementary – the balance between them will also vary over time.

CWPs when well-governed, inclusive and supported are the most powerful instrument to create the framework for implementing the water agenda. The converse is also true, as dysfunctional CWPs, captured by special interests, lose credibility from both country actors and RWPs. Although GWP has the systems for network strengthening (e.g. accreditation forms) there is an over-reliance on bureaucratic tools and prescription. Unlike other global networks, GWP does not coach CWPs so that they become stronger and better-governed network organisations in their own right.

Conclusions and recommendations on GWP network operations are summarised below:

Better utilisation of the partnership and network	
• Conclusion 9 Without core funding of RWPs and CWPs, at least at a minimum level, the network will underperform.	• Recommendation 7 - Enhance the financial sustainability of the network through internal efficiency gains and transferring resources to lower levels of the network.
• Conclusion 10: Greater and more active involvement of the networks in knowledge management is essential for carrying out GWP's vision and mission.	• Recommendation 8 – RWPs and CWPs should take greater responsibility for knowledge management where there is capacity and robust governance in place. • Recommendation 9 - GWPO should explore a range of more radical options for gaining synergy with similar global think tank organisations.

3   Findings, conclusions and recommendations on GWP projects

GWP undertakes a number of projects. The flagship projects examined appear to support the strategy and mission of GWP. Most of the projects involve capacity development and advocacy activities, and do not involve actual physical implementation.

The increasing impetus on demonstrating concrete results is one of the forces driving GWP towards project implementation both from donors and from developing countries who are eager to see tangible economic and social benefits from water resources. The network needs to respond to this to remain relevant. One of the ways it is doing this is through an increasing tendency for the projects to develop investment plans and to orientate attention from management of water resources to development of water resources in line with demands.

Projects have led to a massive increase in GWPO staffing and have started to replace core funding. The vast majority of projects are implemented by GWPO with the RWPs of the Mediterranean and Southern African Region also have significant activity levels.

There are potential benefits but also pitfalls in carrying out a dual role of advocacy and action through projects. GWP and its networks were originally developed to influence policy and create knowledge rather than directly implement projects on the ground that even if they do not involve physical infrastructure could be done by others (e.g. feasibility studies, master plans, and modelling etc.). There is mutual benefit to be gained from the action agenda of implementing projects and the advocacy agenda of influencing policy and creating knowledge. The main benefits are that projects create and test knowledge, fostering learning, and help develop relevant and proven advocacy messages. But there are also pitfalls. The principle ones being that:

- successful project implementation demands a skills set, systems and a track record that GWP has to yet to fully acquire;
- there is a conflict between a neutral broker role and active engagement;
- RWPs, CWPs and their partners are potentially placed in a commercially competitive rather than collaborative environment and;
- seeking projects could weaken or distract from the main GWP mission.

Strategic projects are an essential part of GWP activities, now and in the future – strategic projects not only ensure that GWPs mission remains funded even if core funding reduces but equally importantly strategic projects ensure that GWP's mission is grounded in reality and up to date. Strategic projects also serve to engage the network in direct activities that enhance their credibility, increase their policy influence and provide incentives for partners to engage. Strategic projects also ensure that knowledge is disseminated to the front line and that experience from the front line is transferred back to the country, regional and global levels. **Strategic projects**:

- have as their primary aim, the advance of knowledge and strengthening of the network rather than filling a budget or funding gap.
- cannot be done as well or better by others, and GWPs involvement adds a significant value.
- do not compromise the neutral broker role or initiate competition within the GWP family.

Projects that are not strategic, and especially poorly-conceived demonstration projects on the ground, have high administrative costs and drain the operational and management capacity of RWP/CWP, thus creating confusion on the role of the partnership. Most countries on the other hand are desperate on how to deliver public goods within water.

Conclusions and recommendations on GWP projects are summarised below:

Knowledge management and working with projects	
• Conclusion 11: The current flagship projects of GWP are fully supportive of the strategy. • Conclusion 12: Strategic projects are an essential part of GWP activities, now and in the future.	• Recommendation 10 – GWP should develop a strategic guidance for project engagement: including project selection, implementation arrangements, contribution to core funding; and programme development.