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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

#### Seventh session

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Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda

**Review of past activities and discussion of future activities  
in the different areas of work: adapting to climate change  
in transboundary basins**

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

**Submitted by the secretariat in cooperation with Switzerland and  
the Netherlands**

#### *Summary*

The present document has been prepared at the request of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) in order to discuss and define the long-term objectives and priorities of the work on water and climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, which has been implemented since 2006 under the leadership of the Task Force on Water and Climate. The draft strategy contained herein complements the Convention's draft programme of work for 2016–2018, in particular area 4 on climate change adaptation (see ECE/MP.WAT/2015/3). It was prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with Switzerland and the Netherlands, the lead countries for the work in this programme area. The draft was presented to the tenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva, 24–25 June 2015), which reviewed it and asked the secretariat to submit it to the Meeting of the Parties for information (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/2, forthcoming).

The Meeting of the Parties is invited to comment on the draft strategy. It may wish to request the Task Force on Water and Climate to further elaborate the draft and to submit it to the Working Group at its eleventh meeting for its consideration and a decision on the next steps.



## I. Achievements so far

1. Climate change impacts on water resources are likely to intensify, for example through an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (floods and droughts), which can seriously affect water quantity, quality and ecosystems. Many transboundary basins are particularly vulnerable to these impacts. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore expected to be increasingly important and challenging. For this reason, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) has been supporting countries in transboundary climate change adaptation through guidance, capacity-building, projects on the ground and exchange of experience.

### **Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change**

2. The *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change*<sup>1</sup> was developed by the Task Force on Water and Climate in 2007–2009 and adopted at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention in 2009. It provides step-by-step advice on assessment methods for determining the impacts of climate change on water quantity and quality, undertaking risk assessments, measuring vulnerability and designing and implementing appropriate adaptation strategies.

### **Pilot projects**

3. Since 2010, based on the Guidance, the programme of pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins<sup>2</sup> has demonstrated the benefits of and mechanisms for transboundary cooperation in adaptation planning and implementation. Five pilot projects (“Dauria going dry” and projects in the Chu-Talas, Dniester, Neman and Sava Basins) are being implemented by the Convention secretariat, most of them in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) and in cooperation with ENVSEC partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). These projects have strengthened the capacity of the riparian countries and basins to adapt to climate change, by developing transboundary climate change impact and vulnerability assessments as well as strategic frameworks for basin adaptation, and by implementing adaptation measures. This is particularly notable as, in some pilot basins, there were no previously established institutional and legal mechanisms for transboundary water cooperation. The programme of pilot projects also benefitted from input from more advanced basins, such as the Rhine and Danube, which have developed transboundary adaptation strategies within their river basin commissions and shared their experience at the meetings of the ECE Task Force on Water and Climate, but also valued the experiences of the other basins.

### **Exchange of experience**

4. Collection and exchange of experience was ensured through regular meetings and workshops, a web-based platform and the establishment of a global network of basins working on climate change adaptation, created jointly with the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) in 2013. The global network meets regularly, bringing together 14 basins, including 5 from outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. 09.II.E.14. Available from <http://www.unece.org/?id=11658>.

<sup>2</sup> More information on the progress of the pilot projects is contained in the progress report of the pilot projects, available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=34433#/>.

### Collection and dissemination of lessons learned and good practice

5. The 2015 publication *Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices*,<sup>3</sup> prepared by ECE and INBO based on more than 50 case studies from the global network of basins and other basins worldwide, showcases good practices and innovative approaches to transboundary climate change adaptation.

6. These activities have contributed to increased awareness of the importance of transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation and provided inputs to other political platforms, events and processes, such as the European Union (EU) Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change<sup>4</sup> and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in particular, its Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change (see UNFCCC/CP/2005/Add.1, decision 2/CP.11).

## II. Lessons learned from the past

### Comparative advantages of the Water Convention

7. While in 2006, water and climate change adaptation was still a new topic, in 2015 numerous organizations and platforms are working on this theme, implementing projects and organizing events. However, the Convention's activities have maintained a comparative advantage as they are among the very few which address climate change adaptation in the transboundary context. At the same time, it is recognized that transboundary adaptation is always related to adaptation efforts at the national level. That is why attention has also been given to the national dimension in both the pilot projects and the global workshops.

### Climate change: A possible trigger of transboundary cooperation

8. Transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation is particularly needed for coordinating impact and vulnerability assessments and adaptation strategies at the basin level. Riparian countries need to agree on the overall directions for adaptation measures, while measures are usually implemented at the national and/or local levels. These steps can help to improve trust and willingness to cooperate between riparian countries. Cooperation on climate change adaptation can thus motivate transboundary water cooperation in general, as shown by some pilot projects.

### Climate change partnerships

9. Since climate change adaptation is such a complex and challenging task, cooperation with numerous partners is crucial. The Task Force on Water and Climate under the Water Convention benefits from numerous partnerships, for example, with UNFCCC, the World Meteorological Organization, the Alliance of Global Water Adaptation (AGWA of which ECE is a member), the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the UN-Water Thematic Priority Area on Water and Climate and many others. At the same time, the Task

<sup>3</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.E.1. Available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417&L=0>.

<sup>4</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, An EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change*, COM (2013) 0216 final. Available from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0216>.

Force represents one of the very few intergovernmental platforms for collaboration focused exclusively on water and climate change, and is therefore of value for partners.

#### **Cross-sectoral cooperation and climate change**

10. Other sectors, such as energy and agriculture, hold the key to successful adaptation of water management; therefore, reaching out to these sectors is necessary in the climate change work under the Convention. In this regard, climate change is being integrated in most other programme areas and activities under the Convention such as the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus and identifying, assessing and communicating benefits of cooperation.

#### **Inputs into the UNFCCC process and the post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**

11. In 2013–2015, the Water Convention and its Task Force on Water and Climate were increasingly requested to provide inputs into the UNFCCC process and to the negotiations of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This included co-organizing side events at UNFCCC meetings and providing case studies. However, the Water Convention is not yet an established point of reference for UNFCCC; moreover, such cooperation requires time and resources which are difficult to obtain.

#### **Win-win synergies between projects and the global network**

12. The results of the pilot projects and the global exchange of experience are mutually supportive, with the pilot projects enriching the global network and the exchanges at the regular workshops of the global network of basins facilitating the work in the pilot projects.

#### **Administrative challenges**

13. While moving from the assessment and strategy development phase to the implementation phase of the pilot projects has proven to be difficult for the secretariat from the administrative point of view, the concrete adaptation measures on the ground are highly valued by national Governments and local stakeholders.

#### **Limitations of the web platform**

14. The web platform created in 2011 as part of the platform for the sharing of experiences contains information only on the pilot projects implemented by the Convention and has not really been widely used so far. For it to be effective, it would require efforts to revise it, populate it with information and promote it. It should be decided whether its continuation is justified.

### **III. Proposed future areas of work**

15. The overall goal of the future work on climate change under the Convention is to promote cooperation on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins. Building on past work, this will be achieved through working in two priority areas: policy work and the upscaling of pilot projects.

16. Sharing of good practices is important for these two priority areas and will therefore continue in global workshops, meetings of the network of basins, etc. New, more targeted formats for exchange of experience will be explored and new emerging topics will be addressed, such as groundwater, development of scenarios and financing.

## A. Policy work

17. The policy work will aim at mainstreaming climate change adaptation in the work of the water community and at raising awareness of the importance of transboundary cooperation in the climate change community.

### **Increasing recognition of the need for transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction**

18. The Water Convention and its Task Force on Water and Climate will make efforts to increase the prominence of water and transboundary aspects in global climate change negotiations.

19. **Integration of water in climate change policies.** Water and transboundary aspects will be further integrated or mainstreamed into climate-related national plans, policies and strategies (e.g., Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), Communications to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the UNFCCC, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), as well as international funding mechanisms (Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, etc.).

20. **Cooperation.** The objective of mainstreaming water and transboundary aspects into climate change policies will be achieved, among others, by cooperating with other organizations or mechanisms working on transboundary cooperation in adaptation, including those working on other transboundary ecosystems such as mountains and wetlands (such as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)).

### **Mainstreaming climate change adaptation and mitigation in the work of the water community**

21. Further efforts to raise awareness of water managers are necessary for the integration or mainstreaming of climate change adaptation and potentially mitigation into water-relevant plans, policies, strategies and, importantly, river, lake and groundwater basin management plans. This can be achieved for example by:

(a) **River basin management planning.** Supporting countries in integrating climate change aspects into river basin management plans, especially in the pilot basins, at all stages — from planning to implementation and evaluation — will be an important new aspect of work for the Task Force on Water and Climate;

(b) **Exchange of experience on EU directives.** The Task Force could also, where appropriate, support exchanging experience on how to take into account climate change when implementing relevant water-related EU directives (e.g., the EU Water Framework Directive).<sup>5</sup>

## B. Upscaling of pilot projects

22. After five years of implementation, it is now necessary to upscale the pilot projects under the Convention in order to achieve a wider impact while at the same time ensuring their sustainability.

<sup>5</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, 2000 O.J. (L 327), pp. 1–73

### **Replicating experience of the pilot projects**

23. **Replication.** Successful experiences of the pilot projects will be replicated in other basins where interest is expressed and resources are found. As in the past, these projects will be designed according to the local needs and circumstances. Implementation of the projects will continue in close cooperation with other organizations with a presence on the ground, such as UNDP, OSCE and non-governmental organizations.

24. **Supporting ongoing adaptation strategy development and implementation.** In basins where the secretariat has supported the development of an adaptation strategy and which are now moving towards its implementation, the support from the Convention secretariat will usually become more advisory and facilitative. The secretariat and the Task Force could provide, where needed, guidance and advice to authorities and organizations, both national and international, involved in the implementation of the measures on the ground.

25. **Dissemination of methodology.** Since there have been expressions of interest in the methodologies and approaches used in the pilot projects by partners working in other basins, for instance, the African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO), the secretariat and the Task Force will provide support in this respect.

26. **Mainstreaming climate change considerations in other activities of the Water Convention.** Climate change considerations are and will continue to be mainstreamed into other activities of the Water Convention, such as the activities on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, the EU Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues and the benefits of transboundary cooperation, as well as projects on the ground.

### **Ensuring sustainability of the pilot projects**

27. **Raising funds.** In order to enable further implementation of the adaptation strategies already developed, drawing the attention of donors to the need to fund basin-wide and regional projects on adaptation is required (e.g., as the Adaptation Fund is now doing).

28. **Sustainability of projects.** Ensuring that results of the activities implemented under the Convention and by partners will be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the projects involves political facilitation and brokering, especially at the transboundary level, as well as applying a more programmatic approach, which will need to be developed together with donors and partners.

29. **Mainstreaming the results into strategies and plans.** Upscaling of the projects will also be facilitated by supporting the inclusion of the outcomes of the pilot projects in national policy and planning documents and processes, including NAPs, INDCs and National Communications (mainly a task for national Governments).

30. **Collecting good technical practices.** Transboundary technical cooperation on climate change adaptation can also facilitate general transboundary cooperation at the political level. Support for and documentation of these good practices are needed in order to replicate them.

### **Exchange and collection of experience**

31. Sharing of good practices is important for upscaling and replication of pilot projects. The meetings of the Task Force and global interactive workshops, including consideration of emerging topics such as financing, will continue to provide a platform for sharing good practices. In addition, more targeted exchanges on specific sub-topics, such as hydropower and climate change, water scarcity and groundwater management, will be arranged between interested basins of the global network.