



**Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary  
Watercourses and International Lakes**

**Working Group on Integrated Water  
Resources Management**

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**Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins**

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**DRAFT VISION FOR FUTURE WORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION  
UNDER THE WATER CONVENTION**

**Submitted by the secretariat in cooperation with Switzerland and the Netherlands as lead countries  
for activity 4 “Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins”**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In 2006, the Task Force on Water and Climate was created under the Water Convention and activities on water and climate change adaptation have started. In nine years of work in this area, a lot has been achieved while many challenges still remain. Moreover, as climate change impacts on water resources are likely to intensify in the coming years (such as more and more severe extreme weather events (floods and droughts), impacts on water quality and temperature etc.), transboundary water cooperation is expected to become even more difficult; hence, there is a need to develop a vision for the way forward.

The present document outlines such a vision for work on climate change in the next ten years under the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). It complements the Convention’s draft programme of work for 2016-2018 and in particular area 4 on climate change adaptation as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/L.1 and in the annex to this document. The document was prepared at the suggestion of the Water Convention’s Bureau with the objective to trigger a discussion on future directions of work.

The Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is invited to discuss the draft vision and agree on ways and means to revise it for submission to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budapest, 17-19 November 2015).

**II. ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR**

The Convention has been supporting countries in transboundary climate change adaptation through guidance, capacity-building, projects on the ground, and exchange of experience:

(a) The **Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change**<sup>1</sup> was developed under the Convention's Task Force on Water and Climate in 2007–2009 and adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention in 2009.

**Result:** Decision-makers and water managers received a useful tool, which provides step-by-step advice on how to assess impacts of climate change on water quantity and quality, how to perform risk assessment (including health risk assessment), how to gauge vulnerability and how to design and implement appropriate adaptation strategies.

(b) Since 2010, implementation of the Guidance as well as dialogue and transboundary cooperation on climate change adaptation has been promoted through the **programme of pilot projects** on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins,<sup>2</sup> supporting countries in jointly adapting water management to climate change. Five pilot projects were/are 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), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In addition, other basins such as the Rhine and Danube have developed adaptation strategies within their river basin commissions,

**Results:** The pilot projects strengthened the capacity of countries and basins to adapt to climate change and created positive examples demonstrating the benefits of, and possible mechanisms for, transboundary cooperation in adaptation planning and implementation.

A common understanding on how to adapt to climate change at the basin level has been achieved in the pilot projects on the Chu Talas, Dniester, Neman and Sava basins. This brought concrete results, including the development of transboundary climate change impact and vulnerability assessments and implementation of adaptation measures in the Dniester basin as well as the preparation of strategic frameworks for basin adaptation. This is particularly notable as in some pilot basins there were no established institutional and legal mechanisms or frameworks for transboundary water cooperation.

(c) **Collection and exchange of experience** is ensured through **regular meetings and workshops** and a **web-based platform** and through the **global network of basins** working on climate change adaptation. The global network of basins has been created together with the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) in 2013 and brings together 14 basins from all over the world, including 5 basins from outside the UNECE region. The basins of the global network meet regularly.

Using experiences from the global network of basins, best practices and innovative approaches to transboundary climate change adaptation have been collected, codified and disseminated in the international water community by preparing the **publication “Adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins: lessons learned and good practices”**<sup>3</sup> which contains more than 50 case studies from all over the world.

**Results:** The work has led to increased awareness of the importance of transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation as well as improved sharing of knowledge and experience in this regard. Input has been provided to other events and processes, such as the European Union, the United Nations

1 United Nations publication, Sales No. 09.II.E.14. Available from [www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/documents/Guidance\\_water\\_climate.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/documents/Guidance_water_climate.pdf).

2 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/env/water/5th\\_meeting\\_taskforce\\_water\\_climate.html](http://www.unece.org/env/water/5th_meeting_taskforce_water_climate.html).

3 <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417&L=0>

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and, in particular, its Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

### III. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PAST

1. When the Task Force started in 2006, water and climate change adaptation was still a new topic. Since then, numerous organizations started to work on the topic and countless projects were implemented. Many other platforms now exist and numerous events are organized on this topic. However, activities under the Convention are unique as they address climate change adaptation in the transboundary context. While this is the main added value of the climate change work under the Convention, it is impossible to focus only on transboundary aspects since transboundary adaptation is always also related to adaptation efforts at the national level.
2. Transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation is particularly needed and useful in developing impact and vulnerability assessments and adaptation strategies since, thereby, riparian countries can agree on future expected water availability in the basin and agree on overall directions for adaptation as well as adaptation measures of basin-wide relevance, while implementation of measures is more often done at the national or even local level. 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 some of the pilot projects have shown.
3. Since climate change adaptation is such a complex, uncertain and challenging task, cooperation with numerous partners is crucial and work of the Task Force on Water and Climate would not be possible without numerous partnerships, for example with UNFCCC, the Alliance of Global Water Adaptation where UNECE is a member (AGWA), the Stockholm International Water Institute, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) as well as the UN-Water Thematic Priority Area on water and climate and many others. UNECE has a lot to offer to its partners as the Task Force on Water and Climate represents one of the very few intergovernmental platforms for collaboration focused exclusively on water and climate change.
4. Reaching out to other sectors, such as energy, agriculture is necessary since these sectors often hold the key to successful adaptation. In addition, climate change is relevant for most other programme areas and activities of the UNECE Water Convention such as the Water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus, identifying, assessing and communicating benefits of cooperation etc. Advice is needed for integrating climate change into these areas and in particular into the projects on the ground such as Drin etc. This will help implementation of the Convention in times of a changing climate.
5. In 2013-2015, there has been an increase in requests for inputs into the UNFCCC process from the UNECE Water Convention and the Task Force, as well as to the negotiations of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This has led for example to UNECE co-organizing side events at UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties in Warsaw in 2013 and others. This work on input to global processes, such as the climate change negotiations, has emerged as important, but requires time and resources which are often difficult to get. Moreover, the UNECE Water Convention is not yet an established point of reference for UNFCCC.
6. The combination of work on the ground through the pilot projects and global exchange of experience is very useful and mutually supportive. On the one hand, the lessons learned and methodologies tested through the pilot projects enrich the global network and on the other hand,

the partners, experiences and good practice examples from the global network of basins and regular workshops facilitate the work in the pilot projects.

7. The work on pilots has moved into implementation phase, which proved to be difficult for UNECE, including in terms of administration. However, concrete adaptation measures on the ground are highly valued by national governments and local stakeholders, therefore, UNECE could continue work in this direction by partnering with other organizations (for example OSCE, UNDP, Non-governmental Organizations). At the same time, UNECE has been very successful in advisory support, facilitating cooperation between riparian countries and promoting exchange of experience. These are the areas, where the activities under the Water Convention should scale up.
8. Funding aspects need to be given more attention in order to enable for example implementation of the developed adaptation strategies: this requires raising attention of donors to the need to fund such basin-wide/ regional projects (e.g. as the Adaptation Fund is now doing).
9. The web platform created in 2011 as part of the platform for the sharing of experience only contains information on the pilot projects implemented by UNECE and has not really been widely used so far.
10. In recent years, a certain decrease of interest among European Union countries in the UNECE climate change activities could be observed (for example manifested in the low level of their participation in UNECE climate-related meetings and workshops). This could be due to the fact that many EU countries have advanced in climate change adaptation and are no longer much interested in, for example, broadly focused workshops. Solutions should be found to bring back the interest.

#### **IV. PROPOSED FUTURE AREAS OF WORK**

The overall **goal** of the future work is to promote cooperation in adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins thereby enabling an appropriate implementation of the Water Convention under a changing climate. This would be achieved through working in the following two areas: policy work and upscaling of pilot projects.

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

##### **1. Policy work**

This work will aim at mainstreaming climate change adaptation into the water community and at transboundary water issues into climate change community.

- 1) *Increase recognition of the need for transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction*

UNECE and the Task Force on Water and Climate are among very few organizations stressing the importance of transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. While some progress has been made, it is important to increase the prominence of water and transboundary aspects in global climate change negotiations. In particular, water is not receiving adequate attention in the climate change mitigation discussions. Moreover, it is necessary to further integrate/mainstream water and transboundary aspects 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.).

This objective can be facilitated, 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, wetlands etc.

## *2) Mainstream climate change into the water community*

Progress has been made and more and more water managers realize the need to take into account climate change adaptation in water management. However, further efforts are necessary to integrate/mainstream climate change adaptation and potentially mitigation into water-relevant plans, policies and strategies and, importantly, into river basin management plans for basins.

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 – could be an important new aspect of work for the Task Force on Water and Climate.

The Task Force could also exchanging experience on how to take into account climate change when implementing relevant water-related EU directives (e.g. EU Water Framework Directive). Such activities would need to be implemented in cooperation with the European Commission.

## **2. Upscaling of pilot projects**

For almost five years, pilot projects have been implemented under the Water Convention. It is now necessary to upscale these pilot projects in order to achieve wider impact while at the same time ensuring their sustainability.

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

First, successful experiences of the pilot projects can be replicated in other basins in the UNECE region where interest is expressed and resources are found (for example in the Alazani/Ganikh River Basin, Daugava River Basin). As in the past, these projects can be designed according to the local needs and circumstances.

Secondly, since there have been expressions of interest, methodologies and approaches of the pilot projects can also be expanded to interested basins outside of the UNECE region, working with partners such as the African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO).

Thirdly, the already ongoing work will continue by supporting adaptation measures proposed in the already developed basin-wide adaptation strategies; e.g. in the Dniester, Neman and Chu Talas River Basins according to the model described above (i.e. mainly by local organizations, with UNECE in an advisory and facilitative role).

Fourthly, advice will be provided for mainstreaming climate change into other activities of the Water Convention such as the activities on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, EU Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues and identifying, assessing and communicating benefits of transboundary cooperation, as well as projects on the ground for example in the Kura, Drin, Pyanj River Basins, etc.

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

Work under this area will aim to ensure that results of the activities implemented by UNECE and partners will be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the projects. This will be done, first of all, by political facilitation and brokering, especially at the transboundary level, which is an area where UNECE has a clear comparative advantage.

Upscaling will be also facilitated by supporting the inclusion of outcomes of the pilot projects in national policy and planning documents and processes, including NAPs, INDCs, National Communications, etc. (mainly a task for national governments).

Several of the pilot projects, such as the Neman and Dniester have shown that transboundary cooperation on technical issues such as on climate change adaptation can also facilitate general transboundary cooperation at political level. Such examples need on the one hand further support and on the other hand can be documented and lessons drawn for other similar basins or cases.

## 3) *Exchange and collection of experience*

Sharing of good practices is important for upscaling and replication of pilot projects. This will be done through meetings of the Task Force and global interactive workshops, including consideration of new emerging topics such as financing etc. In addition, more targeted exchanges on specific sub-topics, e.g. on hydropower and climate change etc., would be arranged between those basins of the global network which are interested.

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## **ANNEX: Extract of the Draft programme of work for 2016–2018, Programme area 4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins**

*Responsible bodies:* The Task Force on Water and Climate and the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management.

*Lead Parties/organizations:* [Switzerland, the Netherlands (to be confirmed)].

*Objectives:*

- (a) Increased adaptive capacity and improved cooperation on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins worldwide;
- (b) Increased awareness of the importance of cooperation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction at the national level and in intergovernmental processes, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

### **Work to be undertaken**

#### **4.1 Pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins: moving towards implementation, scaling up and mainstreaming**

This activity will promote cooperation in the development of vulnerability assessments, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies and their implementation in transboundary basins within projects implemented by the ECE Water Convention together with other partners. Some pilot projects (such as those for the Dniester, Chu Talas and Neman River Basins) will continue to implement their adaptation strategies or mainstream prioritized adaptation measures into other plans, strategies, policies, projects or programmes at the basin or national level. In addition, new pilot projects could be started, for example on the Alazani or Kura Rivers or on groundwater in Eastern Europe. Other partner organizations may implement pilot projects outside of the region, with limited involvement of ECE. As in the past, the information on the implementation of all the pilot projects (in the ECE region and beyond) will feed into the meetings of the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation (see 4.2 below).

#### 4.2 Regular thematic global workshops and meetings of the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins

This activity aims at learning and exchanging experience, good practices and lessons learned through, among others, the existing global network of basins working on climate change adaptation coordinated by INBO and ECE, building on the 2015 publication on this topic. The organization of regular workshops will continue (with two workshops, possibly in mid-2016 and at the end of 2017 or early 2018). The workshops could be thematically focused (e.g., on water scarcity) and be organized in cooperation with existing and new partners. In addition, smaller meetings of the basins in the global network may be held to share experiences between river basin organizations.

Direct exchanges on topics relevant to some of the basins of the global network may be organized, e.g., through expert exchange, study visits or smaller thematic or regional events.

These activities will also contribute to global processes on water and climate, such as under UNFCCC, as described in activity 5.4.

*Resource requirements for programme area 4: US\$ 986,000.*

*Possible partners:* The Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the Environment and Security Initiative and its members (in particular OSCE and UNDP), the European Commission, GEF, GIZ, GWP, INBO, IUCN, the Ramsar Convention, the Regional Environmental Centres in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, OECD, SIWI, the Stockholm Environment Institute, UNESCO, UNFCCC, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), other United Nations regional commissions, the World Bank, the World Meteorological Organization and the joint bodies involved in adaptation to climate change.

#### Extract from programme area 5.4: Input to international processes

This activity will also promote the importance of water and climate change adaptation efforts in global processes, such as under UNFCCC and UNISDR, including by organizing side events at major conferences together with partners (e.g., sessions of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties), providing written and oral inputs and advice to other processes and publications, and sharing information and knowledge on adaptation in water management. Direct inputs into the work on water and adaptation under UNFCCC might be provided upon the request of the UNFCCC secretariat or other relevant bodies and mechanisms.

<b>4</b>		<b>Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins</b>	
4.1	Pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins: moving towards implementation, scaling up and mainstreaming	Consultancy costs (national and international consultants in the different basins)	150.0
		Grants for the organization of local meetings and other services	60.0
		P-3 staff time (16 months)	266.4
		G staff time (3 months)	27.0
		Travel of experts and of the secretariat	40.0
4.2	Regular thematic global workshops and meetings of the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins	Consultancy costs	20.0
		Organization of 2 global workshops, 2 meetings of the Task Force and 3 meetings of the core group on pilot projects	320.0
		P-3 staff time (4 months)	66.6
		G staff time (4 months)	36.0
<b>Extract from programme area 6 on input to international processes</b>			
5.4	Providing inputs to global processes on water and climate change adaptation	P-3 staff time (3 months)	50.0
		Travel of experts and staff	40.0
<b>Programme support costs (13%)</b>			<b>140</b>
<b>Subtotal programme area 4</b>			<b>1,216</b>