



FRANCE AND TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

FACT SHEET



Water is, by nature, a local public good and a resource that crosses borders. This is a source of significant tension in some regions, namely Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. For this reason, France promotes international conventions that foster dialogue and support transboundary water cooperation initiatives.

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TRANSBOUNDARY
BASINS

These basins account for nearly
60% of global freshwater resources.

“ *Water holds the
key to sustainable
development* ”

Ban Ki-moon at the opening of the
Budapest Water Summit (Hungary),
8 October 2013.

50%

The proportion of the global
population that will be living in a
situation of water stress by 2025.

What is the issue?

Over 40% of the world's population lives in transboundary river basins, which account for almost 60% of global freshwater resources. Moreover, nearly one country in six depends on upstream countries for over half of its water supply. Any dam or irrigation project, which may be essential for a country's security, can turn into a divisive issue between neighbours. Shared waters can thus be a source of tension, for example the Nile basin, which is shared by 10 countries, and the Mekong basin, which is shared by Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

The international community's commitments

In order to prevent conflicts, there are negotiated solutions, based on international conventions, fostering regional cooperation. The Danube River Protection Convention, for example, brings together 15 states, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River gathers four (see box on next page), and the Niger Basin Authority gathers nine. The aim is to implement the principles of equitable and reasonable water use, the obligation to not cause significant impacts, and the regular exchange of data. International law on shared management of transboundary waters reached a milestone with the entry into force of two global conventions.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), known as the Helsinki Convention, to which there are 40 Parties, provides a framework for the rational use of transboundary watercourses and management of their pollution, and encourages cooperation to prevent conflicts. Its success at the regional level convinced the Parties to open the Convention in 2003 to all United Nations Member States, turning it into a global framework.

The Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997), known as the New York Convention, aims to stimulate regional dialogue and improve governance of water resources through the signing of agreements for joint management of shared watercourses. The Convention entered into force on 17 August 2014, following the required accession of 35 states.

In addition, in view of the need for international cooperation on transboundary aquifers, the UN International Law Commission worked on draft articles that were annexed to a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2008. These articles encourage states to take appropriate steps at the bilateral or regional level. A discussion on the legal form that these articles should take has been scheduled for 2016.

France's strategy

With its Water Act of 1964, France was a pioneer of integrated water resource management (IWRM) at the basin level. Its public stakeholders (water boards, French National Agency for Water and Aquatic Environments (ONEMA), local authorities, etc.) and private stakeholders (research consultancies, cartography and modelling tool providers, etc.) have today a wealth of experience. This experience, which is internationally recognized, underpins French diplomacy in this area.

These water resource management principles are promoted during all negotiations or events related to water or, more generally, the environment or sustainable development, including the 7th World Water Forum (April 2015, Daegu & Gyeongbuk), the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (June 2012, Rio de Janeiro) and the post-2015 development agenda negotiations (July 2014, New York). This diplomatic strategy is supported by the work of the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and the Agence française de développement (AFD, French agency for development). On average, AFD provides funding of €700 million per year for the water and sanitation sector.

Adaptation to climate change, which is already having a clear impact on water resources, is also a major focus of French diplomacy.

France's areas of focus

France supports regional cooperation initiatives on shared waters, particularly in Africa (Niger Basin Authority, Lake Chad Basin Commission, Volta Basin Authority, Sahara and Sahel Observatory, etc.) and Asia (Mekong River Commission, support for water data collection in Central Asia, etc.).

To further encourage international cooperation, France supports the Helsinki Convention by participating in the work of its governing body and promotes the New York Conven-

tion, to which it acceded in 2011. France also plays an active role in the European water diplomacy initiative launched in July 2013 at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting.

Achievements

Although progress in diplomacy and cooperation was slow to begin with, it has gathered momentum in recent years, particularly since the 6th World Water Forum and the efforts made to highlight the issue of "water and security". Since 2012, an additional 11 states have ratified the New York Convention, enabling its entry into force. The Helsinki Convention was officially opened to non-members of the UNECE on 6 February 2013. Furthermore, a growing number of states are no longer opposed to the principles underlined in these conventions. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go as only 40% of basins are managed through an agreement between the countries that share them.

Future challenges

Formalizing the synergies between the two conventions: further discussions will need to be held on addressing the issues linked to transboundary aquifer systems, the expansion of the 1992 Helsinki Convention and, at the same time, the entry into force of the 1997 New York Convention.

Increasing coordination between actors in this sector, such as states (France, the United States of America, Germany, etc.) and donors (World Bank), to foster the formalization of mechanisms for transboundary water sharing and cooperation.

Ensuring this issue is addressed during the two major events of 2015, namely the post-2015 development agenda negotiations and the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21).

80%

The proportion of surface waters in Africa that are transboundary waters.

ORGANIZATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SENEGAL RIVER (OMVS)

The Senegal River passes through Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. In 1972, when the Sahel was suffering from drought and famine, these countries decided to set up OMVS in order to manage the river basin together and further the development of the region.

The construction of dams enabled irrigated agriculture and hydroelectric power generation. AFD is currently helping OMVS to implement its development plan, which was drawn up using a participatory approach, strengthen its monitoring of the environment, and collect data. OMVS is also implementing a health monitoring plan with a sanitation and drinking water access programme to combat bilharzia. This disease, which is caused by a freshwater parasite, kills an estimated 200,000 people in Africa each year.

40%

The percentage of shared waters managed through an agreement between the countries concerned.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

UNECE Water Convention website
www.unece.org/env/water.html

UN Watercourses Convention Online User's Guide
www.unwatercoursesconvention.org

French Global Environment Facility (FFEM)
www.ffem.fr/lang/en/accueil-FFEM

Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)
www.oss-online.org/en/water-program

International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)
www.riob.org/spip.php?sommaire&lang=en

French Water Partnership (FWP)
www.partenariat-francais-eau.fr/en/

Towards a Joint Management of Transboundary Aquifer Systems - Methodological Guidebook (À Savoir collection, No. 3, December 2011)
www.afd.fr/webdav/shared/PUBLICATIONS/RECHERCHE/Scientifiques/A-savoir/03-VA-A-Savoir.pdf

The Handbook for Integrated Water Resources Management in Transboundary Basins of Rivers, Lakes and Aquifers (March 2012)
www.inbo-news.org/IMG/pdf/MGIREB-UK-2012-2.pdf

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