



Workshop on recent progress on transboundary water cooperation: from getting cooperation started to its long-term sustainability

4 July 2017, Geneva, Switzerland, Palais des Nations

Background

There are an estimated 276 international rivers and lakes, and about 600 transboundary aquifers. Approximately 40 per cent of the world's population are dependent on waters shared by two or more countries. Even more telling is the fact that over 90 percent of the world's population lives within the countries that share these basins. Therefore, most of the countries need to cooperate with their neighbours on water resources.

Transboundary water cooperation has led to numerous legal and institutional frameworks. However, more than half of the transboundary surface waters in the world still lack a cooperative management framework. For transboundary groundwaters, cooperation is lagging even more behind. In addition, many existing agreements do not cover all basin countries or all relevant water uses and a number of arrangements are not operational.

The nature of the joint bodies, such as river, lake or aquifer commissions, established for managing transboundary waters also varies widely in terms of their mandates, powers, composition and structures – from commissions that meet rarely and have limited powers and secretariat support, to large basin agencies with numerous staff and responsibilities that include the development and operation of major infrastructure.

The 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention) both stress that legal and institutional frameworks play a key role in ensuring long-term transboundary water cooperation. Legal and institutional frameworks are also decisive to implement SDG 6 on water and in particular target 6.5 which calls for the implementation of integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation.

Cooperation is a main obligation of the Water Convention which requires Parties to negotiate agreements and establish joint bodies to support long term cooperation and sustainably manage transboundary water resources. The Convention and its institutional framework provide support to countries in negotiating agreements and in establishing joint bodies through guidance, projects and capacity-building. Previous work under the Water Convention has led in 2009 to the publication *River basin commissions and other institutions for transboundary water cooperation*¹ and in 2015 to the adoption of *Principles for Effective Joint Bodies for Transboundary Water Cooperation*².

Over the past decades, there has been a considerable increase in the number of legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary water management. However, in the last ten years progress has somewhat slowed down and few new agreements have been signed. In addition, some basins with existing legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary water cooperation face challenges, e.g. in broadening their cooperation to deal with intersectoral issues, revising agreements and institutional structures or sustaining their operations. More therefore needs to be done, in all regions of the world, at early or more advanced stages of cooperation, to improve and strengthen cooperation on transboundary surface and ground waters.

Objectives

The main objective of the workshop is to support countries and basin organizations in advancing step-by-step their cooperation on transboundary surface and ground waters, especially with regard to the development and revision of agreements, and setting up and sustaining joint bodies.

By gathering experience and sharing lessons learned from recent developments in different parts of the world, in basins where cooperation is at different levels of advancement, the workshop will aim to galvanize progress, by showing that it is possible to start or engage in the next step of cooperation, even in challenging circumstances.

More specifically, the workshop will aim at illustrating experiences and lessons learned from recent developments (last 5-7 years), in particular:

- In the starting off of cooperation and step-by-step establishment of the legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation, including new agreements and arrangements;
- In the progressive development and long term support to cooperation.

The workshop should allow identifying common challenges and inform the discussion on the future work under the Water Convention for the triennium 2019-2021.

¹ Available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=11628>

² Available at: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/WAT/11Nov_17-19_MOP7_Budapest/ece.mp.wat.49.add.2.eng.pdf

Target group

The workshop will target governmental representatives responsible for transboundary water cooperation, as well as those working on the establishment of new agreements and institutions for transboundary water cooperation.

Targeted participants will also include representatives of joint bodies' secretariats, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations promoting transboundary water cooperation, experts, and academia.

Topics and organization of work

The workshop will review the different steps of the cooperation process, addressing issues pertinent for countries in early or more advanced stages of cooperation. It will consist of a mix of plenary sessions and interactive discussions in working groups focusing on the following themes:

1. Getting cooperation started: Which actors, tools and circumstances can help to initiate cooperation at an informal level? How to formalize it? How to negotiate agreements and arrangements?
2. Operationalising and sustaining cooperation: What are the practices, tools and methods to be used for an effective day-to-day cooperation? How to proceed when agreements need to be revised or joint institutions need reforms?

The organization of work will include plenary sessions and discussions in break-out groups as well as a "market place" of good practice examples and tools.

Lead Party, partners and donors

The Workshop is organized under the leadership of the government of Hungary, and in partnership with the International Network of Basin Organizations, the Geneva Water Hub and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.

The workshop is funded by the governments of Finland, Germany and Switzerland.

Practical information

The workshop will be held on 4 July 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland, back to back with the Twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management under the Water Convention (5-6 July 2017 Geneva). It will start at 10.00 a.m. and end at 6.00 p.m. It will be held in the Palais des Nations in room XXIII. The working languages will be English, French, Russian and Spanish. Documents and other information for the meeting will be made available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45714#/>

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition and developing countries may apply for financial support to facilitate their participation in the workshop. Requests for financial support should be submitted to the Water Convention secretariat (mayola.lidome@unece.org) as soon as possible, but not later than **20 May 2017**. No applications will be accepted beyond this deadline.

Participants requiring entry visas to Switzerland (Schengen) should inform the secretariat as soon as possible. The minimum amount of time needed for obtaining a visa is now 15 working days. **Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to submit their application as soon as possible and initiate visa procedures at least four weeks before the meeting.**

In accordance with United Nations accreditation procedures, participants are requested to register by **20 June 2017** using the following link: <https://www2.unece.org/uncdb/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=XRCT1s>. For assistance with registration, please see the instructions on the meeting's web page or contact the secretariat by e-mail (mayola.lidome@unece.org). On their way to the meeting, participants should obtain an identification badge at the Pass and Identification Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva Security and Safety Section located at the Pregny Gate, 14 Avenue de la Paix (see map on the webpage indicated below). Please allow time for this. In case of difficulty, please contact the secretariat by telephone at +41 22 917 2596.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available online at: <http://www.unece.org/meetings/practical.html>