UN-Water Country Briefs Project Final Report

October 2013

Summary

The UN-Water Country Briefs (WCBs) were developed to provide a snapshot of a country's water circumstances, by presenting the latest available national-level data on water for 13 countries. Launched at the Stockholm World Water Week on 5 September 2013, the WCBs have been implemented by the AQUASTAT programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on behalf of UN-Water and with financial support from the United States Department of State (USDS). WCBs have been produced for 13 countries: Bangladesh, Chile, the Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Oman, Philippines, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Zambia.
How much does water matter to a country's development and growth? How much is the country investing in water? Water is a vital and strategic component of the development objectives of a country.

As a pilot project, the WCBs have been designed to better visualize the economic and development impact of making water-related investments in 13 countries. Within 6-pages, they present the country's water profile, water-related investment flows, and present evidence and analysis on the state of irrigated agriculture, drinking water supply and sanitation, environment and health, energy, industry, water-related disasters and water governance. In pooling together the national data on water, the WCB project generated a new data set on investments in water for the 13 pilot countries. Moreover, a replicable method has been elaborated, which could be applied to other countries, focusing on the tacit links between water-related investment and development.

Overview of the WCBs:

- ✓ A pilot project to develop a comprehensive data-rich water national snapshot, framed within the larger development equation of a country
- ✓ Data to better visualize the critical importance of 'investments in water' for human and economic development
- ✓ An easy reference of aggregated national information for decision-makers
- ✓ Printed and web products to be made publicly available by UN-Water to all interested national and international actors

Background

The WCB pilot project has been implemented by the AQUASTAT Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on behalf of UN-Water with financial support from the United States Department of State (USDS).

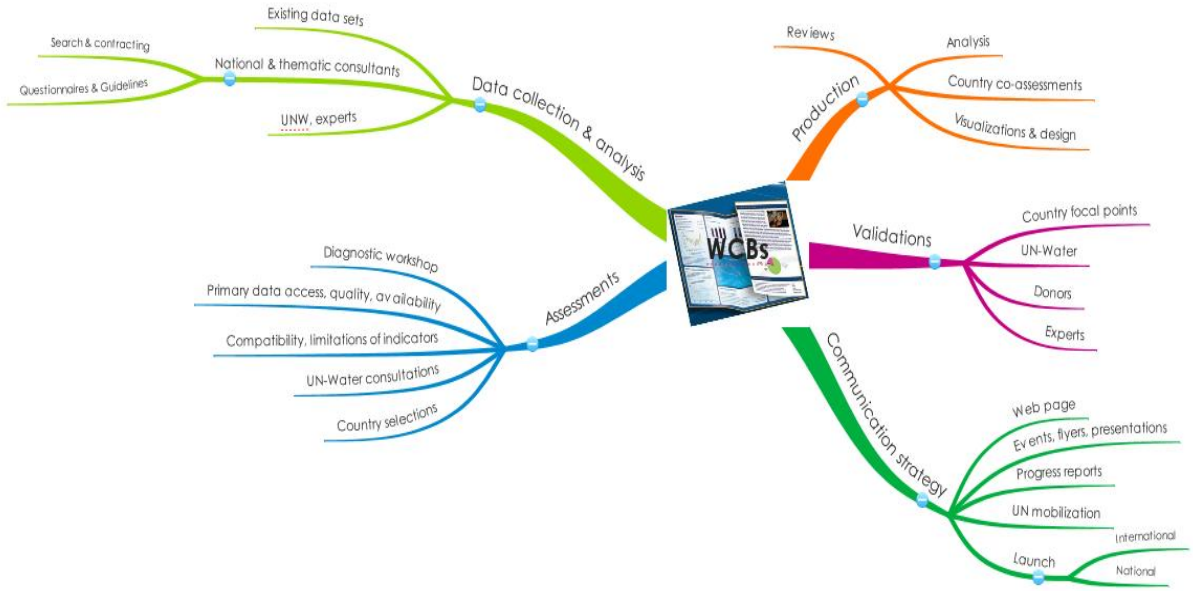
The project intends to frame water issues within the larger development equation of a country as a way to stimulate further political attention and investments in water, by producing an impactful brief to foster increased political momentum for stronger interventions on water-related issues by policy makers. An ultimate goal is to mobilize increased financial and institutional investments directed to water-related interventions, to serve as a tool for advocacy on water issues in more general terms and as a decision support tool in policy processes. The primary target groups are national governments, but major civil society organizations and private sector actors and the media are also targeted.

Objectives of this pilot project:

- ✓ Visualize the critical importance of "investments in water" for human and economic development
- ✓ Foster increased political momentum for stronger interventions on water-related issues by policy makers, dealing with investments, agricultural, health, disasters, environmental issues, etc.
- ✓ Mobilize increased financial and institutional investments directed to water–related interventions
- ✓ Serve as a tool for advocacy on water issues in more general terms
- ✓ Serve as decision support tools in policy processes
- ✓ Target national governments, as well as other key stakeholders – civil society organizations and private sector actors, and the media
- ✓ Define the methodology and develop the template and framework and apply it to a limited number of countries

Process of production & project results

The WCBs were developed through a diverse set of activities, schematically represented below:



Assessments… were conducted at the inception of the project, by means of a) a diagnostic workshop, b) a questionnaire sent to all UN-Water members and partners, and c) through individual consultations – to determine data availability, quality and compatibility issues. The WCBs diagnostic workshop, organized by the WCBs project team and co-hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), was held on 9-10 December, 2010 at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

Data collection and analysis… were performed by collating existing data and collecting new data exclusively for the WCBs. Data from existing international datasets stem namely from: FAO's AQUASTAT, WHO/UNICEF's Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation, the World Bank, UNEP's GEMS/Water, OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS), World Energy Council, among others. The WCB national data collection process was carried out in the 13 countries, through a specially designed data collection questionnaire to collect new data and update existing data on specific variables and indicators. National consultants in each country, hired by the project, collected specific data, through an exclusively-designed questionnaire for WCB data collection. Data sources stemmed essentially from national/official databanks, scientific studies and in some cases, expert opinions and assessments. Thematic consultants were also hired to support the development and analysis of specific themes, such as investment data analysis and water-related disasters, and the elaboration of the analytical methodologies. The WCBs data and analysis methods are comprehensively described in the Project method document.

Production… phase was the opportunity to experiment with several content narratives, visual templates and various visualizations proposals. The consultant designer and the project team worked closely to adjust the contents to the visual format and underwent numerous iterations of the narratives and templates. Close contact was also maintained with the national data collection consultants throughout the production phase, for follow-up on data issues and for validation. Draft visual templates and content templates were presented and circulated among the UN-Water network at several instances throughout the production phase. The project's consultant designer handled all the formatting for both web and print publishing. A folder was also produced to hold the set of 13 WCBs.

Validation… was conducted by sending the first round of drafts to national government focal points and national experts identified by the national consultants in the 13 countries for co-assessment and validation of the contents. The drafts were also sent to the entire UN-Water network and the donor. Having received and integrated comments and feedback, the second round of drafts were then submitted to the UN-Water Senior Project Managers for final clearance before publishing.

Communication strategy… was elaborated by producing a Project webpage, within the UN-Water website and by producing various project documents throughout the project, which were all posted on the project webpage, ie: Diagnostic Workshop Proceedings, WCB flyer, presentation, interview, technical paper, etc. The WCBs were launched at World Water Week in Stockholm, on 5 September 2013 at an exclusively dedicated side-event session, which included participants from UN-Water, USDS, FAO, Global Water Partnership (GWP), and the Government of Mexico. An exclusive interview with the project's senior supervisor was produced and published on MaximsNewsNetwork, with links posted on the UN-Water website. Various announcements and links to the WCB page have been posted on the UN-Water homepage, FAO AQUASTAT homepage, FAO-Water, among others, and on various social media sites.

The 13 WCBs have been printed and are available from UN-Water. They have also been Published online.

Lessons learned

Data

The WCBs, based on the AQUASTAT model, were built on quantitative data with the aim of contributing a comprehensive (ie: across sectors) national evidence-base, both in terms of new data collected - on water-related investments - and updated data - on water-related variables and indicators. Having reviewed several methodologies, such as cost-benefit analysis (CBA) in the water supply and sanitation sector, the project team attempted to adapt them to the WCBs, but came to the

conclusion that it was: a) not easily replicable for the WCBs' purpose due to the heavy data mining involved in pulling together a national CBA analysis and the resource implications of such an exercise, b) not readily adaptable for other sectors, in that in water supply and sanitation, 'more is better'; but that is not necessarily the case for other sectors, such as irrigation, industrial water, etc.

The investment data categories were chosen based on the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), in order to use a well-developed internationally recognized system and enable comparability with Official Development Assistance (ODA), which has been retrieved from the OECD CRS database.

To mention some of the general methodological issues related to data collection of this sort, there are:

- Differences between countries (size, climate, level of development, etc.): for national policy-making it is important to have national-level data, but of course especially in large countries, there can be enormous differences between the different regions within the country. Disaggregated information is important.
- Discrepancies in data for the same variable.
- Differences in definitions and methodology used for data reported: a typical example related to water is the confusion in the words "use", "abstraction", "withdrawal", "consumption", which are often used interchangeably, but which in fact have entirely different meanings and thus should have data with totally different values.
- Information by country versus river basin: the most logical unit for water-related data would be the river basin, which moreover can often be transboundary. It is however difficult to obtain statistical data at river basin level, since countries are interested in national-level data or data by administrative unit, and thus collect at that level.
- Water information can be located in different institutions and ministries, such as those dealing with agriculture, water resources and use, environment, industry, etc.
- Multipurpose use of water: for example, water in an irrigation scheme is also used for household purposes, livestock, etc. On the one hand, this is often overlooked by planners, on the other hand this complicates the data.
- Insufficient information for major indicators: often, global discussions (for example on water scarcity, competition, etc.) are based on insufficient data.
- Difficulties in obtaining time series: data collection is so costly that it is impossible to do it on a regular basis for the entire world. Sometimes 10 years is the interval with the additional risk that 10 years on, definitions, methods and type of data collected have changed. And this makes scenarios for the future difficult to predict.
- Sustainability of the monitoring process in relation to national water monitoring capacities
- High cost of information gathering

Findings on investment data

With regards specifically to the water-related investment data collected through the WCBs project, there was a varying degree of data availability in the countries. For instance, some countries have a good record of their investments in water, both in terms of the tracking back in time as well as in the range of categories. Other countries have scant data on investments, whether in terms of the number of years for which data is available or the number of water-related investment categories. In most countries, national accounting for water is quite recent, and investment data on water is not consolidated prior to 2006 in many cases. In some countries, prior to 2006 there were no secondary reporting mechanisms, as there were no national development plans in place.

In sum:

- ✓ The WCBs project generated a new data set on investments in water for the 13 pilot countries and a replicable method for other countries

- ✓ There are tacit links between investment and development
- ✓ There is uncertainty in investments in water as a cross-cutting issue
- ✓ It is not always possible to separate Government investments and ODA

Country co-assessment and validation process

National focal points in each country were invited to participate in a co-assessment and validation process. The rapid assessment methodology presented in the WCBs is designed foremost to serve as an advocacy tool to generate debate and attention to the issues.

Findings on data quality

In sum:

- ✓ Readily available national quantitative datasets on water are largely lacking for national-level assessments and analysis
- ✓ Varying degree of certainty: it is a challenge to communicate inherent uncertainty in data
- ✓ Different definition for seemingly similar variable or indicator leads to different results
- ✓ Review with governments and country experts is important
- ✓ Data from the WCBs contributes to strengthen national and international datasets.

Opportunities provided by the WCBs project

The WCBs project provided a certain number of opportunities, namely:

- ✓ Show clearly what the data gaps are
- ✓ Collect data on national water investments and water-related variables and indicators (no comparison among countries)
- ✓ Make the case of water "outside the box" and be able to tell the water side to the decision-makers at the country level
- ✓ Strengthen evidence base at the country level
- ✓ Support other initiatives
- ✓ Bring actors together – inside and outside the UN system

Project documents

The following documents were produced by the project and are available on the project webpage:

- Water Country Briefs for 13 countries (hard copy and online version)
- Folder (to contain the set of 13 WCBs)
- 'WCBs Methods' document
- Media interview with the senior project supervisor
- Presentations, flyers, and other communication materials
- Project website on UN-Water website
- Launch at SWWW 2013 side-event