



United Nations Environment Programme
Global Environment Monitoring System /
Water Programme (GEMS/Water)
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National Focal Point Specifications

The United Nations Environment Programme Global Environmental Monitoring System / Water Programme collaborates with a network of local water authorities and agencies through the designation of GEMS/Water National Focal Points (NFPs) and Collaborating Focal Points (CFPs).

The objective of this document is to describe the purpose, outputs, activities and organizational setting of an NFP and of a CFP, with an indication of the type of support provided to NFPs and CFPs by UNEP GEMS/Water Programme.

1. GEMS/Water Mandate:

- (i) The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment recommended the establishment of a mechanism for the exchange of environmental information and experiences among countries (Rec. 101).

In response to this recommendation, WHO established the GEMS/Water Global Data Centre at the Canadian National Water Research Institute, designated as the WHO International Centre on Surface and Ground Water Quality. The GEMS/Water data network and participating governments were requested to designate a National Focal Point (NFP) to coordinate GEMS/Water activities at the country or territory level. To date, 78 countries and territories have designated GEMS/Water NFPs.

- (ii) The 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) reiterated the importance of water quality monitoring, and of information for decision-making and requested the strengthening of the GEMS/Water programme to improve water quality information availability (Agenda 21, Chapter 18 and Chapter 40).
- (iii) Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development proclaimed that: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.
- (iv) The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development committed, through the Programme of Implementation, to the conservation of the quality of both surface and groundwater (paragraphs 24, 25, 27), and the achievement of water and sanitation goals and targets.
- (v) The WSSD produced a Memorandum of Understanding between Canada and UNEP to promote Burlington-based GEMS/Water Programme as the global centre, and created a General Trust Fund, under the auspices of UNEP Division of Early Warning and Assessment, with a mission of providing credible scientific information on the state and trends of the world's water quality, and to support global assessments and policy processes.
- (vi) UNEP GEMS/Water activities and operations are guided by Governing Council decisions related to early warning and assessment and UNEP's water policy and strategy. Policy coherence is maintained with, *inter alia*, the Commission on Sustainable Development,

WMO resolutions, UNESCO International Hydrology Programme reports, World Water Assessment Programme and UN-Water.

2. Working Languages:

UNEP's GEMS/Water Programme uses four working languages - English, French, Spanish, and to a limited extent, Russian, which are all official United Nations languages. Communications between NFPs and UNEP/GEMS/Water can be conducted in any one of the four languages. UNEP GEMS/Water will endeavour to provide its outputs and services in as many working languages as resources permit. Some materials are also available in the two other official UN languages, Arabic and Chinese. Focal points with the expertise to assist UNEP GEMS/Water Programme with multilingual communications are welcome.

Focal Points are permitted to translate and disseminate GEMS/Water materials in non-United Nations official languages, such as Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch, etc.

3. Function:

The primary function of the NFP is to provide a national environmental water quality data and information service from the operating base of a governmental water quality monitoring centre. The national centre should provide easy public access to wide-ranging and authoritative information on water quality data and information for state and trends of the inland aquatic environment.

The NFP should at minimum submit national water quality data and information on a variety of parameters, on a yearly (one time per year) basis. Both the content and format of the substantive information provided should be compatible with the users needs, and with the methods and procedures provided in the GEMS/Water Operational Guide.

NFPs are not expected to have expertise in the management and dissemination of geo-referenced data and digitised maps using a GIS facility. However, the parent ministry/agency quite often has this facility, in which case, a referral service to the appropriate source should be provided by the NFP.

The environmental water quality data and information collected, managed and disseminated by the NFP will, to a large extent, be technical literature. In addition, NFPs generally provide monitoring support and materials to the host government's national environmental water education programme.

UNEP GEMS/Water Programme officially recognizes the designation of an NFP or CFP through a letter of agreement. A memorandum of understanding can be put in place if required.

4. NFP Location Guidelines:

Instrumental to the success of a GEMS/Water national focal point and a critical ingredient in its contribution to the global network will be optimising the placement of the NFP within the governmental structure.

Because the organizational structure and priorities of governments vary so greatly, it is difficult to prescribe an ideal location. However, we offer the following four guidelines for the placement of the NFP:

1. To assist in resolving national water quality issues, the NFP should be easily accessible to policy and decision-makers, scientists, planners, researchers and the general public. Such placement provides ease of access to both the user community and the information resources. The public right of access to environmental water quality information is an over-arching principle applicable to all GEMS/Water NFPs.
2. To actively contribute information to the monitoring network, the NFP should be located at the site of the best concentration of environmental and water resource information and expertise.

3. To ensure the maximum use of the GEMS/Water data network, the NFP should be staffed by water quality professionals and have information services, computing and telecommunications support.
4. To assist scientific credibility and efficiency by coordinating the location with the hydrological data and information monitoring conducted under the auspices of the Global Runoff Data Centre of the World Meteorological Organization.

In practice, many NFPs are located in the national environmental information centre or water resource branch of the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Water Resources, or other governmental ministry, agency, commission, with strong environmental water resources mandate.

Each national government is invited and encouraged to designate an NFP and to communicate its name, representative and address to the Director of UNEP GEMS/Water Programme. The location and organizational structure of the NFP is the prerogative of the participating government. GEMS/Water is designed to be sufficiently flexible to allow for many focal point variants. In keeping with its catalytic role, GEMS/Water assists NFPs to participate effectively in GEMS/Water by offering training opportunities, prototypes of publicity materials, technical documentation, consultancy services, QA/QC tools etc.

5. CFP Guidelines:

Collaborating Focal Points are participating non-governmental organizations, such as universities and not-for-profit organizations and programmes. CFPs are designated on a case-by-case basis, with roles and outputs determined by mutual agreement. CFPs can be regional or sub-regional in scope and activity.

6. Costs:

There are no financial outlays involved in joining UNEP GEMS/Water Programme. However, participating governments are expected to ensure that sufficient resources are available to their NFPs to deliver most of the outputs and services described below. The major cost components are office space and laboratory facilities, and communications costs. NFPs in developed countries are encouraged to bear the costs of providing technical assistance and capacity building to developing country partners.

7. Staff:

The staff of a focal point must be chosen so as to allow it to perform in an efficient manner its functions at both operational and policy levels. The NFP/CFP staff should understand the role of information in rational decision-making and should be able to motivate decision-makers and others to use GEMS/Water data. The actual number of working-level staff employed in operating an NFP will depend on the resources available, on the size of the potential source-user community and on the degree of automation available to the NFP. However, a minimum of one staff should be assigned responsibility for different aspects of GEMS/Water activities at national level.

Focal Point Representative:

Head of Environmental Water Quality Monitoring and Information Centre/Department or equivalent responsible.

Qualifications:

Primary or advanced degree in an Environmental Science with several years of general management experience in a water authority, specifically including water quality monitoring. Fluency in one of UNEP GEMS/Water Programme's four working languages.

Responsibility:

Management of the national environmental information service. Liaison with UNEP GEMS/Water on policy matters related to the operation of the NFP. The incumbent is the appropriate person to attend network management meetings organised by UNEP

GEMS/Water.

Raising awareness of national environmental problems and the role of information in meeting those challenges and promoting sustainable development.

8. NFP Outputs and Services:

Since NFPs are located in developed countries, developing countries, and countries in transition, the following list of outputs and services will obviously not apply to all NFPs due to differences in information management capacities. Therefore, this list should be interpreted as a long-term objective to be attained.

1. National environmental information centre accessible to the public
2. Submission of national water quality datasets to GEMS/Water, on a range of parameters, and at regular intervals
3. National Directory of Sources of Environmental Water Quality Data and Information
4. National Environmental Water Quality Database
5. National QA/QC programme
6. National environmental water quality site
7. GEMS/Water National Focal Point promotional pamphlet or communications materials
8. Water quality awareness fact sheets or leaflets on topics of national interest available in local language(s)
9. Updated contribution to regional water quality database (if applicable)
10. Twice annual query-response statistics report compiled and submitted to UNEP GEMS/Water, on key parameters covering chemicals, biota, organics, metals and ions (see Operational Guide)
11. Promotes the work of UNEP at national level
12. Provides information input to federal UNEP lead on GEMS/Water NFP activities, particularly in preparation for Governing Council meetings
13. Establishes and maintains links with national/international NGOs on environmental water quality monitoring
14. Participates in sub-regional GEMS/Water network (if applicable)
15. Maintains communications at appropriate levels in the GEMS/Water network
16. Participates in the development, evaluation and improvement of the GEMS/Water network
17. Organizes regional network management meetings and training courses in cooperation with UNEP GEMS/Water Programme (in particular FPs which are also GEMS/Water regional centres).

9. UNEP GEMS/Water Programme Outputs and Services

UNEP GEMS/Water Programme operations are focused on four main areas: global water quality monitoring data collection and database; technical tools including QA/QC; assessments; and capacity building. As an intergovernmental body, GEMS/Water promotes participation and collaboration amongst countries with an overarching goal of global environmental sustainability.

Outputs

1. GEMS/Water Analytical Methods published in English
2. GEMS/Water website available in English, French, and Spanish
3. GEMStat (Global Water Quality) database available in English, French, and Spanish
4. Performance evaluation studies for laboratories offered in English, French, and Spanish
5. Modular courses and training series booklet published in English
6. 20 Modular training courses offered in English, French, and Spanish
7. GEMS/Water Operational Guide published in English, French, Arabic, Russian, Spanish and Chinese

8. GEMS/Water Network Fact Sheet published in English, French, Arabic, Russian, Spanish and Chinese
9. GEMS-Water Quality News available biannually in English
10. GEMS/Water Steering Committee meeting reports published in English
11. GEMS/Water Technical Advisory Papers in English
12. International Atlas on Freshwater Quality published in English
13. Internet guide to environmental information resources published in English
14. Annual State of the GEMS/Water Network Report published in English, French and Spanish
15. National Focal Point Directory published biannually in English
16. Maintenance and expansion of GEMS/Water subscription list on the Internet for electronic exchange of information
17. Water quality indicators development
18. Water quality assessments and reports for UNEP (such as the Global Environmental Outlook), other UN agencies (such as the World Water Development Report) and other global and regional environmental assessment initiatives.

Services:

1. Operates a back stopping query response service
2. Provides technical assistance on various aspects of environmental water quality data monitoring and information services
3. Establishes sub-regional networks upon request
4. Conducts regional and in-country training courses on water quality monitoring and management/services
5. Conducts in-country training courses on environmental information management/services
6. Organizes regional network management meetings
7. Convenes GEMS/Water Steering Committee meetings annually
8. Convenes Technical Advisory Group meetings every 1.5 years
9. Provides technical assistance and advisory services to NFPs
10. Liaises with NFPs on network support matters
11. Conducts needs assessments for FPs needs as a prerequisite to the formulation of capacity-building projects
12. Implements capacity-building projects to strengthen FPs
13. Distributes materials to NFPs
14. Distributes UNEP and other UN agency materials
15. Recruits new network partners
16. Evaluates NFP performance as an GEMS/Water network partner
17. Identifies misplaced and under-performing NFPs and advises on their optimal relocation within the host government structure
18. Catalyses enhanced information exchange between governmental and NGO sectors
19. Catalyses participation and efficiency between international organizations and water assessment processes (i.e. Global Environment Outlook, World Water Assessment Programme, UN Statistical Division, etc.)
20. Manages the UNEP/GEMS/Water WWW site with links to WWW sites managed by NFPs
21. Provides policy coherence within the international water agenda and agencies, including UNEP family and other UN bodies.