BENEFITS OF ENHANCED TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ECOSYSTEMS

ASSOCIATED EVENT TO THE 5TH COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
21 - 23 NOVEMBER 2018, UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE CENTRE, BANGKOK THAILAND

Venue: Meeting Room H, 1st floor UNCC
Date: Friday, 23 November 2018
Time: 10:00 – 12:00
Organizers: UN ESCAP/Water Convention Secretariat, UNECE

Background

The Asia and Pacific region is facing increasing risk of water shortages and stress. In 2016, 29 of 48 countries qualified as water insecure due to low availability and unsustainable water withdrawals. Seven of the world’s 15 biggest extractors of groundwater are in Asia and the Pacific, and research suggests that groundwater use will increase by 30 per cent by 2050. Water scarcity will have a negative impact on food security as 70 percent of water withdrawals are for agricultural production. At the same time, 70 per cent of urban waste water is discharged into ecosystems, and 80 to 90 per cent of all wastewater remains untreated. Cities generate about 1.37 million metric tons of municipal solid waste a day, of which up to 90 per cent is discharged into the environment or disposed of improperly.

To cope with these pressures on water quantity and quality, including with the additional challenge of climate change and predicted increased hydrological variability, transboundary water cooperation is a necessity. However, the Asia-Pacific region is one of the least advanced in terms of legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary water cooperation, adding to the vulnerability of the countries to shocks and potentially posing risks to the economic and social development of the countries in the region. The gaps in cooperation frameworks are demonstrated by the baseline reporting on the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, on the proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation, which was carried out in 2017 by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as co-custodian for this indicator.1

A key dimension of transboundary cooperation is the need to share water, and the benefits it generates. Reasonable and equitable use of waters, avoiding significant transboundary harm and ensuring sustainability are among the key principles of transboundary water cooperation. Balancing different water needs and responding to water-food-energy-ecosystem interdependencies is a common challenge in the face of increasing demands from different sectors, growing water scarcity and climate variability. Improving transboundary water management in Asia by strengthening technical and institutional capacities of agencies and individuals is therefore crucial. It would not only strengthen their potential to influence and advise decision-makers on negotiation, adoption and implementation of legal frameworks

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1 The global baseline report on indicator 6.5.2, showing the progress in transboundary cooperation in integrated water resources management is available at: http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=49605
for water management, but will also allow for multi-track water diplomacy/stakeholder engagement, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, supporting also achievement of various other goals.

**Scope**

The associated event will focus on opportunities for using transboundary water cooperation mechanisms and tools for enhancing sustainable water resources management in transboundary basin areas. The panel will discuss how – considering the Asia and Pacific region’s challenges – the countries can benefit from strengthened transboundary cooperation, how international instruments and frameworks can be of assistance and draw lessons from selected examples which demonstrate the value of cooperation and ecosystem protection for development.

**Key Questions**

The key questions the session will address include:

- How can conservation of water ecosystems and restoration of their services benefit from enhanced transboundary water cooperation?
- What is the importance of transboundary water cooperation and coordination among basin countries for generating economic, social, environmental and political benefits with positive and sustainable impact?
- How can accelerated implementation of the SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2 on Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation foster implementation of the SDGs in Asia-Pacific?
- What could be concretely done to improve cooperation in the region: needs, opportunities and concrete examples with replication potential?

**Introduction and moderation**

Mr Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP (tbc)

**Panelists/discussants**

Mr. Keizrul Bin Abdullah, Senior Advisor, Network of Asian River Basin Organizations (NARBO) – the key role of basin organizations in sustainable cooperation and ensuring sustainable development

Mr. Timur Akhmetzhanov, Counsellor, Embassy of Republic of Kazakhstan – how Kazakhstan has benefitted from the application of the Water Convention to strengthen cooperation with its neighbors and what have been the impacts on its development

Ms Dang Phuong Loan, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Viet Nam – regional environmental and water cooperation challenges as seen from Vietnam’s perspective

Dr. Solieng Mak, Chair of Cambodia Water Partnership, Global Water Partnership – The need to build capacity in integrated water resources management and international water law
Ms Annukka Lipponen, Secretariat, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, UNECE – the value of and support from the instruments of international water law for advancing cooperation

Mr Bulat Bekniaz, Director of the Executive Board of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in the Republic of Kazakhstan – examples for investing into measures for ecosystems restoration and efficiency and the resulting economic benefits

Mr. Nuritdin R. Inamov, Director, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Russian Federation (TBC) – Balancing economic development and sustainability in Russian Federation’s transboundary water cooperation

**Tentative Programme**

1. Opening by Chair/Vice Chair of the CED-5 (1-2 mins) (tbc)
2. Brief introduction by Moderator (5 mins)
3. Panelist interventions (50 mins):
4. Q&A and discussion (55 mins)
5. Key messages and closing by Chair/Vice Chair of CED-5 (5 mins) (tbc)

**For more details and information contact:**

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