

Seventh meeting of the WFEE Nexus Task Force under the Water Convention

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Ladies and Gentlemen, excellencies, dear colleagues,

Good morning, let me introduce myself, I am Francesca Bernardini, the chief of the Transboundary Cooperation Section.

Having been the Secretary to the Water Convention back in 2013 when the Task Force on the Water, Food, Energy, Ecosystems Nexus held its first meeting, it is a real pleasure to be with you today to open the 7th meeting of the Task Force.

Compared to 9 years ago, the 200 participants in today's TF meeting are more than 3 times those present at the first meeting. 56 countries are represented today (2.5 times more than those at the first meeting), 40 partners from international organizations, joint bodies and NGOs, and a rich participation from academia.

This is a very concrete evidence of the global expansion of the Water Convention, which was joined on the 1st of November by its newest Party, Cameroon. And I take this opportunity to warmly welcome Cameroon to the community of Parties.

The broad participation in today's meeting is also a strong testimony of the growing recognition of the water-food-energy-ecosystem approach. Since its prominence in policy and development discourses back in 2011, the concept is now widely recognized as critical to sustainable development and to achieving the SDGs.

Given the synergies, conflicts and trade-offs that arise from how water, land, energy and nature are managed, it is clear that we MUST use integrated, holistic approaches in the planning of these resources, taking into account interactions and dependencies. And this is even more needed in the transboundary context, if we are to prevent conflicts and optimize resource efficiency.

However, we also know that the applying a nexus approach and breaking sectoral silos is challenging. And, again, even more so in the transboundary context. Applying a nexus approach obliges us to deal with complexity coupled with deficiency of data. It challenges us to bridge the gap between science and policy making, to deal with the non-alignment between nexus boundaries and administrative units.

This Task Force is established exactly with the aim to support efforts to overcome these challenges by advancing the understanding of the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus in transboundary basins, and by promoting best practices in the application of the nexus approach.

The success of this Task Force is very much depending on the partners which use it to disseminate their work. So, I would like to wholeheartedly thank, first of all Finland, which has led this work since the beginning, together with FAO, ESCWA ECLAC, DESA, GIZ, GWP, GEF, IUCN, KTH, OECD, and the many

other partners, in particular river basin organizations, which have enriched the Task Force with their experiences.

Today and tomorrow we will hear from countries, river basin organizations, academics, project managers, donors and partners. We have a busy agenda and a several topics of discussion:

1. The promotion of nexus cooperation in transboundary basins globally building on all the knowledge and experience developed so far - under the Task Force and beyond;
2. The “operationalization” of Nexus Solutions and Investments, especially from the perspective of RBOs;
3. Water allocation in the transboundary context and complementarity of the Nexus Approach, as the Task Force is also responsible for overseeing the work on water allocation under the Water Convention
4. We will also focus on the key role of ecosystems in the nexus - which is very timely considering the ongoing COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Science findings are clear: biodiversity and ecosystem functions are declining faster than at any time in human history and this will undermine nature’s capacity to provide water, food and energy in the future. So we need to focus on this part of the nexus.
5. We will also hear about the activities of the Sustainable Water and Energy Solutions Network coordinated by UNDESA and ITAIPU Binacional, which are in many ways complementary to the ones of this Task Force.

Of course, we will also review the most recent activities on water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus and water allocation under the Water Convention, and future plans for the period 2022-24.

As I said, the Task Force aims to trigger the much-needed action across water, food, energy and ecosystems through transboundary cooperation. So let us take the opportunity of the upcoming 2023 UN Water Conference – the first UN conference on water in almost 50 years – to accelerate this action. As you know, both Water for Sustainable Development, which refers to the Water-Food-Energy Nexus, and “Water for Cooperation”, and which puts transboundary cooperation at the forefront, are among the themes of the Conference. We need clear commitments that help deliver on water in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, accelerate implementation and enhance impacts. Such commitments will be compiled in the Water Action Agenda, a key outcome of the Conference. I encourage all countries and organizations to submit commitments to the Conference focusing on transboundary water cooperation and on water, food, energy, ecosystem nexus solutions.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all a fruitful meeting.