

Global Environment Facility
Third Biennial International Waters Conference

June 20-25, 2005
Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

Report

Office of Sustainable Development and Environment (OSDE)
General Secretariat of the Organization of American States

Introduction

This document provides a summary of the main highlights of the *GEF Third Biennial International Waters Conference* held in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, on June 20-25, 2005, according to the participation of the OSDE. The report focuses on the participation of those projects executed in cooperation between GEF Implementing Agencies, such as the World Bank and UNEP, and the OSDE/OAS.

The document also draws some conclusions, which are expected to serve as a guideline for the implementation of GEF-IW projects in the Americas.

Some general considerations and overall assessment

The Conference stressed the following themes and actions:

- (1) Integration of GEF Focal Areas. This thematic integration is already taking place in the context of hydrographic basins projects executed with GS/OAS cooperation, such as the San Juan (IW, Adaptation to Climate Change and Variability, Biodiversity, and Land Degradation,) the Bermejo (IW, Biodiversity, and Land Degradation,) and the La Plata Basin Framework (IW and Climate Change Adaptation,) among others. However, the Conference stressed this requirement and coordination between these GEF Focal Areas was seemingly proved at the level of the GEF. New projects and next phases of current projects will need to integrate this multi-focal area approach more explicitly;
- (2) Groundwater was given a high priority. The GEF Tech Sec stressed the role of groundwater as an ecosystem stress-reduction element. While the objective of IWRM –in surface waters, is to improve the health of ecosystems (terrestrial and aquatic,) integrated management of aquifer systems/ groundwater bodies seeks to relief stress over surface water systems. Consequently, according to the GEF Tech Sec, the objective of groundwater integrated management is not to improve water quality and ecosystem health, but to provide an alternative source for safe-drinking, irrigation, and other consumptive and non-consumptive water-uses, contributing to release pressures on surface water and to improve the health of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems;
- (3) E-forums were broadly promoted. IW:LEARN is expanding its work to support specific and thematic e-forums, such as groundwater. Projects such as the Guarani Aquifer System (GAS) should capitalize on these tools, while providing content and purpose to the discussions. Participants stressed the need to address current barriers, as experience proves that these forums do not work in multiple-cultural, language, and discipline environments, if these factors are not properly addressed; and
- (4) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E.) This issue came up repeatedly throughout all sessions. Particular discussions were held on the differences between Project progress and achievement indicators versus environmental status and stress reduction, and process indicators. The first two, typically used in the logical frameworks that are included in all GEF Project Briefs for project progress monitoring and achievement evaluation. While the last three are used for monitoring and evaluation of the impacts –changes—yielded by the implementation of mitigation, remedial and preventive measures, included in Strategic Action Programs (SAP.) Consequently, these indicators can only be used after a baseline for the environmental status of the ecosystems and natural resources, as well as of the institutional and legal frameworks and institutional capacity, has been determined; usually, included in the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA.) In addition, specific discussions were held on the need to identify indicators for groundwater. Andrea Merla of the GEF Tech Sec explained that due to the objective of groundwater integrated management, indicators commonly used for surface water, such as water quality parameters, are not suitable for groundwater projects. Therefore, new and innovative indicators need to be identified.

Also, indicators to measure local versus global benefits were discussed. While the GEF M&E team has been very vocal on the need to identify, measure, and document global benefits, Conference's participants, including staff members of the GEF Tech Sec, stressed the need to identify local benefits, as they are essential to the sustainability of the actions. Thus, indicators for local benefits need to be developed as to find linkages between local and global benefits.

The Information and Communication Technology Workshop

The workshop was conducted in the format of presentations offered by Sean Khan of UNEP and Dann Sklarew of IW:LEARN. All participants agreed on the need to provide translation services in conferences and events, and also for the development and maintenance of Web sites and e-forums.

The early partnership between IW:LEARN and the PROCUENCA-SAN JUAN Project in the development of that project's Institutional Mapping Tool (IMT) and Information and Communication Tool (ICT) was particularly highlighted. The PROCUENCA-SAN JUAN IMT, which provided the basic engineering for the development of the Web-based Nodes Network of the Inter-American Water Resources Network (IWRN) under the DELTAMERICA, and DELTAMERICA's Web-based ICT provide a leading experience, giving the Americas the edge on the development and implementation of these tools.

IW:LEARN presented its work plan and new set of activities that now include conferences, such as the GEF Biennial International Waters Conferences, workshops and seminars. Their program continues relying on electronic surveys, which according to them have had a quite high response. However, participation seems still low and not representative. Project Personnel and Executing Agencies from the Americas continue to be poorly represented in the surveys. Efforts for a closer and more effective coordination between IW:LEARN and GEF-IW Project Units in the Americas should be made, as to integrate more effectively national experts and authorities.

Session "Ten Years of GEF Partnerships in Latin America"

This session was characterized by short presentations and very little time for discussions. Language proved, once again, to be an important barrier, as it limited the participation of national experts and authorities from the audience. Little time and the use of a foreign language added up to hamper the ability of some Latin American presenters to convey a more clear message. Nevertheless, Americas' GEF-IW projects were very visible and well recognized among the participants.

Groundwater Breakout Sessions

These sessions had a high attendance. Although, time for discussion was very limited, the sessions were characterized by a high and active participation of all attendants. The Guarani Aquifer System (GAS) presentation raised a lot of interest and triggered comments of support from GEF Tech Sec and Implementing Agencies staff members.

Maybe, the most relevant outcome was the GEF Tech Sec emphasis on the distinctive objective of groundwater integrated management and, consequently, the need for identification of groundwater-specific indicators. Andrea Merla of the GEF Tech Sec explained that contamination of groundwater is irreversible; therefore actions are in general of a preventive nature. He added that while surface water supports ecosystems, terrestrial and aquatic, groundwater does not. He explained that groundwater integrated management seeks to relief stress on surface water systems. Due all these reasons, indicators commonly used for surface water, such as water quality parameters, are not suitable for groundwater projects. Consequently, new and innovative indicators need to be identified. These considerations will need to be addressed by projects such as GAS, when preparing the TDA and the SAP.

World Bank Portfolio Discussion Session

Some highlights of the session are:

- (1) GEF 4 (2006 replenishment) is uncertain in scope and level of funding;
- (2) There is limited access to GEF 4 under International Waters (IW);
- (3) A significant mortgage exists on the proposed GEF 4 IW allocation from currently approved programs;
- (4) There is pressure to move to performance-based allocation of funds;
- (5) The Paris Declaration calls for phasing out the use of Project Management Units and Project Implementation Units. The World Bank indicated that this will require a reform on how the assistance system works;
- (6) Evaluation is giving emphasis to outcomes and impacts from GEF resources;
- (7) Review of evaluation studies. Agencies will look at Laurence Mee's studies to see how projects are doing;
- (8) TDAs and SAPs are required to consolidate a programmatic approach (water, land and biodiversity interfaces.) This is particularly relevant to the preparation of the GAS' TDA, as interfaces between groundwater and wetlands (ecosystems), groundwater and land degradation, and groundwater and climate change adaptation need to be identified in the causal-chain and root-cause analysis of the TDA;
- (9) Cooperation between the World Bank and UNEP and UNDP is required;
- (10) Integration into World Bank processes. Planning and resource allocation: (i) regional/ country ownership; (ii) country assistance strategies; (iii) country water resources strategies; and (iv) country environmental analysis. Use of Bank staff to provide continuity for management and advocacy; and
- (11) Partnerships need to be identified whenever institutions have something to contribute with. Not all parties may be included as partners. Seek for natural partnerships and not for inclusion of all.