REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND LEARNING:
2016-2017

ALLIANCE FOR
WATER STEWARDSHIP

OUR IDEA

We unite organizations behind our mission: To lead a global network that promotes responsible use of freshwater that is socially and economically beneficial and environmentally sustainable. We achieve this through a global water stewardship system that connects and motivates leading organizations, and an internationally-endorsed standard that drives, recognizes and rewards good water stewardship performance.

THE AWS STANDARD

The AWS Standard is a globally-applicable framework for major water users to understand their water use and impacts, and to work collaboratively and transparently for sustainable water management within a catchment context.

Developed through a four-year global multi-stakeholder process, the Standard supports implementing sites in understanding the local context and its shared water challenges, and to begin transparent and constructive engagement with other stakeholders. This helps sites develop contextually appropriate actions in pursuit of four outcomes:

- Good water governance
- Sustainable water balance
- Good water quality status
- Healthy status of important water-related areas

Implementing the AWS standard helps sites to

- Understand their water use in the context of a catchment
- Build internal capacity through a stepwise learning framework
- Manage water risks at site level and through supply chains
- Engage effectively and build trust with local stakeholders
- Demonstrate real leadership in addressing water challenges

Driving continual improvement

The AWS Standard drives continual improvement through three performance levels: core, gold and platinum. The AWS System includes third party certification and a network of accredited professional service providers who support and assess the implementation of the Standard.

Building trust for collaboration

The integrity of the multi-stakeholder processes through which it was developed enables the Standard to act as a neutral framework that drives transparency, builds trust and enhances understanding of shared water challenges. In doing so the Standard provides a "safe place" that is critical to enabling genuine and lasting collaboration.

Image: Nestlé Waters — Ontario, California, USA.
Image courtesy of Nestlé.

A global initiative, driven by members

The Alliance for Water Stewardship is a global membership-based collaboration. Our members are drawn from all sectors: leading businesses, non-profits, public sector agencies and academic institutes.

By connecting organizations at the forefront of collaboration on water, AWS membership acts as a forum to exchange learning and advance the uptake of water stewardship worldwide. This knowledge helps our members to continually refine their own stewardship practices.

As owners of the AWS system, our members shape the development of AWS processes so as to be responsive to the learning generated and changing nature of water challenges. By working together we are also able to support, and draw strength from, other water initiatives and other sustainability standards pursuing compatible objectives.

Connecting global-to-local and local-to-global

Water use is a local issue with primarily local impacts. The AWS Standard aims to deliver genuine benefits for local stakeholders.

To achieve this, we are building a network of local and regional partners who engage local stakeholders and establish localized networks, expertise and data sets. These facilitate contextually appropriate water stewardship actions within the globally consistent framework of the AWS Standard.

Local partners play a key role in raising awareness, building water stewardship capacity, and supporting uptake of the AWS Standard. The work of local partners helps to establish the "local-to-global" learning pathways that are a critical part of the AWS approach, informing our governance and connecting multinational organizations with local water expertise. AWS regional coordinators support the local-to-global approach as part of our international secretariat.

Supporting implementation of water stewardship

AWS-accredited specialist service providers are a key part of the capacity development program necessary to advance understanding and implementation of AWS water stewardship.

Working closely with our local partners, AWS-accredited organizations support organizations implementing the AWS Standard, and provide third party assessment of conformity with the Standard.

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Image: Irrigated Coffee Plantations — Aviv, Ruvuma, Tanzania. Image courtesy of Olam.

2016's inaugural Global Water Stewardship Forum was a milestone event

Over 100 participants from 20 countries engaged in sessions that reflected on our progress, articulated the roles of different players and explored how we can collectively advance water stewardship to better deliver on its potential.

The event recognized the progress made in ten years of water stewardship's evolution, the centrality of the AWS Standard in driving credible water stewardship, whilst also reflecting on the significant challenges we still need to resolve.

Collectively, at last year's Forum we concluded that:

- The AWS Standard is now widely recognised as the credible framework for implementing water stewardship

- We need to continue to develop local networks that connect to a vibrant international community of AWS members, sharing knowledge and best practice

- We should seek to deepen engagement with the public sector at different levels, especially local government

- The AWS Standard review process should seek to make the AWS system more accessible to smallholder farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

- We need to invest in knowledge sharing platform to support uptake and impact

- Investment in communications and the AWS brand is needed to better explain how AWS water stewardship supports corporate goals, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other sustainability objectives.

We have been able to make significant progress in many of these areas during 2017. The following sections outline progress made, key lessons learned, and major issues we are seeking to address.

As a global alliance we draw strength from our members

Members are at the heart of AWS. Over the last 12 months our membership has grown to nearing 100 and has become increasingly diverse. We have welcomed a wide range of organizations into our fold from sectors as diverse as bottled water in Zambia, community development in Pakistan, sustainability consulting in Brazil, water technology in USA and public-sector healthcare in Scotland.

The theme of last year's Forum emphasized the need to build "ownership" of AWS. Members have a critical role to play in building the local and international networks needed for water stewardship to flourish. Our members are increasingly taking the lead in water stewardship and being more visible in these efforts, thereby encouraging others to join them on the journey.

One example can be seen in the report by Ceres "Feeding ourselves thirsty" which examined corporate performance on water risk in different categories of food and beverage. The best ranked companies in three of the four categories are all AWS members who are all at the forefront of corporate engagement in water stewardship.

Ownership is required not just from major corporates but from the diversity of stakeholder interests that we seek to reflect. As a global alliance with increasing diversity within our membership, we are ideally placed to connect and be connected with organizations that have specific expertise needed for water stewardship to reach its potential. Whether this is technical expertise, local knowledge, convening power, funding or research, we can only benefit from an approach that recognizes and embraces the need to collaborate.

Lesson: Our members are our greatest asset. We need strong collaborative relationships within our membership as well as externally. All members can and should play a leadership role in advancing and deepening the impact of water stewardship.

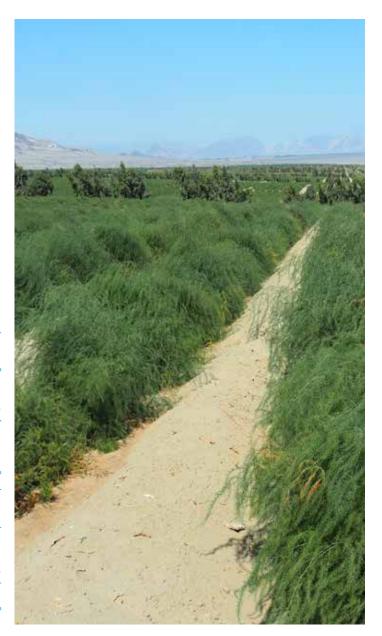# Uptake of the AWS Standard continues to accelerate

We recently celebrated the 8th site to achieve AWS certification. Interestingly, those eight sites are located across six continents: in China, Australia, Tanzania, Pakistan, USA, New Zealand and Peru. Another 40+ sites are formally pursuing certification, many more self-verification and several hundred are using the AWS Standard for purposes that do not (yet) include certification.

Our growth has been accelerated by important strategic commitments to implementation of the Standard from major companies that are AWS members. Greater visibility and recognition of these commitments will help to strengthen the AWS brand and participation in our work. As a direct result of our first Annual General Meeting in November 2016, we have prioritized the work to enhance the recognition and protect the integrity of the AWS brand. We now have a clearly articulated approach to use of the AWS logo and certification mark, and from 2018 limited on-product use of the certification mark will be permissible.

We are also exploring other routes to scale our impact and to deliver on our mission through partnerships with other systems. By working with other sustainability standards, initiatives and sector platforms we can accelerate the uptake of water stewardship in ways that are credible but do not place unrealistic barriers to entry. This is especially relevant in smallholder agriculture as emphasized at last year's Forum and during the Standard review.

Our continuing involvement in the SDC-funded WAPRO project is an example of this. WAPRO aims to drive improved water stewardship for rice and cotton farmers in India, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan using two commodity platforms: the Sustainable Rice Platform and the Better Cotton Initiative. Project teams from all four countries are now trained and using the AWS Standard as a means of connecting on-the-ground actions with local policy interventions. Other partners we are working with to improve accessibility for smallholder agriculture include the Global G.A.P. and the Global Agribusiness Alliance.

Lesson: Increasing the scale and scope of our collaborations and the visibility of the value that AWS is delivering is critical to accelerating uptake.

Image: Danper, Fundo Compositan Asparagus Farm – Trujillo, Peru. Image courtesy of AWS

The gathering and sharing of information is key to achieving scale

As AWS water stewardship gains traction and more examples emerge from different sectors and regions, two of the most frequently asked questions are:

1. **How do I implement the AWS Standard within my organization?**
   This question is most often posed by companies who understand the benefits that water stewardship can deliver but are unsure what concrete steps to take to begin on the implementation pathway

   To address this, we need to improve availability of and access to practical guidance on how to engage in water stewardship. Enabling peer learning and support will be a key part of this.

2. **What difference does it make?**
   This question is usually posed by organizations with a view on the bigger picture of sustainable development and relates to the impact of water stewardship and its potential to contribute to transformational change.

   To address this, we need to demonstrate how water stewardship can drive transparency, build trust and help companies to feel secure about sharing what they have learned and thereby engage more deeply in public policy spaces and support delivery of the SDGs.

Lesson: Improved access to information, whether that is data to support individual sites or in-depth research on the change AWS implementation has enabled, is required.

Evidence from the field is shaping the future of the system

The AWS Standard was designed to be applicable by all sectors, at any site, in any geography and at any scale, however, evidence from early applications and feedback from AWS members suggest that the AWS Standard is challenging for some users. The review and revision process for the AWS Standard is progressing and highlighting important ways in which the AWS system needs to improve, including the accessibility of water stewardship in agriculture and availability of water, sanitation and hygiene services. Examples of evidence shaping the system include:

- Our partnership in Spain with German supermarket Edeka and WWF-Germany working with citrus growers. This has provided useful lessons that we will draw on as we enter the next phase of the partnership where we seek to deepen engagement with Spanish growers. Lessons from here will also be adopted in a new collaboration with DEG, working with growers in Peru, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay and Guatemala, and in our ongoing work in South Africa.

- The successful completion of the SECO funded project to drive water stewardship through asparagus value chains in Peru. This project engaged producers in key growing regions (including the first AWS certification in Latin America), traders and retailers in Europe, and policy makers in Peru, including the National Water Authority. Lessons from this project help us to understand more about the applicability of the AWS Standard in agriculture, effectively engaging the public sector and the importance of the AWS Brand in engaging value chains.

- Our partnership with GIZ's International Water Stewardship Program which aims to advance water stewardship uptake in Africa. Lessons from this collaboration have been instrumental in shaping our understanding of water stewardship with smallholder farmers as part of dispersed supply chains.

Lesson: Making credible water stewardship accessible is one of the major challenges we face and one that can only be addressed by utilizing the expertise that exists with AWS members and partners.

Image: WAPRO project - cotton growers in Krygystan.
Image courtesy of HELVETAS/Simon B. Opladen

The building of local AWS networks is an essential part of driving participation and gathering evidence

Our need for improved guidance material emphasises the importance of developing and strengthening our regional partnerships and the local water stewardship networks they support, through which we drive uptake of the AWS Standard and gather evidence of impact.

Through AWS Asia Pacific's partnership with the Australian Government, we have greatly expanded our work in the region. This includes new and innovative projects in Thailand and Vietnam and extended involvement with industrial parks in China. We have a new partnership with China Water Risk focused on the Pearl River Delta and have deepened application of AWS water stewardship in small-scale agriculture in China. Alongside this there is work in Papua New Guinea and Australia, which includes the first irrigation scheme seeking AWS certification.

AWS North America has supported accelerated uptake of the AWS Standard in California, a state that now has two AWS certified sites with another 5 sites seeking certification. Elsewhere in the region, we have been able to increase engagement in key sectors like mining, expand the AWS network to Canada, the Gulf states and south-eastern USA, and maintain strong focus on capacity building.

Together with local partners, we have established and strengthened water stewardship networks in India, Pakistan and Southern Africa. Similar networks are emerging in Peru, Brazil and East Africa. In Europe, we have made significant progress in our discussions with the European Water Partnership toward our mutual aim of achieving a single global water stewardship standard system.

These networks play a key role in engaging influential stakeholders and understanding how AWS supports local goals. From a governance perspective, they complement the formal regional partnerships we have in Asia-Pacific and North America.

Lesson: Local networks and partnerships are a critical means of engaging stakeholders and understanding specific local needs. These strengthen the global system by enabling wider uptake and impact.

Strong networks are emerging but building these takes time and investment. Maturing and reinforcing these mechanisms will ensure that stakeholders around the world have ownership of AWS and can contribute to the development of a truly global water stewardship system.

Image: Waitaki River - New Zealand. Image courtesy of Waitaki Irrigators Collective Ltd. and Carswell Images

FIVE WAYS YOU CAN HELP TO ENSURE RESPONSIBLE USE OF FRESHWATER:

1. Join AWS:
Become a member and help shape the future of water stewardship.

2. Implement the AWS Standard:
Join a growing number of leading water users to commit
to global best practice.

3. Help others to use the AWS Standard:
Work with your supply chains, investments, clients or partners
to advance uptake of the AWS Standard.

4. Participate in a local network:
Take part in advancing water stewardship in your own country
or region by joining one of our local networks.

5. Fund our groundbreaking work:
With more resources we can accelerate the uptake
and impact of water stewardship worldwide.