

**International conference on:
'Cooperation for Water, Energy, and Food Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate
Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, 2-3 April 2014**

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In the year 2015, stock-taking of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is on the international agenda, along with the adoption of a new set of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to succeed them, setting the stage for the *post-2015 development agenda*. Recognising the critical importance of water for development, livelihoods and maintenance of our ecosystems, a potential dedicated SDG on water is being discussed internationally, along with how to stress the importance of water in other SDGs. The year 2015 is also the year of the *COP 21 in Paris* at which a new global climate agreement is on the agenda. As reconfirmed by the IPCC Fifth Assessment launched in March 2014, the impacts of climate change and the actions required to adapt and build resilience to these impacts, are strongly related to water, and through water to food and energy security. Both of these agendas have *strong transboundary dimensions*.

Acknowledging this, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and other shared basins of the world came together to address these issues. The purpose was to inform the international community, and transboundary basins around the world, in their efforts to shape the future global agenda, as well as to inform the Mekong Region leaders meeting at the 2nd MRC Summit on 5th April 2014. Following similar initiatives before the 1st MRC Summit, the Pre-Summit International Conference held in 2010, and the MRC international conference "*Mekong to Rio*" held in 2012, the MRC organised a third international conference conjoint with its 2nd MRC Summit – the Pre-Summit International Conference entitled "*Cooperation for Energy, Food and Water Security in trans-boundary Basins under changing climate*".

This conference gathered about 300 participants, including chief and senior representatives from some 20 transboundary river basin organisations in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas¹, leading representatives of some 20 international and regional organisations, most of which supported the Conference as Sponsoring Partners², and a wide range of stakeholders from the Mekong region and beyond.

GENERAL MESSAGES

Some 40% of the world's population live in river basins shared by several countries, and these are even more when also counting shared aquifers and water shared between sovereign entities (states, provinces) within countries. Transboundary basin organisations play an important role in developing and managing shared water resources and the benefits to be derived from cooperation between upstream and downstream riparian countries.

Wise water management is critical to climate change adaptation, not least in building resilience to sea-level rise and increased variability and extreme events, and is key to food and energy production. This underscores the importance of an integrated view on water, energy and food security. This becomes even more important when water is shared in order to realize the full benefits of cooperation.

¹ *The transboundary basins (shared river basins and aquifers) represented were Aral Sea, Columbia, Congo, Danube, Ganges, Guarani, Geneva Aquifer, Indus, Itaipu Binacional, Jordan, La Plata, Mekong, Niger, Nile, North Western Sahara Aquifer, Orange-Senque, Sao Francisco, Sava, Senegal, Severn, Vuoksi*

² *The Conference was convened in collaboration with the following sponsoring partners: African Network of Basin Organisations (ANBO), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Australian National University (ANU), Conservation International, (CI), Danish International Development Agency (Danida), German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Global Water Partnership (GWP), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group, International Water Association (IWA), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNESCO-IHE, University of Arizona, University of West England, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), World Bank WB), World Water Council (WWC)*

SPECIFIC MESSAGES

In addressing the overall topic, the Conference focused on three key issues:

Climate change adaptation in a transboundary context

- Progress should be acknowledged. The trend is upwards, not downwards, in openness, sharing of information, technical capacity and actions on the ground. Action should continue focusing on no/low regret options, while at the same time deepening the technical capacity and cooperation addressing trade-offs; otherwise asking for perfection may lead to inaction.
- There is sense of realism and long-term commitment in climate change adaptation approaches. There is no such thing as a quick fix. Scientific advances in support of adaptation show clear policy orientation on e.g. flood management, crop development and delta management. Interaction with policymakers should be intensified to have an effective science-policy dialogue with real impact.
- The focus of the discussions and the actions is sharpened when concentrating on climate variability, but there are still gaps in important areas such as water quality, sediment transportation, fish population and ecosystem impacts.

Sustainable development

- The nexus approach provides a very useful policy framework to understand development opportunities and challenges, and to involve multiple-sector stakeholders. However, the implementation of actions to address the issues will and should still take place through existing mechanisms and institutions, bearing the nexus approach in mind.
- While the nexus approach is important for the development of targets and goals in the post-2015 agenda, these targets are more likely to be reached through a dedicated goal on water. There is a risk that assuming that 'water is everywhere' leads to 'water being nowhere'. This goal must clearly reflect transboundary surface and groundwater challenges.
- Guidance is needed for the private sector to assess cumulative impacts of multiple developments to mitigate impacts on e.g. sediment transport, fisheries and livelihoods.

Benefits of cooperation

- Appropriate use of a nexus perspective in transboundary basins helps transform challenges in water management into opportunities and create the will to connect.
- In order to collectively benefit from the opportunities, transboundary agreements and institutions develop and need to adapt to changing environments. For these to work effectively, a combination of political will, technical cooperation and an inclusive process is required. Stakeholder's interests, both individuals and sovereign states, need to be balanced.
- The multi-stakeholder processes and institutions are key to turning social and environmental challenges into benefits to be shared between riparian communities and countries.

IN CONCLUSION

This outcome will inform the MRC Summit leaders in their deliberations on the future of the Mekong region and the MRC. It is also intended that the outcome will be useful the transboundary basin management agenda to receive attention among the participants and negotiators addressing the SDGs and the climate agreement at COP 21 in 2015.

In order to further disseminate and promote the outcome of this conference a Publication will be launched at the World Water Week in Stockholm in September 2014. The international Sponsoring Partner organizations will convey the outcome of the conference to relevant stakeholders world-wide.

Ho Chi Minh City, 3rd April 2014