

First meeting of global network of transboundary basins working on climate change adaptation held in Geneva



On 20 and 21 February 2013, just two weeks after the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was opened to all UN member states, representatives of 16 transboundary basins from four continents gathered in Geneva to exchange experience on adapting transboundary water management to climate change.

The network of basins, which is managed by the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) currently includes the following: the Amur/Argun/International Dauria Protected Area; the Chu Talas; the Congo; the Danube; the Dniester; the Drin; the Meuse; the Mekong; the Neman; the Niger; the Rhine; the Sava; the Senegal; the Tonle Sap; and the Upper Paraguay; as well as the Northern Sahara aquifer system.

At the meeting, representatives had the opportunity to learn from each other in an interactive setting. The experience of the Rhine Basin — one of the most advanced in terms of climate change adaptation — in bringing together scientists and decision makers to join forces for adaptation to climate change was, among others, highly appreciated.

Another example of an advanced basin is the Danube, where the River Commission has developed a transboundary adaptation strategy, the first of its kind developed in a transboundary basin. In the Neman Basin, shared by Belarus, Lithuania and the Russian Federation, a pilot project on climate change adaptation and river basin management has led to a renewal of transboundary cooperation between riparian countries.

The experience of the Senegal Basin — a new member of the network — raised a high level of interest as well. In the Senegal Basin, riparian countries not only jointly manage the river through the Senegal River Basin Development Authority, but also the infrastructure in the basin, including dams and reservoirs. They are now considering how to climate-proof their infrastructure.

The two co-Chairs of the UNECE Task Force on Water and Climate — Switzerland and the Netherlands — presented how they had developed their own national adaptation strategies and selected measures.

All participants called for further extension of the global network of basins to cover in the near future a great proportion of the transboundary basins worldwide. The fourth workshop on water and adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, to be held on 25 and 26 June 2013 in Geneva back to back with the Task Force on Water and Climate on 27 June, will provide an opportunity for this.

Background information:

This first meeting of the global network of basins marked the transformation of the programme of pilot projects, implemented by the UNECE and partners since 2010, into a global network of basins working on climate change adaptation in a transboundary context, managed by UNECE and INBO. The global network aims to enable the comparison of methodologies and approaches, foster exchange of experience and promote a shared vision between the participating basins.

The creation of a global network of basins working on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins was an outcome of the 6th World Water Forum and its results will be presented to the next World Water Forum in 2015 in the Republic of Korea. It is also part of the programme of work for 2013–2015 of the UNECE Water Convention, which also includes a global platform for water and climate change adaptation in the form of annual workshops.

The meeting was organized just two weeks after the Convention's transformation into a global Convention. The UNECE Water Convention is a unique framework for supporting transboundary cooperation in adaptation. Since 1992, the Convention has played a crucial role in the pan-European region in supporting the establishment and strengthening of cooperation. Building on the successes achieved, the Parties to the Convention amended it in 2003 to open it up to accession by non-UNECE countries. Having received the necessary number of ratifications, the amendments to the UNECE Water Convention to open it globally entered into force on 6 February 2013. It is expected that non-UNECE countries can accede to the Convention at the end of 2013. ■

All presentations of this meeting can be found at:

http://www.unece.org/env/water/core_group_pilot_projects_climate_change_2013.html.

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