



Convention of the Protection and Use of
Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
Task Force on Water and Climate
Eighth meeting
Geneva, Switzerland, 15 September 2016

REPORT OF THE EIGHTH MEETING

Held in the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
Thursday, 15 September 2016

Introduction and attendance

1. The Task Force on Water and Climate under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) is responsible for activities related to adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, including flood and drought management, in accordance with the programme of work for 2016-2018 of the Water Convention (programme area 4).

2. The eighth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate was held in Geneva on 15 September 2016, back to back with the Sixth Workshop on Adaptation to Climate Change in Transboundary Basins, which focused this time on financing (13 and 14 September 2016).¹ The Task Force meeting aimed to discuss, plan and provide guidance to the implementation of the activities on water and climate under the programme of work for 2016-2018 of the Water Convention, including the review of progress by pilot projects and global network of transboundary basins, contribution to global processes on water, climate and disasters and possible synergies with other areas of work under the Water Convention, the Protocol on Water and Health and UNECE.

3. The Task Force meeting was attended by representatives from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Peru, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

4. Representatives of the following international and intergovernmental organizations attended the meeting: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the World Bank, Authority of Lake Titicaca (ALT), the Chu-Talas Commission, the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC), International Meuse Commission, Mekong River Commission, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), the Union for the Mediterranean,. The representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, academia and private sector were also present: Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA), Earthjustice, Fundacion Vida Grupo Ecológico Verde, Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health, Swiss Institute for Water Law and Climate Change, International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), Plan Trifinio, Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, International Union for Conservation

¹ The report, presentations and other relevant materials of the workshop are available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42218#/>.

of Nature (IUCN), the World Wide Fund for Nature – Russia, Geneva Water Hub/University of Geneva, Orange.

Opening and election of officers

5. The Task Force elected Mr. Niels Vlaanderen (the Netherlands) and Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) as co-chairs for the period 2016-2018. The co-Chairs opened the meeting and the Task Force adopted its agenda as set out in the document TFWC/2016/1. The co-Chair briefly presented the main outcomes of the workshop on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, held prior to the Task Force meeting.

Programme of pilot projects and global network of transboundary basins working on adaptation to climate change

6. The Task Force reviewed the progress of the programme of pilot projects and provided comments. The representatives of the pilot projects on the Neman river basin presented the main outcomes of the pilot project contained in the Strategic Framework for Adaptation to Climate Change publication. Representative of Belarus and Lithuania shared their experience on the implementation of the pilot project and plans to initiate the elaboration of a joint river basin management plan for the Neman with the support of the Water Convention.

7. The representatives of the pilot project on the Chu and Talas rivers basin shared information on the progress in the implementation of a new phase of the project on climate change adaptation supported by Finland and on the elaboration of national adaptation plans for different sectors by the basin countries – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The representatives of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine reported on the implementation of the pilot project on the Dniester river basin, noting that the current phase of the project is coming to conclusion. In relation to the ongoing finalization of the Implementation Plan for the Strategic Framework for Adaptation for the basin, the delegates mentioned the importance of raising funds for the realization of key adaptation measures listed in the plan. In this regard, it was noted that the workshop on financing adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, held prior to the Task Force meeting, was very useful in providing information on the potential sources of funding and how to access them.

8. The representative of the Meuse River Commission presented priority issues on the agenda of the Commission, including water scarcity and climate change adaptation, and future plans of the Commission to raise awareness of the climate change issues facing the basin.

9. The representative of the Netherlands briefed participants about the outcomes of the third meeting of the global network of basins working on climate change, held in Geneva on 6–7 April 2016, and invited other basins to join the network and share their experiences at the next Task Force meeting.

10. Finally, the secretariat informed about the status of the publication on Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary basins: lessons learned and good practices, finalized jointly with INBO in 2015. It was noted that the publication would be initially available in English, French and Russian languages.² The Task Force discussed the further promotion of the publication and based on comments by Sudan, ALT and INBO, noted that further translation into Arabic, Spanish, Chinese and Portuguese would be useful. In this regard, the co-Chair invited delegates to

² The publication in these three languages can be accessed from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417>.

consider different ways to prepare translation into additional languages, including through involving national experts or students.

Contribution to global processes on water, climate and disasters

11. The co-Chair introduced the agenda item by reiterating the importance of the global agreements adopted in 2015, such as the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement, and by underlining their relevance to water and climate. She invited participants to share ideas and proposals on how the Task Force could contribute to their implementation.

12. The representative of Morocco informed participants about the outcomes of the International Conference on Water and Climate (Rabat, 11-12 July 2016) and the preparations for the 22nd session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Marrakech, Morocco, 7-18 November 2016). In the course of his presentation and the discussions that followed, it was noted that different pacts and alliances related to water and climate change that were established at the preceding Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Paris should continue to be active. It was further noted that the Moroccan Government and its partners were planning to launch a Blue Book on Water and Climate and the Water for Africa initiative during a special day at the Conference devoted to action on water issues. The Task Force meeting participants further discussed how to provide inputs by the Task Force and by the Water Convention in general to the Conference.

13. The representative of Ecuador reiterated the interest of his country in participating in the activities under the Water Convention and informed the participants that the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016 (HABITAT III Conference), will also address, among others, water and climate related issues.

14. In relation to the global agenda on climate change, the participants also discussed the process of development and submission by Parties to the UNFCCC of the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in accordance with the Paris Agreement. It was noted that while about 80% of NDCs mention water, the percentage of NDCs, which refer to transboundary waters and adaptation measures is considerably below that number. In this regard, the participants discussed the ways and means how the Task Force and the Water Convention in general could promote the inclusion of such aspects in NDCs. Among others, the idea of preparation of a relevant checklist was discussed. The participants were also encouraged to discuss the matter with their colleagues in ministries responsible for the NDC preparation.

15. A representative of INBO reported on the Paris Pact on Water and Adaptation in the Basins of Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters, specifically noting that the Pact counted 348 signatories from 94 countries. He recalled that the main purpose of the Pact was to call for action and implementation at the basin level. As future steps in the promotion of the Pact, he highlighted the possibility to support the implementation of selected projects, the further contribution to keeping high profile of water and adaptation issues in the context of the global climate debate and a possibility to prepare a platform to assist in the project preparation.

16. The co-Chair recalled discussions at the special session on the global opening of the Water Convention and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global commitments at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Budapest, 17-19 November 2015), where it was noted that the Convention could be useful in the development of a “Words into Action” guide on disaster risk reduction in transboundary basins.

17. The representative of UNISDR expressed the support of his organization to this initiative and its interest to cooperate in the development of the “Words into Action” guide. He also presented short information about the “Words into Action” as an instrument of implementation of the Sendai Framework.

18. Based on the discussion that followed, the Task Force decided to develop a “Words into Action” Implementation Guide for river basin management and transboundary cooperation in cooperation with UNISDR to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction. It entrusted Netherlands to take the lead in its development, with support of the secretariat, and to create a core group of experts from both water and disaster communities to prepare the guide.

19. The Task Force:

- a) Decided to develop a “Words into Action” Implementation Guide for river basin management and transboundary cooperation in cooperation with UNISDR to support implementation of the Sendai framework,
- b) It entrusted Netherlands to take the lead in the development, with support of the secretariat, and to create a core group of experts from both water and disaster communities to prepare the guide,
- c) Entrusted the Bureau to discuss with France, Morocco and INBO the follow-up to the Paris Pact,
- d) Decided to consider the possibility to develop a checklist for NDCs, possibly together with AGWA.

Cooperation with partners

20. The representatives of AGWA, CEEAC, and WMO presented their suggestions for cooperation between their respective organizations and UNECE and for the promotion of the exchange of experience on water and climate change adaptation in the form of an interactive discussion.

21. The representative of AGWA underlined the importance of considering transboundary dimension in the national work on adaptation while the representative of WMO highlighted the role of quality hydrological information as key to drawing up effective adaptation strategies. The representative of CEEAC noted that the CEEAC region is home to several shared basins and underscored in this regard the need to establish water information systems to inform cooperation on international waters and climate change.

22. In the ensuing discussion, participants exchanged ideas on the role of the Water Convention in promoting cooperation on water and climate globally, mainstreaming climate change adaptation in national plans and strategies and fundraising through the preparation of bankable projects.

Synergies with other areas of work under the Water Convention, the Protocol on Water and Health and UNECE

23. The representatives of the secretariat of the Water Convention presented the overview and possible cross-linkages with the water and climate activities in the following areas under the programme of work for 2016–2018 of the Water Convention: a) the water-food-energy-ecosystems

nexus and the planned work on water allocation; and b) National Policy Dialogues under the European Union Water Initiative. The planned future work related to water and climate under the Protocol on Water and Health was also presented here.

24. The UNECE secretariat also presented possible cooperation opportunities with other programme areas of UNECE. A proposal for possible cooperation with the Working Party on Inland Water Transport, specifically in relation to the development of adaptation strategies as applied to inland water transport was noted by the Task Force. The Task Force also took note of the presentation from the UNECE Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) team on the development of PPP standards in water sector.

Draft strategy for future work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the Water Convention

25. The co-Chair recalled that at its seventh session, the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention considered the draft strategy for future work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the Water Convention and entrusted the Task Force on Water and Climate to further elaborate it, for submission to the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management. He invited participants to provide their comments on the document.

26. The participants discussed the draft strategy in the context of the programme of work under the Convention for 2016-2018 and planned activities under its programme area 4 on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, including flood and drought management. The Task Force concluded that the draft strategy covered all the main aspects of future work under the programme area.

Closing

27. The co-Chairpersons expressed gratitude to participants for their contributions to meeting discussions and closed the meeting at 5.30 p.m. on Thursday, 15 September 2016.