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Launch of the new Groundwater working group for implementation of the United Nations Framework Classification (UNFC)

Content

During the recent Resource Management Week organized by UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) in Geneva last May, aimed at the application of the official resource classification adopted by United Nations, namely UNFC (United Nation Framework Classification), a new working group exclusively dedicated to groundwater resources has been established, side to other historically existing working groups. This novelty is demonstrating the relevance of groundwater resources in the worldwide approach to sustainability. In fact, the UNFC is a universally acceptable and internationally applicable scheme for the sustainable management of all energy and mineral resources, with specific focus on minerals, raw materials, oil and gases, and more recently on renewable resources as solar, wind, geothermal. Furthermore, the UN adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a modern management of earth resources based on sustainability also aimed at climate change mitigation. In this framework, where the existing UNFC is moving towards an extended classification named UNRMS (United Nations Resource Management Sustainability), a growing interest in groundwater resources has been raised. Peculiarity of groundwater resources respect with other earth resources is mainly due to the coexistence of renewable (due to annual recharge of aquifers) and not-renewable resources (long-term groundwater stocked in deep aquifers); this situation requires a preliminary validation phase to verify applicability of existing UNFC on groundwater resources. At the same time, the emerging approach based on sustainability, which implies not only focus on exploitation for human uses, but also on the environmental and ecological needs, seems to fit perfectly with the comprehensive concept of management and protection of groundwater resources. In addition, groundwater is a natural resource interested by transboundary flows, which implies application of modern policies and a solid governance to be efficiently managed.

Taking into account the UNFC, the activity of the working group to be developed in the following years is aimed to: i) enlarge the WG membership to ensure a worldwide representativeness; ii) check existing classifications adopted by single member states; iii) test the consistency of UNFC to groundwater; iv) submit a document explaining the Terms of Reference for the working group; v) bridging existing classifications with UNFC; vi) apply the UNFC to groundwater by case studies; vii) prepare the transition to the new UNRMS.

This ambitious program requires a solid knowledge basis, the involvement of groundwater experts and organizations, firstly IAH, and an efficient dialogue with stakeholders. In addition, synergies with other research programs, as EU projects (e.g. GeoERA), Unesco-IHP projects, and others, are mandatory. With these premises, the working group is open to worldwide contributions and collaborations to deal with the expected goals and to increase the relevance of groundwater issues and consequently of its community.

Primary author(s) : Prof. PETITTA, Marco (Earth Science Department - Sapienza University of Rome); Mr ABSAMETOV, Malis (Institute for Hydrogeology and Geoecology, Kazakhstan); COETZEE, Henk (Council for Geoscience, South Africa); Mrs GARAVEVA, Narmina (Geneva Business School, Switzerland); Dr HINSBY, Klaus (GEUS, Denmark); Dr HOOGENDOORN , Bob (Deltares, Netherland); Mr NETSKVI, Oleksii (State Commission on Mineral Resources, Ukraine); Mr PARKS, Kevin (Alberta Geological Survey, Canada); REICHLING, Joerg (BGR, Germany); Mr RUDKO, Georgii (State Commission on Mineral Resources, Ukraine); Dr SZOCS, Teodora (Mining and Geological Survey, Hungary); Mr TUDVACHEV, Alexey (St. Peterburg State University, Russian Federation); VINOGRAD, Natalia (St. Peterburg State University, Russian Federation)

Presenter(s) : Prof. PETITTA, Marco (Earth Science Department - Sapienza University of Rome)

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