



Water allocation in transboundary basins: a global workshop on the status and good practices

To be held in Geneva, 16-17 October 2017

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland,
starting at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, 16 October 2017

INFORMATION NOTICE

I. Background

Water allocation, which is the allocation over time of water resources between and within different sectors and for different uses, is one of the biggest challenges in water management and protection. At the same time, it is one means to balance different water needs, hence responding to the water-food-energy-ecosystems interdependencies. Increasing demands on water from different sectors, growing water scarcity and climate variability have led to a rising global interest to the topic of water allocation. For instance, the recent OECD report “Water Resources Allocation - Sharing Risks and Opportunities”¹ sheds a light on current water allocation practices at the national level and provides recommendations for national reforms.

In the transboundary context, increasing competition over water resources between countries and the deriving risks of political tensions and conflicts, make water allocation ever more relevant. The key principles of international water law (the principle of equitable and reasonable use of shared water resources, the no-harm rule, the sustainability principle and the precautionary approach), embedded in the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), provide orientation for allocating water in transboundary basins. Nonetheless, there are no universally accepted formulas or guidelines for allocating shared water resources, or their benefits – as it is often argued that the allocation of benefits should drive the allocation of water resources.

Challenges in setting water allocation schemes include commonly a lack of harmonized information about water availability but in particular about water demands and a lack of agreed projections about their future development. The priority in water uses of the riparian countries may differ, and there might not be appropriate tools available for assessing the trade-offs or frameworks where the different needs could be discussed. Optimization in water allocation taking into account different

¹ OECD (2015), Water Resources Allocation: Sharing Risks and Opportunities, OECD Publishing, Paris.

priorities may get complex but also can lead to a more widely agreeable outcome. How to approach some of these issues will be discussed at the workshop.

Beyond these gaps in the information basis, another major challenge is formally agreeing about water allocation in the transboundary context. Riparians may implement ad-hoc solutions, or they may have cooperation arrangements that include provisions for water allocation. There are different options for formalizing aspects of water allocation at the transboundary level, ranging from provisions in the main water cooperation agreement to supplementary instruments, including protocols, annexes and operational flow regulation rules.

Currently only a minority of transboundary agreements include water allocation provisions, and groundwater resources are particularly poorly covered in this regard. Moreover, the implementation of some of the agreed allocation frameworks is proving challenging and highlights weaknesses due to different reasons: from the fact that the agreed allocation is not robust and flexible enough to deal with increasing variability in water availability, to the growing recognition of the need to factor in environmental conservation concerns, such as environmental flows, to the sustainability of the existing solutions. Water quality is also an important consideration and the related requirements vary according to use; and consequently e.g. high mineralization groundwater may constitute a resource for some purposes and, on the other hand, some uses are particularly vulnerable to degraded water quality.

Given the growing importance of the topic and the specific challenges faced in the transboundary context, at its seventh session in November 2015, the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention decided to collect good practice examples on water allocation, water sharing and benefits sharing from different transboundary surface water basins and aquifers, through the organization of a global workshop on this theme.

This activity builds on previous and ongoing work carried out under the Convention on the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus, on the benefits of cooperation and on adaptation to climate change, including dealing with water scarcity.

II. Objectives and scope

The overarching objective of the workshop is to support efforts to develop sustainable and equitable transboundary arrangements on water allocation that strike a balance between robustness and flexibility. To this end, the workshop aims to increase understanding and knowledge of criteria, mechanisms, tools and good practices for water allocation in transboundary basins and aquifers.

Despite the diversity of circumstances (climate conditions, socio-economic development etc.) as well as different degrees of cooperation, there is great potential for learning about water allocation practices between the various regions of the world. Therefore, examples of water allocation arrangements and practices in the transboundary context world-wide will be discussed. Related insights will be drawn from international water law and other disciplines. In particular, the workshop will promote mutual learning and transfer of knowledge in line with the objectives of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) International Waters Learning Platform (IW:LEARN). Participants will be invited to share experiences, identify good practices and lessons learned, and formulate questions and needs informing possible future work on water allocation under the Water Convention.

The programme will highlight opportunities in water allocation but also limitations, stressing the need to complement it with other approaches such as sharing benefits from water resources, increasing water use efficiency and managing demands to satisfy multiple water needs.

III. Tentative workshop programme

The workshop will include a mix of plenary presentations and interactive sessions, such as work in groups or world café.

The following themes will be debated in the workshop, with focus on transboundary aspects:

- 1) Considerations for water allocation:
 - a) The evolution and principles of international water law;
 - b) Allocation criteria (such as equity, sustainability, flexibility, security, efficiency, precaution, predictability and real opportunity costs, which may inform definition of priorities);
 - c) Water allocation and benefit sharing.
- 2) Informing water allocation decisions to deal with conflicting interests and uses:
 - a) Data and monitoring requirements;
 - b) Tools and approaches to create a common baseline in terms of understanding water availability, the current level of use and use-related trade-offs, environmental needs, outlook and variability (including quantitative and qualitative models, optimization);
 - c) Approaches to build political and public acceptance: stakeholder involvement, communication.
- 3) Process of agreeing about water allocation:
 - a) examples of existing transboundary cooperation arrangements, from formal agreements to operational flow regulation rules;
 - b) integrating into the arrangements flexibility and changing hydrological conditions, including uncertainties related to climate change;
 - c) Building trust.
- 4) Implementation of water allocation arrangements; challenges, lessons learned and success factors
 - a) Governance solutions;
 - b) Monitoring and enforcement;
 - c) Flexibility and dealing with hydrological extremes;
 - d) Dispute settlement;
 - e) Revision of water allocation arrangements;
 - f) Resource needs and financing options;
- 5) Implications for future work under the Water Convention

IV. Participation and call for examples and experiences

The priority target audience includes country officials (ministries and agencies), practitioners, river basin organizations, project managers (in particular of GEF International Waters projects), international organizations, research institutes and academia as well as NGOs working in transboundary water resources management or policy.

Expected participation to the workshop from different regions of the world will make it possible to exchange broadly experience in addressing water allocation issues in transboundary basins.

Interested participants are invited to propose examples of water allocation mechanisms in transboundary basins for presentation at the workshop and/ or use in follow-up activities:

- 1) Good (or instructive) practices of water allocation in transboundary basins
- 2) Examples of tools and methods used in the process of developing and revising water allocation agreements and arrangements.

Proposals need to clearly address topics of the workshop as described in section III. Any such proposal should not be longer than 300 words and should be sent by e-mail to water.convention@unece.org by 31 August 2017. Please consider that given the time limitation and the fact that the workshop will give preference to discussions rather than prepared presentations, not all proposals will be finally included in the workshop programme.

V. Partners involved

The workshop will be organized under the leadership of the Government of Finland, with the support of the UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention.

The following organizations are partners in organizing this workshop: the Global Environment Facility's Project International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the Geneva Water Hub, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The workshop is supported financially by Finland and Germany.

VI. Practical information

The workshop will start at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, 16 October and end at 6.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 October 2017. It will be held in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, in room V. The workshop will be followed by the fifth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus to be held on 18 October 2017 in Geneva. The working languages will be English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition and developing countries may apply for financial support to facilitate their participation in the meeting using the financial support request form available on the meeting website which needs to be duly signed by the supervisor of the applicant. Requests for financial support should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat (mayola.lidome@unece.org) as soon as possible, but not later **than Monday, 4 September 2017**. No application will be accepted after this deadline.

Participants requiring entry visas should inform the UNECE secretariat as soon as possible. Since Switzerland is part of the Schengen Area, obtaining a visa might take up to 5 weeks. Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to submit their application as soon as possible and initiate visa procedures at least four weeks before the meeting.

Delegates attending the meeting are requested to register by **10 October 2017** using the following link <https://www2.unece.org/uncdb/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=YFwzQE>. In case of difficulties please contact the secretariat by e-mail (mayola.lidome@unece.org). On their way to the meeting, participants should obtain an identification badge at the Pass and Identification Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva Security and Safety Section located at the Pregny Gate, 14 Avenue de la Paix (see map on the UNECE website). Please allow enough time for this.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available online at <http://www.unece.org/meetings/practical.html>

Further information and relevant material will be made available on the following website in due course: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43623>

For the Task Force: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43626>