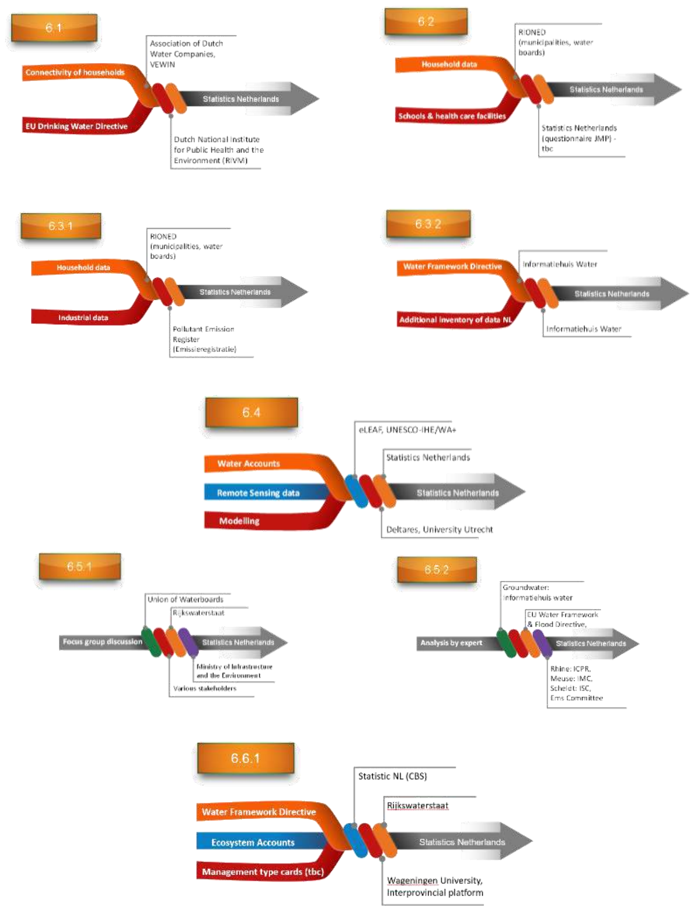
# GEMI proof of concept report
# The Netherlands

*Pilot testing of the draft monitoring methodologies for SDG 6 global indicators*

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Edited by Rozemarijn ter Horst, based on contributions of Dutch experts

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# Introduction

GEMI is the UN-sponsored initiative aiming at establishing and managing a coherent monitoring framework for the implementation of SDG 6 for water and sanitation. It contributes to country progress through well-informed decision-making on water, based on harmonized, comprehensive, timely and accurate information.

Six proof of concept countries - including the Netherlands - were invited to test the methodologies developed by UN organizations, to collect data for the indicators linked to Sustainable Development Goal 6.3 to 6.6.

None of the targets and related indicators had been monitored and reported on before in the framework of the MDGs or SDGs in the Netherlands. However, the Netherlands had already indicated to be interested in the monitoring of SDG 6 during the workshop on 'Exploring new data for SMART monitoring of water SDG targets' in December 2015[1]. In this workshop, policymakers and (young) scientists of the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium exchanged their experiences and views on new data for SMART monitoring of water SDG targets. The Dutch water sector showed great interest in the SDG processes, and are eager to contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. GEMI provided an opportunity for the Dutch water sector to contribute to knowledge development for the SDGs.

In this report, details are provided on the Netherlands approach to GEMI, insights in the question if the Netherlands can provide the requested data for indicators linked to SDG 6.1 to 6.6. and 11.5, and feedback on the proposed methodologies following the pilot review framework designed by UN Water of 15 August 2016. Proposals are included from the scientific community for methods to facilitate gathering of data. The majority of this report was shared with UN custodian agencies during the GEMI Work in Progress Workshop hosted by the Netherlands from 7 to 9 September 2016[2]. The aim of this workshop was to share and discuss feedback on the proposed methods and indicators with all the Proof of Concept Countries.

Work on the GEMI proof of concept phase provides us- the Netherlands Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, as the coordinating ministry of SDG 6 -with a strong platform for the implementation of GEMI next year, creating a baseline for the monitoring of the water-related SDGs. We commit ourselves to support the implementation of GEMI worldwide to ensure that the water targets are effectively monitored such that it leads to enhanced implementation of policy and ultimately meeting the SDGs.

[1] The workshop was organised by the Netherlands IHP-HWRP Committee. The report is available via http://ihp-hwrp.nl/index.php/2016/02/03/workshop-report-available-exploring-new-data-for-smart-monitoring-of-water-sdg-targets/.

[2] A workshop report was written and shared with all participants. For more information, please contact Monique Berendsen: Monique.Berendsen@minienm.nl.

## Netherlands approach to the proof of concept phase

### *Approach*

The Netherlands stands for a comprehensive approach to water safety and water security. Key elements of the Dutch approach are an integrated water resources management, collaboration, long term strategy, good governance and robust national policy promoting prevention and innovation, so as to mitigate the effects of flooding, water shortage and polluted water.

This approach was translated into the following actions for the Netherlands Proof of Concept process:

- The Netherlands supports comprehensive monitoring of the SDGs for water, which is relevant for policymaking. This entails that coordination of the monitoring and implementation of water-related indicators are managed by the same ministry, ensuring that the different processes strengthen each other through sharing information, best practices and lessons learned.
- The Netherlands also supports using an integrated information system on water based on statistical standards adopted by the international community, such as the System of National Accounts (United Nations *et al.* 2008) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) (United Nations *et al.* 2012). Methods for estimation of variables related to the SDGs using non-conventional data sources constitute an important source of information.
- Indicators linked to target 6.1 to 6.6. and 11.5 were included in the Dutch GEMI proof of Concept phase, as a basis for integrated water resources management.
- For each indicator one can learn from activities set up for the other indicators, as well as from experiences of other countries and monitoring requirements for other programmes.
- Dutch policy makers were asked to act as coordinator for each indicator, to ensure reflection on the policy relevance was included in the GEMI process
- Contributing experts were asked to reflect on the policy relevance of the proposed monitoring methods; provide the methodologies information to policy makers on how to adapt policies to facilitate better implementation of the SDGs? An example of this is the DPSIR (Driver, Pressure, Status, Impact, Response) approach used in the Water Framework Directive. Contributing experts were asked to identify which additional information can be provided in the framework of progressive monitoring to support innovation such as retrieval of nutrients and address additional challenges such as micro plastics.
- All parties involved are invited to identify how the Netherlands can support other countries in the monitoring of SDGs to ensure that the water targets are effectively monitored such that it leads to enhanced implementation of policy and ultimately meeting these targets.


*Figure 1: The Water Cycle in the Sustainable Development Goals, showing all indicators included in the Netherlands GEMI process (Source: UN Water)*

### *Framework for coordinators and experts*

The approach mentioned above was translated into a framework for the Dutch coordinators and experts working on GEMI. This was done before receiving the pilot learning framework, but fits seamlessly to the approach proposed by UN Water:

- identify which already available data can be used for the monitoring of the SDG indicators
- identify additional data suitable for the monitoring of the indicators in the context of progressive monitoring
- use the available monitoring data to test the applicability of the GEMI monitoring framework in practice for the Netherlands and neighboring countries.
- provide feedback about what works / does not work with regard to the identified indicators and the GEMI monitoring framework; and formulate (low-cost) proposals for improvements, if applicable
    - Is it doable? – can we measure it?
    - Is it effective? – do we measure what we want to measure
    - Is it efficient? – are other methods better?
- Identify how the Netherlands can support other countries in the application of the SDG monitoring framework

### *Process*

The national coordination of the SDGs in the Netherlands is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They work in close cooperation with central bureau of statistics: Statistics Netherlands (CBS), which both holds a seat in the IAEG-SDG and is the lead organisation in providing data on the SDGs. They have analysed which data is available for all SDG related indicators. Not for all indicators, data is available. The ministries work closely with governmental and non-governmental organisations, businesses and scientific organisations for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

For the water-related SDGs, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment leads the implementation and monitoring process for the water related indicators, within the framework of the national SDG efforts and GEMI. Work is done in close collaboration with Statistics Netherlands.

Statistics Netherlands has identified for each indicator which data was available in their databases, which is in accordance to the SEEA Central Framework. Regular meetings were organised to discuss progress on each indicator and the best approach to include the Dutch water sector. For each indicator, a coordinator working with the Dutch government was identified. This was specifically done to ensure that the process of monitoring will serve decision making processes and thus the implementation of the SDGs.

The coordinator was invited to select a group of experts with in-depth knowledge of the topic and a large network in the water sector. Lead organisations in the water sector, both governmental and non-governmental, were invited to join the process. To facilitate inclusion of as many insights and knowledge as possible, focus group discussions were organised for most of the indicators.

The Work in Progress workshop organised from 7 to 9 September in Delft provided a good incentive for the coordinators and experts to provide feedback in a short period of time. After the workshop, time was available for an additional round of feedback and confirmation of roles. The outcomes are included in this report.

In the Netherlands, we have data readily available to monitor indicators 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.4.1, 6.4.2 and 6.5.2. All this data can be collected from existing international reporting requirements and from the SEEA based water accounts compiled by Statistics Netherlands. This ensures that more countries can provide the data requested for GEMI. For 6.3.1 and 6.5.2 data was already collected. For the other indicators, this will be done next year, when monitoring for SDG 6 starts.

For the indicators linked to 6.4, additional research was done on which methods can best be used to monitor the indicators. The outcome of this is added as addendum. For 6.5.1, a group of experts needs to be brought together for a focus group discussion to collect the data. For 6.6.1, data is collected by the provinces, the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency andWageningen University. Statistics NL, in cooperation with Wageningen University, is developing the ecosystem accounts for the Netherlands. In 2017 and 2018, work on a Condition Account and Capacity Account is planned. These accounts can provide valuable data for indicator 6.6.1. Based on the final monitoring methods provided by GEMI, Statistics NL, Rijkswaterstaat and Wageningen University will identify which data is most relevant for the monitoring of SDG 6.6.1.

## General lessons from the Netherlands approach to the proof of concept phase

*Resources and capacity building:*

Setting up a monitoring system requires a clear idea on which data is needed, the infrastructure needed to collect this data, and resources to set up this infrastructure such as expertise, time and funds.

To ensure funding and time of experts is available for implementation and monitoring of the water SDGs, the project needs to be on the political agenda to be integrated in the financial and human resources planning.

For the implementation of the SDGs and monitoring of the water indicators in 2017 and beyond, the project is now integrated in the financial and human resources planning of the coordinating agencies, of which Statistics Netherlands and the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment play the most important role for water. However, for the proof of concept period, this was not yet done as it was a project accepted and developed within one year, and implemented over the course of four months. Many of the experts who have contributed to the review of the indicators and data availability in the Netherlands have done so as they found it an interesting and important project, finding time themselves in their mostly busy schedules.

We have noticed how important it is to have very clear step-by-step guides, which can also be used by people who do not have extensive knowledge of the SDG process, how important it is to include enough time in people's yearly schedules to contribute to the data collection activities, and thus the importance to allocate enough funds to finance time of experts.

*Results*

In the Netherlands, we have data readily available to monitor indicators 6.3.1, 6.4.1 and 6.4.2. For indicator 6.3.2, 6.5.1, 6.5.2, and 6.6.1, data are available but it needs to be gathered from different institutions. A necessary step to ensure The Netherlands will be able to provide data to the UN custodian agencies next year is to identify lead institutions for these indicators and to decide if the data will be provided through the Central Bureau of Statistics or through other organisations.

The process of bringing together different experts has proven to be very effective and resulted in several connections between experts and organisations which had not met before. This is remarkable as in the Netherlands, almost all organisations in the different water subsectors are familiar with each other.

The large and inclusive role of Statistics Netherlands (CBS) in the preparations provided inspiration for experts in the water sector who gained new insights in the work of the CBS and for the experts of the CBS to tap into new data sources. The CBS plays a central role in the collection of data for all SDGs, but GEMI accelerated the process within the CBS for the water goals. The GEMI process also provided a boost for the discussion on how to combine the best of the SEEA based water accounts and water accounting databases. The SEEA based water accounts compiled by Statistics Netherlands bring together a wide range of water statistics across different industries, and provide a useful starting point for the compilation of many of the SDG indicators related to water, particularly 6.3.1 and 6.4.1.

Through the GEMI process, water experts in the Netherlands gained more insight in the SDGs as GEMI provided a tangible activity for the SDGs. This will enable the Dutch water-sector to support other Western and perhaps Southern countries alike in the implementation and monitoring of the water SDGs.

As concrete outcomes, the GEMI process led to:

- A consortium of organisations worked on testing the value of different monitoring methods – surveys, satellite data, modelling – to gather data for indicators 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 linked to progressive monitoring. This project was funded by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.
- A consortium assessed whether biomonitoring, an in particular fish species, can be added to indicator 6.3.2 as an additional or alternative water quality indicator. The presence of certain fish species indicates that the basic ecological requirements (food, shelter, reproduction) and a minimum of water quality or habitat availability are being met.

As an additional spinoff of the workshop, The Netherlands is discussing with UN Water how to support the global roll-out of the GEMI process, including involving more countries in the monitoring of the water related SDGs.

*Lessons learned*

As proof of concept country, we have learned several lessons about what is needed to ensure that the water targets are effectively monitored such that it leads to enhanced implementation of policy and ultimately meeting these targets. This feedback and lessons were broadly shared by the other Proof of Concept Countries during the work in progress workshop. Please find the summary of this workshop in Annex 3

The indicators and methodologies proposed provide a good basis to work from. General feedback is given on a few definitions, norms and references used, as not all were immediately clear or understood in the same way by each proof of concept country. Clear concepts and definitions is critical for success and comparability of the results. To this end, it is advisable that existing statistical standards and their corresponding definitions, such as those encompassed in the SEEA Central Framework and SEEA Water, are used to define the indicators where applicable.

There are still questions that need answering; on who is responsible for what, and how will information be shared at the global level. This uncertainty influences and may inhibit countries to develop additional activities, such as providing open source information and developing innovative methods for implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Therefore, there is a need for clarity on the bandwidth countries have to gather additional data, and how this will be shown at the global reporting level.

Currently there is limited attention for sustainability in the indicators. It was also remarked that the indicators give little feedback to policy makers on how to adjust policies and activities. This needs to be adjusted in the methodologies.

It needs to be re-emphasised that monitoring of SDG indicators is not about data gathering for the sake of data gathering, but to support decision making processes for improved implementation of the SDG targets. Therefore, it is important to link the monitoring process to policies in countries, enabling policy makers to identify where action is needed, and how to improve the local situation.

Integration of the indicators under SDG 6 is key; do not separate SDG6 from other SDG's too much, and approach SDG6 in an integrated manner. For this reason, using existing statistical standards to monitor SDG 6 (SNA and SEEA) allows for comparison between the water-related indicators with economic and other environmental information compiled using the same framework.

To facilitate this, data should be analysed comprehensively. The indicator methodologies of target 6.3 to 6.6 facilitate this to some extent, as some of the methodologies build on data of other indicators.

It is needed to develop and include the progressive monitoring approach and apply it to more indicators. Additional indicators on regional variations should be included: e.g. coping mechanisms in water stressed areas. Also, the contextual reality is important: How does a method/indicator perform in hyper arid areas?

Last but not least, it's important to have face to face meetings and opportunities to exchange new insights and methods to monitor the indicator.

## Information flows

Please find below an overview of data sources and institutions involved in monitoring the targets in the Netherlands. For 11.5, this is will be defined the coming weeks.