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Conditions for Accreditation for Regional and Country Water Partnerships

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1. Introduction

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) is a decentralised global network of member institutions, called GWP Partners. The GWP Network is not a legal entity.

The GWP Organisation (GWPO) is an intergovernmental organisation established in 2002. The GWPO includes the GWP Steering Committee, the Technical Committee and the Secretariat based in Stockholm, Sweden. It has recognition as a legal entity under international public law and the national laws of most countries. GWPO is the legal representative of the GWP Network and they are both governed by the same statutes.

The Partners have organised themselves on a regional and country basis into Regional and Country Water Partnerships. According to the statutes of the GWP and the GWPO, the GWP Network operates through relations with accredited Regional Water Partnerships (RWPs) and Country Water Partnerships (CWPs).

GWP has established a strong global reputation with a clear mandate. GWP Partners and Partnerships have rights, privileges and obligations to maintain this reputation. The GWP has therefore established these Conditions for Accreditation as a minimum set of standards to enable consistency and coherence throughout the Network worldwide. The GWPO is the legal custodian of the GWP name and protector of its reputation. Good governance throughout the Network is fundamental to safeguard GWP's name and maintain its reputation and credibility as an organisation.

These Conditions for Accreditation serve as a minimum framework for governance of effective RWPs and CWPs working as the strategic institutional mechanisms facilitating the implementation of GWP's Strategy. They have been kept to a minimum and are based on GWP's experience since its creation in 1996.

These Conditions for Accreditation apply equally to existing and future RWPs and CWPs. Accreditation as a RWP or CWP does not necessarily mean that the Partnership is in position to be held accountable under national legislation and respond to donor requirements.

This document is an updated version of the one which entered into force in November 2005. Previously accredited RWPs and CWPs agreed to comply with any updated and approved versions. This amended version was approved by GWP Steering Committee in XXXXXX on XXXX and, should be read in conjunction with the following basic documents of the GWP:

- GWPO Statutes
- GWP Policy on Partners
- GWP Graphical Policy
- GWP Financial Guidelines

• Guidelines for Selection of Host Institutions for GWP Regional Water Partnerships. All the documents mentioned above can be obtained at the GWP website or requested from the GWP Secretariat.

2. Definition of Regional and Country Water Partnerships

The core of the GWP Network is its Partner organisations. A Water Partnership is a grouping of Partners which operates at regional (RWP) and country level (CWP) in accordance with the regional and national context and needs. These Water Partnerships are the institutional arrangement of the Partners at the respective geographic levels and are the organisations through which Partners exchange ideas, critical knowledge and information, and carry out actions to achieve the sustainable management of water resources. The Water Partnerships are guided by operating principles based on transparency of processes and broad representation from the stakeholders in the water and related sectors.

The RWPs and CWPs are not Partners of the GWP Network in themselves. They are, however, an integral part of the Network's institutional arrangements but are not legally part of the GWPO.

The RWPs have a special role to encourage collaboration in the work of the GWP across national boundaries and should not be seen as simply a source of funds or expertise for CWPs or Partners. A CWP should not be dependent on funding from either the GWPO or the RWP.

3. GWP principles and values

All GWP Partners, and therefore all RWPs and CWPs, agree to adhere to the guiding *principles* of water resources management and development adopted by GWP in pursuing its Vision and Mission. These guiding principles stem from the Dublin and Rio statements, the Millennium Assembly (2000) which gave rise to the Millennium Development Goals, and from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) Plan of Action. GWP has adapted and elaborated these principles to reflect international understanding of "equitable and efficient management and sustainable use of water". These guiding principles are:

- Freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment.
- Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels.

- Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.
- Water is a public good and has a social and economic value in all its competing uses.
- Integrated water resources management is based on the equitable and efficient management and sustainable use of water and recognises that water is an integral part of the ecosystem, a natural resource and a social and economic good, whose quantity and quality determine the nature of its utilisation.

The main *values* that all GWP Partners, and therefore all RWPs and CWPs strive for, are inclusiveness, openness, transparency, accountability, respect, gender sensitivity and solidarity. The GWP has a non-commercial, voluntary culture and is not a bureaucracy. Those involved are often employed elsewhere and contribute their time freely to GWP activities, for example as members of governing committees.

4. Basic conditions for accreditation as a GWP Water Partnership

In order to be accredited as a GWP Water Partnership and to benefit from the rights and privileges of the Network including the use of GWP's name and logo, the RWPs and CWPs must formally commit to abide by the conditions stated in this document. To function under the GWP name and logo, each Regional and Country Water Partnership is required to:

a) Abide by the GWP principles and values as stated in section 3 above.

b) Abide by the GWP Policy on Partners approved by the GWP Steering Committee in December 2004 or any subsequent policies or updated versions as approved by the GWP SC.

c) Abide by the GWP Graphical Policy on use of name and logo as approved by the SC on December 2002 and updated October 2004 and XXXXX or any subsequent policies or updated versions as approved by the GWP SC.

d) Establish a neutral platform for dialogue among stakeholders with different interests and mindsets from a wide range of organisations covering different sectors and disciplines. The organisations represented should be as defined in the Policy on Partners. Every effort should be made to achieve a gender balance among representatives and to expand the Partnership so that any water-related organisation that is prepared to agree to GWP principles and values may become a Partner.

e) Establish and operate in accordance with Statutes that delineate principles of governance as outlined in these Conditions for Accreditation, in particular Section 6 below.

f) Abide by the GWP Financial Guidelines. Transparency and accountability will be ensured through high quality financial accounts, audited annually as set out in the Financial Guidelines or as required by donors. There must also be a sound governance structure, with the Regional/Country Secretariat accountable to the Regional/Country governing body (e.g. Regional Steering Committee or Council). In some cases, additional audits may be requested to meet financial reporting requirements in line with agreed funding agreements.

The Conditions for Accreditation define the basic requirements for good governance, which are essential for the financial and operational accountability of effective organisations, and to protect GWP's reputation. Detailed requirements for financial accountability are not set out in these Conditions. However, for funds provided by the GWPO, the Water Partnerships

agree to follow the financial requirements as set out by the GWPO. For funds raised elsewhere the Water Partnerships agree to follow the rules of the funding agency and provide the GWPO with summary information on such funds and on request make available to the GWPO copies of financial records for such funds.

g) Prepare and implement annual work plans that promote the GWP Vision and

Mission. Within the context of the GWP Strategy and the overall GWP Work Programme, each Water Partnership will develop its own approach and as much as possible engage its country/regional Partners in implementing the Work Programme activities.

h) **Cooperate with the wider GWP Network**. A cooperative mode of operation is expected that includes proactively participating in the Network activities at every level, where and when appropriate and affordable, promoting transparency in selection of delegates to represent the Water Partnership in any country, regional or global activities, and providing complete reports on such activities.

i) Ensure high quality technical content by being open to external review and advice and having the Partnership's activities and structures assessed from time to time by an expert panel for relevance to the GWP mandate and adherence to the GWP Conditions for Accreditation. In addition, each Water Partnership should establish an appropriate mechanism for technical advice to support initiatives, and contribute to learning processes as and when required.

5. Roles and responsibilities

In the implementation of regional and country activities, GWPO and the accredited RWP and CWP will have the following roles and responsibilities.

a) GWPO

The GWPO is the custodian of the values, credibility and name of the entire GWP Network. It provides guidelines and advice with regard to the governance of RWPs and CWPs and the management and use of funds, to the extent that this may affect the overall reputation and operations of the GWP Network. GWPO will:

- Conduct fund raising activities at the global level for the operations of the GWP networking activities in the region and ensure relations with the global financiers of the GWP Network. Subject to available funds, GWPO allocates basic core funds on an annual basis to all RWPs.
- Oversee the development and implementation of annual work plans and budgets for the operations of the RWPs (and the CWPs as part of regional processes or when required by specific funding arrangements). This includes approval of GWPO funded activities and review of complementary activities.
- Oversee the activities of the RWP and ensure that GWPO funds are used exclusively for the purposes agreed with the financiers and approved by GWPO.
- Provide the RWP and the Host Institution (HI) with guidance on financial management.
- Support programme implementation by providing support and guidance on technical matters (depending on available resources and on a demand-basis), when such competence is not available at the RWP and/or the CWP.
- Provide political support as required and requested by the regions and countries.
- Make regular disbursements in accordance with the agreed budgets of the regional and country programmes, upon joint request by the RWP and the Host Institution.

- Foster inter-regional dialogue, and promote experience and lessons sharing at all levels.
- Promote linkages between the GWP Technical Committee and Regional and Country Water Partnerships.
- Track compliance by the RWPs and CWPs with the Conditions for Accreditation and recommend corrective action to ensure compliance as appropriate.
- Review all applications for accreditation as RWP and CWP according to these Conditions.

b) Regional Water Partnerships

- Plan regional activities and coordinate feedback from the CWPs and Partners to be included in the overall regional annual work plans and budgets, ensuring that both RWP and CWP work plans, budgets and reporting are in line with the global Strategy.
- Implement regional activities in the concerned region as per work plans and budgets. The RWPs in coordination with GWPO prepare an annual work plan and budget for submission in October, for approval by the GWP Steering Committee in November.
- Prepare periodic narrative progress reports as required by the GWP Secretariat, coordinating feedback from the CWPs and Partners as appropriate.
- Conduct programme development and fund raising activities at the regional level for RWP activities in the region, and ensure relations with the regional funders of the GWP Network.
- Oversee the Host Institution's performance and work with the Host Institution to maintain sound financial and administrative management, including preparation of financial reports and audited accounts as set out in the Financial Guidelines or as specified by other RWP donors, as well as engagement of RWP personnel and procurement in line with standard good practice.
- Provide support to the implementation of activities at country level. The RWP is responsible, on behalf of GWPO, for supervising and following up such activities, including alignment to GWP's Strategy and a quality control function with regard to governance, programme implementation and financial management. RWPs approve the work plans and budgets of the CWPs in their region and prepare consolidated reports for GWPO (when relevant) based on information provided by the CWP. RWPs may request clarification and amendments on documents from the CWPs before submission to GWPO.
- Oversee the Host Institution's provision of guidance to the CWPs on financial management and reporting, and the necessary administrative and financial management arrangements that should be in place for transferring of funds.
- Maintain regular communication within the region and with the GWP Secretariat.
- Broaden the base of GWP Partners within their respective region.
- Monitor outcomes and the effectiveness of activities in line with a programme management system put in place by the GWPO, and engage in learning and knowledge sharing within the region and with other regions of the GWP Network.
- Comply with the Conditions for Accreditation.

c) Country Water Partnerships

- Plan country activities involving GWP Partners and other key stakeholders (with special emphasis on the national government) within the broad framework of the Global and Regional Strategies.
- Coordinate feedback to be included in the overall regional annual work plan, budget and reporting.
- Implement the GWP country programme activities as set out in their work plans and budgets.
- Prepare periodic narrative progress reports as required by GWP Secretariat or the RWP.

- Ensure sound financial and administrative management, including preparation of financial reports and audited accounts, in line with the requirements of the Financial Guidelines and the CWP donors.
- Conduct programme development and fund raising activities at the local level and ensure sound relations with the local financiers of the GWP Network.
- Make professional contributions to the GWP Network, GWP Secretariat and its Partners (on a voluntary basis or under mutually agreed conditions).
- Broaden the base of GWP Partners within their respective country.
- Maintain regular communication within the country and with the RWP and the GWP Secretariat.
- Monitor outcomes and the effectiveness of activities in line with a programme management system put in place by the GWPO, and engage in learning and knowledge sharing within the country and the RWP.
- Comply with the Conditions for Accreditation.

6. Governance structures and operational principles

Accredited Water Partnerships will establish open and transparent operational procedures and practices in line with GWP principles and values. In operational terms, good practices should reflect important elements such as involvement of Partners, broad based, transparent and gender-sensitive selection of representatives and staff, financial accountability, etc.

a) Legal registration

Each RWP and CWP is a separate entity within the GWP Network. They do not necessarily have legal personality and do not have to be legally registered to enable use of the GWP name and logo. As registration of a RWP may be a complex matter, this should be discussed and agreed upon between the GWPO and the concerned RWP before an RWP starts with its registration procedure. Local regulations or other reasons may require some form of legal status for the Partnership to operate effectively. In this context, several options are available:

(i) <u>The Water Partnership remains unregistered</u> and operates through agreements with a Host Institution (HI). The establishment of a relationship between the Water Partnership and a HI allows it to use the legal personality of the HI serving several purposes. The HI enables GWPO to transfer funding for the Partnership's programme and monitors the financial and administrative management of these funds including engagement of the Partnership's secretariat staff. Additionally the establishment of the relationship between the Water Partnership and the HI may provide a framework for the HI to manage and be accountable to regional and local financing institutions for funds raised for the Partnership's programme.

The GWP Secretariat *Guidelines for Selection of Host Institutions for GWP Regional Water Partnerships* are to be followed in the identification of a HI for RWPs. A Host Institution Agreement is signed by GWPO, the RWP and the HI. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of the parties and the conditions for the financial and administrative management to be provided by the HI. Template agreements are provided by the GWP Secretariat and adapted to the individual RWP context as necessary.

(ii) <u>The Water Partnership legally registers</u> as a NGO, Association or similar legal entity in the country (for a CWP) or in one of the countries of the region (for a RWP). The RWPs may, if need be, register legally irrespective of working through a HI or other. Registration as a national legal entity should of course only be undertaken if agreed by the regional or

country Partners. Legal registration would normally enable the RWP or the CWP to enter into contracts, employ personnel and be legally accountable for funds in its care.

A RWP that is registered as a legal entity and wishes to manage GWPO funds must enter into an agreement with GWPO, prior to which GWPO will assess the RWPs financial and administrative management capacity in accordance with the basic requirements for host institutions as set out in the *Guidelines for Selection of Host Institutions for GWP Regional Water Partnerships*. If the RWP wishes to be responsible for the management of its own funds, there are cost and other implications that need to be carefully considered and weighed up against using a HI.

Legal registration should not limit a RWP from functioning effectively across the countries in its region. Should the RWP register in one country of the region it should carefully review the legal requirements for such registrations and ensure that these requirements do not contradict any requirement in these Conditions for Accreditation. It is also important to take into consideration that many governmental organisations cannot join NGOs, and being formally established as such may deter key stakeholders from working with the GWP, which would not be consistent with GWP's core values.

(iii) <u>Other options</u> may exist in different regions/countries for legal registration. In such cases the RWP shall seek a "no objection" from the GWP Secretariat prior to any legal registration. It is not acceptable for a RWP to register as a legal intergovernmental organisation or international (global) NGO.

b) Governance arrangements and structures

All RWPs and CWPs must operate through regional and country governance structures that comply with these Conditions for Accreditation and the Policy on Partners.

Each RWP or CWP should establish its own **statutes** that are agreed upon by the constituency comprising the Partners in the region or country concerned (regardless of whether it is legally registered or not). The statutes should set out important aspects of governance including inter alia the following:

- Functions of the different governance bodies of the regional and country structures and their relationships with the members.
- Terms of Office of all the Water Partnership representatives, and the roles and responsibilities for representatives and staff.
- Linkages of the regional and country governance structure to the GWP Secretariat and to other entities within the Network.
- Roles and responsibilities of other bodies within the Partnership, for example, a technical support group.
- Mechanisms for direct participation and representation by any Partner in the region.

The RWP and CWP are accountable to GWP Partners, who are entitled to provide advice to ensure accountability and transparent policies regarding all aspects of operation of the Partnership within the framework of the RWP/CWP statutes and the Conditions for Accreditation. Each RWP/CWP should periodically hold a **General Assembly** with GWP Partners, as stated in its statutes and according to budget availability. For RWPs this should preferably be annually or at least every two years. CWPs should hold a General Assembly every year. Notices and announcements should be given in advance of these meetings, providing a draft agenda for review and comment by the Partners.

RWPs and CWPs should establish **Regional/Country Steering Committees or Councils** (referred to as Steering Committee below) - the highest governing body responsible for providing overall strategic direction to the Partnerships. The RWP/CWP Steering Committee should comprise a majority of elected representatives from the GWP Partners in the region/country, who should be nominated and elected by the GWP Partnership in an open and transparent process, seeking a balanced composition across relevant disciplines, stakeholder groups, geographic area and gender. The Chair will preferably be elected from among the Partners institutions and be appointed by the General Assembly or the Steering Committee members, as set up in the regional/country statutes, with each RWP/CWP designing its own process for selection. The outgoing and incoming regional Chairs should not be from the same country in order to avoid 'capture' by a specific country in the region.

To prevent 'capture' by specific groups and extend participation and benefits as widely as possible, it is necessary to rotate the RWP Chair and Steering Committee members. The Term of Office of each and every member of the Regional Steering Committee (including the Chair and other members) is expected to be a maximum of three years. The Steering Committee member may be elected for only one additional term. The two terms do not have to be consecutive. A phasing out system should be worked out to ensure a smooth transition and continuity. After completion of two such terms, she or he is expected to step back and support and strengthen the RWP/CWP in other capacities.

RWP/CWP Steering Committee members should undertake their governance responsibilities with great integrity and in a voluntary spirit, as is common practice in the non-profit sector and is the practice also for the GWP Steering Committee. The RWP Chair is an honorary position. Members of the RWP/CWP Steering Committee should not carry out any paid work that arises from decisions they have made on the assignment as this is considered a conflict of interest. If a SC member is willing to undertake a remunerated activity, this member should declare his/her interest and recuse him/herself from related deliberations and decisions. The RWP will follow competitive and transparent procurement procedures in which such SC member could participate on equal terms as any other external service provider.

The RWP Steering Committee is responsible for overseeing the Host Institution's performance and, when justified, recommending a change of HI. Careful thought should be given prior to recommending a change of HI due to the negative impacts of moving the Secretariat, such as loss of institutional knowledge and cost of moving, which can reduce the performance of the RWP for a substantial period of time. A change may however be justified if the quality of the hosting services is below what is required, if the location prevents the RWP from effective operations throughout the region, if the host acts as a capture mechanism turning the RWP into one of the host's programmes, or if the security situation at the location calls for a change. As GWPO is accountable for the funding it provides to the regions, it has the prerogative of advising the RWP Steering Committee to keep or change the Host Institution based on its performance. Likewise, GWPO has the option to unilaterally terminate the HI agreement if the Host Institution is performing poorly.

The GWP Steering Committee includes one member representing all RWPs, the "Chair of Regional Chairs", who is nominated and selected in accordance with terms of reference adopted by the GWP Steering Committee.

Each RWP will establish a small Secretariat to manage day-to-day operations. The Regional

Secretariat should be a lean institutional arrangement, making sure that the coordination, communication and administrative functions are duly covered to ensure effective operation of the Partnership. In some regions or countries with significant additional funding, the Secretariat may need to recruit other staff or consultants for programme implementation. In any case, the recruitment process of the staff should be transparent, fair and non-discriminatory and subject to competition.

The salaries for the Regional Coordinator are set and approved by the RWP Steering Committee and by the Coordinator for the other staff. Salaries should be set in consultation with the HI. The level of salary should be in line with remuneration for similar positions in the country and/or region as appropriate. Any compensation should be in compliance with the laws of the country in which the Partnership is established, subject to budget availability and the requirements of the HI.

All RWPs should establish an **experts group for technical support** independent of operational structures, who could be called upon or meet as and when required on a needs basis. RWPs should avoid the cost of a permanent sitting committee.

c) Network Officers

The Network Officers (NOs) based at the GWP Secretariat provide liaison between the GWP Secretariat and the RWPs to support the implementation of the GWP Strategy at regional, country and sub-national levels. The NOs work mainly at the interface of the global and regional levels, responding to the needs emerging in the regions and countries (when necessary) and ensuring that the GWP Network standards are maintained.

The NO is regarded as a representative, advocate and spokesperson of the Partnerships within the GWP Secretariat and is a representative of the GWP Secretariat within the RWPs and CWPs. The NO is responsible for monitoring the financial and programmatic performance of the RWP within the agreed strategy and workplan, and should be kept informed on all important administrative issues within the region.

The NO is an ex-officio member of the Steering Committee/Council of the RWP representing the GWP Secretariat and has the right to sit as an observer on the Steering Committee/Council of the CWPs.

7. Procedures for accreditation

Even though the establishment of Regional or Country Water Partnerships is decided by the local Partners, their accreditation as a GWP RWP or CWP is a decision by: 1) the GWP Steering Committee in the case of RWPs, and 2) the Executive Secretary, as delegated by the GWP Steering Committee, for CWPs.

The GWP Secretariat works with the respective RWP or CWP to ensure that the proposed Partnership meets the requirements of these Conditions for Accreditation. The formal accreditation of a RWP or CWP is thus contingent upon the proposed Water Partnership meeting the Conditions for Accreditation, as reflected in their proposed statutes. The GWP Secretariat is responsible for conveying to the GWP SC a recommendation as to whether or not to accredit a RWP.

a) Procedure for Accreditation of a RWP as part of the GWP Network

- 1. Decision by Partners in a region to establish a RWP.
- 2. Adoption of a governance structure that conforms with GWP's principles and values.
- 3. Election of a Steering Committee or Council by the regional constituency.
- 4. Review by GWP Secretariat of the status and preparedness of the RWP, including the identification of a HI.
- 5. Application for Accreditation submitted to GWP Secretariat by the Chair of Steering Committee.
- 6. Assessment of compliance with these Conditions by the GWP Secretariat.
- 7. Recommendation by the GWP Secretariat to the GWP Steering Committee to accredit the Partnership.
- 8. Decision by the GWP SC to accredit the Partnership.
- 9. Letter of Accreditation signed by the GWP Executive Secretary and sent to the RWP.

b) Procedure for Accreditation of a CWP as part of the GWP Network

- 1. Decision by Partners in a country to establish a CWP.
- 2. Adoption of a governance structure that conforms with GWP's principles and values.
- 3. Election of a Steering Committee or Council by the country constituency.
- 4. Review by the RWP together with the GWP Secretariat of the status and preparedness of the CWP.
- 5. Application for Accreditation submitted to the GWP Secretariat with copy to the RWP by an authorized representative, accompanied by the CWP statutes, the names and organisations of the elected Steering Committee and list of Partners.
- 6. Assessment by the RWP of compliance with these Conditions.
- 7. Recommendation by the RWP Regional Steering Committee or Council to the GWP Secretariat to approve Accreditation.
- 8. Decision by the GWP Executive Secretary to accredit the Partnership.
- 9. Letter of Accreditation signed by the GWP Executive Secretary and sent to the CWP with a copy to the RWP.

c) Making these Conditions for Accreditation applicable to existing Water Partnerships

These Conditions are binding on all existing GWP RWPs and CWPs. Other Water Partnerships operating at sub-national level, for example, Area Water Partnerships (AWPs) are not covered under these Conditions for Accreditation but operate under the auspices of the appropriate CWP.

In the case of RWPs where the Conditions for Accreditation are not yet fully met, as based on the assessment of the GWP Secretariat, the Water Partnership is expected to take the necessary action to comply with these Conditions. During this process the RWP will be considered temporarily accredited. The GWP Secretariat will assess compliance with this document and provide feedback to GWP Steering Committee, so that the latter can confirm or withdraw accreditation by XXXXXX date.

For existing CWPs which have not yet received confirmation of their Accreditation, the relevant RWP, together with the GWP Secretariat, will assess compliance with these Conditions and provide feedback to the GWP Executive Secretary with status on progress. During this process the CWPs will be considered temporarily accredited. The GWP Executive Secretary will confirm or withdraw accreditation to these CWPs by XXXXX date. Where progress has been made but more time is required the GWP Executive Secretary may extend the temporary accreditation.

8. Non-compliance with the Conditions for Accreditation

If an accredited RWP or CWP fails to meet the GWP Conditions for Accreditation at any point in time, the GWP Secretariat, and the RWP in the case of a CWP, is responsible for advising on the necessary steps to ensure that improvements are implemented.

In the event that improvements are not made by the Water Partnership, the Executive Secretary shall recommend to the GWP Steering Committee that the Accreditation be withdrawn. If the GWP Steering Committee agrees with the recommendation, the Accreditation shall be withdrawn along with all corresponding rights and privileges.

9. Dissolution of a Water Partnership

Partners that comprise the RWP or the CWP may decide to dissolve the Partnership according to mechanisms provided for in their statutes. In such case Accreditation is automatically withdrawn. Similarly, if a RWP or CWP becomes inactive and no longer fulfils its function the GWPO SC may decide to withdraw Accreditation along with all the corresponding rights and privileges.

10. Clarifications

In the event of any need for clarification relating to these Conditions for Accreditation, the RWP or CWP should formally raise the issue with the GWP Secretariat, which is responsible for responding directly or for bringing it up for consideration to the Steering Committee.