

Summary concept note

Integrating freshwater data into sector-wide decision making to improve the protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystems

Background

The natural environment plays an integral role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Achieving lasting progress in social and economic domains requires the sustained provision of environmental goods and services, derived from functional and healthy ecosystems. Freshwater ecosystems - including lakes, rivers, wetlands and groundwater - possess enormous biological, social, educational and economic values. They underpin sector-wide activities including water for drinking, agriculture, employment, energy generation, industry, navigation, recreation and tourism. They also provide important ecosystem services, such as naturally purifying freshwater, regulating flows and extreme conditions, acting as carbon sinks, and supporting climate adaptation.

Recognizing their importance for Agenda 2030, SDG target 6.6 aims specifically ‘to protect and restore water-related ecosystems’. Unfortunately, freshwater ecosystems are increasingly facing serious pressures driven by human activities, including pollution, overextraction, and flow alteration, and these issues are compounded by climate change. Decision makers need to utilise all information at their disposal that enable them to better understand the threats to water-related ecosystems and implement appropriate mitigation measures, involving the breadth of stakeholders and institutions concerned with sectors which impact upon those ecosystems.

One important information source is the [Freshwater Ecosystems Explorer](#) data platform, that has been developed by UNEP, as custodian agency for SDG 6.6.1, to support countries in monitoring and reporting on SDG 6.6.1. This data platform provides countries with up-to-date, high-resolution geospatial data at different scales, showing the extent to which their freshwater ecosystems change over time.

The motivation for the project is that countries use the available information, including that of SDG 6.6.1 Explorer, to improve their evidence-based decision making and increase actions that protect and restore water-related ecosystems, thus accelerating progress under SDG 6.6.1.

Overarching objective

Encourage and promote the integration of environmental data within relevant decision-making processes through multi-stakeholder engagement, to improve the protection, management and restoration of freshwater ecosystems.

Outcomes and outputs

Outcomes:

- i. Target countries have increased capacity and political will to protect and/or restore freshwater ecosystems and/or watersheds;
- ii. Key stakeholders in target countries have prioritised key ecosystems and/or watersheds for protection and/or restoration and endorsed related action plans.

The overarching objective and outcomes stated above will be achieved through the implementation of pilot projects in Argentina, Kazakhstan, and Kenya, with two outputs at country level:

Output 1: Enhance the awareness of decision-makers and build the technical capacity of key institutional actors to protect and/or restore of freshwater ecosystems and/or watersheds

Through a close collaboration with the lead mandated institution and building on a capacity needs assessment, output 1 will comprise of delivery of capacity development activities through live demonstrations and subsequent tailored national trainings, on the role, value, and importance of protecting and/or restoring freshwater ecosystems, and on the use and interpretation of the 6.6.1 Explorer to that end, further complemented by existing national level data, to identify key trends and threats per country, for key watersheds and/or per type of ecosystem.

Output 2: An ecosystem-specific cross-sectoral action plan to preserve and/or restore targeted watersheds and/or ecosystems is prepared

Output 2 will entail technical assistance to carry out, in close collaboration with the relevant lead institution, a consultative multi-stakeholder process applying the learnings from output 1, in order to prioritise ecosystems within the national context and develop an action plan which includes a high-level implementation roadmap for protection and/or restoration of priority ecosystems/watersheds, that also identifies potential funding sources where possible. The scope of the prioritisation and roadmap must clearly consider environmental as well as social and economic factors.

Target Audience

- Decision-makers, mandated institutions and stakeholders in infrastructure, water, forestry, agriculture, climate change, biodiversity, land-use and urban planning, who may influence the frameworks for ecosystem restoration and/or protection in the target countries
- Multilateral and bilateral organisations who support the restoration and/or protection of freshwater ecosystems;
- The private sector, foundations, and other non-traditional investors in freshwater ecosystems.

Project implementation and timeline

The project is implemented from October 2020 to June 2022 by the [Global Water Partnership Organization \(GWPO\)](#) and [Cap-Net](#), with the support of the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), and under the guidance of [UNEP-DHI](#). Implementation is conducted jointly between GWPO and Cap-Net's networks in the target countries, which coordinate the implementation of the in-country activities with the focal points for SDG 6.6.1 and other key stakeholders.