



Topic Working Groups: Briefing Note

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Topic Working Groups: what are they?

CPWF Topic Working Groups (TWG) are communities of practice that address specific, well-defined issues of water and food in several CPWF basins. They aim to do the following: facilitate cross-basin learning through various interactive ways, including virtual communication; help build capacity of basin teams through sharing of experiences and mentoring; facilitate cross-basin research; and produce topic-specific syntheses and other generic outputs.

Topic Working Groups contribute to achieving CPWF objectives and goals: to increase the resilience of social and ecological systems through better water management for food production. Along with BDC research programs, TWGs are embedded in the program theory of change and adopt the core principles of the program: interdisciplinary integration, partnership, adaptive management, capacity building, gender and diversity, and accountability.

Rationale and Objectives

While Basin Development Challenge (BDC) research programs focus on local catchment and basin scales, Topic Working Groups focus on cross-basin and global scale research and capacity-building. They respond to shared needs – as identified at the basin or project level – to support the production of basin, cross-basin or generic outputs, and to facilitate and stimulate learning across basins. They aim to strengthen basin teams, contribute to adaptive management of projects, and upgrade project design and implementation through sharing of experiences and mentoring. Objectives and products are jointly defined by the core TWG members, and the CPWF management team, guided by the TWG founding conceptual framework. This framework calls for comparative analysis between basins, introduction of specific tools or methods at basin and project levels, and advances in the development of specific theories or concepts that can help respond to the Basin Development Challenges.

TWGs are defined and launched by the CPWF team together with project teams to fulfill the needs of each basin research program. The selection of topics is thus an evolving process of identifying key emerging issues of global importance, and selecting those most relevant to the needs of CPWF research at any moment or stage. The first topics were identified through a review of Phase 1 research and validated against their relevance to Phase 2 BDC projects. The initial set of topics includes: Multiple-Use of water Services (MUS), Resilience in water and food

systems, Global Drivers of Change, Benefit Sharing Mechanisms, and Learning to Innovate. As Phase 2 progresses, these topics can be adapted and complemented, as other communities of practice emerge that are pertinent to specific basins.

Process for Implementation

Whilst implementation remains flexible and specific to each TWG, the following structure provides guidance for implementation and achievement of objectives.

TWG leadership and membership

A specific leader is nominated for each TWG, usually a part-time scientist preferably already engaged in Phase 2, appointed by the CPWF. The leader works under the supervision of the MT TWG Lead, Associate Director, who oversees all TWGs on behalf of the Management Team. The first task of the leader is to consult with Basin Leaders and Project Leaders and, based on this consultation, propose a workplan identifying output and outcome targets, and key milestones. TWG membership is voluntary, motivated by the desire to improve own project research, inform the BDC and contribute to experience and evidence beyond the Basin. The role and responsibilities of the Basin Leaders and project teams who are championing particular topics need to be made explicit to ensure achievement of outcomes and delivery of outputs.

The current TWG leaders are as follows:

- MUS TWG (Aug. 2009): Barbara van Koppen - IWMI, South Africa
- Resilience TWG (Sep. 2010): Line Gordon and Elin Enfors – SRC/SEI, Sweden
- Global Drivers of Change TWG (Sep. 2010): Simon Cook - Consultant, Australia
- Learning to Innovate (Sep. 2010): Boru Douthwaite – CPWF Management Team (CPMT)

Launch of the TWG

The launch is an event that has a dual purpose: led by the TWG lead, it aims to ‘brainstorm’ about the TWG with the basin representatives and experienced scientists, and to define preliminary research questions to be addressed by the TWG in the relevant BDCs. It also establishes a community of practice, agrees on its internal communication mechanisms and defines its expected outputs for at least the first 12 months. The launch is also a key opportunity to position the TWG and communicate to the international community.

CPWF Position Paper

The TWG Position Paper is a collaborative effort by the TWG Leader and MT in consultation and collaboration with project teams. It is informed by needs and realities of BDC projects. It is recommended that major TWGs (e.g. MUS, Resilience and Global Drivers) produce a topic position paper to clarify the program position regarding the selected research topic, that is: i) what the topic ‘means’ and how it translates into the program research; ii) what is the scope of the TWG research agenda, and iii) how the TWG will support and promote basin research, and in

turn how basin project implementation will support progress in the topic research area. The document can be used as a roadmap to guide the TWG community of practice.

Interactions with BDC teams and the international community

A community of practice may include scientists, practitioners, managers and policy-makers within and outside the CPWF. While the interaction outside the CPWF community varies according to the group, the interaction within the CPWF community is more structured, responding to the program requirements summarized in this note. Such interaction should be systematic, continuous and iterative. The community of practice may interact in various ways (virtual and face-to-face) and is supported by the Communication team (see below). Notably, conferences and events organized by BDCs are opportunities for TWG meetings. Linkages with the CGIAR Consortium Research Program (CRPs) Best Bets, will also be explored, in particular within CRP5 “Durable solutions for water scarcity and land degradation”.

Communication and Information Management Support

The concept of the topic working groups is predicated around the assumption that improved cross-basin sharing and learning will lead to greater impact and insights into CPWF activities. Ensuring effective communication, internally and to external actors, and sharing of information and knowledge will be integral to the success of the TWGs. This section lays out the role, approach and some best practice tools that the TWGs can rely on. The CPWF communication and information strategy will therefore:

- Support communication and information sharing **within** the TWGs
- Assist in communicating results and linking to other relevant networks **beyond** the CPWF.

Communication is not just the end ‘product’ but a process of creating shared meaning. It is assumed that actors within the TWGs will be active communicators and information sharers themselves. The communication and information team will support the TWGs therein by providing a range of tools and mechanisms that help facilitate the learning process. Throughout the TWG’s life span, the team will assist in finding innovative ways to communicate the results of the groups and ensure that products and outputs are appropriately packaged and used by different end users. It is foreseen that the TWGs will themselves define their own information and communication needs, actively designing and using systems that are best suited to communicate their results.

A range of tools can be used both for sharing across members and for communicating results. Some of the tools for consideration (after objectives and needs are assessed) include:

Assisting in communication and information sharing processes	Potential end products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of internal web-spaces to promote sharing and learning (blogs, web-pages, TWG wikis, etc) • Use of one-way and two-way discussion groups and/or newsletters • Document repositories – or areas within the CPWF document repository to establish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of toolkits, sourcebooks and other materials for practitioners • TWG working paper series and/or policy briefs • Strategic linkages to relevant networks to produce broader publications • Production of Journal articles • Short videos/presentations summing key messages and outcomes

International Forum on Water and Food: IFWF3, Nov. 2011

The IFWF3 will be a major event for learning across all CPWF basins. Each TWG will contribute to this event and provide input into the Forum design. Two TWGs will play particularly important roles:

- The Resilience TWG will promote resilience as core to Phase 2 (see also Box.1) and will take stock of achievements in fostering resilience through 2011, and what further achievements can be anticipated by the end of Phase 2 and beyond.
- The Learning To Innovate (L2I) TWG will present the CPWF “different way of operating” and the value of innovative science.

The other TWGs will have a more explicit cross-basin focus: what is emerging from the Basins, what is emerging across the Basins, how and where can we expect to have the most impact? In addition emerging TWGs will be identified and developed by the basin teams.

The practical implications for TWG are as follows:

- The Forum and its preparation will be integrated into the workplan of each TWG. This includes the role and responsibilities of TWG Leaders, BLs and other key players; activities and outputs including communication.
- The Organizing Committee (OC) includes the Resilience TWG Leader and the TWG Lead.
- TWG position papers will be communicated in the Forum and will provide the basis for facilitation and discussion with basin/project teams. Resilience position papers will provide the overarching guiding direction in Forum design. L2I TWG will play a key role in underpinning guiding direction, structure and outputs.
- TWG Leaders will have an explicit facilitation role during the Forum, and will be part of the Forum Facilitation Team.

Monitoring and Evaluation

TWG are monitored and evaluated against their objectives and operating plan, and against the assigned roles and responsibilities of the TWG leaders and basin representatives, including Basin Leaders. This process is also central to the adaptive management approach and contributes to responding to emerging changes and uncertainties. The TWG peer-review is based on six-monthly reporting and a range of indicators measuring programmatic performance (e.g., see the CPWF Knowledge Management strategy). For example: the number and quality of interactions (meetings across basins, joint publications, etc.); the number of people supervised or trained; the number and quality of interdisciplinary publications.

Box.1 - Resilience TWG by Alain Vidal, CPMT representative of the Resilience TWG

Resilience of a social-ecological system is its capacity to absorb disturbance and reorganize whilst undergoing change, while retaining essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks (Walker et al. 2004). In its phase 2, CPWF aims to increase the resilience of social and ecological systems through better water management for food production.

The importance of resilience to the CPWF has emerged from the lessons learnt from its Phase 1 projects, but the concept remains not well understood, if not misunderstood, by many. Therefore its practical use in Phase 2 projects requires scientific investment. On the other hand, CPWF partners working on resilience theories lack practical examples, esp. in developing countries and in food production systems. This constitutes a good ground for crosscutting interests, inside and outside the program.

The resilience concept is being adapted to the often degraded food production social-ecological systems addressed by the CPWF, through work recently done jointly by the CPMT, some Phase 1 project leaders and resilience specialists (mostly from the Stockholm Resilience Center). Such cooperation pushes CPWF researchers to explore beyond their “comfort zone”, to look beyond how the system they are studying had improved compared to baseline studies thanks to a given technical and/or institutional innovation, but also to assess whether this improved state is more resilient than the degraded one, and what feedbacks are at play that make this improvement fragile, or on the contrary, sustainable.

This recent cooperative experience has also shown that, for such TWGs, CPWF needs expertise from outside the program (in the case of resilience, the TWG will be co-led by Line Gordon and Elin Enfors, both with the Stockholm Resilience Centre). At the same time, there is a need for a serious and lasting investment in the topic from an MT member (e.g. as a co-author of the TWG position paper) to ensure that our external partners are properly guided according to the program objectives and values, so that the objectives and activities of the TWG primarily serve the CPWF objectives, and secondarily the broader scientific community.