

# **HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WATER COOPERATION**

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## **HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON WATER COOPERATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

**Keynote by  
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Chair of the GWP Technical Committee**

Respected co-chairs;  
Distinguished panelists  
Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends;

I am very pleased and honoured to open up our discussions and share with you few initial thoughts on the role of capacity building in Water cooperation. The Global Water Partnership is privileged to co-convene, with UN Water Decade Programme for Capacity Development, this high level panel because we strongly believe, as stated in the concept note, that capacity development is an essential stepping stone for water cooperation – this includes not only water-related capacity development at both the individual and institutional levels, but also the enabling environment needed to implement good water governance.

I made the perilous choice to focus my talk on addressing briefly 3 questions:

- **Why water cooperation? Why now?**
- **What are the drivers of regional water cooperation?**
- **What are the key implications for capacity building?**

## I. Why cooperation? Why now?

We live in a world of ever growing interdependence and interconnectedness. We are confronted by a multiplicity of problems which in my view have some striking features in common:

- **The problems are interconnected.** For example, the problem of climate change is closely related to the problems of energy security and food security. These interconnections are often ignored when policy-makers devise partial responses to individual problems.
- **They cannot be solved by individual countries or stakeholders acting in isolation.** Instead, policy-makers, business leaders, academics and decision makers in civil society must work together, across national and cultural boundaries, to make progress.

Since these diverse decision-makers are sovereign and independent, global and regional cooperation requires shared visions of the future that induce them to work together voluntarily. The work must be embodied in concrete strategies to achieve these visions.

Dealing with these problems requires genuine cooperation at all levels. Thus, the present Age of Globalization must now be supplemented by an Age of Global Cooperation, where shared goals motivate diverse stakeholders to pull in the same direction. Much is intellectually and technically within our grasp. What is often missing is the will and the skill to global and regional cooperation. This will and skill must be nurtured and developed by building capacities at national and regional levels that induce diverse decision-makers and stakeholders to cooperate.

## II. What are the drivers of regional water cooperation?

The economics and international relations literature suggest that countries cooperate because they either face difficulties they cannot overcome themselves; or they anticipate externalities relating to pollution, flood control, or hydropower; or for reasons such as economies of scale where parties anticipate being better off acting in a coalition rather than acting alone when facing certain water situations.

There are many examples, as you know of successful cooperative approaches: In the Senegal river group, Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania have agreed to disagree about who is entitled to how much water, and instead concentrate on sharing out various projects, so that a dam may go to one but the electricity generated, or part of it, to another. Thailand has helped pay for a hydro scheme in Laos in return for power, South Africa has done the same with Lesotho, in return for drinking water in its industrial province of Gauteng; These examples, and many others, show that water infrastructure investments can be a key tool to creating a platform for regional economic development.

So why does cooperation happen in one area and not in another? If we look at the drivers for regional water cooperation we see that most of them lie outside of the water box. These drivers include: geography, resources endowment/variability, democracy and governance, trade, power asymmetries, diplomatic relations, colonial heritages, political regimes.

I'd like to look at a few of these to illustrate their implications in terms of capacity building.

#### Resources endowment/variability

Water resources are unevenly distributed and this makes comparisons highly misleading. Studies of international water cooperation focus mainly on water scarcity as trigger for either conflict or cooperation. The relationship between water scarcity and cooperation follows an inverted U-shaped curve. When water is abundant riparian states are less in need to cooperate because they boast a sufficient level of water; as water scarcity level increases, the impetus for cooperation increases. But as water becomes extremely scarce, there is very little to cooperate over. Therefore, it is very important to understand the level of “tension” that exists in the system. It is found in the literature that the collaboration potential is greater in arid than in wet regions but there is little scope for capturing the gains from basin level management if economic integration does not extend beyond water issues.

**Therefore, to facilitate negotiation and cooperation it is important to create basin protocols, guidelines and practical measures for standardizing measurements of quantity and quality of water resources, developing common approaches to interpret the data collected from equipment pertaining to water flows, climate and relevant environmental indicators. It may be also necessary to undertake either joint or independent assessment of availability of resources, long term supply and demand projections, and needs of consumers in the basin.**

Climate change will affect river flows by increasing intra and inter annual variability and in certain locations reduce annual means. Robust projections of climate/runoff models imply decreasing water availability in southwestern North America, the Mediterranean region, and southern Africa, and increasing water availability in high-latitude North America and Eurasia, the La Plata Basin of South America, eastern equatorial Africa, and Indonesia. In general, regions of projected decreasing water supply tend to be the regions of contemporary water-supply stress, and regions of projected increasing supply tend to be regions where water shortage is not a major issue for water managers. Climate change will affect the frequency of droughts. In particular, it is expected, an increase in drought frequency in many regions (like my region the Mediterranean) where drought has been a problem historically. Additionally, we have reason to watch for increased frequency of floods, particularly in humid regions, though not necessarily only in those regions. Recurrent problems of drought and floods and the joint suffering they cause should be the greatest motivators for regional cooperation. The risks related to climate extreme events are increasing. We no longer deal with them through conventional crisis management approaches. Resilience is the key word for the future and it should be at the heart of IWRM.

**Therefore, it is important to invest in enhanced knowledge of the dynamics of climate change as it affects water and its use and in hydrological and meteorological information systems which are crucial to informed and directed interventions.**

#### Democracy and governance;

Domestic institutions may play a major role in either facilitating or inhibiting regional cooperation. Political, legal and economic institutions sustain the functioning of the state both domestically and regionally or internationally. They reflect the state's ability to enter into, and honor, a cooperation agreement, which might require financial investments and costs. The higher the level of institutionalization and governance the more cooperation is likely to be facilitated.

#### Power asymmetries

The international relations literature has entertained power asymmetry as possibly facilitating cooperation but other works have argued that power asymmetry generally impede cooperation. It all depends on the region's geopolitics.

I have had the privilege of being the chief agricultural negotiator of the free trade agreement between Morocco and the United States of America. I can tell

you from this experience that overcoming power asymmetry and negotiating rationally requires a problem solving mindset supported by robust technical, scientific, economic and legal arguments.

Over the past decades the international community has constructed the legal and institutional framework to manage closer cooperation on transboundary waters. Yet, The discrepancy between the reality of today's implementation of this framework, the challenges resulting from it, and the capacity of governments to deal with them is striking. This is why GWP in collaboration with Dundee UNESCO Center has established a scholarship programme in International Water Law. This pilot programme now has 3 years track record with a growing alumni of experts in water resources management with formal education in international water law. It is now ready to be rolled out across different regions and in different disciplines, providing an abundance of opportunities to extend / develop Knowledge across the GWP network. We are also looking into Mass Open Online Courses as an innovative educational tool for broadening ACCESS. MOOCs are at the forefront of the world's leading higher education institutions as open access programmes. There are challenges with this, but we must be bold and brave in addressing the problems with ACCESS and QUALITY issues in IWRM capacity development models.

### **III - What are the key implications for Capacity building**

In current development and globalization trends, change is the only stable pattern. The ability to respond to change will decide whether we can successfully champion water cooperation.

In this context, putting water cooperation into practice is a very large and complex agenda. It requires a long-term, strategic engagement of governments for actively seeking solutions that could move us up the ladder of global/regional water cooperation.

Tackling this agenda must start with new institutional mind sets and mechanisms that can develop more coordinated approach to the challenge of water resources development and management reflecting stronger interconnectedness of water systems. It calls for the creation of an enabling environment based on an adequate set of mutually supportive policies and a comprehensive legal framework with a coherent set of incentives and regulatory measures to support these policies.

But, policies and regulations, though necessary, are not sufficient. Putting water cooperation into practice also means strengthening and/or creating institutions

and mechanisms that can transcend the geographical boundaries between countries as well as boundaries between sectors.

Mr Chairman,

These reflections lead me to sum up, without anticipating your debates, with the following three points:

1. The concept of capacity building should, in my view, encompass advanced professional training, professional and organizational development so as to respond to a complex and fast changing environment. It is the skill of recognizing and addressing change, challenges and chances proactively that must be added to the world of technical solutions.
2. To achieve impacts, capacity building has to stress the links between the competence of individuals, the performance of national organizations and the regional institutional that needs to be developed involving legal and regulatory framework, regional dialogue, the establishment of data sharing and communication platforms and so on.
3. The institutionalization of cooperation can help to build trust, and numerous joint governance institutions have provided solutions for the challenges in shared waters.

### **Conclusion:**

Let me conclude by saying that despite differences in ultimate values, there is still much that we, as a world community, can do to help one another achieve our disparate ends. And there is still vast, unexploited scope to promote cooperation and solidarity in the pursuit of common goals. With due respect for our differences, we must find this common ground through practical, measurable achievements. For this purpose, capacity building should help us to think afresh about how water cooperation problems can be solved. I hope that this Panel will contribute to the insight and drive that can help turn our potential for global/regional water cooperation into reality.

Thank you for your attention.