



Convention of the Protection and Use of
Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
Task Force on Water and Climate
Seventh meeting
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Agenda item 5

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTIVITIES ON WATER AND CLIMATE UNDER THE WATER CONVENTION

Background and suggested action by the Task Force on Water and Climate

The seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention) to be held in November 2015 in Budapest will adopt the Convention's programme of work for 2016-2018. First discussions were held at the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva, 25-26 June 2014). The Working Group considered water and climate change as one of the priority areas of work for the new programme of work for 2016-2018. The present document contains suggestions for future activities in the area of water and climate change.

The Task Force is expected to:

- a) Discuss the proposed future activities;
- b) Make arrangements to further develop and finalize the proposal, including financial aspects and partners in implementation, for its presentation at the tenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva, 24-25 June 2015) and its subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties.

I. Current work on water and adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) provides a sound framework for transboundary cooperation also in the context of adaptation to climate change. The Convention is supporting countries in developing transboundary adaptation strategies through guidance, capacity-building, projects on the ground and exchange of experience. In 2013-2015, the objectives of the work area on climate change adaptation are as follows:

- (a) Compile, analyse, publish, print and disseminate good practices and lessons learned from the programme of pilot projects under the Convention and other similar initiatives;
- (b) Promote cooperation in the development of adaptation strategies and in their implementation in transboundary basins, in particular within the programme of pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins;
- (c) Provide a global platform for exchanging experience, good practices and lessons learned regarding adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins.

The activities have led to the following results¹:

- (a) The platform for exchanging experiences on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins is well established and in use, consisting of annual workshops and a web-based platform. Two global workshops have been organized in the period 2013-2014 as well as two meetings of the Task Force on Water and Climate. The platform has led to increased awareness of the importance of transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation as well as improved sharing of knowledge and experience in this regard. Input has been provided to other events and processes, such as the European Union, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and, in particular, its Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change (Nairobi Work Programme).
- (b) For example in the pilot projects on the Chu Talas, Dniester, Neman and Sava basins a common understanding on how to adapt to climate change at the basin level has been achieved. This included the development of transboundary climate change impact and vulnerability assessments as well as the preparation of strategic frameworks for basin adaptation (similar to a basin-wide adaptation strategy) in the basins Dniester and Neman. In the Dniester basin, adaptation measures have been prioritized and implementation of some selected measures is starting.
- (c) A global network of basins has been created in cooperation with the International Network of Basin Organizations in order to exchange experience on how to adapt to climate change at the basin level. Two meetings of the network were held in 2013 and 2014.
- (d) Existing knowledge on the topic of climate change adaptation at the transboundary (basin) level has been synthesized in the collection of lessons learned and good practices on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins which is currently being prepared.

II. Lessons learned

1. The combination of work on the ground through the pilot projects/ basins of the network and global exchange of experience is very useful and mutually supportive. On the one hand, the lessons learned and methodologies tested through the pilot projects/ basins enrich the global network and on the other hand, the partners, experiences and good practice examples from the global network of basins and regular workshops facilitate the work in the pilot projects/ basins.
2. The global network of transboundary basin has been developing through the pilot projects/basin-level work and its core group, through the lessons learned and methodologies tested by pilots and river basin organizations as well as the exchange with partners, experiences and good practice examples. There has been a true exchange and reciprocal benefits between global network and the countries involved in the pilots/ basins with the regular workshops.
3. Those pilot projects which have developed a basin-wide adaptation strategy now move into a new phase where implementation of the suggested measures is needed. This requires resources and therefore upscaling, mainstreaming and integration into national and basin-wide strategies, plans and programmes, such as river basin management plans, national adaptation and development strategies and plans etc.
4. Since climate change adaptation is such a complex, uncertain and challenging task, cooperation with numerous partners is crucial, for the global network and the pilot projects as well as for the regular workshops (see section V). Cooperation with some partners needs to be expanded.
5. More and more activities and organizations are working on the topic of water and climate change. Under the UNFCCC Nairobi Work Programme, water is now one of the thematic areas.

¹ As of October 2014, the activities are still ongoing.

Cooperation with these different organizations is crucial and challenging. The special niche and added value of the activities on water and climate change under the Water Convention need to be clearly defined, such as the focus on adaptation on primarily transboundary and basin level. Activities to link to global processes are ongoing, also due to the global opening of the Water Convention, but are dependent on input of other partners and countries.

6. The global network of basins as well as the regular workshops have a wide audience, with some basins and countries very advanced in climate change adaptation and some which are just starting activities in this area. Care needs to be taken to make the activities interesting for all different groups of countries and basins, including for the most advanced ones.
7. Climate change adaptation in the water sector requires cooperation with many other sectors such as energy, agriculture, navigation etc. Therefore, the climate change activities need to be seen from a larger nexus perspective and linked more closely for example to the current and possible future activities on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus under the Convention.

III. New Developments to take into account

The following processes and developments should be taken into account when discussing future activities on water and climate change adaptation under the Water Convention:

- The global opening of the UNECE Water Convention to all UN Member States following the entry into force on 6 February 2013 of the amendments to articles 25 and 26,
- The entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention) on 17 August 2014,
- The expected adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Agenda in September 2015,
- The expected adoption of a new climate change agreement at the UNFCCC 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris where adaptation should prominently feature,
- The recent inclusion of water in the UNFCCC Nairobi Work Programme,
- The publication of the latest 5th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2014.

IV. Possible future activities on water and climate change adaptation

Future activities on water and climate change adaptation will build on the existing ones, the lessons learnt and on previous discussions within the Task Force, the pilot projects as well as the platform for exchanging experience.

The programme of work could contain, for example, the following possible areas of activities:

A) Revision of the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change or additional material

Six years after its adoption the Guidance could be updated to integrate the new knowledge and experience gained with regards to adapting to climate change in transboundary basins. Such an update might result in a supplement, additional complementary material, new tools or a full new publication.

B) Global network of basins/ river basin organizations working on climate change adaptation:

B1) Pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins: moving towards implementation and upscaling/ mainstreaming

Some of the pilot projects could continue in order to implement their adaptation strategies or mainstream the adaptation measures decided upon into other plans, strategies, policies, projects or programmes at basin or national level. In addition, new pilots could start. UNECE would mostly focus on implementing pilot projects in the UNECE region, while other partner organizations may implement pilot projects outside of the region, with limited involvement of UNECE.

B2) Regular thematic global workshops and meetings of the network for exchanging experience on water and climate change adaptation in transboundary basins

The successful organization of regular workshops could continue, e.g. one workshop in mid-2016 and one at the end of 2017 or early 2018. The workshops could be thematically more focused and be organized in cooperation with old and new partners. In addition, smaller meetings of the basins in the global network can be held to share experiences between the river basin organizations (RBO). New formats, locations and contents of the meetings could be envisaged, such as hosting of the meetings by a particular RBO etc.

C) Promotion, partnerships and inputs/linkages with other processes, in particular the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN ISDR)

Given that the UNFCCC Nairobi Work Programme now includes water as one of its thematic areas and that the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction currently under negotiation is expected to cover also water-related disasters, it is important to reinforce linkages with these processes. Through these partnerships, ultimately, the recognition of the role of water in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction should be increased as well as the recognition of the need for transboundary cooperation in adaptation. Partners are also crucial for implementation of the pilot projects in the UNECE region and possibly beyond.

D) Development of recommendations on water allocation in transboundary basins under a changing climate

There are increasing requests by countries from beyond and within the UNECE region for activities targeted at arid countries and basins such as strategies for reducing drought risks. Water allocation in transboundary basins or definition of minimum environmental flow in transboundary basins have been mentioned as possible future areas of work. This would include work on transboundary aquifers. This could be done under or in cooperation with other bodies and work areas of the Convention such as the Task Force on the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus.

All the activities under the Task Force would help countries, in particular Parties to one or both of the global Conventions, in implementing the UNECE Water Convention and the UN Watercourses Convention.

Thematically, the above mentioned activities could cover the following issues:

- Water and disasters, in particular transboundary aspects and prevention of water-related disasters
- Water scarcity and droughts
- Funding for actual implementation of adaptation measures, upscaling and mainstreaming into river basin management plans and national plans, strategies, programmes etc.

- Increasing synergies and avoiding tradeoffs between adaptation and mitigation measures

All the above mentioned activities will be subject to the timely receipt of sufficient extrabudgetary funding.

The Task Force is invited to discuss the relevance and need for these activity areas, also considering availability of resources and strategic issues, possible partners, activities of other organizations etc. Since possibly not all proposals can be carried out in the triennium 2016-2018, it might be advisable to consider some activities for the medium or longer term, for example for the following triennium 2019-2021.

The Task Force is invited to discuss the following questions:

1. Should the activities on water and climate change under the Water Convention continue beyond 2015?
2. If yes, which activities and topics should be included in the new programme?
3. How should such activities be further specified to best respond to needs and be realistic and feasible? How should the work be organized for each of them?
4. Who can/ is willing to fund some of the activities or where could funding be found?
5. How can the upscaling and mainstreaming of the pilot activities be ensured?
6. Does it make sense and is it realistic and feasible to update the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change by 2018? If yes, how, when and by whom can this be done?
7. How to ensure that the work of the Task Force is relevant for both developed, in particular EU and developing countries?
8. How to ensure synergies and ensure added value of the Task Force's activities compared to the numerous other activities, projects and publications on water and climate by other organizations? How and which partners to work with?
9. How to address the recent frequent requests for more focus on water scarcity and arid regions?

V. Possible Partners:

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), UNFCCC, UNESCO, other United Nations regional commissions, the Environment and Security Initiative and its members — in particular UNDP, UNEP, OSCE and the Regional Environmental Centres in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia — GEF, the World Bank, the German Society for International Cooperation (giz), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the European Commission, the International Network for Basin Organizations (INBO), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA), the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the joint bodies involved in adaptation to climate change.
