

CONCLUSIONS

of the Global workshop on building climate-resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels

Session 1: Increasing resilience of water and sanitation to the effects of climate change, including through the Protocol on Water and Health

1. Climate change impacts water cycle by disrupting weather patterns, leading to extreme weather events, unpredictable water availability, exacerbating water scarcity and contaminating water supplies in short, medium and long term. Such impacts can drastically affect water quantity and quality, ultimately affecting human health. Temperature changes and rainfall alter ecological niches, spreading and distribution of some water-borne illnesses and disease vectors while rising sea levels affect water and sanitation service security and safety.
2. Building and maintaining water supply and sanitation systems that are resilient to climate shocks should rely upon the commitments of policy governance and integration with other sector and progress (e.g. green and digital transition) and requires integrated perspective on water, sanitation, climate and health with the applying of risk-based approaches and tools, such as water and sanitation safety plans.
3. Within the fundamental inter-sectorial approach, water and sanitation operators play an important role in increasing resilience to climate change. Strong climate-sensitive regulatory frameworks are key enablers in the process.
4. The Protocol on Water and Health is a powerful multilateral instrument that helps countries systematically address water and sanitation-related health risks arising from a changing climate.

Session 2: Water, sanitation and health in national climate policies

1. Water is a common thread linking the key global goals of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with national commitments on climate change.
2. Integrating water and sanitation-related climate adaptation policies is crucial for strengthening the resilience of our economies and societies, health and well-being.
3. National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) serve as the umbrella plan of action for adaptation at country level, embracing all other relevant national plans and sectoral strategies, as well as plans at subnational and, where relevant, regional/transboundary plans. Water, sanitation and health should be given high priority in the NAPs and also in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Session 3: Disaster risk reduction through transboundary cooperation

1. An integrated multi-hazard risk approach is needed to adequately address disaster risks, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, linking, for example, floods and droughts which

often happen in the same basin at different moments. Natural disasters can trigger technological disasters such as industrial accidents. Basin-wide contingency planning is therefore recommended. Health aspects of disasters are often disregarded; however, they should be also considered.

2. Cooperation at the regional and transboundary level is important for addressing disaster risks to prevent mal-adaptation and make disaster risk reduction more effective, for example, by sharing data, basin-wide early warning and monitoring systems, joint prioritization of measures to address disaster risks and consequently sharing adaptation costs and benefits. This can increase trust and promote transboundary cooperation more broadly. Making existing transboundary agreements climate-resilient is complicated but may be important. Nature-based solutions can help to reduce disaster risks. The Water Convention plays an important role in helping countries jointly adapt to climate change and to reduce disaster risk.
3. Increasing funds are available for adaptation and it is therefore important for the water community to submit good project proposals on water, WASH and climate change, including regional and transboundary water cooperation, highlighting the climate rationale, and to mainstream these issues into NDCs and NAPs.

Session 4: Transboundary cooperation and health policies

1. Some transboundary agreements such as on the Lake Victoria, the Amazon and the Senegal basins include health or WASH issues, with an increasing trend, maybe due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Those examples illustrate that health and water quality issues can actually promote transboundary cooperation.
2. Some basin organizations, especially in developing countries, which work on broader development topics, are dealing with health-related issues, mostly WASH and access to water, in addition to more traditional RBO tasks such as implementing water quality measures such as pollution prevention, developing and applying joint norms and standards, etc. This may be related to their broader mandate aiming also to support development. For example, a few river basin organizations are involved in disease surveillance, prevention of infectious diseases e.g. by distributing mosquito nets and disseminating medicine.
3. It is important to involve local communities in disaster risk reduction, water management and, if relevant, transboundary cooperation, e.g. through awareness-raising, education, trainings, etc. Story-telling can enable better understanding of the importance of basin-wide cooperation and reduction of impacts on shared waters. Impacts of climate change need to be demonstrated within an actor's immediate sphere of influence as well as their role so that they see how these impacts and actions of local communities are translated to transboundary level which is quite abstract otherwise. Working with community focal points or leaders is also crucial, including for health-related issues.
4. Integration of WASH and health aspects into transboundary basin development requires regional coordination with strong technical and financial support to enhance development, harmonization and implementation of the relevant policies and actions.

5. Transboundary cooperation is a long process which has been impacted in both positive and negative ways by the COVID19 pandemic. On the one hand, pre-existing cooperation frameworks have mostly been able to continue, although in altered formats. New cooperation frameworks have, conversely, been challenging to establish and many meetings could not take place. Digitalization of cooperation methods has been accelerated, sometimes enhancing stakeholder involvement into transboundary meetings and processes; on the other hand, Covid-19 has also diminished the possibilities for more complex negotiations which require in-person dialogue. In some cases, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted higher cooperation between some border cities around shared rivers and water supply and sanitation. There are opportunities that in the process of building back better disaster risk reduction can be better integrated into policies, strategies and river basin management plans by linking biological, technological and natural hazards.
6. Water supply and demand in commercial and residential settings significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions (up to 10%). Therefore, water is crucial for climate change mitigation and should therefore be considered in global climate discussions.