

Response to Svenska Dagbladet's article series on GWP

This is our response to the article series on GWP published in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, in four parts, starting on 15 October 2024. We have published separate statements responding to each article in detail and a closing statement. GWP takes strong exception to these articles, which have also been circulated widely through an anonymous email campaign.

The entire response series can be read on our website at this link:

[Response to Svenska Dagbladet's article series on GWP](#)

We will continue to update our statements as needed and stand ready to provide additional clarifications and responses.

We are concerned about the recent series of articles published by Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) regarding the Global Water Partnership (GWP). While we respect the role of investigative journalism, these articles present an unfair and misleading portrayal of our organisation.

The global secretariat of our organisation experienced challenges in 2022-2023. The articles series fails to note that these challenges have been addressed, and that throughout 2024, our organisation has been making significant positive changes, as well as continuing to make substantial impact – especially through the work of our global network – towards achieving water security across the world.

Taking criticism seriously

At GWP, we take all criticisms seriously, particularly those concerning the management of development aid funds and ensuring a safe and fair working environment. These are among our top priorities. We handle formal complaints according to strict confidentiality standards and maintain high accountability in all processes.

Steps we have taken

We have fully acknowledged that there was a crisis within our Global Secretariat (GWPO) in 2022-2023, which impacted both our work environment and funding. However, since then, we have made significant improvements that were not reflected in the article:

- **Governance and accountability:** In response to the KPMG audit, we implemented comprehensive reforms to strengthen governance and accountability.

- **Organizational strengthening:** These reforms were already in progress before the audit, helping us recover from the challenges and build a stronger, more resilient organisation.
- **Financial stability:** Our funding situation has stabilized, and our current and former partners have expressed confidence in GWP's renewed direction.

Whistleblower allegations and staff cuts

We take whistleblower concerns seriously and have established formal, independent channels for complaints. Regarding staff cuts in 2023, these decisions were made based on financial constraints and the need to restructure, not as retaliation against whistleblowers. These actions were necessary to ensure the organization's sustainability.

Achievements despite challenges

Despite the difficulties of 2022-2023, GWP has continued to deliver significant results globally. Our [2023 Annual Report](#) highlights the many successes achieved by our network in addressing critical water management challenges worldwide, even during the period of crisis.

Commitment to transparency and dialogue

We remain committed to transparency and dialogue with our partners, employees, and stakeholders. GWP continues to act with integrity and accountability at all levels. We welcome constructive feedback and remain focused on our mission of ensuring water security worldwide.

We hope future reporting will provide a more balanced and accurate reflection of GWP's work and achievements.

Response to Svenska Dagbladet's article published on 16 October (Travel)

An article published in Svenska Dagbladet on 16 October presents several claims about the travel practices of GWP and its leadership that are misleading and do not accurately reflect the actual circumstances. This response aims to provide a clearer and more accurate picture.

Key Points

1. Travel costs: GWP Chair Pablo Bereciartua's travel expenses for his 2022 trip from Buenos Aires to New York and Washington were significantly less expensive than the amount reported by SvD.

2. Class of travel: Contrary to SvD's claims and insinuations of extensive first-class travel, Bereciartua travelled exclusively in Economy Class and Economy Plus, with two exceptions

where the cost was either not significantly higher, or was less expensive, than Economy.

3. Spot-audit feedback: The spot-audit requested by Sida in 2023 provided important feedback to GWP that led to immediate improvements in our policies, including requiring formal written travel reports (instead of oral reports) from the Chair.

4. Auditor transparency: Pablo Bereciartua provided extensive written follow-up information to the auditors engaged by Sida, including comprehensive details of his engagements, meetings and discussions. Similar materials were also provided to SvD.

Detailed Clarifications

- Travel costs for Pablo Bereciartua:** GWP Chair Pablo Bereciartua travelled from Buenos Aires to New York and Washington in 2022. SvD reports a total cost for the trip of SEK 70 000, which is inaccurate. The internal documents cited by SvD were budget estimates, not actual reported costs. The total cost of the trip was approximately SEK 44,000, of which the airline ticket price was SEK 25,350. The main Buenos Aires-New York leg of the trip was conducted in Economy Plus, a higher class was chosen only for the New York-Washington leg (on advice of the travel agency) to ensure that luggage was transferred in time. The total cost of the ticket was not significantly affected.
- Claims regarding first-class travel:** SvD’s claims that GWP’s leadership has “awarded themselves expensive first-class travel” are misleading. While former Chair Howard Bamsey travelled in Business Class, this was standard and accepted practice during his tenure, which ended on June 30, 2022. Pablo Bereciartua, who assumed the role on July 1, 2022, has consistently travelled in Economy or Economy Plus.
- Context of former Chair’s resignation:** The claim that former GWP Chair Howard Bamsey resigned “in protest” when Sida denied approval for Business or First-Class travel is incorrect. Mr. Bamsey faced health concerns related to deep vein thrombosis (DVT), leading his doctor to advise against flying in economy class. Mr. Bamsey has reconfirmed to GWP that his decision not to seek re-election to a second term was based solely on personal health considerations. It implied no criticism of Sida’s or GWP’s travel policies and was simply a logical result of those policies.
- Contextual misrepresentation of quotes:** The SvD article misrepresents a quote from Pablo Bereciartua by failing to include the context of the event at which he spoke at World Water Week at GWP’s Booth (he joined online). This was a hybrid event, combining online and in-person participations, to [kick-off the consultation period for GWP’s new Strategy 2026-2030](#). The omission of the surrounding context alters the intended meaning of his statements.

The text omitted from Pablo Bereciartua’s statement includes the following: “I think this is most of all an unbelievable opportunity for Global Water Partnership to rethink itself. We are definitely in a world that is changing. Big-time changes are happening around us, and we need to see those changes as opportunities.” Pablo Bereciartua emphasised that GWP’s unique position, as a neutral intergovernmental entity free from external ownership pressures, allows it to adapt to these changes effectively. As

he further elaborated: “We are already a global network—very diversified, very horizontal—and we have the capacity to speak from a neutral point of view. This neutrality is crucial for effective water governance because it enables us to connect various stakeholders and facilitate important discussions within the sector.”

- **GWP’s value and results:** The assertion that GWP “drains funds from the Swedish state without delivering results” is baseless. GWP has for many years consistently reported impressive and quantifiable outcomes, contributing to water management and water security improvements in many countries around the world, as evidenced in our Annual Reports. In its public response to the SvD article series, Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) referred to GWP as “a key actor in the global agenda” that “fills an important niche for contributing to a more water-secure world.”

In conclusion, the SvD article contains significant inaccuracies and does not reflect the true nature of GWP's operations, its travel practices, or its documented value and impact.

Response to Svenska Dagbladet’s article published on 18 October (Partners)

At Global Water Partnership (GWP), we wish to address, clarify and correct the information presented in Svenska Dagbladet's (SvD) recent article regarding our partner database, published on 18 October. The SvD article presents a misleading view of GWP’s operations by focusing solely on one category of partners, misrepresenting key facts, and failing to provide accurate information to its readers about how our organisation works and how it makes effective use of development aid funding.

This article is intended to provide readers with a brief and more accurate picture of our partnership system.

Key Points

1. GWP’s core **operational network** consists of its accredited **13 Regional Water Partnerships and 77 Country Water Partnerships**, not the thousands of organisations who have chosen to register themselves in our partner database. The SvD article misrepresents this central fact regarding how the organisation works.
2. **Applying to become a registered partner** is open to all organisations who agree to support the principles of **Integrated Water Resource Management**.
3. GWP has been engaged in a process of **cleaning and updating our database** of registered partners (as we do periodically).
4. According to the Statutes governing our intergovernmental organisation, **no partner organisation may be expunged from our list of partners** before a decision to do so is

formally approved by the annual meeting of the Network of Partners. We are working to update and modernise these Statutes.

5. **To provide a more accurate picture**, we have begun reporting publicly on the number of partners whom we consider to be “**active**”.

6. GWP also practices **many other forms of partnership** in pursuit of our goal: a water-secure world for all.

GWP’s core operational network of Regional and Country Water Partnerships

GWP’s operational network primarily consists of our 13 Regional Water Partnerships (RWP) and 77 Country Water Partnerships (CWP). These Partnerships are accredited by GWP to represent and act on behalf of the global organisation in their regions and countries.

Our [Business Plan](#) is first and foremost based on the work of these partnerships, not on the several thousand organisational entities in our database of registered partners.

Understanding the GWP network of registered partners

Applying to join GWP’s network of registered partners is open to states, governments (at all levels), organisations, academic institutions and businesses (though not to individuals). The only ground condition for becoming a Partner is to indicate that one is committed to the principles of integrated water resources management (IWRM). All partner applications are vetted by GWP and must be personally approved by the Executive Secretary (CEO).

Registered partners receive regular communications from GWP globally, including information on relevant opportunities and resources that might be useful to them; and they have opportunities to participate, in varying degrees, in relevant regional or country-level processes (as decided by the accredited, independent Regional and Country Water Partnerships described above).

All GWP Partners are invited to the annual Network Meeting of Partners, where they have the opportunity to make their voices heard in our governance processes.

Misinterpretation of funding and governance of GWP’s registered partners

SvD inaccurately claims that GWP’s entire network of registered partner organisations is “funded and receives overall governance via GWP” (“finansieras och får sin övergripande styrning via GWP”). This statement is incorrect and misleading. GWP does not fund or govern the broader network of registered partners that we have described above.

GWP made repeated efforts to inform SvD of the important difference between our operational network (which is the part that receives funding and implements programmes) and the broader network of registered partners. SvD showed no interest in addressing, understanding, or communicating that distinction, neither during the interviews conducted nor in the resulting published article series.

Database clean-up and clarification

As communicated to SvD and explained in our [article](#) on our website (“How many GWP Partners are there?”), we are currently updating and cleaning our partner database. Note that we have recently begun referring to “registered partners” in order to distinguish the partners in this database – all of whom have at some time actively applied to and been formally approved by GWP – from other types of partners with whom we work.

It is important to note the following about the governance of our partner database:

- While ALL organisations in the database were once registered and formally approved, *removing* partners from the database requires, under our governing Statutes, a formal decision taken by the entire body of registered partners, at our annual Network Meeting of Partners.
- GWP’s governing Statutes were written many years ago, and agreed to by the governments who created us, with the aim of ensuring that GWP’s registered partners had a meaningful say in the governance of the organisation. As the number of partners has grown, certain formal procedures – such as the removal of partners from our list – have become unwieldy, and GWP is pursuing a programme of governance reform to address that. However, changing our governing Statutes takes time, as it requires decisions taken at the governmental level (and often at the parliamentary level).
- As noted at our recent [Network Meeting of Partners on 8 October 2024](#), we have recently developed a method to provide a more accurate picture of the current partner list, without requiring a formal decision for expulsion from the list at that annual Network Meeting. This method categorizes partners as “active” or “inactive,” based on the evidence available to us. We must be careful, however, not to exclude partners simply based on an incorrect email address or a non-functioning website (these things always change over time).

GWP’s partner network extends more broadly

In addition to the registered partners (that is, those listed in our database), GWP collaborates with a variety of other partners, including:

- Organisations working with us on program and project delivery (these are often contractual relationships).
- Organisations participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue processes or communities of practice to advance knowledge and learning on water.
- Partners with whom we have other formal agreements but who are not listed in our database (because, as noted, joining the list of registered partners requires that the organisation make a separate application – we cannot simply add them to the list).
- Strategic partners without formal agreements.

We regret that SvD has not been responsive to our efforts to explain the way our various partnership processes work and are governed, and that they have chosen instead to present an inaccurate and misleading picture.

We take the information published by SvD seriously, and we welcome information that helps us identify partners who may have registered long ago and who no longer wish to participate, or who no longer exist as organisations; and we are committed to providing accurate and transparent details about our work. As our published statements indicate, this is an area of priority focus.

We encourage readers to explore the full scope of GWP's partnerships and partners, which extend beyond the registered partners in the database. And we invite interested organisations to apply to become a GWP Partner, and to join our global community of actors working to achieve a more water-secure world, for this and for coming generations.

For more information, please visit the [Partner section](#) of our website.

Response to Svenska Dagbladet's article published on 19 October (Finances and concluding statement)

The recent article in Svenska Dagbladet on 19 October, reporting on GWP's finances, presents a biased and incorrect picture of the organisation. The article fails to take into account the major shift in development aid financing generally that has also affected GWP, and it does not report on the extensive development of programme and project financing that GWP has secured in recent years.

In this statement, we wish to correct that picture. We also wish to make a final concluding statement about the article series as a whole.

Key Points

- 1. Shift in development aid:** In recent years, many countries that previously provided core support (unrestricted grants) to organisations like GWP have reduced their use of core support generally and moved to programmatic (earmarked) support. To a significant degree, the changes in funding at GWP reflect a broader shift in international development aid.
- 2. Changes in donor support:** While some funders have left GWP because of changes in their priorities, others – such as the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environmental Facility – have been moving to increase their support and engagement.
- 3. Operational efficiency:** During 2023 and 2024, GWP has moved decisively in the direction of having a leaner, more efficient, and more decentralized secretariat. Increasingly, programmes are also led and contracted by our regional offices (see the [article](#) how our network operates). These changes in our secretariat operations and funding strategy reflect strategic decisions being taken at the global level.

4. FCDO funding misrepresentation: The UK funder FCDO did not abruptly “end” its funding of a programme implemented by GWP, Global Water Leadership, as Svenska Dagbladet erroneously implied. FCDO accelerated its timetable, which closed the programme earlier than originally planned. However, the programme was successfully completed, [its results were reported and publicly launched at Stockholm World Water Week](#), and FCDO has indicated that it is satisfied with those results. FCDO recently awarded GWP with an “A” rating for its capacity to implement programmes effectively. (Please see the related GWP [news story](#).)

Concluding statement from GWP:

As we have carefully documented, the recent article series in Svenska Dagbladet includes numerous misrepresentations of fact and does not present a fair or accurate picture of our organisation. We have been open about the fact that the Stockholm-based secretariat experienced a crisis in 2022-2023. We have continued to protect the confidentiality of people who have raised concerns internally, in full alignment with international standards. And we have also demonstrated that we take criticism seriously and that we act on it.

We have also documented that in spite of this crisis, our organisation and network continued to produce impressive results that are having a demonstrated positive impact on the critical global issue of water security. We have successfully recovered from the crisis period and moved on.

We have attempted to bring our concerns about this article series, including many requests for factual corrections, to the editors of Svenska Dagbladet.

We regret that despite our efforts to provide balanced information, Svenska Dagbladet has not shown interest in presenting an accurate picture of how our organisation works. Nor has the newspaper shown any interest in the positive side of the GWP story – how we have worked for years to improve water-related laws, develop better management plans, support climate-change readiness and investment, promote the inclusion of women in decision-making, and so much more.

We thank our partners and funders for the support they have shown by not accepting this inaccurate and misleading picture of our organisation, and we invite readers to become more familiar with the Global Water Partnership. If you are an organisation that supports the principles of [Integrated Water Resources Management](#), we invite you to [join us as a partner](#). We also invite Svenska Dagbladet, as a leading newspaper in Sweden, to engage with us in a more balanced conversation and consider highlighting the important, positive changes GWP has made. There is a larger story here, one of global impact in water governance, that deserves to be told.

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