



Convention of the Protection and Use of
Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
Task Force on Water and Climate
Third meeting
Geneva, Switzerland, 12 May 2010

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON WATER AND CLIMATE ON ITS THIRD MEETING

Introduction and attendance

1. The third meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate was held on 12 May 2010 in Geneva, back-to-back with the workshop “Water and Climate Change- how to develop an adaptation strategy in transboundary basins” held on 10-11 May 2010. The Task Force meeting was attended by representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, The Netherlands, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

2. Representatives of the following International Organizations also attended: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea- Executive Committee (EC-IFAS), Interstate Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia (ICWC), the International Sava River Basin Commission. In addition, representatives of the following Non-Governmental Organizations attended: Cooperative Programme on Water and Climate (CPWC), Ecoproject, EUCC - The Coastal Union, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Eco-TIRAS International Environmental Association of River Keepers, Wuppertal Institute, The Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, Georgia Iv.javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Southern Cross University, New South Wales and Wageningen University and Research Centre.

3. The outgoing co-Chairpersons opened the meeting. The Task Force re- elected Mr. Joost Buntsma (The Netherlands) and Mr. Thomas Stratenwerth (Germany) as co-chairs for 2010-2012. The new chairpersons recalled that the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Geneva, 10-12 November 2010) had given the mandate to the Task Force to facilitate the programme of pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins as well as the platform for sharing experience with water and climate change.

Pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins

4. The Chairperson and the secretariat presented the programme of pilot projects, in particular the aims, the modalities and preliminary timeframe of the programme, including approximate dates for the Task Force’s future meetings until the next session of the Meeting of the Parties, tentatively scheduled in the second half of 2012. It also explained the difference between pilot projects included in the programme which would receive full support by the secretariat in their implementation and other pilot projects that would not be fully supported but would still be part of the programme.

5. The three pilot projects currently included in the programme and fully supported by the Secretariat (on the Dniester, Chu Talas and Sava basins) had been presented and launched during the Workshop “Water and Climate Change- how to develop an adaptation strategy in transboundary basins” on 11 May. Additional comments on the three pilot projects were discussed during the Task Force meeting. It was stressed that the time plan, activities and priorities of each individual pilot project are to be decided upon jointly by the representatives of the projects.

6. Participants recommended that the pilot projects should build on already existing similar projects and past and ongoing activities regarding water and climate change adaptation. For this reason, a baseline study, collecting, comparing and analysing results of such activities both at the national and transboundary level will be conducted as a first step in all pilot projects. For the Chu Talas pilot project Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan pointed out that several activities on water and climate change had been done, mainly assessments of climate change impacts in both countries as well as a national adaptation strategy has been initiated and that thus, the pilot project will mostly focus on the joint elaboration and agreement on adaptation measures.

7. The baseline study will be followed in all pilot projects by an impact assessment phase at the transboundary level, including modelling, scenario development and vulnerability assessment depending on the needs. However, since even models and scenarios will always lead to uncertain results, it was recommended to focus this phase on finding an agreement between the riparian countries on common scenarios to be used, if possible the latest ones developed by IPCC. Several scenarios should be taken into account and the adaptation strategy be designed in a way as to adapt to a range of different scenarios and future impacts, increasing thereby the overall resilience.

8. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recommended a combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach downscaling General Circulation Models (GCMs) and assessing local risks. The UNFCCC also recommended that the pilot projects should focus on the process of developing a transboundary adaptation strategy, thus on the planning of adaptation measures and only perform additional impact assessments where necessary and where a clear gap was identified. In addition, the pilot projects should use and implement the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change and already focus as much as possible on implementation.

9. Hungary pointed that GMES, the Global Monitoring on Environment and Security could be useful for the pilot projects.

10. Subsequently, representatives of two additional proposals for projects to be included in the programme of pilot projects were presented. None of the proposal was funded by the time of the meeting.

11. Mr. Simonov, Daursky Biosphere reserve and representative of WWF Russian Federation, presented the situation and a project proposal entitled “Dauria going dry” on the Argun and Uldz river basins, tributaries of the Amur, shared by the Russian Federation, Mongolia and China, flowing in the Dauria steppe region with semi-arid conditions and significant changes in water availability that condition human activities in the basin. WWF Russia is planning to expand the network of protected areas while at the same time some of the riparian countries such as Mongolia and China are planning to extent their water infrastructure in the region. WWF Russia and Daursky Biosphere reserve proposed a project aiming to harmonize transboundary river protection and management in the Dauria and as first steps perform a transboundary assessment, evaluation of

environmental flow needs, create a transboundary monitoring network, design ecological networks connecting protected areas and undertake awareness-raising.

12. The secretariat stressed that this project could not be included as a fully supported project in the programme of pilot projects, but that, if the project would find other funding sources, it would be very interesting to include it in the programme of pilot projects given its focus on environmental and strategic impact assessment, environmental flows, conservation and protected areas etc¹.

13. The Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) (Ms. Jovanka Ignjatovic) presented a project proposal on the Drina and Vardar rivers which was not yet funded but could also be included as a not fully supported project in the programme of pilot projects. The International Sava River Basin Commission expressed its preparedness to cooperate in the project.

14. Belarus expressed interest in an additional pilot project on the Neman river basin, shared by Lithuania, Belarus and the Russian Federation which would focus on integrated water resources management and climate change adaptation. The Secretariat underlined that it was making efforts to fund-raise for such project and would need a confirmation of the interest on the pilot by all riparian countries.

15. The Task Force decided that in addition to the three fully supported pilot projects on the Dniester, Chu Talas and Sava rivers the ongoing climate change activities in the Danube, Meuse and Rhine would also be included in the pilot projects programme. In addition, if other funding sources were identified by the proposers, the proposed projects on the Amur/Argun river as well as the Drina and Vardar could also be included in the programme.

16. The Task Force also decided to create a core group of representatives of the programme pilot projects which would meet more often and in a smaller circle than the Task Force in order to optimize the exchange of experience between the pilot projects.

17. The Task Force on Water and Climate agreed that it would mainly play a facilitative and supportive role in the programme of pilot projects; it will not be a decision-making body for the pilot projects. In addition, participants suggested that the Task Force could review the Guidance taking into account the pilot projects results and activities, help the pilot projects in the correct and appropriate identification of all important stakeholders, encourage sustainable funding solutions for adapting water management to climate change and underline the role of groundwater in adaptation.

Platform for exchanging experience on water and adaptation to climate change

18. Representatives of other similar initiatives such as the European Union and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) had reported on their planned and ongoing activities and possibilities for cooperation already at the workshop on 10 May. Participants stressed the need for cooperation and coherence between UNECE and these other activities. Participants suggested as additional partners for the pilot projects programme and the platform: the World Water Council and preparatory process for the next World Water Forum 2012 in Marseille, the Espoo Convention, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the UN-Water Task Force on Climate Change and Water, the Global Water Partnership, the Coastal and Marine Union

¹ In June 2010, WWF Russia found enough funds for at least the first phase of the project, thus the project “Dauria going dry” was included in the programme of pilot projects.

(EUCC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization, the World Water Assessment Programme and the European Union. In addition, EU projects should be taken into account, such as the project MEDIATION which aims to establish a similar platform as well.

19. The secretariat presented the concept note on the platform (TFWC/2010/4) stressing that the proposed platform should take into account other similar activities. At the same time it underlined the specificity of the platform under the Convention which focused on exchange of experience in adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins. The Task Force discussed the different proposed elements of the platform which aims to ensure a continuous exchange of experience, good practices and lessons learnt between the pilot projects and other similar initiatives through different means.

20. The Task Force decided to establish an online platform, possibly linked to or integrated to other trustworthy platforms such as the Adaptation Learning Mechanism, with information on the pilot projects and their progress, maps and visual information. The platform would include material in Russian language which would be its main added value compared to many other platforms. The Task Force members cautioned against establishing an online discussion forum which would require significant human and financial resources. Instead, it was rather recommended to have a wiki space which could be accessible only to registered users.

21. The Task Force discussed whether the platform should become part of an already existing adaptation platform such as the Adaptation Learning Mechanism or be newly constructed as a self-standing platform. Participants raised the importance of ensuring credibility and neutrality of the platform and that cooperation with other UN agencies would be especially important.

22. The Task Force also discussed the need for a repository of experts who could be asked for advice on specific aspects of the pilot projects. Such a database should comprise experts from different disciplines, natural and social sciences, experts in adaptation and vulnerability assessment etc. However, several such databases of experts already exist such as the UNFCCC Roster of experts under the Nairobi Work Programme, the WMO Panel of the Commission on Hydrology as well as those experts who participated in preparing the National Communications to UNFCCC. But none of these lists of experts include experts in transboundary issues. However, the significant difficulties in establishing such a database were also pointed at such as how to establish such a list of experts, whether through country government nominations (which did not work well in the case of the UNFCCC) or through other channels.

23. UNFCCC suggested adding a helpdesk function to the platform where requests for help could be raised. However, WMO underlined that its Flood Helpdesk had not been solicited very much since those in need of help seemed to prefer contacting experts whom they know instead of filling out a questionnaire only. It was therefore decided rather to include different Guidance material as well as links on the platform and not a helpdesk function.

24. The Task Force decided not to publish a regular newsletter since this was not considered as an appropriate means for exchanging experience. Annual meetings and workshops were however considered as very important for exchanging experience.

25. The Task Force agreed that a collection of good and bad practices, including an analysis of their success factors and lessons learnt should be done and inserted into the online platform. It was also suggested to perform an evaluation of each phase, following a certain methodology in

order to identify good practices and lessons learnt. For this, a template for evaluating projects, including a self-analysis would need to be elaborated.

26. The idea of publishing methodological studies, if possible in a transdisciplinary manner, was welcomed when there would be a need. Suggested topics included using ecosystems for climate change adaptation, Payments for Ecosystem Services and climate change, preserving wetlands and river ecosystems in times of climate change and many more.

Cooperation with the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events established under the Protocol on Water and Health

27. The secretariat presented the work of the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events on behalf of the chairperson, Ms. Luciana Sinisi, and in particular the draft Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events. The Task Force was invited to submit comments by end of June 2010. Further cooperation depended on the decisions on future activities on water supply and sanitation in extreme weather events by the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Bucharest, 23-25 November 2010). In the meanwhile, it was suggested that ensuring the appropriate consideration of health aspects in the pilot projects could be a point for cooperation with the Protocol on Water and Health.

28. Hungary announced that in the framework of its EU presidency in the first half of 2011 two events particularly relevant to the topic of climate change were planned:

- a) The future of European Waters – conference, 21-25 March 2011
- b) Conference on water scarcity and droughts, 30-31 March 2011, there could be a session or side event on water, human health and extreme events

Implementation of the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change

29. Representatives of several countries reported on their experiences and future plans with regard to the implementation of the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change². Hungary announced that it was considering to implement, together with Romania a project on the Moros. The Secretariat expressed that it would be useful to include this as well in the programme of pilot projects if it would be approved.

30. Ukraine announced that it would elaborate a strategy for adaptation of water resources to climate change, following the Guidance at the national level. Discussions should be held in parallel with the Dniester pilot project. In this regard, a political dialogue was planned to be held in first part of November and Ukraine asked for support from the secretariat.

31. ICWC raised the need to widen information about the Guidance among other UN agencies and other organization working on water and climate change. EPAMA (France) announced that it would assess the AMICE project (on the Meuse river) based on the Guidance.

Preparation of the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Astana

32. The secretariat briefed the Task Force about the outcomes of the Extended Bureau Meeting of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) (Geneva, 16-17 March 2010) in relation to the

² Available online at : http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/documents/Guidance_water_climate.pdf

preparations of the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” to be held on 21-23 September 2011 in Astana. Since the decision regarding the exact topics under the water theme would only be taken at the next meeting of the CEP in November 2010 the Task Force could not discuss about a substantial contribution to the Astana conference. However, the Task Force welcomed the idea to promote the work on water and climate change at the Ministerial Conference in any case through a side event and a document on the pilot projects.

Transboundary cooperation between UNECE and non-UNECE countries

33. The importance of transboundary cooperation in adapting to climate change was continuously reaffirmed during the meeting. In this regard it was stated that the UNECE region with the Water Convention and the variety of guidelines and recommendation developed within its framework, including the Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change, had a wealth of experience that could be shared with neighbouring non-UNECE countries. Moreover several UNECE countries represented in the meeting (Kazakhstan, Russian Federation) expressed interest in sharing experience on cooperation between UNECE and non-UNECE countries on transboundary waters. To this end it was suggested to organize a conference focusing on cooperation in basins shared by UNECE and non-UNECE countries in order to transmit to the neighbouring countries experiences with implementing the Water Convention. This would be in line with activity 1.1 under the programme of work under the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/29/Add.1) aimed to promote the rapid entry into force of the amendments to articles 25 and 26 of the Convention opening it to non-UNECE countries. The Water Convention secretariat welcomed this idea and would consult about it with the Bureau.
