



**Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes**

**Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management
Fifteenth meeting**

Geneva, 30 September – 2 October 2020

Item 7(b) of the provisional agenda

Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins.

Concept note

Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus

Sixth meeting

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland/Virtual participation through Interprefy

22-23 October 2020

Background

Transboundary water resources constitute more than 60% of global freshwater resources. Water, energy, food, and environmental security depend on these waters. Their sustainable management is crucial for development, peace and stability, as is effective cooperation among riparian countries and the different sectors of the economy that rely on them. The international community explicitly calls for a nexus approach in efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing their interlinked nature. The way shared water resources are used will also be impacted during the current global crisis and in the recovery by the evolution of energy and food markets as well as changes in production, when Governments will be prioritizing securing supply and affordability of these resources. Regional cooperation across sectors can ensure that these strategic decisions come with minimal trade-offs and exploit to the maximum possible synergies. Understanding the resource interlinkages opens crucial opportunities for cooperation benefits that diplomatic efforts can leverage.

The Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystem Nexus, chaired by Finland as the Lead Party, was established in 2013 under the Water Convention to oversee a series of thematic “nexus” assessments¹ in transboundary basins, responding to the recognition by countries that intersectoral issues can be a source of tension in transboundary basins even when their causes lie beyond water management. This global platform allows countries and basins to share their knowledge and experience of integrated management of natural resources in shared basins. The Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention at its eighth session (Astana, 10-12 October 2018) requested the Secretariat, as part of the Programme of Work 2019-2021² under the

¹ Transboundary Nexus Assessment methodology was developed ad-hoc for the assessments. Information is available at : <https://www.unece.org/env/water/nexus.html>

² Area of work “Supporting intersectoral dialogues and assessments through the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach” (3.2), led by Finland.

Water Convention, to undertake the preparation of a Synthesis report of solutions to such intersectoral issues and experience from addressing the nexus.

The “nexus” concept is rooted in the idea that sectoral and national policies urgently need to become more coherent to reduce resource management trade-offs and reconcile multiple uses. Policy coherence can be improved through inter-sectoral exchange of communication, active coordination and integrated planning, due consideration of different interests, negotiation of trade-offs, all the way to maximizing synergy and cooperating towards common objectives. Notably, policy coherence is a necessary condition for effective climate action, which requires acting across sectors (energy, food, environment protection, etc.) and across scales (global to local, and transboundary).

Policy coherence can bring economic benefits by facilitating the development of synergies and partnerships, which in turn motivates the co-financing of investments: public-private, multi-sector, and multi-countries. In transboundary settings, increased trust among riparian countries is essential to reduce the political risks for investors. Transboundary cooperation in investment also provides for different interests and concerns to be accounted for, more effective placement of investments and harmonization in applying environmental standards.

Multiplying benefits from a single project (e.g. multi-purpose infrastructure; improved efficiency of water, land, and energy resources through innovative solutions) is the most practical way of contributing to different objectives at the same time. However, without a coherent policy framework, consultative processes and planning frameworks that support integration, upscaling or replicating this type of investments are difficult.

Various Governments and institutions have been involved so far in nexus dialogues and/or assessments carried out by the Water Convention and/or partner organizations around the world. Among them is IUCN, who has a wealth of experience, among others from the project Building River Dialogue and Governance (BRIDGE)³ and Nexus Dialogue on Water Infrastructure Solutions, and the Global Water Partnership. These efforts make up a significant body of knowledge and practical experience. Other major initiatives include the regional Nexus Dialogues supported by the European Commission and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Despite this experience, there is still a lack of convincing examples – also due to low awareness and dissemination – demonstrating the real added value of a nexus approaches (to policy making and investment planning) compared to traditional, sectoral approaches. The nexus approach should lead to “nexus solutions”⁴ that increase resource efficiency and reconcile different interests, while protecting water resources and the environment and maximizing the social value of investments. However, in many cases, it may be difficult to *operationalize* these solutions across sectors and across borders. Therefore, a lot of questions remain open: Who should develop these solutions, and how? What are the costs and benefit associated with them? What institutional frameworks (particularly in transboundary basins) are needed to support their implementation? What financing sources are available, and what investment schemes? And – last but not least – what can we learn from the experience of governments and other key stakeholder who took part in nexus dialogues and assessments? It is these important gaps that the Synthesis of nexus solutions seeks to fill, with focus on transboundary contexts.

³ Information available at : <https://www.iucn.org/theme/water/our-work/current-projects/bridge>. Among the relevant studies for this report is *Measuring, understanding and adapting to nexus trade-offs in the Sekong, Sesan and Srepok Transboundary River Basins*: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2019-024-En.pdf>

⁴ For the nexus assessments under the Water Convention, the “5 I’s framework” was developed, which groups solutions in: (i) Institutions, (ii) Information, (iii) Instruments, (iv) Infrastructure, and (v) International coordination and cooperation.

Sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus

At the Sixth meeting of the Task Force, to be held in Geneva from 22 to 23 October 2020⁵, back-to-back with the virtual Third meeting of the Expert Group on Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook (20-21 October 2020)⁶, the Secretariat will present the draft Synthesis report on nexus solutions, prepared in cooperation with IUCN, for review and discussion. This will include the experience of various organizations and actors around the world, including Governments, Regional Economic Commissions, and River Basin Organizations. The meeting is open to officials and experts representing governmental authorities, the private sector, non-governmental and international organizations as well as academia.

Limited physical participation is foreseen in Geneva following the sanitary regulations at the time. However, due to the travel restrictions due to the COVID 19 pandemic it will be possible to attend the entire meeting online.

The meeting will be an occasion to discuss lessons learned from this variety of experiences of developing and implementing nexus solutions and investments. Participants will discuss how working across sectors supports transboundary cooperation and vice versa, by: 1) reducing pressures on water by acting on external drivers (outside water management); 2) acting more effectively on common cross-cutting challenges (e.g. adapting to climate change in a shared basin) ;3) broadening the funding base available for cooperation, as well as for projects of common interest, and 4) engaging more, and more strategic, sectoral stakeholders in the transboundary cooperation processes.

The meeting will be held over two days and will consist of four sessions of two hours.

Overview of the agenda:

Session 1 (22 October, 10 CET-12 CET)

- Introduction: **assessments of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus under the Water Convention** – from joint identification of issues to intersectoral solutions
- Presentation of and discussion on the draft **Synthesis Document on Nexus Solutions and Investments**.
- Discussion on the **experience from different regions** informed by the Synthesis report. Solutions identified, experiences in implementation and challenges faced, particularly with regard to institutional arrangements across scales (role of river basin organizations (RBOs) and regional organizations) and across sectors (e.g. national coordination in relation to integrated planning, SDGs' implementation)
- Planning of discussions by region to be carried out as follow-up to the Task Force in partnership with interested regional partners (e.g. RBOs or Economic Commissions) and/or international organizations.

Session 2 (22 October, 14 CET-16 CEST)

- **Financing and investing in nexus solutions** (in terms of: Climate finance, Nature-based solutions, Transboundary investments, Public Private Partnerships, etc.).
 - Selected interventions from e.g. International Financing Institutions and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat.

⁵ Due to the uncertainties related to international travel, the secretariat provides for virtual participation.

⁶ <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/water/areas-of-work-of-the-convention/water-allocation-in-a-transboundary-context.html>

Session 3 (23 October, 10 CET-12 CEST)

- Panel of interventions highlighting **key themes and partnerships** (TBC): e.g. Transboundary River Basin Assessment Methodology and its applications, Nexus Solutions and Investments (International Union for Conservation of Nature), Contribution to GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW-LEARN) (GEF), Sustainable renewable energy deployment toolkit⁷ (UNECE Sustainable Energy Division/Group of Experts on Renewable Energy), Regional cooperation on natural resources (UNECE Nexus Cluster on Sustainable Management of Natural Resources).

Session 4 (23 October, 14 CET-16 CEST)

- **Next steps** in nexus work under the Water Convention and proposals for the next Programme of Work (2022-2024): presentations by Finland (the nexus) and Hungary (water allocation).
- **Discussion**, expressions of interest

⁷ UNECE, 2020. [Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment.](#)