

TRANSBOUNDARY FUTURES

SUMMARY

WATER CAUCUS, MARSEILLE, FRANCE, 14 OCTOBER 2009



Keynote and Panel:

- Dipak Gyawali, Nepal Water Conservation Foundation and Former Minister of Water Resources of Nepal
- Cicero Bley, Itaipu Binacional
- Jean-François Donzier, International Network of Basin Organizations
- MP Kabbani, Lebanese House of Parliament
- Sibylle Vermont, Ministry of Environment of Switzerland, Chair of the Bureau of the UN-ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
- Olçay Unver, World Water Assessment Programme

There are more than 276 transboundary river basins and hundreds of transboundary aquifers shared by over 3 billion people. The future development of many countries depends on successful management and allocation of these resources. Although many legal and institutional mechanisms have been developed to improve cooperation, very few have proven sustainable and replicable. Most of the world's shared water resources remain outside transboundary agreements between all riparian countries, some have no agreements in place at all.

Recent global economic events and future challenges including population growth, changing land-use and climate change demand that governance of transboundary water resources be improved in order to support and nurture stronger economic growth and social development. But what might (and should) a more comprehensive global architecture on transboundary management look like and how might it function? On the eve of the World Water Council's General Assembly, the Water Caucus workshop on Transboundary Futures began to formulate a first response to this question. In welcoming the participants and encouraging "out-of-the-box" thinking, Dogan Altinbilek, Governor of the World Water Council, noted that the sessions on transboundary issues organised during the 5th World Water Forum (Istanbul, 2009) were among the most attended and lively.



Dipak Gyawali, Director of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation and Former Minister of Water Resources of Nepal, began his keynote speech by pointing out that transboundary issues are often characterised by nested problems that can sometimes not even be properly defined, let alone solved by international treaties. In addition, he observed that internal administrative or disciplinary boundaries can be just as difficult to contend with as international boundaries, all of which require unconventional solutions.



Citing the clean-up efforts of the Rhine River, he identified a few elements that prove for successful cooperation in transboundary situations. These include involvement of a range of stakeholder groups/social solidarities that set collective goals and establish constructive engagements at the lowest possible level. Moreover, it is helpful to regard international agreements as informal at the outset.

He maintained that multi-track diplomacy and innovative partial solutions, rather than perfect solutions, can contribute to making more rapid progress. These solutions are not always technical, but can also be social in nature, such as creating moral pressure on authorities. In reaction to his speech, various members of the audience pointed out that partial solutions are ineffective in situations of conflict, disaster or inexistent water rights. Transboundary solutions are also dependent on increasing awareness of individuals towards higher-level sharing principles.



Mohammad Kabbani, member of the Lebanese House of Parliament, initiated the reaction from panellists in describing the political challenges in Lebanon. He proposed that mathematical modelling tools can help to calculate the extent of impediments to be overcome. He launched a call to action in this sense, also emphasising the recognition to the right to water as a means for improving access.

Cicero Bley from Itaipu Binacional of Brazil, documented the successful multiple-use cooperation that was established and has evolved between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay over the past decades. He noted that the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu, still in existence today, is a strong and fair treaty and one that enables populations to benefit from the energy generated by the dam, while keeping in mind social and environmental responsibilities. Each of the 20 turbines offers enough energy for a city of 2-million inhabitants. Cumulatively, this represents 20% of all of Brazil's energy needs and 80% of Paraguay's.



Jean-François Donzier of the International Network of Basin Organizations stressed that transboundary issues, which cover much more than simply the sharing of water, should not be left only to diplomats, but must be complemented by the collective knowledge of technicians and all categories of water users. Indeed, if the national representatives do not wish to cooperate, no agreement can force them to. However, the creation of international commissions and basin organisations can provide alternative avenues for cooperation and should be a pre-requisite to the implementation of any large project. He concluded that nothing is possible without political will, long-term commitment and robust public participation.

Sibylle Vermont of the Ministry of Environment of Switzerland and Chair of the Bureau of the UN-ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes described the efforts to strengthen the multi-stakeholder dimension of the Commission's

work. She described the multiple facets of the convention, which examines quantity and quality of surface and ground water, in addition to human health, ecosystem services and socio-economic conditions. She posited that bilateral and multilateral agreements are also needed to reinforce the Convention's aims.

When raising the issues of the right to water and "commodification", which are inherent to transboundary issues, members of the audience encouraged that these discussions be carried out at the highest political levels. Participants also pointed out that the disparity in knowledge and lack

of information-sharing is a hindrance to meaningful and serious discussions on the matter. The World Water Council was encouraged to create conditions for cooperation through the establishment of shared information systems and a database of transboundary-related decisions. Participants also supported training and awareness-raising efforts among populations and local authorities on a regional basis and in an integrated manner. Estimating the costs of inaction can also provide further incentives for progress.



NEXT STEPS

Transboundary issues were further discussed during a roundtable discussion of the World Water Council's General Assembly on the following Friday, and a working group of members and Governors was constituted. The group considered putting in place a concrete project to encourage dialogue among riparian nations in an effort to increase understanding, using the support of its members.

