



Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins

To be held in Geneva, 4-5 December 2019
 Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland,
 starting at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 4 December 2019

INFORMATION NOTICE

I. Background and objectives

Integrated Water Resources Management requires diverse information and data, including about hydrometeorology, ambient water quality (physico-chemical, hydrobiological), uses and functions of water resources, and water dependent ecosystems. This breadth of information needs implies that different authorities need to be involved in assessing and monitoring water resources. The basin approach calls for forming a coherent picture of the situation at basin level, requiring in transboundary basins and aquifers exchange of information and data across borders.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) sets out a general obligation by which Parties must cooperate on the basis of equality and reciprocity. Data and information exchange on transboundary waters is also an obligation specific to riparian Parties, and is one of the fundamental tasks of joint bodies such as river basin commissions, established to implement transboundary agreements and to enhance cooperation.

Among the recognized benefits of data and information exchange in transboundary basins are that it provides a better understanding of the main pressures and the status of waters as well as knowledge gaps relating to a particular transboundary water system. Such an exchange also allows for better appreciation of the issues and problems faced by co-riparian countries; highlights improved possibilities for early warning and alarm systems; helps harmonize methodologies and standards for data gathering, and leads to better project design and planning of measures. Without developing a shared understanding through a common information basis, agreeing about actions that need to be taken and establishing effective joint management and related decision-making may prove difficult. Extending the exchange of information to impacts (ecological and socioeconomic) and management responses (measures taken) can further support taking cooperative action. Beyond the initial challenge of political willingness to initiate data and information exchange, on the practical

side, among the main challenges remains data and information comparability. Comparability can be improved by harmonizing approaches, classifications, definitions, indicators and data formats, among others, and by applying common standards. Exchange of data and information can, when becoming regular and established, feature shared information systems, including further defined data management and uniform procedures.

In order to support implementation of the Water Convention's monitoring and assessment related provisions, several Guidelines on monitoring and assessment were developed in the 1990s and 2000s, including the *Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters*¹ as well as several technical guidelines specific to transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters². This guidance has been tested in pilot projects on both surface and groundwaters, and experience about its practical application has been gathered. In the past years, the work on monitoring and assessment has been integrated into different thematic areas under the Convention. It is now again in focus of attention due to the significant challenges that remain but also due to the global opening of the Water Convention and the developments including progress in monitoring technology (for example, remote sensing/earth observation, automated monitoring, crowdsourcing by sensors associated with mobile applications), data availability and tools.

During the past years, a variety of global and regional initiatives has been undertaken, including with support from the partners in organizing the workshop, which are contributing to improved availability of water data. These include, just to mention a few, the World Water Data Initiative (WWDI), Water Productivity Open-access portal, SDG6 Data Portal under UN-Water and the World Water Quality Assessment. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2017 baseline process of monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation has drawn attention to gaps and challenges in monitoring the status of waters and pressures on them based on country-led data evidence. Related to water quality and water related ecosystems, for example, there are significant gaps. While overall new information sources are emerging worldwide, official exchange of data and information at the basin level or bilateral still maintains its importance, perhaps increasing emphasis on exchange of information about plans and measures, and specific management issues.

As part of the SDGs, the international community has agreed to 'implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate' by 2030, and data and information play a key role in supporting progress. The results from 2017 pilot reporting under the Water Convention and reporting on the SDG 6.5.2 provides insights to whether data collection and exchange or joint monitoring are a part of the scope of a particular cooperation arrangement, types of information exchanged as well as challenges in these areas. The operationality criteria of SDG indicator 6.5.2 (proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation) include whether basin countries exchange data and information at least once per year, and the results show that in many basins, the cooperation arrangements in place do not meet this criterion. Already the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters (UNECE, 2011), pointed to issues related to monitoring cooperation, data availability across sectors and diverse approaches in assessing water quality across in the European and Asian parts of the UNECE region.

Considering all these developments, it is clear that exchange of data and information exchange remains pertinent and challenging in transboundary basins, but also that needs and most appropriate solutions vary. The Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention considered it timely to take stock of experiences gained worldwide and share lessons about exchange in the transboundary context, as part of the Programme of work 2019-2021 and in particular its Programme area 2, "Supporting monitoring, assessment and information sharing in transboundary basins". This area's objectives are to support countries in initiating or further developing joint or coordinated monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, covering both

¹ Available from www.unece.org/index.php?id=11683.

² All the publications are available at: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50216>

water quantity and quality aspects, and ensure exchange of information between riparian countries. More specifically, among the activities is the organization of a global workshop on data and information exchange (activity 2.1) in order to review relevant experiences, discuss good practices and develop recommendations on the exchange of information on transboundary basins and aquifers, taking into account, among others, new information technologies.

The main objectives of the workshop are to:

1. Discuss practical experiences, on the basis of a range of initiatives and basin or aquifer cases, related to different key issues in information and data exchange that has brought results and has allowed to overcome challenges, considering different solutions – lighter and more comprehensive ones, institutionally and in terms of resource requirements;
2. Draw some recommendations on the themes highlighted at the workshop which can be taken on in further work with support of the Water Convention and the workshop’s organizing partners

The conclusions from the workshop will be used in the future work under the Water Convention to foster transboundary cooperation and provide assistance to countries and joint bodies, such as transboundary basin organizations. In particular, the conclusions will guide the discussions in the meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment which will meet just after the workshop (Geneva, 6 December 2019).

Format of the workshop and the sessions

The format of the workshop includes a mix of plenary sessions, short presentations to smaller audience in a world café (or marketplace format) and group work.

The following aspects will be covered:

- **Identifying the relevant types of information for exchange for the context and stage of cooperation:** Keynote presentations illustrating different approaches, for example, establishing the baseline and characterizing river basins/aquifers, importance of determining the right determinants to link pressures to the state of water resources.
- Both **legal and institutional framework** for exchange of data and information (and other governance aspects); and physical **infrastructure for collecting and managing data**, will be discussed, highlighting both lighter and more advanced or comprehensive options.
- **Achieving comparability:** The value of internationally agreed definitions and reporting frameworks for statistical data as well as standards for facilitating data exchange will be discussed. Comparison of methods and intercalibration are also a part of the scope.
- **Specifics of different waters:** Specifics of different types of transboundary waters, rivers, lakes and groundwaters, relevant for data and information exchange will be explored in group work. Links to coastal waters and water-dependent ecosystems will also be elaborated on.
- Session devoted to **How to get information exchange started, progressively changed or participation broadened** aims to support countries and joint bodies grappling with such transitions
- Presentations devoted to **Sustainability of monitoring** will address financing issues, how for example technology can improve cost effectiveness, and how international data sources/initiatives can support countries; but also other aspects of sustainability such as institutional questions and robustness in the face of climate change.

An overview of the different sessions is given below in the form of a table.

	4 December: Data and information exchange workshop (Day 1)	5 December: Data and information exchange workshop (Day 2)	6 December: Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment
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AM 10 am -1 pm	Opening Key note presentations and the world café Identifying the most relevant types of information for the purpose, the context and the stage of cooperation. Establishing a baseline. Linking pressures to the state of water resources	Plenary session: Achieving comparability Group work: Specifics of transboundary waters: rivers, lakes and groundwaters. Links to coastal waters and water-dependent ecosystems	Information from the reporting under the Convention and reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2. Gathering feedback on the guidelines on monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters developed under the Convention
Lunch break			
PM 3 pm - 6 pm	Plenary session: Legal and institutional framework for exchange of data and information (and other governance aspects); Infrastructure for collecting and managing data: different degrees of harmonization and sharing, optimizing at the transboundary level.	How to get information exchange started, progressively changed or participation broadened Sustainability of monitoring and data exchange (finance, technology, institutional responsibilities, robustness etc.). How international initiatives can support.	Projects on the ground and regional events Information and data needs for sustainable water allocation Cooperation with partners. Strategic discussion about future work on monitoring and assessment

II. Participation and call for examples and experiences

The priority target audience includes country officials (ministries and agencies), practitioners, river basin organizations, project managers, international organizations, research institutes and academia as well as NGOs working on monitoring and assessment of water resources, managing data and information or related policy.

Expected participation to the workshop from different regions of the world will make it possible to exchange broadly experience in tackling challenges related to exchange of data and information, benefitting Governments, basin organizations and regional organizations in their particular contexts.

III. Organization of work

The workshop will be held on 4 to 5 December 2019, back-to-back with the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group (6 December 2019).

The workshop will consist of plenary presentations and discussion sessions as well as smaller group discussions. Working languages will be English, French, Russian and Spanish.

A detailed programme will be issued in November 2019.

IV. Partners involved

The workshop will be organized under the leadership of the Governments of Finland and Senegal, with the support of the UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention. Funding for the workshop is provided by Finland, Sweden and Germany. The Netherlands is providing in-kind support.

The following Parties and organizations are partners in organizing this workshop: Finland, Senegal, International Network of Basin Organizations, World Meteorological Organization, UN Environment, International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), World Bank Group, EUWI+ Programme.

V. Practical information

The workshop will start at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 4 December and end at 5.30 p.m. on Thursday, 5 December 2019. It will be held in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, in room Salle XI. The workshop will be followed by the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, which will be held on 6 December 2019 in Geneva. The working languages will be English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition and developing countries may apply for financial support to facilitate their participation in the meeting using the financial support request form available on the meeting website. Requests for financial support should be submitted to the Water Convention secretariat (water.convention@un.org) as soon as possible, but not later **than Wednesday, 30 October 2019**. No application will be accepted after this deadline.

Participants requiring entry visas should inform the UNECE secretariat as soon as possible. Since Switzerland is part of the Schengen Zone, obtaining a visa might take up to 5 weeks. Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to submit their application as soon as possible and initiate visa procedures at least four weeks before the meeting.

Delegates attending the meeting are requested to register by **20 November 2019** using the following link: <https://uncdb.unece.org/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=XjcPSI>. In case of difficulties, please contact the secretariat by e-mail (water.convention@unece.org). On their way to the meeting, participants should obtain an identification badge at the Pass and Identification Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva Security and Safety Section located at the Pregny Gate, 14 Avenue de la Paix (see map on the UNECE website). Please allow enough time for this.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available online at: <http://www.unece.org/meetings/practical.htm>

Further information and relevant material will be made available on the following website in due course: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50216>

For information about the monitoring and assessment work under the Water Convention: https://www.unece.org/env/water/assessment_activ.html