



Water for Peace

“The message that transboundary water cooperation is important still needs to find its way into the UN and other political documents - we need to bring water cooperation high on the global political agenda.”

– Water for Peace e-consultation

Key messages

1) International water law represents the basis for cooperation - Suitable cooperation mechanisms on transboundary waters need to be built on the principles of international water law (i.e. the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization, no-harm rule, protection of the environment, peaceful settlement of disputes and participation of the public). Joint mechanisms can address risks of tensions and conflicts only when they build on these established principles. A global framework is important for providing main guiding principles of international water cooperation, as well as the exchange and knowledge transfer platform. The 1992 UNECE Water Convention and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention provide such global frameworks. These instruments should be ratified and actively used by countries. However, to be able to tap on the benefits of international law, more efforts are needed to enhance its understanding and application by riparian countries.

2) Transboundary agreements and joint institutions are effective instruments to support cooperation - It is essential to have established mechanisms and bodies to communicate regularly in order to address transboundary water issues in specific basins. Agreements and joint institutions have proven to be key to overcome disputes and to find compromise approaches. Such platforms to discuss and negotiate water management issues are important for long term, successful cooperation. Joint institutions also help to build trust, to enhance mutual understanding and to exchange knowledge and experience. However cooperation through specific agreements and joint institutions needs time and patience to work efficiently.

3) International organizations and NGOs can have a facilitative role - The international community, the UN, other international organizations, donor agencies and NGOs have an important role to play to help riparian countries to establish fruitful cooperation. While it is primarily the responsibility of countries sharing transboundary waters to cooperate, NGOs would like to be able to play a more active role.

4) Climate change makes cooperation urgent - Cooperation between countries becomes more and more important in light of climate change and its impact on water resources. It is essential that governments together elaborate strategies to tackle growing floods, droughts and other extreme weather events and their economic and social consequences. We need to create awareness about current and upcoming challenges which should motivate riparian countries to develop and strengthen cooperation. Moreover, as also underlined in the consultation on climate change and water-related risks, without cooperation there is the risk that unilaterally decided adaptation measures cause harm to other riparian countries.



Key issues for follow up

1) Raising awareness on the benefits of cooperation - Policy-makers should be more aware of the benefits of transboundary cooperation in terms of peace, economic and social development, environmental protection, and climate change adaptation. Raising awareness on such benefits and even quantifying them, where possible, will help to advance transboundary water cooperation.

2) Developing cooperation on transboundary groundwaters - While cooperation on transboundary rivers is developed in many basins, cooperation is largely non-existing for groundwater resources. There is little information available to the general public about groundwater and its use.

3) Providing information to the public - It is difficult for the public to assess the effectiveness of transboundary water cooperation since the information about such cooperation is often not available.