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

Lessons learned and future work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins

**Prepared by the Netherlands and Germany as co-leaders of the
Task Force on Water and Climate**

Summary

During the period 2010–2012, the activities on water and climate change under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes included a programme of pilot projects and a platform for exchanging experience on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins. These activities have attracted a lot of interest, including from beyond the ECE region.

The present document summarizes lessons learned from the activities in this area, in line with programme area 3.1 of the Convention's Workplan for 2010–2012, adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its fifth session (ECE/MP.WAT/29/Add.1). The document also contains a proposal for future activities in this area for the next programme of work for the Convention for 2013–2015. The preparation of such a document for submission to the Meeting of the Parties was approved by the Convention Bureau at its fifteenth meeting (Geneva, 16–17 February 2012). Past and future activities in this area were also discussed and endorsed by the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at their joint meeting (Geneva, 3–4 July 2012), and the Working Groups subsequently requested the secretariat to submit the present document to the Meeting of the Parties at their sixth session (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2012/2–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2012/2, forthcoming).

The Meeting of the Parties may wish to:

- (a) Reconfirm the importance of the work on water and adaptation to climate change in the transboundary context and express its appreciation for the work achieved so far under the Task Force on Water and Climate in 2010–2012, as well as for the progress achieved in the pilot projects;
- (b) Thank the two co-Chairs of the Task Force, the Netherlands and Germany, for their wise leadership of this area of work in 2010–2012, and express its appreciation to the Netherlands and Switzerland for their readiness to co-lead the Task Force during the period 2013–2015;
- (c) Express its gratitude to all donors, partners and organizations which made possible the implementation of the climate change activities in 2010–2012, in particular Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden;
- (d) Discuss the proposed activities and decide on their inclusion in the Convention's draft programme of work for 2013–2015;
- (e) Invite countries and joint bodies sharing transboundary basins worldwide to indicate their interest in joining the programme of pilot projects/network of basins working on water and adaptation to climate change in a transboundary context by the end of December 2012;
- (f) Invite Parties and other partners to support the implementation of the activities on water and climate change by providing expertise and financial resources.

I. Current work on water and adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins¹

1. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) provides a sound framework for transboundary cooperation also in the context of adaptation to climate change. The Convention is supporting countries in developing transboundary adaptation strategies through guidance, capacity-building, projects on the ground and exchange of experience:

(a) The *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change*² 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. It provides step-by-step advice for decision makers and water managers 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 cooperation on climate change adaptation is promoted through the programme of pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins,³ supporting countries in jointly adapting water management to climate change. The eight pilot projects aim to strengthen the capacity of countries to adapt to climate change and to create positive examples demonstrating the benefits of, and possible mechanisms for, transboundary cooperation in adaptation planning and implementation. Four of the pilot projects are implemented by the Convention secretariat 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), whereas four others have their own implementation and funding framework. They include joint impact and vulnerability assessment and the development of a basin-wide adaptation strategy;

(c) Collection and exchange of experience is ensured through a platform for sharing experience on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, which includes regular meetings and annual workshops as well as a web-based platform. Three workshops have been held — in 2010, 2011 and 2012 — within the platform for exchanging experience on adaptation to climate change in the transboundary context. They provided a forum for sharing experience between the pilot projects and other ongoing initiatives, as well as an analysis of the specific challenges of adapting water management to climate change in the transboundary context. In addition, a core group of representatives of the pilot projects has been created, which meets annually and enables a direct exchange of experience between the projects.

¹ More information is available in the report on implementation of the programme of work for 2010–2012 (ECE/MP.WAT/2012/1).

² United Nations publication, Sales No. 09.II.E.14. Available from www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/documents/Guidance_water_climate.pdf.

³ 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.

II. Outcomes of the activities and rationale for future activities

2. The activities have resulted in increased awareness of the importance of transboundary cooperation in climate change adaptation, as well as improved shared knowledge and experience in this regard through the pilot projects and platform for exchanging experience. The Water Convention is recognized as one of the leading organizations in the area of transboundary cooperation in adaptation worldwide, and is increasingly solicited to provide input on this issue in other events and processes, such as the development of the planned European Union Adaptation Strategy. From this perspective, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Water Convention is also contributing to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and in particular its Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change (Nairobi Work Programme), for example, at the UNFCCC technical workshop on water, climate change impacts and adaptation strategies (Mexico City, 18–20 July 2012).

3. The activities also already had some concrete impacts on the ground through the pilot projects. Due to different circumstances and conditions, the pilot projects have progressed at different speeds. Most of them have developed a joint climate change impact assessment and are now at the stage of joint vulnerability assessment, which will be followed by the development of a joint adaptation strategy. Due to a variety of reasons, such as political instability in the project countries, administrative issues, etc., some of the projects are expected to end in 2013, later than originally planned.

4. In some cases, the cooperation on adaptation to climate change has been a driver for a general enhancement of basin cooperation. Most of those involved in the pilot projects, including for the Chu Talas, Neman and Dniester basins, have expressed interest in continuing the activities and in potential follow-up projects.

5. The platform for exchanging experience has received a lot of interest. Participation in the annual workshops has exceeded all expectations, with a peak of more than 150 participants in 2011. In addition, those participating in the pilot projects very much appreciated the opportunity for exchanging experience through the regular meetings of the core group of pilot projects.

6. The programme has also attracted significant interest from beyond the ECE region. The *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change* is being used in many basins outside the region, and the annual workshops have increasingly seen participation from outside Europe. This corresponds to the process of opening the Convention globally, with the expected entry into force in 2012 or 2013 of the amendment to the Convention enabling accession by non-ECE countries. Several basins from outside the ECE region have also indicated preliminary interest in joining the pilot projects programme. It is therefore proposed to officially establish the climate change activities as one of the first “global” activities under the ECE Water Convention.

7. In addition, as an outcome of the Sixth World Water Forum (Marseille, 12–17 March 2012) — and in particular its target 3.3.2 on the assessment and handling of uncertainties of the impacts of climate change on water resources — the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the French Water Academy have requested the Water Convention, together with the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), to lead a global network of basin organizations working on climate change adaptation. Such a network of basins could be a logical continuation of the current pilot projects programme, which so far has only included basins from the ECE region.

8. Furthermore, it has been shown in most of the pilot projects and the platform that climate change should be considered together with other drivers and pressures on water resources, such as economic and demographic development, which often have a greater influence on water resources than climate change. This calls for a holistic and integrated view and for considering climate change as one of the global challenges. In addition, interactions between adaptation and mitigation need to be considered, including the contribution of the water sector to climate change. For this reason, the future activities on water and climate change adaptation could consider aspects of green economy and the water- food-energy- ecosystems nexus.

III. Proposed future activities on water and climate change adaptation

9. Future activities on water and climate change adaptation will build on the existing ones, the lessons learned and on previous discussions within the Task Force and the pilot projects, as well as the platform for exchanging experience. Some activities might be considered for the medium or longer term, for example for the following triennium, 2016–2018.

10. It is proposed that the programme of work for 2013–2015 contain four complementary activity areas regarding climate change adaptation in transboundary basins:

- (a) Collection of good practices and lessons learned;
- (b) Programme of pilot projects — network of basins working on climate change adaptation;
- (c) Global platform for exchanging experience on water and climate change adaptation in transboundary basins;
- (d) Promotion and partnerships.

A. Objectives

11. The objectives of any future activities on water and climate change adaptation are to:

- (a) Compile, analyse and publish good practices and lessons learned;
- (b) Promote cooperation in the development of adaptation strategies and their implementation in transboundary basins globally, for example, through the programme of pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the Water Convention;
- (c) Provide a platform for exchanging experience, good practices and lessons learned regarding adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins.

B. Description

1. Collection of good practices and lessons learned

12. Significant knowledge and experience has been accumulated on how to adapt to climate change in transboundary basins since the publication of the *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change* in 2009, through the pilot projects and other similar initiatives, projects presented at the workshops of the platform for exchanging experience and others. Additional experience will be collected through the continuation of the pilot

projects programme and the creation of a global network of basin organizations working on water and climate change adaptation. At the same time, more and more organizations are working on guidance documents on water and climate, some of them also focusing on transboundary aspects.

13. It is therefore proposed to compile, analyse and synthesize existing knowledge, experience, good practices and lessons learned on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, based on concrete experiences from the ECE pilot projects and other similar activities, such as in other basins within the INBO network. This could result in a handbook, a collection of good practices, experiences and lessons learned complementing the *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change*, developed under the Water Convention in 2007–2009. The good practices will be made available in electronic form, on the Internet or the web platform and in a printed publication. The collection of good practices will be elaborated and published in cooperation with other organizations, such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), UN-Water and its Thematic Priority Area on Water and Climate, UNFCCC, UNESCO, INBO, the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Water and Climate Coalition and others working on water and climate change, in particular in the transboundary context.

14. The collection of good practices and experience could be organized in the second half of the triennium, i.e., from 2014–2015, under the core group of pilot projects, the Task Force on Water and Climate and/or a drafting group established for this purpose. A possible revision of the *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change* could follow on this basis in the following triennium, 2016–2018, when more knowledge, for example from the implementation of the pilot projects, will be available.

2. Programme of pilot projects — network of basins working on climate change adaptation

15. The programme of pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins will be continued in two complementary ways:

(a) By promoting the implementation of previously agreed adaptation strategies in some of the ongoing pilot project basins, for example the Dniester and Chu Talas. This may include, depending on the basin, the development of an action plan for climate change adaptation, prioritization of measures, identification of funding sources and implementation of some first low-regret or no-regret adaptation measures;

(b) By adding new pilot project basins, including at the borders of the ECE region or in other regions, which will be mainly implemented by other organizations and will follow a similar approach in the development of adaptation measures as those in the period 2010–2012. Such additional basins should formally express their interest, should be active in the area of water and adaptation to climate change and able to contribute to and benefit from the regular exchange of experience. Some basins and organizations from within and outside the ECE region working on water and climate change, such as the Drin and the Mekong basins as well as the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), have already expressed interest in joining the network. Other interested basins are encouraged to fill out the template circulated for this purpose by the end of 2012.

16. New basins will primarily work on their adaptation activities themselves; the Water Convention secretariat will only be involved in some of them or to a limited extent. As in the current programme of work, work in different basins will focus on different aspects of climate change adaptation as decided by the riparian countries themselves. Other drivers on water resources, balancing multiple uses and awareness-raising will be considered as appropriate.

17. This will enable the creation of a global network of basins working on adaptation to climate change aimed at sharing experiences, comparing different methodologies for adapting to climate change and promoting a shared vision between the participating basins. The global network will be established in cooperation with other organizations, such as INBO and GWP and its planned Integrated Drought Management Programme in Central and Eastern Europe, to be established jointly with WMO.

3. Building a global platform for exchanging experience and discussion on water and climate change adaptation in transboundary basins

18. The platform for exchanging experience among Governments and organizations will be transformed into a global platform, including the organization of international workshops in 2013–2015 and annual meetings of the Task Force on Water and Climate, as well as regular annual meetings of the core group on pilot projects. The platform should focus on its unique elements, mainly the intergovernmental nature of the work and transboundary issues of adaptation. In addition, close links will be established with similar initiatives, such as the UN-Water Thematic Priority Area on Transboundary Waters, the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the Water and Climate Coalition, regional centres and networks.

19. The global workshops (approximately two within the three-year workplan period) could focus on specific topics within the field of climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, targeting issues as they are raised in the network. The platform will as much as possible aim at integrating other related sectors, such as health, agriculture, navigation, tourism, fisheries and hydropower, by inviting experts from these sectors to the workshops.

20. Depending on the number of basins in the pilot projects programme and their location, as well as the resources available, regional workshops or pilot project meetings will be organized, in addition to the global meetings, possibly some of them by partner organizations, in order to exchange more regionally specific information and experience.

21. A workshop on flood risk management in transboundary basins, building on experience in basins within and outside the ECE region, including consideration of lessons learned with the implementation of the European Union Directive on the assessment and management of flood risks,⁴ will also be organized (most probably in late 2014 or early 2015, under the leadership of Germany).

22. Cooperation will be expanded with other global partners, in particular UNFCCC and its Nairobi Work Programme, where water is now receiving greater attention. This could include sharing information and knowledge on adaptation in water management. Direct inputs into the work on water and adaptation under UNFCCC might be provided on request of the relevant UNFCCC bodies. The UNECE platform could further function as an informal network among water experts which countries can use for facilitating preparation of their inputs on adaptation and water for the UNFCCC process. Options for cooperation will be explored and, if viable, implemented in the workplan period.

23. For the platform to be truly global, open to participation by all United Nations Member States, additional resources are required, for example for travel of eligible experts and interpretation into all six official United Nations languages. Establishing a global platform would support the opening of the Convention, one of the strategic priorities under the Convention.

⁴ Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007.

4. Promotion and partnerships

24. As explained above, through its different activities as well as through numerous partnerships, the Water Convention has gained international recognition for working on the specific and often neglected aspect of transboundary cooperation in adaptation, which is now receiving increasing attention from the adaptation community. It is therefore necessary to further promote the activities on water and climate under the Water Convention at the national and international levels and to establish and continue strategic partnerships. This includes partnerships with other international organizations working in this field, presenting activities at international events, such as the World Water Forum and World Water Week and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Conferences.

C. Funding

25. As before, funding will be coming from different sources. Some pilot projects will continue to be funded through ENVSEC. New pilot projects and/or those outside the ECE region will mainly be implemented and funded by partner organizations, e.g., by river basin organizations, other regional commissions or GWP.

26. Continuing pilot projects may receive some follow-up funding from ENVESC and other sources; however, in the long term it is expected that the countries or river basin organizations will fund the necessary adaptation measures from their own budget or, alternatively, from international funding sources, such as the UNFCCC adaptation fund and bilateral funding.

27. Sufficient funding will be needed for the platform for exchanging experience, the workshops and Task Force meetings. These costs will be higher than previously due to the global nature of the activities.

D. Partners

28. As in the past, partners will include ENVSEC and its partner organizations UNDP, UNEP, OSCE and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe.

29. Moreover, it is expected that the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), as well as WMO and its different programmes and bodies such as the WMO Regional Association VI (Europe) Working Group on Climate and Hydrology, will continue to be key partner organizations.

30. For the globalization of the activities on water and climate, in particular the inclusion of basins worldwide in the programme and the creation of a global network of basin organizations, a wider partnership is necessary, including with UNESCO, INBO, the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the Water and Climate Alliance, the European Commission, the respective basin organizations, other regional commissions, regional climate centres, UNFCCC and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cooperation will also be sought with GEF.
