

Regional Workshop on Transboundary Water Cooperation in the context of the SDGs in South Asia and beyond

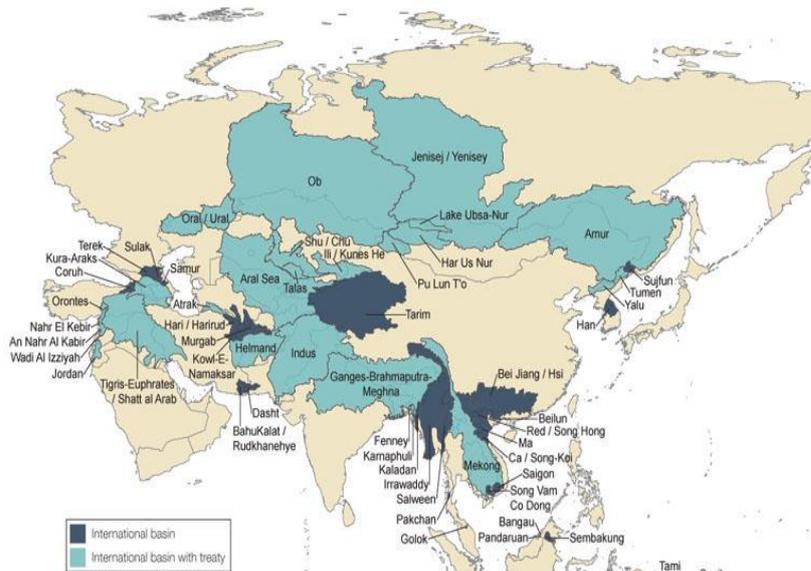
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organized by the GWP, GWP South Asia and GWP Nepal
in cooperation with the Geneva Water Hub and UNESCO-IHE

1. Background:

Transboundary cooperation is necessary in Asia, and particularly in the Greater Himalayas, since most of the rivers in this region are shared across borders, which creates strong inter-dependencies. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, for example, share twenty major rivers. The largest three transboundary basins in the region – in terms of area, population, water resources, irrigation and hydropower potential – are the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra. There has been recognition for the need for regional cooperation in the management and development of water as means to support economic and social development, regional political stability and peace. The riparian countries have tried to navigate the transboundary water flows through a series of treaties and ongoing negotiations. However, amid geopolitical challenges, the implementation of these legally binding bilateral agreements is often being hampered. New dam and hydropower developments constantly bring newer dimensions to the debate. Moreover, the onset of climate change has started to affect hydro-meteorological conditions in the area, triggering glacier melting, worsening floods, droughts, and other extreme weather events.

In this context, mutual trust and incentives to share benefits should be further promoted between the riparian countries of this region. Universal and basin-specific agreements are tools to build dialogue between States. The principle of equitable and reasonable utilization, the obligation not to cause a significant damage, the requirements of notification, consultation and negotiations as well as prevention and settlement of disputes are provided under these instruments. However, together with the implementation of the principles and rules, participatory approaches should also be promoted involving stakeholders from all sectors, from NGOs to associations of water users, incl. youth, women and vulnerable groups.



At the same time, with the adoption by the UN General Assembly in 2015 of the “2030 Agenda” aiming at achieving 17 different Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, a new global milestone has been reached. Several of these SDGs and related targets are relevant to transboundary cooperation. This is particularly the case of SDG 6.5., which aims at “By 2030, implement(ing) integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate” but also of SDG 16 to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” as well as SDG 17 to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” and several others. This creates new opportunities for collaboration at all levels, which can bring forward solid transboundary water governance, security and peace.

Taking into account the global agenda as well as the specificities of the region is key for the implementation of IWRM and transboundary water cooperation. Context specific solutions, regional and local partnerships should of course be preferred to one-size-fits-all approaches while building on important global milestones and opportunities. In this regard, the workshop is a follow up to several discussions between representatives of the four Asian RWPs (Caucasus-Central Asia, China, South Asia, South-East Asia) held since 2014 on how to work more closely together in areas of common interest to the region on transboundary matters.

2. Purpose of the workshop:

This workshop aims at promoting the exchange of experiences, knowledge sharing, capacity building, and other forms of cooperation on the common issue of transboundary cooperation, with a view to foster mutual trust and enhanced collaboration and build on the recently adopted 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

More precisely, with the support of selected international and regional experts, the workshop intends to:

- Bring together international and regional experts and practitioners active in the field of international water law and transboundary cooperation to share knowledge, experiences and expertise on key issues in their area of expertise
- Build trust and develop negotiation skills through relevant role plays/working group activities
- Develop inclusive approaches, which leave no one behind, notably involving civil society, women and youth
- Explore possible joint activities, context-specific solutions and way forward on knowledge exchange in international water law and transboundary cooperation

3. Target audience:

The workshop is targeted at:

- Water practitioners from across Asia active in transboundary cooperation;
- Regional and country coordinators of GWP across Asia;
- Members of women, youth and civil society organizations active in regional transboundary cooperation.

4. Key topics:

- Current status of key international water law instruments and case law (incl. the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, the 1992 UNECE Water Convention, and the International Law Commission's Draft Articles on Transboundary Aquifers);
- Transboundary cooperation in the SDG context;
- Status of regional cooperation, incl. several case studies, in particular on key rivers (Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra, Indus, Salween, Irrawady, Mekong, etc.);
- Public participation and stakeholder involvement in transboundary governance.

5. Expected outcomes:

- Participants are updated on the latest developments regarding transboundary water cooperation and international water law in the context of the 2030 Agenda;
- Participants are able to identify interlinkages between transboundary cooperation and the SDGs;
- Participants have exchanged knowledge and experience on the status and challenges of transboundary water cooperation in the region, and gained insight from experts and fellow participants;
- Participants have developed together a draft roadmap for further learning, knowledge exchange and identified further capacity building needs in the context of GWP's Transboundary Thematic Programme.