

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF BASIN ORGANIZATIONS



World Water Forum– Istanbul – March 2009

Analysis of.... the tangible progress made in basin management and transboundary cooperation.

The topic of basin management and transboundary cooperation was widely discussed during the recent World Water Forum of Istanbul.

The International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) and UNESCO were entrusted with the task of coordinating the five official sessions of Topic 3.1 entirely devoted to this issue and which has been the subject of a broad preparatory mobilization for more than one year:

- Several regional meetings were organized in 2008 with our partners, in Solo-Surakarta (Indonesia), Venice (Italy), Moscow (Russia), Saragossa (Spain), Sibiu (Romania), Rio (Brazil), etc..., as well as a side event during CSD 16 in New York,
- More than 200 papers were received on the Forum website or directly by the coordinators.

These five sessions, which took place on 20 and 21 March 2009, allowed hearing 63 speeches of very diverse organizations, representing the main streams of opinion and the various parts of the World, including a high proportion of basin organizations presenting their field experience. The sessions, which were held in a packed room where more than 450 participants stayed during almost the 12 hours planned in the official program of the Forum, left a broad place to debate and rich and lively discussions, sometimes heated, impassioned even!

Such questions as the « international » statute or not of transboundary waters, the methods for financing and implementing common infrastructures, the ratification of the United Nations Convention of 1997 or the management of transboundary aquifers saw divergent positions clashing, sometimes vehemently expressed, especially from our numerous Turkish colleagues, showing that it is still difficult to achieve real consensus.

But a vast majority of the participants converged on the advantage of national and transboundary basin approaches to face the great global challenges of water resources management.

Taking account of these many contributions and apart from the most radical positions, the findings and recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- ***Strong political will and long-term commitment are prerequisites for basin management and transboundary cooperation in the face of future changes,***

- ***Significant progress has already been made since the 1990s with reforms undertaken in many regions and countries around the world. The gained experience allows now saying that integrated water resources management at the level of river and aquifer basins is a real advantage. These experiences allow proposing guidance to countries which want to implement efficient basin management and reinforce their transboundary cooperation,***

- ***The progress made so far is however insufficient to meet the requirements of a globally changing world. Adaptive strategies, focused on maintaining the integrity of river basins and aquifer systems, should become the norm in national and international policy. This will require:***

- 1) Surface water to be managed in river and lake basin units and groundwater to be managed in aquifer systems units – where the two resources are used together, they should be used conjunctively;***

- 2) Essential quantitative and qualitative information on resources, their uses, polluting pressures, ecosystems and their functions, the follow-up of their evolution, risk assessment and financial challenges of the sector should be obtain and made accessible. This information should be used as the objective basis for dialogue, negotiation, decision-making and evaluation of undertaken actions, as well as coordination of financing from the various donors;***

- 3) The participation in decision-making of the concerned Governmental Administrations and local Authorities, the representatives of different categories of users and associations for environmental protection or of public interest. This participation would be better organized in Basin Committees or Councils;***

- 4) Basin management plans or master plans clearly stating the long-term objectives to be achieved to guarantee water resource integrity;***

- 5) Significant increase in training and educational programs for responding to the adaptation needs in cooperation building and basin management;***

- 6) Mobilization of financial resources to meet the needs of countries in this field, taking account of their socioeconomic, cultural, and geopolitical specificity. It is necessary to set up everywhere complementary funding systems that are based on the participation and common cause of the users. Water charges mechanisms established for basin management can enable the use of the polluter-pays and***

user-pays principles and may have an interactive effect on consumption reduction and pollution control.

- *As global inventories of transboundary basins and aquifer systems and their technical and socioeconomic peculiarities are now completed, through the global programs supported by PCCP, World Water Assessment Program, ISARM, EU-WFD, EUWI, INBO-AP, the GEF and others, available conventions and agreements should be ratified by the riparian States concerned. Furthermore cooperation agreements need to be crafted at global, basin and aquifer levels to achieve necessary and sound cooperation. Similarly, institutions such as basin organizations should be created to nurture transboundary cooperation and strengthen communication and dialogue among users.*
- *Existing or developing legal instruments as well as adapted technical tools and gained experiences should be further disseminated through efforts of agencies and networks of basin organizations to promote transboundary water resources management.*

In parallel to the official sessions of the Forum, several side events allowed presenting a broad range of field experiments and direct exchanges between managers of basin organizations: the meeting organized between Chinese and European managers and experts within the «China - European Union Program for basin management» and the meeting between the people in charge of the Po Basin Authority in Italy and their counterparts of several large rivers in other continents, in particular.

The regional « Europe » session allowed presenting the implementation of the European Water Framework Directive and the UNECE Convention of 1992, called Helsinki Convention.

All the papers and photographs of these events, organized during the last World Water Forum held in Istanbul from 15 to 22 March 2009, may be consulted and downloaded on the website:

http://www.riob.org/wwf-5/index_fr.htm .

During the Forum, the joint publication by the Global Water Partnership - GWP and the International Network of Basin Organizations - INBO of the « Handbook on integrated water resources management in basins », which presents 84 examples of practical actions, allows confirming the realism of the recommendations made:

<http://www.riob.org/gwp/handbook/GWP-RIOBManuelDeGIREparBassin.pdf> .

The ministerial declaration of the Forum supports (2) « *the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at the level of river basins and groundwater systems, within each country, and, where appropriate, through international cooperation, to equitably meet economic, social and environmental demands and, inter alia, to address the impact of global change, taking into account the interests of all the partners, using participatory process in decision-making and planning, while creating links between relevant sectors to achieve solutions that benefit all parties* ».

The ministers also declared that they will (6) « *strengthen the prevention of pollution from all sectors in surface and ground water, appropriately applying the « polluter-pays principle »... (9) that they resolve to develop, implement and further strengthen transnational, national or/and local plans and programs to anticipate and address the possible impacts of global changes,... (11) that they will strive to improve water related monitoring systems and ensure that useful information is made freely available to all concerned populations, including neighboring countries ».*

Finally, they also declared (16) « *that they will take, as appropriate, tangible and concrete steps to improve and promote cooperation on sustainable use and protection of transboundary water resources through coordinated actions of riparian States, in conformity with existing agreements and/or other relevant arrangements, taking into account the interests of all riparian countries concerned. They will work to strengthen existing institutions and develop new ones, as appropriate and if needed, and implement instruments for improved management of transboundary waters ».*

Of course, some people will point out that these formulations can be subject to interpretation and obviously all the problems will not be miraculously solved, as some positions still remain too different, but unmistakably basin management and transboundary cooperation have scored during the World Water Forum of Istanbul!

For contacting us: riob@riob.org .

For more information: www.riob.org .

www.unesco.org .

www.worldwaterforum5.org .