



## 3<sup>rd</sup> HIGH-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION “WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT” 2018-2028

10-13 June 2024, Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan

### INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 4 - WATER FOR COOPERATION

#### *Concept Paper*

**Title**

Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda.

**Subtitle**

Fostering trust and stakeholder commitment for coordinated governance arrangements to implement accelerated transboundary water cooperation based on international law and best practices.

**Co-organizers**

Switzerland (Mr. Simon Zbinden) and Senegal (H.E. Dr Cheikh Tidiane Dieye) in partnership with UNECE (Ms. Sonja Koeppel) and IHP-UNESCO (Mr. Abou Amani, IAC)

**Background information and rationale**

Water cooperation across borders and sectors has proven to generate significant shared benefits that accelerate progress through SDGs. Effective and sustainable transboundary water cooperation can catalyse regional integration, drive cooperation in other areas, or build sustainable peace. There is a cost to non-cooperation: it is at best a waste of resources and, in the worst cases, can multiply risks that can contribute to the destabilisation of societies and threaten security. Transboundary water cooperation is about managing shared waters, mutual interests, and constructive reciprocity. It requires trust and commitment for coordinated governance arrangements providing the enabling environment in which to advance development goals across multiple levels, sectors, and stakeholders. Intergovernmental arrangements are only achieved in a setting of trust and transparency.

According to the third reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation, only 26 countries out of the 153 worldwide sharing waters, have all their shared waters covered by operational arrangements for water cooperation. Hence, cooperation in most transboundary basins is not adequate to deal with future challenges related to climate variability, and progress is too slow. This requires increased ambition of the world’s efforts to foster enabling legal, policy and institutional environments as well as economic, financial, and political incentives for cooperation, across borders and sectors, over transboundary surface and groundwater, from source to sea.

Where coordinated governance arrangements lack adaptability or resilience to attend contemporary challenges due to insufficient trust and commitment, it becomes imperative to build up these vital elements. Governments should take responsibility, in partnership with non-governmental actors and with support from the international community, for instituting governance arrangements based on the principles of international law and good practices. Joint bodies, such as river basin organisations, are key drivers for such arrangements. The capacity of joint bodies should be strengthened to realise their multiple roles, including to engage with water-related sectors and stakeholders at multiple levels, coordinate basin plans and climate adaptation strategies, leverage innovative financing solutions, and maintain common data and information systems. The UN Water Conventions provide important support in this regard, while assessing the criteria for “operational” transboundary arrangements as per SDG indicator 6.5.2 can be informative on best practices and gaps.

### **Cross-cutting issues**

Transboundary water action unlocks social, environmental, and political benefits that can be built on to develop sustainable and resilient cooperation and overcome bottlenecks towards mutually beneficial outcomes, including beyond water per se. This encompasses strengthening the scientific and information base, enhancing the capacities at all levels, improving the governance frameworks, nurturing transformative innovation as well as mobilising novel financing and funding streams. Greater cooperation is needed to advance cross-sectoral approaches that recognise the foundational value of water across SDGs, while managing trade-offs and maximising shared benefits.

### **Link with results and recommendations of the UN 2023 Water conference**

The Interactive Dialogue 4 of the 2023 UN Water Conference has come up with the following four recommendations (translated from its original French version):

- 1. Strengthen cooperation, particularly at cross-border level, as a prerequisite for tackling water-related challenges and for ensuring sustainable development, regional integration, building lasting peace and promoting cooperation in other fields.*
- 2. Strengthen basin organizations and support their efforts towards inclusive, sustainable, and integrated water resource management, by promoting the exchange of information, experiences and best practices: in this, transboundary aquifer basins should receive increased attention.*
- 3. Accelerate the establishment of cooperation arrangements where they do not yet exist, and strengthen existing arrangements to make them effective for the growing challenges, based on the principles of international law and the two UN Water Conventions.*
- 4. Increase funding for cross-border and cross-sector cooperation by mobilizing additional public and private funding, as well as innovative financing models such as mixed financing.*

In any aspect, enhancing transboundary water cooperation can only be built and finally succeed in an environment characterised by trust and transparency. Key message two above highlights the role of basin organisations and the importance of strengthening them and supporting their efforts to promote inclusive, sustainable, and integrated management of water resources, by promoting the exchange of information, experience, and good practice. Basin organisations have the capacity to convene a variety of basin stakeholders from different levels and different sectors. They are crucial to build trust and transparency as a prerequisite to coordinated governance arrangements.

### **Main questions for discussion**

- a) What are opportunities in accelerating progress and have operational arrangements and joint bodies for water cooperation in place for all transboundary rivers, lakes, and aquifers by 2030?
- b) What needs to be done (better) to build trust and promote commitment among governments

and other stakeholders leading to new or improved transboundary governance arrangements?

- c) How can the role of joint bodies, in particular river basin organisations, be strengthened to build trust and enable inclusive governance arrangements among river stakeholders of all levels?
- d) Is there any conducive role to play for the private sector? If yes, how can trust and opportunities be built for private sector actors to engage, collaborate in transboundary water cooperation?
- e) Which innovations and transformative solutions have the prospects to reach inclusive and cross sector governance arrangements in support of integrated water resources management by 2030?

### **Key messages**

- 1) Strengthen genuine and inclusive cooperation, particularly at transboundary level as a prerequisite for tackling water-related challenges and ensuring sustainable development, regional integration, the building of lasting peace and promoting cooperation in other areas.
- 2) Accelerate the establishment of coordinated governance arrangements and cooperation agreements where they do not exist yet, and strengthen existing ones to enable them to meet the growing challenges based on the principles of international law and the UN Water Conventions.
- 3) Build trust and promote commitment among all stakeholders, in particular among the respective governments, as an essential prerequisite for new operational transboundary water management arrangements or the enhancement of existing ones.
- 4) Reinforce and sustain basin organisations and their efforts towards inclusive, sustainable, and integrated management of water resources, by promoting the exchange of information, experience, and good practices, with a specific attention to transboundary aquifers and groundwater.

### **Follow-up actions and commitments**

- Accelerate the achievement of SDG target 6.5, by reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2, where not yet done so, and developing or implementing operational arrangements for water cooperation. Also, where relevant, promote the recognition of States of the benefits of the UN Water Conventions and facilitate their accession.
- Continued commitment of the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition –a diverse, multi-stakeholder coalition of actors from around the world with a wide range of functions and capacities launched in 2022 – having set out to promote and support both the sustaining and the advancement of transboundary water cooperation in the context of the Water Action Agenda and SDG 6, in light of growing risks, including those linked to climate change. ([TWCC](#))
- Follow-up on the Initiative 30-30-30 of the Global Youth Movement for Water aiming by 2030 at young people under the age of 30 representing 30% of stakeholders participating in mechanisms, consultations and decision-making processes relating to water management and governance, as well as in the climate transition space. ([GYMW](#))
- Mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation throughout all nine countries the Niger River runs through by strengthening the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) and its member countries in their regional planning, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms. This involves climate-smart agriculture, wetland restoration and other nature-based solutions to overcome the region's increasingly erratic rainfall and desertification. ([CLIM'O\\_NB](#))

### **Program and proposed structure**

The two hours session is to display new knowledge, explore innovations and highlight best practices in transboundary water cooperation in following up the UN 2023 Water Conference to accelerating change. It will showcase progress and prospects in solutions enhancing transboundary water