

**The UNECE Water Convention  
20 years of experience in  
supporting transboundary water  
cooperation on the ground**

Sonja Koepfel  
Secretariat, UNECE Water Convention

# The Water Convention: making a difference on the ground...

A great number of transboundary water agreements in both East ...



# The Water Convention: making a difference on the ground...

...and West



## ... in various contexts

Significant diversity within UNECE region:

Water challenges

- ✓ Growing problem of water scarcity
- ✓ Extreme events

Political landscape

Economic and social conditions



# How?

A **strong institutional framework** and a comprehensive **programme of work** supporting...

→ The development of soft-law tools:  
Guidelines..

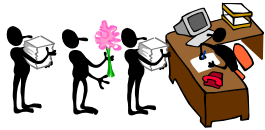
→ Projects on the ground: NPDs, capacity building...

→ Advisory services: new agreements, establishing joint bodies

→ Exchange of experience

# Institutional framework

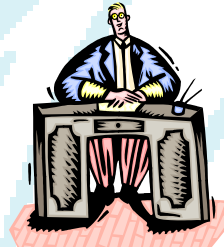
Meeting of the Parties



Implementation  
Committee



*Working Group on  
Monitoring and  
Assessment*  
*Legal Board*



Bureau



Task Force on Water and  
Climate

Task Force on Water-  
Food-Ecosystems-Energy  
Nexus

Working Group on Integrated  
Water Resources Management



Secretariat

A permanent institutional platform  
ensures sustained progress and long-term results

# Soft law development to support implementation

- Water pollution by hazardous substances (1994)
- Water pollution from fertilizers (1995)
- Licensing of wastewater discharges (1996)
- Monitoring & assessment of rivers & lakes (1996), transboundary groundwaters
- Sustainable flood prevention (2000)
- Safety of pipelines (2006)
- Payments for ecosystem services (2007)
- Transboundary flood management (2007)
- Tailing management facilities (2009)
- Water and adaptation to climate change (2009)
- Guide to Implementing the Water Convention (2009)
- Transboundary groundwaters (2012)...
- Assessing benefits of cooperation (2015)
- Nexus assessment methodology (2015)



# Comprehensive work programmes

**Work programme 2010-2012: 100% implemented**

## **Work programme 2013-2015:**

Area 1: Support to implementation

Area 2: EU Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues

Area 3: Quantifying the benefits of transboundary cooperation

Area 4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

Area 5: Water- food-energy-ecosystems nexus

Area 6: Opening of the Convention

Area 7: Promotion of the Convention and establishment of strategic partnerships



# Work on benefits of cooperation under the Water Convention

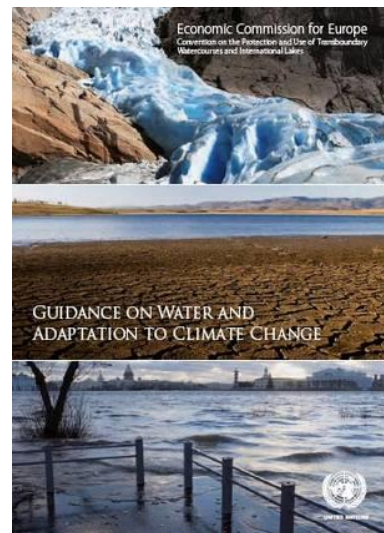
**Objective:** To support Governments to estimate the broad range of potential benefits of TWC to encourage cooperation  
→ A Policy Guidance Note on identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of TWC

	On economic activities	Beyond economic activities
From improved water management	<b>Economic benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activity and productivity in economic sectors</li><li>• Economic impacts of water-related hazards</li></ul>	<b>Social and environmental benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Health impacts</li><li>• Employment and poverty</li><li>• Cultural value, recreation</li></ul>
From enhanced trust	<b>Regional economic integration benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goods, services, labour</li><li>• Cross-border investments</li><li>• Infrastructure networks</li></ul>	<b>Peace and security benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peace and security</li><li>• Avoided cost of military conflict, military spending</li></ul>

# Responding to the needs - example of water and adaptation to climate change

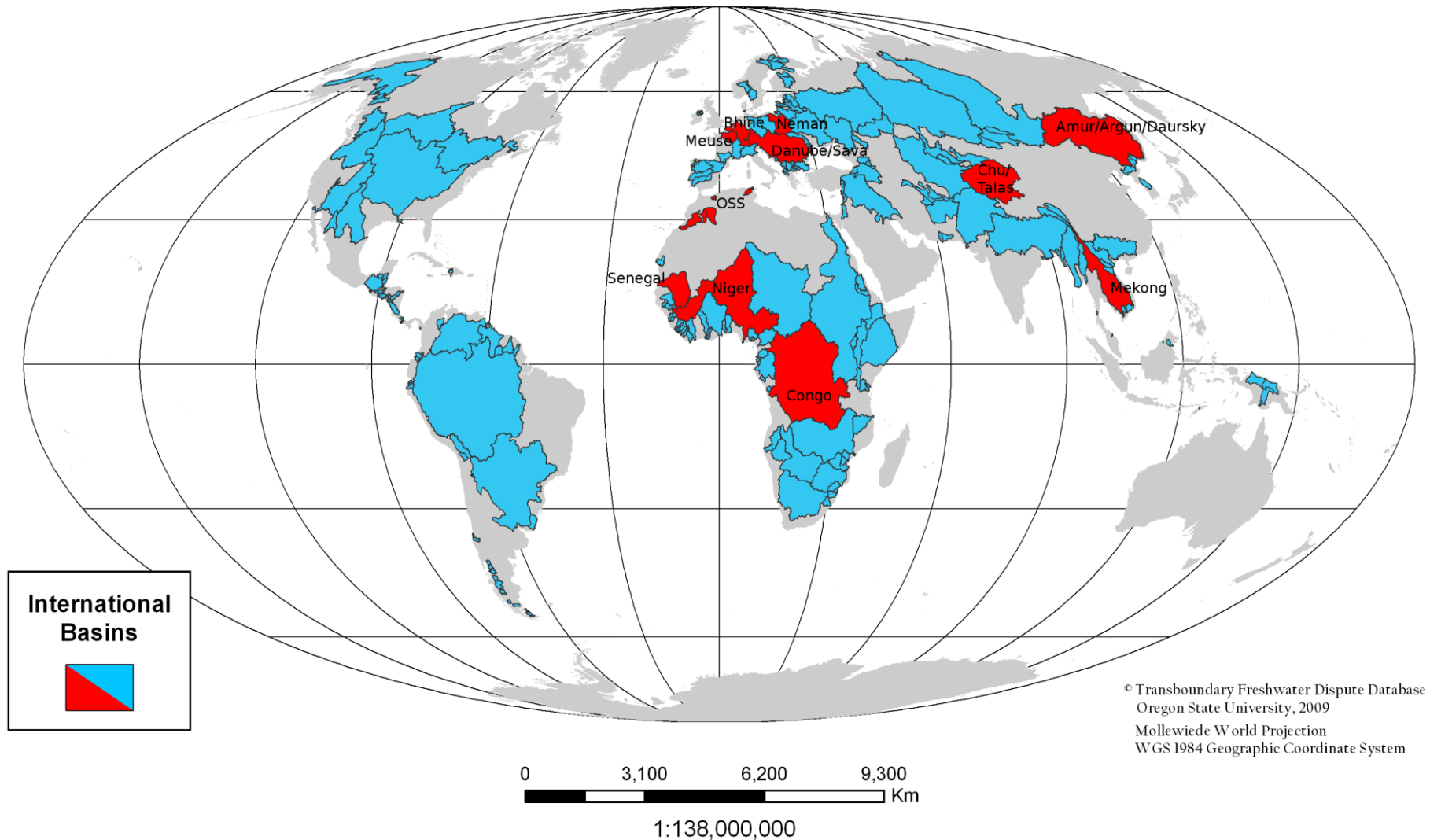
Impacts of climate change on water ->  
needs for transboundary cooperation ->  
Task Force on Water and Climate

- Guidance on water and adaptation to climate change (2009)
- Collection of lessons learned and good practices (2015)
- Annual global workshops
- Pilot projects to apply the Guidance - a global network of basins
- Global platform for sharing of experience



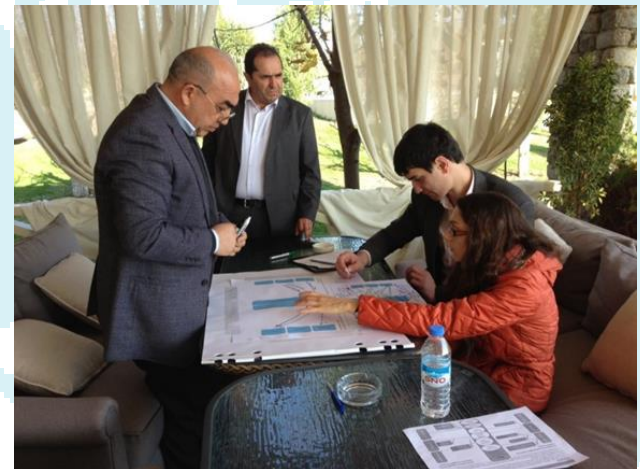
# Basins in the global network of basins working on climate change

## International River Basins



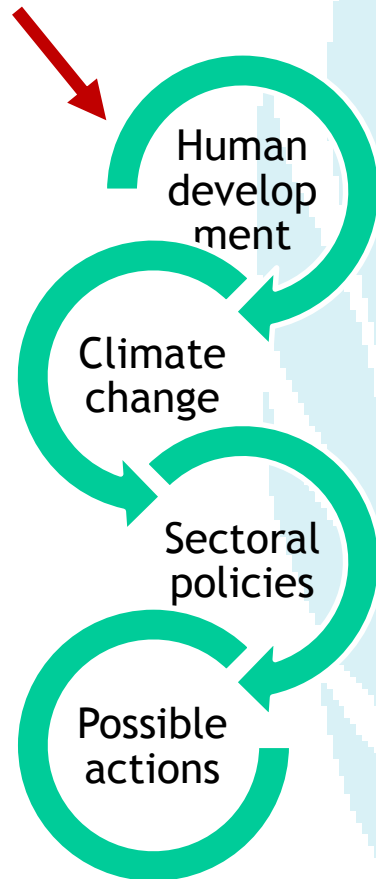
# Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus under the Water Convention in selected basins

- Work overseen and guided by the nexus Task Force
- Several basins assessed - pan-Europe, Africa, Asia; different nexus settings, climate, resource scarcity etc.
- Key partners: Finland (lead)/Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, FAO, Royal Institute of Technology (Stockholm)
- Generic methodology developed & piloted; basins assessed: the Alazani/Ganikh, Sava, Syr Darya
- Participatory process supports an Intersectoral dialogue for sustainable development
- Proposed to be replicated on the NW Sahara Aquifer & Niger Basin



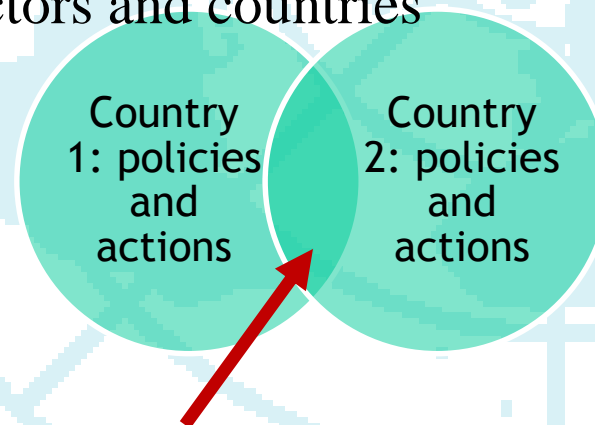
# Why a Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus in transboundary river basins?

## *Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus*



Need to integrate/coordinate:


1. A better understanding of inter-sector and inter-resources dynamics allows accounting for impacts & more effective resource management
2. To make policies and actions more coherent across sectors and countries



*Communication, collaboration and joint action!*

# Convention is supporting agreements: Intergovernmental bilateral Dniester Basin Treaty of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine supported by UNECE and OSCE





## Practical support to establish cooperation - example of the Drin

- Drin river basin (Albania, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo (under UN SC resolution 1244))
- Launch of “Drin Dialogue” in 2009, in partnership with GWP-Mediterranean and Petersberg Process
- MOU “Shared Vision for the management of the Drin Basin” - 2011
- Support by the GEF



## Working with non-Parties in difficult conflict-prone regions: Tajik-Afghan example

Establishing cooperation on hydrology and environment in upper Amudarya between Tajikistan and Afghanistan (2012-2013):

- bilateral working group
- exchange of hydrological data
- visits to hydrological monitoring stations
- cooperation with border guards
- first steps: cooperation in flood management and emergency situations, agreeing on compatible hydrological monitoring equipment, methods and models
- vision for the future: integrating Afghanistan in the Aral Sea cooperation (IFAS)



# Some lessons learnt

- **Agreements, joint bodies** (commissions etc.) are key to establishment of sustainable transboundary water cooperation
- A constructive **dialogue** and **identification of common interest** among riparians and with partners is necessary
- Establishment of contacts and a necessary basis through **technical cooperation for building trust** among riparian countries - potential for a more political dimension
- Developing effective transboundary cooperation takes time - **long-term engagement** and patience important
- Sharing / solidarity/political willingness essential for progress, and identification of windows of opportunity!



# Why is the Convention relevant for Africa?

- Sound legal framework coupled with action to support implementation and implementation committee
- Catalyst for cooperation, balanced approach for both upstream and downstream countries
- Several African countries already participated in the Convention's activities, some showed some interest - the Convention can support such requests
- Cooperation with partners such as ECA, GWP, SADC, IGAD, ANBO, and many others
- Continuously evolve and address emerging issues that involve conflict potential (dam failure, climate change)
- BUT: It is up to each country to decide

# Upcoming events and opportunities

- Meeting of the Parties: 17-19 November, Budapest: invitation to all, new work programme to be adopted:
  - Benefits: invitation to use the Guidance developed
  - Nexus: Invitation to use the methodology developed
  - Climate change: Invitation to join the global network of basins: next workshop in April 2016
  - Opening: national and subregional events
  - New work on water allocation in transboundary basins

# Thank you!

## More information

including guidelines, publications and information on activities under the Convention can be found at

<http://unece.org/env/water>

[water.convention@unece.org](mailto:water.convention@unece.org), [sonja.koeppel@unece.org](mailto:sonja.koeppel@unece.org)

