



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Regional Workshop

Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region: progress, challenges and opportunities

Information Note

3-4 March 2020

United Nations House, Beirut, Lebanon

1. Background

Water resources in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are characterized by scarcity and disparate geographic distribution. Considering current and projected threats caused by increasing demand and competition for water resources utilization, as well as growing impacts of climate change on societies and on ecosystems in water basins, integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, has become imperative to ensure sustainable development. This is underlined in global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in regional commitments such as the Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region 2010-2030, the Union for the Mediterranean Water Policy Framework for Actions 2030 and the 5+5 Water Strategy in the Western Mediterranean.

Most countries in the MENA region largely rely for their provision of water on transboundary surface and groundwater resources that are shared with neighbouring countries. These resources therefore play a key role for the development of the region. While the high dependency on transboundary water resources can be seen as a potential challenge to the attainment of SDGs, cooperation over their management can generate a broad range of benefits and opportunities for cooperating countries, such as accelerated economic growth, improved human well-being, enhanced environmental sustainability and increased political stability.

Various technical, legal and policy options are available for riparian countries to jointly manage and develop transboundary water basins and therefore achieve mutual satisfaction and multiple benefits. However, the majority of basins are not yet covered by operational arrangements for water cooperation.

With the support of:



The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) is a legal framework and institutional platform developed under the auspices of the United Nations to promote the adequate quantity, good quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources. Originally negotiated as a regional convention, the Water Convention has driven significant improvement in transboundary water cooperation in the pan-European region over the past 20 years, supporting trust building, the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies for the management of transboundary water resources. It has then evolved into a universally open framework for transboundary water cooperation, available for all United Nations Member States since 2016. The Water Convention can offer a solid cooperation framework also for the countries in the MENA region. Several countries in the MENA region already initiated processes towards accession and some countries from Africa (Chad and Senegal) already joined it in 2018.

As the socio-economic development in the region results in growing inter-sectoral trade-offs between the agricultural, domestic, industrial and energy sectors for the use of limited (transboundary) water resources, and ecosystems preservation is often at risk. A way to effectively respond to this challenge is to move beyond the traditional sectoral thinking and adopt a more integrated approach. A water-energy-food-ecosystems Nexus approach to transboundary water cooperation can help identify basin-wide inter-sectoral synergies and mutually beneficial solutions through improved coordination and cooperation.

Building on previous work in the region, as well as successful experiences in other regions of the world, the workshop will explore the current status of transboundary water cooperation and its benefits, as well as existing tools and approaches to prompt further progress, through topical discussions relevant to the specific context and needs of countries of the MENA region.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the workshop is to contribute to the strengthening of transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region, therefore supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 6 in particular.

More specifically, the workshop aims at:

- Providing an updated snapshot of the status of transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region and of implementation of SDG 6 on water, specifically its target 6.5 on implementing IWRM at all levels;
- Showcasing good practices and lessons learnt from successful cooperation over the management of transboundary surface and groundwater in the MENA region and beyond, highlighting the benefits of cooperation;
- Developing strategically good approaches to the exchange of data and information as well as to monitoring in transboundary basins, on the basis of the water management issues at stake;
- Understanding how international water law, and the Water Convention in particular, can contribute towards strengthening transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region, and reviewing the interest and progress of countries in the region so far in acceding to it;
- Sharing experiences on how to improve water management in order to increase resilience to climate change impacts and coping with water scarcity, in particular through cooperation;
- Discussing different tools and approaches to improve cooperation for the better management of transboundary water resources, including through effectively engaging with economic sectors

using water and impacting on water resources by applying an intersectoral “Nexus” approach and by developing sustainable and equitable transboundary arrangements on water allocation.

3. Organization of work

Presentations, panel discussions, plenary debates and interactive breakout sessions will allow discussing issues related to transboundary water management in MENA region, allowing for exchange of experiences between countries of the MENA region.

The full programme of the workshop will be made available early February 2020.

The workshop will start on 3 March 2020 at 08:30 and will end on 4 March 2020 at 16:30.

The workshop is organized back-to-back with the workshop *Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs - Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 indicator 6.5.2* (5 March 2020).

4. Participation

The main target audience of the workshop will be delegates from countries of the MENA region and experts working on transboundary water cooperation. 40-60 participants are expected to attend the workshop.

Given the topics to be discussed, delegations should include representatives from different relevant ministries as appropriate, in particular water and foreign affairs. It is expected that experts working on the following issues will participate from each country: transboundary water cooperation, including legal issues, water management, data and information exchange and climate change, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation.

Some representatives from the Ministry in charge of water are also invited to stay for the technical workshop *Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs - Transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 indicator 6.5.2* organized back-to-back on 5 March 2020.

Representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, academia, financial actors and international development partners with an interest in the topic will also attend.

5. Partners

The workshop is jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med).

This workshop is organized in the framework of the project “Making water cooperation happen in the Mediterranean” (*aka* the Water Matchmaker Project), and in particular its component to “Enhance transboundary water cooperation” implemented by GWP-Med and UNECE, with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and in the framework of the European Union funded project to promote and support accession to the Water Convention at global level.

The workshop is part of the programme of work of the Water Convention for 2019-2021.

It is organized as a follow-up to previous regional and national activities on transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region, co-organised with and with support from different regional and

national partners, including Sida and the Water Matchmaker Project. These activities include, inter alia:

- 2012 (Rome, Italy): *International Roundtable on Transboundary Water Resources Management in the Southern Mediterranean*¹
- 2014 (Tunis, Tunisia): *Legal frameworks for cooperation on transboundary waters – Key aspects and opportunities for the Arab countries*²
- 2015 (Budapest, Hungary): *Promoting transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and Northern Africa region on the basis of the Water Convention*³
- 2017 (Tunis, Tunisia): *Sub-regional workshop: Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the North Africa region*⁴
- 2018 (Beirut, Lebanon): *1st Nexus Roundtable in the MENA and wider Mediterranean*⁵
- National workshops on the Water Convention for Jordan (2015), Iraq (2016), Tunisia (2016) and Lebanon (2019)

6. Venue and practical information

The workshop will be held at the United Nations House, Beirut, Lebanon.

Lunches and coffee breaks will be provided. A dinner will be offered on 3 March 2020.

Working languages

There will be simultaneous interpretation into Arabic, English and French.

Registration

Officially nominated participants should send their signed letter of nomination to Mayola Lidome at UNECE (Mayola.lidome@un.org) and Zoe Karka at GWP-Med (zoe@gwpmmed.org) and register online via the following link: <https://bit.ly/2FWm8Xu> **no later than 9 February 2020**.

Countries eligible to financial support will be contacted by GWP- Med individually.

Visa

Participants are required to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary. A personalized letter of invitation can be provided for nominated participants to facilitate the visa request process. Lebanese visa and entry requirements are available at the following site: <http://www.general-security.gov.lb/en/posts/38>.

ESCWA can coordinate with the Government of Lebanon to assist in obtaining entry visas for participants who are unable to secure visas in their home countries. Those who need assistance in this matter should send a colour, scanned copy of their national passport and a work attestation or similar, such as a valid employment ID or official nomination letter no later than **9 February 2020** as visas may take four weeks to process. This is required to confirm your status as an expert, which is a requirement for your visa to be issued.

¹ More information at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=30362>

² More information at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35454>

³ More information at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40539>

⁴ More information at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47322>

⁵ More information at : <https://www.gwp.org/en/GWP-Mediterranean/WE-ACT/News-List-Page/debating-the-water-energy-food-ecosystems-nexus-in-the-mena-and-wider-mediterranean-beirut-26-28-november-2018/>

Webpage of the workshop

Further information and relevant material, such as the programme, background documents and practical information on the meeting venue, will be available shortly at: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53364> and also communicated to the confirmed participants.