ASIA REGIONAL STORIES

Connecting countries, disciplines, and sectors across Asia

In 2020, GWP expanded its commitment to interregional collaboration by supporting several events designed to link stakeholders from different disciplines and sectors across Asia.

Water-related disaster risk reduction

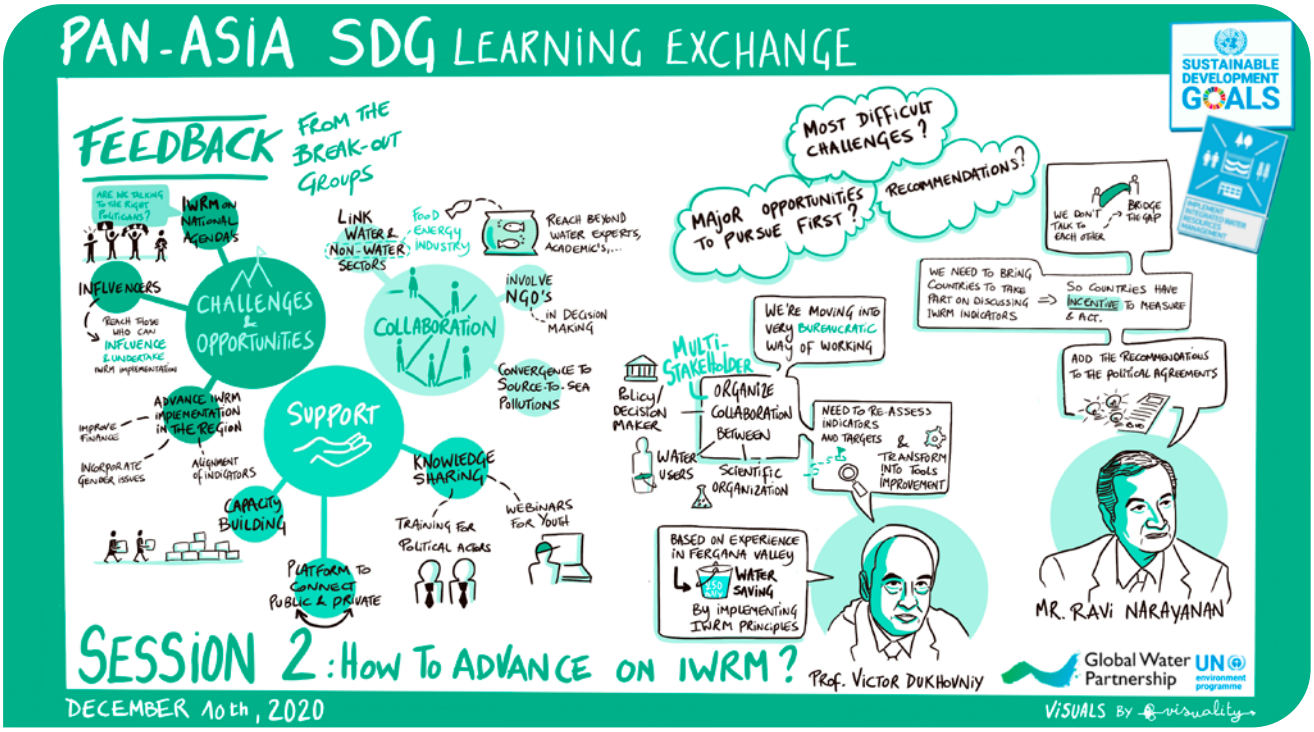
In July, GWP joined with the High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP) in organising an online consultation for more than 100 participants from all over Asia. The aim was to devise a strategy to address key water-related disaster risks under the conditions imposed by COVID-19. Emerging areas of consensus revolved around the need for good national leadership in science-based decision-making and the importance of raising awareness among sectors not traditionally regarded as having responsibility for water. The participants suggested launching a special fund to convert risk into insurance products and obligations.

Regional workshop on monitoring transboundary water cooperation

In September, GWP and partners organised an online workshop on monitoring the implementation of transboundary water cooperation across Asia. The 64 participants exchanged experiences on the monitoring and reporting process, and identified opportunities for future improvement. As part of its effort to address the commonly cited problem of lack of technical capacity and limited data, GWP introduced the new massive open online course on governance for transboundary freshwater security (see the feature on water solutions for the SDGs for more).

Learning exchange on monitoring IWRM

In December 2020, GWP and the United Nations Environment Programme co-organised a learning exchange event to share experiences on monitoring and accelerating the degree of implementation of IWRM (SDG indicator 6.5.1). A total of 76 people from 21 countries took part. The workshop connected country focal points with regional organisations, with representation from the Asian Development Bank, Asia-Pacific Water Forum, and Scientific Information Centre Water Commission of Central Asia. The key recommendations included the suggestion to build a community of practice that would further knowledge exchange, facilitate dialogue between the youth and decision-makers, and promote links among water and non-water sectors. Participants also stressed the need to develop national capacities for raising finance (including from the private sector) and ensuring political commitment to water reform goes beyond the IWRM assessment for 2020.



Summary from the pan-Asia SDG learning exchange

Caucasus and Central Asia

Information system promotes water-use efficiency in Tajikistan

As a mountainous country, Tajikistan has relatively abundant water resources. However, with more than 50 percent of the population relying on agriculture-based livelihoods, the country's sustainable and equitable socioeconomic progress will depend on developing fully integrated water management solutions. In 2013, the World Bank launched a project to address key issues in the management of water resources in the Kofarnihon river basin. The Kofarnihon is one of the major tributaries of the Amu Darya, a key source of irrigation water for the dry steppe of Central Asia. In 2020, the project team created a database and information management system designed to improve water-use efficiency in the Kofarnihon irrigation systems. GWP Tajikistan played a key role in implementing this initiative, which facilitated automation of the water metering system in 3 districts, encompassing 19 pumping stations and 26 water user associations. After introducing the metering system, water supply increased by 20 percent, with a 25 percent saving in water use.

Second public consultation on river basin management in Armenia

The European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+), running from 2016 to 2020, is a major EU commitment to aligning the water legislations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine to EU policy on water management. It focuses on improving water resources management, particularly in transboundary river basins. As part of this project, GWP Armenia organised two stakeholder consultations with a view to developing management plans for the Sevan and Hrazdan rivers in Armenia, which are part of the Kura-Aras river basin. The first public consultation, held in 2019, gathered more than 50 local stakeholders, who aired their views on the main challenges facing water sharing, drinking water quality, pollution, and human health. The second event, held in June and July 2020, took place virtually due to COVID-19. Questionnaires and information videos were used to provide information and to gather input from stakeholders.

River basin management webinars in Georgia

Georgia is undergoing a process of water reform and has committed to introduce a new water law. This includes a requirement for the development and implementation of river basin management plans. As part of this process, and with assistance from the SDG 6 IWRM Support Programme, GWP Georgia organised a series of webinars for stakeholders from two key river basins, the Mtkvari (also known as the Kura) and the Enguri-Rioni. Representatives from 20 municipalities took part in 12 webinars in October and November 2020. Each event included a question-and-answer session in which the participants raised their concerns (e.g. over drinking water tariffs and groundwater abstraction licences). They also discussed water reform within the new draft water law. Those attending said that the webinars had expanded their knowledge on IWRM and helped them to connect theoretical knowledge to practice. They are now better equipped to be fully involved in the development of their river basin management plans.

Webinar on key river basins in Georgia

China

National water management information system

In September 2020, the Ministry of Water Resources of China organised an event to assess the influence and outcomes of the National Water Resources Monitoring System project. GWP China was involved in providing technical support to the development of IWRM plans for this eight-year project, which was completed in 2020. GWP China assisted in designing national IWRM frameworks, formulating monitoring and reporting indicators, and improving capacity for mobilising funding. In responding to water management challenges, GWP brought together river basin management agencies, provincial administrators, and construction teams, involving 19,000 water users and 43,000 online monitoring stations.

Legal protection for the Yangtze and Yellow rivers

GWP China took a leading role in the formation of the Yangtze river basin organisation in 2018. In 2020, this support culminated in President Xi Jinping signing a decree to enact the Yangtze River Protection Law, which came into effect on 1 March 2021. This is China's first legislation on a specific river basin and addresses a range of topics, including water resource planning, protection, and control; prevention of pollution; restoration of ecologies; green development; and legal responsibilities.

This successful outcome has inspired water stakeholders in the Yellow river basin to advocate a similar law. GWP has acted as the principle convenor, bringing together representatives of the government agencies from the nine Yellow river riparian provinces. Through transboundary cooperation, it is hoped a Yellow river protection law will be drafted to ensure the integrated, sustainable, and equitable development of its valuable water resources.

Sharing knowledge on environmental protection

In November 2020, GWP China brought together a team of experts to provide an online training course on monitoring and protection of the ecological resources of rivers and lakes. The two-day course attracted more than 600 scholars, including 83 students from 15 countries outside China. The course was based on decades of experience and research on aquatic ecological monitoring in the Yangtze river basin. Several Chinese academic institutions have linked to form a joint training centre and will be offering similar courses over the next two years.

"Online training provides a useful way to learn from China's river and lake ecosystem monitoring technologies and methods," said Dr James Rhodes from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, who during the course shared Kenya's problems with environmental degradation in the Tana river basin. "Through learning, we can seek better methods for monitoring … and new ways to restore ecological functions."

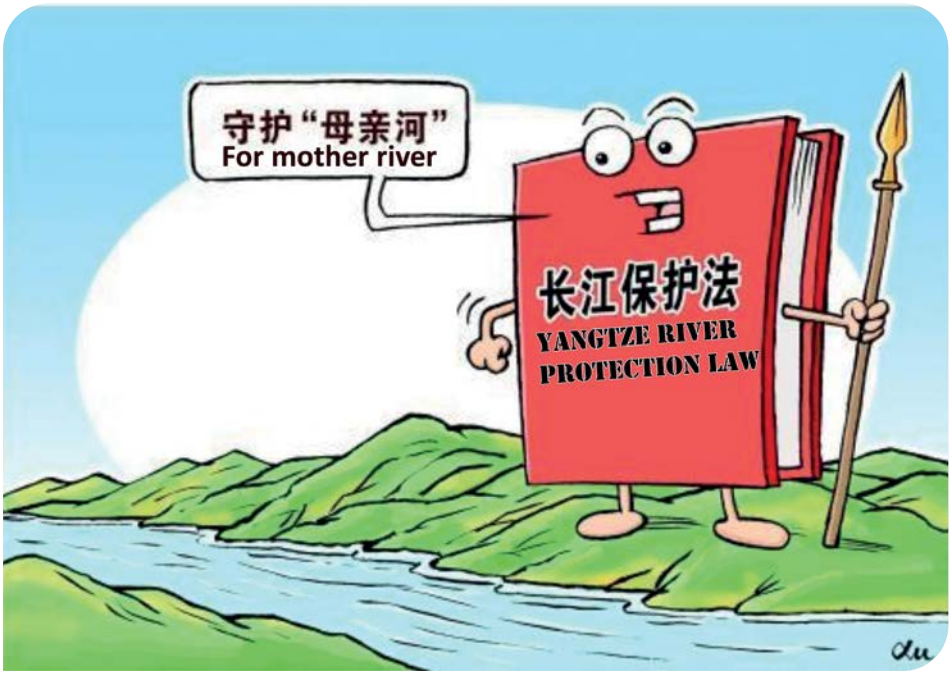


Illustration from the Yangtze River Protection Law of the People's Republic of China

South Asia

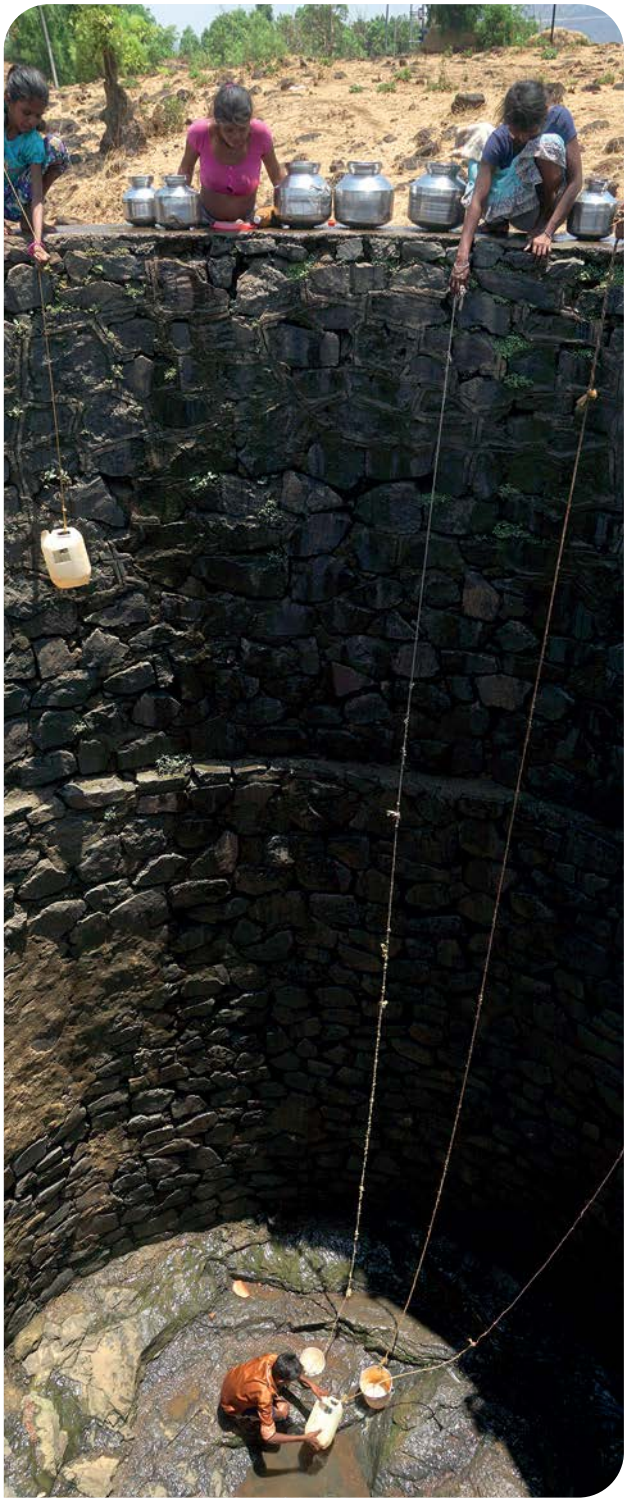
Monitoring progress on climate change in Madhya Pradesh, India

GWP India provided financial and technical support for a consultation on the State of Madhya Pradesh monitoring framework for SDG 13 on climate action. The aim was to produce recommendations and suggestions on how to improve it. Stakeholders were drawn from the state government departments of environment, planning, and health, as well as from academic institutions and international development agencies. The event highlighted the need for better data management and sharing to permit accurate monitoring. This led to recommendations to adopt a more integrated approach to national data management, initiate local-level and multi-stakeholder data collection platforms, and standardise data collection and analysis tools. An online dashboard was suggested as a key tool for data integration and dissemination, along with systems for capacity building and knowledge exchange. Finally, participants recommended better integration of climate action planning within frameworks for achievement of the other SDGs. The participants' views will be integrated in the development of the monitoring framework.

Promoting community action for village water security in Bihar, India

The Pandai river, a tributary of the larger Gandak, marks a short stretch of the border between India and Nepal and provides water for many small villages in both countries. However, just before the monsoon season, river flows are reduced to a mere trickle, resulting in disputes over water availability and sparking conflict between the two countries. In 2020, GWP India supported a project designed to promote dialogue and build cooperation among the villagers who depend on the Pandai/Gandak, an important transboundary water resource.

Cooperation and community engagement were the key, with downstream stakeholders in India learning how to engage peacefully with their upstream neighbours in Nepal, and to encourage them to allow water to flow even during periods of scarcity. At the same time, downstream users were supported to find alternative solutions, including rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge. Discussion platforms included all community members, including women and youth. Capacity building was provided to local non-governmental organisations for effective mediation and arbitration. The project benefited almost 10,000 people in 11 villages. The resulting documented successes and educational materials will be used to inform similar projects elsewhere.



A well in Maharashtra, India

Southeast Asia

Support for IWRM implementation

GWP Southeast Asia coordinated the first round of consultations on the SDG indicator 6.5.1 questionnaire in 2017, learning important lessons along the way. One of these was the need to allow sufficient time and provide adequate support for the process. So, in preparation for the 2020 survey, the Regional and Country Water Partnerships worked closely with their national focal points, helping them to understand the methodology and building a stronger relationship as a result. GWP also supported the data collection process through online consultation workshops. These activities were appreciated by all stakeholders, including government representatives.

GWP Southeast Asia also organised an IWRM implementation performance assessment in 2020, which amassed data from seven countries in the region. This was designed to identify the water management gaps and priorities as a means to improve IWRM implementation in the short, medium, and long terms. The results will be used as the basis for seven country-level IWRM conferences in 2021, which will engage a wider group of stakeholders and donors in the development of a multi-stakeholder IWRM action plan.

Development plan for Cambodia's central floodplain

GWP Cambodia has been working with local partners since 2018 to develop a Green Climate Fund application for the implementation of integrated water resources management as part of flood risk management planning in the central floodplain. The work included stakeholder consultations and meetings with key decision-making bodies, including the National Mekong Committee and the National Council for Sustainable Development. In 2020, the Mekong Committee recognised the value of this work, due to its basin-wide significance and multi-stakeholder support. Following a second stakeholder consultation, the project was incorporated into the country's national development planning process, with funding committed by the Ministry of Finance.

Stakeholders at the Green Climate Fund application workshop in Cambodia