

THEMATIC CONCEPT PAPER

Interactive Dialogue 4

Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda (SDG 6.5, 6.b and SDGs 16, 17)

Introduction

- Transboundary water cooperation is not only **key for sustainable water management** but also, more generally, for **sustainable development, regional integration and peace**.
- Cooperation is essential, especially in areas vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and where water is already scarce.
- While three core principles of customary international law relevant to international waterways are usually recognized (equitable utilization, no harm, and prior notification - each applying reciprocally to all parties), codifying these has faced great **difficulties**, due in large part to the **perceived challenge to sovereignty**.
- Today the **models of transboundary cooperation vary**, from fully informal exchanges to fully institutionalised organisations. The modalities of cooperation vary also, from simple memorandums of understanding to fully detailed agreements. Yet only 32 countries have at least 90 per cent of their waters covered by operational arrangements for transboundary water cooperation, and only 24 countries have all their basin area covered.
- As a cross-cutting issue, **water cooperation demands attention at all levels and across sectors**. Indeed, water issues involve many stakeholders with conflicting and competing needs and cross multiple physical, political and jurisdictional boundaries.
- Successful transboundary water management therefore requires **coordination within and across sectors and actors, coherent policies, and integrated planning**.
- Joint bodies and notably **Basin Organizations for rivers, lakes and aquifers are key to transboundary water cooperation** by implementing water by helping to implement international water law while also supporting economic development, environmental protection, international trade, and regional integration.

Overview of the challenge, current status and interlinkages

- **Data gaps and data sharing:** while data collection and information sharing among riparian countries is crucial to enable effective water management, results show that it this remains a challenge, in particular for transboundary aquifers and countries with no SDG indicator value.
- **Lack of political will:** cooperation requires political will and cannot simply be based on institutions. Yet limited understanding of cooperation risks and benefits and limited trust between riparian countries can hinder political will to seek agreements.
- **Water demand:** given the cross cutting nature of water resources, there are competing demands for its use between sectors, nations, communities, urban and rural environments.

- **Water quality and water quantity:** concerns on water quality and water quantity can form a challenge for water cooperation. Within a basin, the upstream use of water can have consequences for downstream users.
- **Infrastructure development:** such as dams may provide significant benefits for society, but can also negatively impact surrounding ecosystems and communities.
- **Climate change:** is expected to add to pressures on water resources in many areas with fluctuations in water availability and water quality.
- **Economic interests:** over water and its use can cause conflicts that change the balance of power in a region.
- **Financing:** investment needs for sustainable financing of transboundary water management institutions often exceed the resources available to riparian countries.

Overview of opportunities for progress and transformative solutions

- **Data and information** collection and sharing among riparian countries is the fundament to reach a joint understanding of the dynamics of water and related resources, which in turn is a critical precondition for their effective and equitable management across boundaries.
- In order to complement domestic budgetary contributions and meet financial needs of basin development, **innovative financial instruments** are being developed and tested, through blended finance models.
- Focusing on the **community dimension of water cooperation** helps create awareness among and pressures on political actors and the possibility of expanding water issues to include related areas.
- **Benefit sharing** represents an alternative and inclusive approach to the negotiation of shared waters and involves any action designed to optimize the allocation of costs and benefits associated with cooperation.
- **Joint benefit assessments** are important in helping riparian countries move from perception to facts regarding what can be gained from strengthening cooperation on shared water resources.
- **Capacity development** is an essential stepping-stone for water cooperation – this includes not only water-related capacity development at both the individual and institutional levels, but also the enabling environment is needed to implement good water governance.
- **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)** plans in large and complex water bodies basins, to ensure effective management and equitable use of water and related resources needs to be urgently developed or where they already exist, be considered for possible revisions due to increasing climate change impacts and other possible drivers.
- The **Water-Energy-Food nexus** is a key approach to enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation, including at the transboundary level, in view of achieving all the SDGs.
- **Blue Peace** refers to water cooperation across borders, sectors and generations to foster peace, stability and sustainable development. Blue Peace deploys water diplomacy as a means to turn competition over limited freshwater resources into collaboration, resulting in more peaceful, cohesive and sustainable societies.

Recommendations

- **Funding for water cooperation** must be further encouraged through initiatives such as the **Blue Peace Financing Initiative** that can provide incentives for countries and sectors

- to cooperate and come to political agreements for a more sustainable management of shared resources, reducing social, political and economic conflicts.
- We need to **adopt more inclusive approaches** and involve the most vulnerable groups, including women, youth and indigenous communities, in negotiation on shared waters and decision making processes.
 - **Transboundary arrangements** should be encouraged and supported, including the accession of additional countries to the **UN Water Conventions**.
 - Provisions related to **transboundary aquifers** should be added to existing transboundary river basin agreements using the ILC Draft Articles on Transboundary Aquifers as guidance.
 - We reiterate our call upon the UNSG to **appoint a UN Special Envoy on Water**, providing the international community with a strong and effective tool to increase high-level political engagement, helping us in our collective commitment to leave no one behind and ensuring lasting momentum to overcome the global water crisis.
 - We encourage all concerned stakeholders to join the **Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition** and take bold commitments, in this framework, to advance transboundary water cooperation.

Swiss voluntary commitment: Pursuant to its strong and longstanding commitment on transboundary water cooperation and water and peace issues, Switzerland is preparing to **invest approx. CHF 20 million over the next 12 years** on transboundary aquifer related activities aimed at strengthening the management of transboundary aquifers. In several regional contexts.

Guiding Questions

- What makes transboundary water cooperation effective?
- Can water diplomacy lead to peace?
- To what extent do different institutional models facilitate water cooperation?
- Why should for CSOs and other crucial stakeholders be involved in transboundary water dialogues and what is the most effective setting?
- What are the barriers to countries adopting operational arrangements for transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers?
- How can we foment the interest of some countries to accede to the water conventions and what are the opportunities offered by such accession?
- How can businesses be persuaded to recognize the importance of collaboration to deal with the global water risks?

Proposal for interactive dialogue no. 4

Introduction

This note intends to propose an event format for the 4th interactive dialogue of the upcoming UN 2023 Water Conference entitled: *Water for cooperation: transboundary and international water cooperation, cross-sectoral cooperation and water across the 2030 Agenda*.

The suggestions relate both to the way in which the sub-themes can be addressed and to the speakers and moderators. The aim is to be as comprehensive as possible while going into depth on the topics to try to find solutions that can be reported to the plenary and inspire commitments.

Following the PGA high level preparatory conference on 25 October 2022, it was agreed that the following topics should, to the extent possible, also be included in the discussions of the interactive dialogue no.4:

- Integrated water resources management (IWRM)
- Participation of local communities
- Peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development

Format

It is proposed that the dialogue consist of three debates, each lasting one hour. The objective is twofold:

1) To have real exchanges and conversations – where the panelists are invited to react and respond to each other's interventions and not just deliver their speech – while maintaining a progression in the discussion so that all topics are covered. The role of the mediator will be decisive and it is important to choose a person capable of bringing about a real debate.

2) To emphasize the actions that can be taken by governments, private sector, civil society organizations, and all stakeholders for realizing more effective and beneficial water cooperation, in line with the Water Action Decade.

The proposal is to launch each debate with a concise keynote speech (max. 8mn) that defines and opens the debate and to have a moderator who then leads the discussion. Each debate should be composed of 4 to 5 panelists who are both qualified and high level and allow the audience to participate through a short Q&A session (max. 15mn) that would conclude the session.

Debate 1: Sharing benefits from Transboundary Water Management

Through the examples of several basins from around the world, this session will highlight the breadth of potential benefits of transboundary water cooperation, ranging from accelerated economic growth, increased human well-being, enhanced environmental sustainability and increased political stability. It will also aim to show how a benefit sharing approach can often help to overcome political and technical challenges in water sharing.

- *What makes transboundary water cooperation effective?*
- *Why do nearly half of the world's transboundary waters still lack an operational cooperative arrangement?*
- *Why is benefit sharing in river basins important and how can it be done in practice?*

Keynote speaker: Hamed Diane Semega (High Commissioner OMVS)

Moderator: Ms. Christina Leb (WB)

Panelists

Anoulak Kittikhoun (CEO MRC)
Jaffer Machano (UNCDF)
Ms. Olga Algayerova (SG UNECE)
Prof Christian Bréthaut (Geneva Water Hub)

Debate 2: Can cross-sector collaborations solve the water crisis?

Based on the principle of the 'Sink or Swim' report from the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), this session proposes to bring together different stakeholders to discuss possible new partnerships that would achieve long-term resilience to water scarcity across multiple sectors. For if there is a shared realization today that the status quo has to change, differences in stakeholder interests mean cross sector partnerships are inevitably complex.

Guiding questions:

- *What are the benefits, risks and challenges of cross-sector partnerships around water?*
- *How can businesses be persuaded to recognize the importance of collaboration to deal with the global water risks?*
- *How can water serve as a catalyst for change?*

Keynote speaker: Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Senior Minister of Singapore

Moderator: Roger Harrabin (BBC)

Panelists:

Wu Chunghua (CEO Future Innovation Center)
Ruth Kimmelshue (Chief Sustainability Officer Cargill)
Pedro Arrojo-Aguda
Maude Barlow

Debate 3: Promoting water cooperation: institutional arrangements in water diplomacy

This session proposes to look at various institutional models for transboundary water cooperation discussing how they can facilitate equitable and sustainable technical and diplomatic engagement in inter-state transboundary water cooperation. The session will also consider the role of water in building peace and cooperation, looking at how institutional arrangements or organizations such as RBOs can act as informal diplomats or peacemakers.

Guiding questions:

- *To what extent do different institutional models facilitate water cooperation?*
- *Why should CSOs be involved in transboundary water dialogues and what is the most effective setting?*
- *How can water diplomacy lead to peace?*

Keynote speaker: Ciaran Ó Cuinn (Director MEDRC)

Moderator: Raya Stephan (Deputy Editor in Chief Water International)

Panelists:

Tanya Trujillo (Assistant Secretary for Water & Science, US)
HRH Prince El Hassan
Danilo Türk
Dr. Aminata Touré (former Prime Minister of Senegal)