

REGIONAL FORUM

ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNECE REGION

GENEVA | 1-2 March 2018



SHARING WATER: BALANCING COMPETING NEEDS IN A CONTEXT OF DECLINING RESOURCES



1 March 2018, 16:30-18:00

Room 18, International Conference Centre Geneva

In English, with interpretation to Russian

Objectives

The objectives of this round table are to share experience about how to manage declining water resources through integrated planning, institutional arrangements and promotion of both policies and technical measures that strike a balance between development, sustainable use of resources and environmental protection.

Core questions:

- How can water needs of different sectors and the environment be balanced, including in the face of increasing water scarcity?
- What kind of intersectoral coordination and planning arrangements are proving effective?
- How are countries dealing with conflicting water uses and trade-offs in transboundary basins?
- How are countries and basins coping with growing water scarcity?

Background:

Water scarcity is a growing concern in many parts of the UNECE region. Population growth, urbanization, increased demands in irrigated agriculture and inadequate water management are important determinants of water scarcity. This is accelerated by the effects of climate change which result in an increase in the frequency and intensity of droughts. Scarcity has serious consequences for society and threatens sustainable development. It can negatively affect water supply and sanitation services, health of a population, agricultural production or energy generation. Consequently, the implications for economic development are potentially significant. Scarcity may also affect the environment and biodiversity by reducing river flows and degrading water quality or even lead to conflict within and across countries and exacerbate migration.

Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal on water (SDG 6). Regarding water and sanitation, the scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is much broader and higher, respectively, compared to the earlier development goals. Among the aims is to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate (target 6.5). All water uses need to be considered, as well as impacts from measures to achieve sectoral goals. Transboundary cooperation and intersectoral coordination may be effective strategies to securing availability, quality and manageable variability of water resources.

The Agenda 2030 has important interlinkages between the SDGs on water and sanitation (SDG 6) and energy (SDG 7), food security (SDG 2) and ecosystems (SDG 15) as well as the climate goal (SDG 13). For example, water and its management are crucial inputs to enable sustainable energy transition, including development of renewable energy generation. A series of assessments of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus carried out under the UNECE Water Convention since 2013 demonstrates that the synergies between sectoral actions provide valuable opportunities for benefits but the trade-offs also need to be accounted for.¹

The trade-offs may become particularly acute and problematic when there is water scarcity: Priorities need to be set and measures taken to improve efficiency or perhaps to even shift to less water intensive activities. Climate change introduces uncertainty and risks, and some parts of the UNECE region are expected to become particularly heavily affected. In the face of these challenges, transboundary and regional level cooperation and coordination are essential. The work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the Water Convention since 2006 has shown the benefits of addressing climate change and water scarcity at the basin level. Among others, improved demand management and resource use efficiency are emerging as possible solutions. The “nexus approach” has a high potential to increase efficiency, reduce trade-offs, build synergies and improve governance while protecting ecosystems in the context of the interlinked SDGs referred to above.

In the roundtable, diverse experiences from countries of the UNECE region will be shared about how water use between sectors is balanced and coherence between policies improved. Good approaches to

¹ The nexus assessments are available at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub.html>

integrated planning and coordination across sectors and across borders will be discussed. This exchange of experience will contribute to better understanding of water-use related trade-offs in connection with the achievement of some sectoral SDGs, and ways in which they can be minimized. It will also help to identify measures to address water scarcity at the transboundary and national levels.

Case studies:

Country	Title and area of case study
Finland	Balancing river flow regulation and water use for energy and for managing hydrological extremes
Hungary	Water allocation in transboundary basins: Hungary's experience
Italy	Sustainable Development Solutions: the role of the private sector (tbc)
Kazakhstan	Water use efficiency in agriculture, working across sectors (agriculture, energy) to ensure water for different uses (tbc)
Serbia	Towards sustainable energy with energy efficiency: co-benefits for environment, water and climate
Spain	Measures to address water scarcity – water use efficiency in agriculture and beyond (tbc)
Switzerland	Improving water quality and protecting ecosystems through multi-level action

Linkages with other SDGs: The discussion at the roundtable focuses on links between clean water and sanitation (SDG6) and some water-related SDGs, notably those on energy (SDG7), food security (SDG2) and ecosystems (SDG 15). Particular attention will be paid to 6.5 on Integrated Water Resources Management, including through transboundary cooperation, and target 6.4 on addressing water scarcity. The roundtable seeks to highlight practical experiences about coordination and planning arrangements as well as policy and technical solutions that help progress towards several SDGs or address possible trade-offs.

Target audience: This round table will be of interest to policymakers and other stakeholders involved in water management, energy and agriculture sectors, adaptation to climate change and environment protection. It will also be of interest to Government representatives engaged in related cooperation and to academia and civil society representatives active in these fields.

Organizer: UNECE Water Convention secretariat

Key resource persons: Mr. Stefan Uhlenbrook, Coordinator, World Water Assessment Programme (moderator), Mr. Thomas Stratenwerth, Head of Water Management Division, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany (rapporteur)

Background documents:

UN-Water, 2016: Water and Sanitation Interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (<http://www.unwater.org/publications/water-sanitation-interlinkages-across-2030-agenda-sustainable-development/>)

UNECE, 2015: Reconciling resource uses in transboundary basins: assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41427>)

UNECE, 2017: Deployment of Renewable Energy: The Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus Approach to Support the Sustainable Development Goals (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=46026>)

UNECE, 2015: Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417>)

UNECE, 2009: Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=11658>)