

Take-aways from the Global Workshop on Source-to-sea Management

Geneva, 14-16 December 2022

Breaking down silos: Transboundary and intersectoral cooperation must be strengthened.

- Transboundary cooperation on shared river basins planning and management, as well as in coastal zones, should be strengthened and consolidated to respond to all the challenges “from source to sea” which include institutional fragmentation, lack of capacity, incoherent policy frameworks, etc.
- The Water Convention has the protection of marine environment among its objectives. It includes relevant source-to-sea provisions such as preventing, controlling and reducing transboundary impacts and applying the precautionary principle and ‘polluter pays’ principle. However, more activities are needed on source-to-sea management under the Convention, such as building capacity, exchanging experience and developing guidance.
- Regional seas conventions, with their land-based sources protocols, and other agreements for the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems are important frameworks to work with.
- A holistic approach is necessary to overcome institutional and legislative silos and to coordinate across sectors and national borders which is a cornerstone of transboundary water management and the Water Convention. Making use of existing spatial planning frameworks at land and at sea and connecting those is a good starting point. It is necessary to reinforce the coordination of decisionmakers and researchers in the performance of public policies and to establish or strengthen coordinating mechanisms that cross the traditional land-freshwater-coastal and marine boundaries.
- Policy and institutional fragmentation at national level can be overcome through joint policies, action plans or vision documents which address water management and marine resources. Their implementation and enforcement can bring together the relevant institutions to achieve joint objectives and strengthen coordination across sectors, stakeholders and geographic areas. At transboundary level, source-to-sea aspects can be integrated in river basin management planning.
- Institutional fragmentation at transboundary level can be overcome by basin organizations and other joint bodies working together with regional seas conventions, by setting joint objectives, cooperating and implementing jointly activities and plans (see examples of HELCOM, Benguela Current Commission - ORASECOM, ICPDR - Black Sea Commission). Coordination with sub-basin commissions e.g. in terms of pollution load reporting is also needed. Source-to-sea challenges that arise from alterations to key flows such as water, biota, sediment, pollution, materials and ecosystem services, data and information exchange, harmonisation of surveys and standardisation of monitoring practices can be among areas for cooperation between joint bodies and regional seas conventions. Cooperation for the protection of marine environment and the source-to-sea approach may need to be better reflected in the mandates of joint bodies, if possible, and their action plans and additional mechanisms for cooperation considering interests of all sides may need to be discussed. Mapping of pollution pathways from source-to-sea can improve the understanding of common goals and support the prioritisation of actions to fight against the pollution at the local, regional and global scale.

- Additional efforts are needed in finding synergies among Integrated Water Resources Management, Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning, in order to ensure more sustainable development of coastal areas as well as protection and restoration of coastal wetland areas.
- For effective collaboration on source-to-sea at transboundary level, highlighting benefits for upstream countries to be involved is crucial. Ecosystem protection or restoration can play such a role as benefits from this can transfer upstream. Protecting wetlands and other ecosystems is important for source-to-sea management.

More awareness and capacity-building are needed.

- There is a need to increase awareness and involve the communities and youth in source-to-sea management, This requires simplifying terms and messages (e.g. plastic pollution, clean beaches, saving local fish species etc.) and using creative approaches (like art).
- More work needs to be done to increase the understanding of the different flows of large-scale transboundary river systems to the large marine ecosystems and the ocean as a whole.
- It is critical to understand and identify clear management objectives for connected flows from land to sea and to prioritize which actions can deliver positive outcomes.
- It is important to demonstrate economic, environmental and social benefits of applying the source-to-sea approach.
- There are already good examples of local, bilateral and multi-country projects, with public and private partners, but it is necessary to accelerate actions on the ground and to scale up successful solutions.

Financing of source-to-sea action must be incentivized.

- Financial institutions are slowly starting to consider source-to sea issues in their investments, but much more incentives are needed.
- The inclusion of the source-to-sea approach in TDAs and SAPs in GEF projects is a positive incentive for wider uptake of the approach in transboundary basins.
- Transboundary waters can be considered as global public goods and investment in preserving the public good can be harnessed for source-to-sea action.
- The private sector also needs to be involved; blended finance is important.
- Practical tools exist such as the new EU taxonomy on sustainable finance, task force on nature-based financial disclosure, etc.

There is momentum and urgency to accelerate source-to-sea action.

- Freshwater and ocean pollution in different world regions put at risk also the achievement of other SDGs
- The 2023 UN Water Conference, to be held a year after the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, is an outstanding opportunity to raise political ambition and commitment, for example through the water action agenda, including source-to-sea approaches, and bring global freshwater and ocean communities closer to each other.

- Climate change can be a motivator for developing mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination and upstream-downstream cooperation.
- Source-to-sea challenges can only be solved through collective action. It is essential to bring together all stakeholders.
- Capacity building is very important and needed at all levels of government. The private sector needs to be involved in financing action. Public sector finance can trigger private sector investment.
- With the currently ongoing negotiations on a global plastics treaty and strong legislative measures such as plastic bans in some countries there is momentum to build upon. However, other forms of pollution such as diffuse/nutrient pollution, industrial and mining pollution, microplastic and proliferation of toxic chemicals also need to be considered and addressed.
- In some contexts, closing the gaps in access to drinking water and sanitation and introduction of basic solid waste management and wastewater treatment would greatly improve the situation.
- Possible future work under the Water Convention includes cooperation with the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management, development of tools, principles and guidance, capacity building etc.