



UNESCO and INBO coordinate Topic 3.1. on basin management and transboundary cooperation at the Fifth World Water Forum

On 20 and 21 March 2009, UNESCO and INBO coordinated the five sessions on 'Basin Management and Transboundary Cooperation' of Theme 3 'Managing and Protecting Water Resources and their Supply Systems to Meet Human and Environmental Needs' at the Fifth World Water Forum, Istanbul,

Turkey.

213 proposals of contributions were received by the Coordinators of Topic 3.1. This was the result of a long-year process and in particular a "call for contributions" to Topic 3.1., sent in March 2008 and widely distributed directly and through the website of the 5th World Water Forum. All the contributors were considered stakeholders to Topic 3.1., meaning they were considered as interested in and potentially attending Topic 3.1. to take part in the debates. Among the 213 contributions received, 61 formal speakers, retained on the basis of criteria including geographic balance, disciplinary balance, the mandate of the institutions, intervened as formal speakers during the 12 hours of sessions.

Based on practical experiences, the sessions' dialogues addressed the critical conditions for the enforcement of transboundary water cooperation and basin management, answering pertinent questions such as: How to achieve hydrosolidarity? How to involve stakeholders in decision-making processes? Which tools and mechanisms are needed to reach these objectives? Issues, such as whether "international" and "transboundary" are equivalent when referring to water resources, the methods for financing and implementing common infrastructures, the ratification of the United Nations Convention of 1997 or the management of transboundary aquifers, were discussed. The five sessions, of which half of the time was devoted to formal presentations and the other half to debates, allowed various interesting contributions to be presented, as well as many diverging views to be expressed.

Taking account of the various interventions in Topic 3.1., as well as the many contributions received on the Forum's Virtual Meeting Space or sent directly to the session coordinators by the 213 session stakeholders, some findings and recommendations, reflecting the opinion of the majority, can be summarized as follows: Strong political will and long term commitment are pre requisites for sustainable basin management and transboundary cooperation in the face of global changes.

Significant progress has already been made since the 1990s. The gained experience allows now to say that integrated water resources management at the level of river and aquifers basins is a real advantage.

The progress made so far is insufficient to meet the requirements of a globally changing world. Adaptive strategies focused on maintaining the integrity of river basins and aquifer systems should become the norm in national and international policy. This will require:

- Surface water to be managed in river and lake basin units and groundwater to be managed in aquifer systems units;
- Essential quantitative and qualitative information on resources, to be obtained and made accessible. This information should be used as the objective basis for dialogue, negotiation, decision-making and evaluation of undertaken actions, as well as coordination of financing from the various donors;
- The participation in decision-making of the concerned Governmental Administrations

and local Authorities, the representatives of different categories of users and associations for environmental protection or of public interest.

- Focusing on long-term objectives and implementing well conceived management plans or master plans in given time horizons;
- Significant increase in training and educational programmes for responding to the adaptation needs in cooperation building and basin management;
- Mobilization of financial resources to suit the different and diverse needs of countries based on their socio economies, cultural priorities, and geopolitical considerations.

As global inventories of transboundary basins, transboundary aquifer systems and their technical and social peculiarities become clear, through the global programmes supported by PCCP, World Water Assessment Programme, ISARM, EU-WFD, EUWI, INBO-AP, the GEF and others, available conventions and agreements should be ratified by the riparian States. Furthermore adapted cooperative institutions should be created and cooperation agreements crafted at global and basin and aquifer level to achieve necessary and sound cooperation.

Existing and developing international legal instruments and adapted tools and experiences concerning transboundary water resources management should be further disseminated through efforts of agencies and networks promoting cooperation around water resources.