



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF BASIN ORGANIZATIONS

It is time to take stock of the situation... Feedback from the 8th World Water Forum of Brasilia

*Climate change, transboundary river basins, citizen participation,
training, information systems, innovative funding...*

The International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), the Global Alliances for Water and Climate (GfWac), the International Network of Water Training Centers (INWTC) and their many partners, including UNESCO, UNECE, OECD, IOWater, REBOB, LANBO, ANBO, BAFWAC, EMWIS, in particular, were given the coordination of about ten thematic sessions, which have been mobilizing for more than a year a large international community for their preparation, and also a strong participation in the related sessions and also in the two Forum "Regional" and "Citizens" processes.

These thematic sessions allowed addressing, in particular, the issue of integrated basin management and governance of transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers, as well as the central topic of adaptation, which is now essential, to the effects of climate change on water resources and of the information and training of decision makers and all stakeholders concerned.

Two special sessions, among the most attended throughout the Forum, were devoted to "Strengthening Citizen Participation in Basin Management" and to Water Information Systems: "Data and Tools for Water Management and for Making the Right Decisions".

Issues such as the statute and means of transboundary river basin organizations, how to plan, implement and finance joint projects, the establishment and strengthening of integrated water information systems and exchange of data and information between riparian countries and between partners, the implementation of UN Conventions, better consideration of transboundary aquifers and joint management of surface and groundwater, the use of Nature Based Solutions, the participation of users and citizens in basin management, as well as the education of the populations and the improvement of the professional training of the various stakeholders involved, the adaptation to climate change and the financing necessary for the implementation of the essential actions to be carried out in a very short time, could be dealt with in depth and illustrated through the presentation of many very practical case studies and constructive debates.

Although there are still different sensitivities, especially in some countries, on transboundary water management, a very large majority of the participants agreed to the interest of using basin approaches, both national and transboundary, in addressing the major challenges of water resources management and, first of all, of adaptation to climate change, which is recognized by all as a priority for inland freshwaters.

On these topics, the main recommendations can be summarized as follows:

First of all, we will remember the slogan, which has prevailed in almost all the themes of the Forum: "**We cannot manage what we do not know how to measure!**".

In each country and each basin, the organization and improvement of the production, collection, conservation and exchange of data, **as part of true Integrated Water Information Systems (WIS)**, whose long-term sustainability must be ensured, must allow for a precise view of the hydrological and meteorological situations, of consumption, pollution and the status of natural environments and their evolution, especially in relation with the effects of climate change. Existing systems, often ineffective, and incomplete or even non-existent, need to be strengthened and adapted and the parameters evaluated and revised by taking climate change into account. Early warning systems for floods and droughts must be developed wherever necessary.

A second major advance of the Brasilia Forum is the recognition of the importance of all stakeholders' participation in the definition and achievement of the common objectives, defined through dialogue, for water resources management.

The effective participation of the civil society as a whole, of local authorities, all relevant economic stakeholders, associations and, in particular, women and young people, must be guaranteed in decision-making and management processes, and it is advisable to join the forces of all these public and private stakeholders to build resilient communities and share adaptation strategies. **It is especially necessary to use recognized consultation frameworks such as Basin Committees or Councils, Local Water Commissions or River or Aquifer Contracts for this purpose.** Access to information, training and environmental education needs to be improved around the world, especially for the most disadvantaged populations.

Regarding adaptation to climate change:

Mobilization is essential at global level, in order to urgently implement essential programs to prevent and adapt to the effects of global warming on freshwater resources.

The "**Paris Pact on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Basins of Rivers, Lakes and Aquifers**", launched at the COP21, proposes a set of actions that have proved effective and immediately applicable.

Freshwater must be truly recognized as a formal priority in the UNFCCC COPs negotiations, especially by emphasizing the importance of adaptation measures alongside mitigation measures. The attention of the Parties to the UNFCCC is drawn to the strategic importance of freshwater in all economic, social and environmental fields. It should be prioritized in the adaptation components of the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and it is urgent to have a better integration of water with the other strategic sectors concerned, such as a sustainable city, agriculture and food, health, waterways transport, forests, fisheries, mines or hydropower, in particular.

Stakeholders are encouraged at all levels to include Nature-Based Solutions in an ambitious way in their policies and strategies for combating climate change, in land-use planning and water resources management.

The achievement of the SDGs by 2030 and the implementation of the Paris Agreement require a significant acceleration and increase in funding from all sources for climate action in the water sector.

Financial institutions need to clarify the directions of their climate-related funding and the mechanisms to be used for applications. Their funding should not only support infrastructure projects, but also serve to improve knowledge of water resources and climate change impacts, capacity building, governance, monitoring and evaluation of policies. It is also advisable to recognize and reinforce the essential role of river basin organizations in the sustainable management of water resources, especially transboundary water resources, by financially supporting joint projects to face climate change.

With regard to cooperation to prevent conflicts and strengthen transboundary water management:

- It is important to ensure or restore the water cycle by developing international cooperation to achieve integrated basin management;
- Cooperation and dialogue between riparian countries on transboundary waters offer important perspectives for their sustainable development, regional integration, improved relations for mutual benefit in all economic, social and ecological fields;
- The establishment and strengthening of International Commissions, Authorities or Joint Organizations in transboundary basins improve dialogue, exchange of useful information, conflict resolution and the sharing of the cooperation benefits between riparian countries;
- These joint organizations must have clear mandates and human, technical and financial resources to carry out their missions and, in particular, have a highly skilled and well-trained staff;
- One of the keys to building confidence is to facilitate the exchange of data and information between countries bordering transboundary basins and aquifers, as well as between all interested partners at all levels;
- The entry into force of the 1997 UN Convention on International Watercourses, the opening of the 1992 Helsinki Convention to all UN member countries, as well as the application of regional guidelines are useful for developing cooperation;
- There is an urgent need to strengthen the reasoned and sustainable management of transboundary aquifers throughout the world. There is a broad consensus to promote joint management of surface and groundwater in the same area;
- Improving skills in integrated water resources management is essential.

These general recommendations of the discussions were presented to the ministers present, who welcomed the many contributions and efforts made to prepare the various processes.

The Ministerial Declaration of the Forum, while remaining very general, as for each Forum, encourages governments to establish or strengthen national integrated water resources management, policies and plans, including strategies for adaptation to climate change, with a view to achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, to adequate and equitable sanitation, and to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, in line with SDG6.

It supports the strengthening of institutional arrangements (...) with the participation of all stakeholders and consideration of local circumstances in the policy-making process, while fostering the exchange and sharing of information and experiences among public and private stakeholders and the civil society.

It recognizes that efforts and initiatives taken at all levels should promote the adequate and inclusive participation of all relevant stakeholders.

It recommends developing and sharing solutions, including integrated water resources management and adaptation to the impact of climate change, and nature-based solutions to address the most pressing water and sanitation challenges, through research and innovation, upscaling cooperation on capacity building and technology transfer.

The Ministers encourage transboundary cooperation based on "win-win" solutions for all, in accordance with applicable international law, namely relevant bilateral, regional and international instruments.

They noted the key role of the United Nations in promoting international water cooperation at the global level and that several of the principles of the International Water Conventions could be useful in this regard.

In addition to the official sessions of the Forum, several side events allowed the presentation of a wide range of field experiences and direct exchanges between field leaders, especially in the French, Moroccan and Senegalese pavilions... Including a session on examples of fruitful cooperation supported by the French Water Agencies on several continents.

On the occasion of the 8th World Water Forum, INBO, IOWater and their partners jointly published, with the support of the French Agency for Biodiversity, two Handbooks, respectively:

- **Handbook on water information systems: administration, processing and exploitation of water-related data,**
- **Handbook for the participation of stakeholders and the civil society in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers.**

These handbooks are addressing water policy makers and those who wish to develop their capacity to implement an integrated water resources management policy at the local, national and transboundary levels and increase the participation of stakeholders and the civil society.

English version on the Web: www.inbo-news.org/en/documents/all-handbooks-basins-management

Of course, not all the problems will be solved miraculously, but undeniably the strong mobilization of the partners, especially the South Americans, shows that the ideas are progressing and that we observe a real convergence towards operational solutions which have been proven in the field and can be implemented quickly.

Passing without delay from words to action should become real!

All papers and photos of the events organized by INBO, GAFWaC, INWTC, EMWIS, IOWater and all their partners during the last World Water Forum held in Brasilia from 19 to 22 March 2018, can be viewed and downloaded on the website: www.inbo-news.org.

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