

Thematic session on public participation in river basin management in transboundary basins

(Wednesday, 21 June, 11.10-13:00 and 15:00–15:20,
Conference room XXVI, Palais des Nations, Geneva/ Switzerland)

Background:

What does the Water Convention say?

Article 16 of the Water Convention outlines that all states “shall ensure that information on the conditions of transboundary waters, measures taken or planned to be taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, and the effectiveness of those measures, is made available to the public”. The obligation also seeks to enable the public to participate effectively in relevant decision-making processes. Additionally, many Parties to the Water Convention are also Parties to the **Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)**, which provides more detailed procedural obligations in relation to stakeholder participation. The second Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 25-27 May 2005) adopted the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums and recommended their application by all Parties.

What is the current situation?

According to the latest report assessing progress in the implementation of the Water Convention in the period 2017–2020, the **involvement of the public and other stakeholders in the activities of joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation by granting observer status or an advisory role is limited**.¹

The general public is less likely to be involved in activities of joint bodies or mechanisms than organized entities, such as non-governmental organizations, water user associations, academic or research institutions and private sector or intergovernmental organizations. There is also **a need for stronger engagement of local stakeholders in activities of joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation**, as such participation enhances the quality and acceptance of decisions and contributes to the transparency of decision-making processes. The involvement of the public and other stakeholders in the activities of joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation through an observer status or an advisory role is less frequent.²

What needs to be done?

The Decade of Action calls for actions to be accelerated also at a people level, including youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate the force to push through the requisite transformations (United Nations General Assembly, 2019; United Nations Secretary-General, 2019).

Transboundary water cooperation should be seen as a multitrack process that enables a diverse group of stakeholders – including scientists, water managers, diplomats, technicians, and civil society organizations – to help establish the basis for sustainable transboundary water cooperation.

¹ [Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation under the Water Convention](#), p.45

² [Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation under the Water Convention](#), p. 68

At the 2023 UN Water Conference (22-24 Mar 2023, New York), strong calls were made for more inclusive water governance and effective stakeholder engagement, especially in [Interactive Dialogue 5 on the Water Action Decade](#).

Objectives of the session:

- Increase the understanding of objectives and principles of public participation;
- Learn about practical and replicable examples of effective stakeholder involvement in transboundary water management:
 - o Formal mechanisms in joint bodies for public engagement (e.g. observer status or advisory role for stakeholders in joint body),
 - o Case studies showcasing the effective involvement of specific stakeholder groups.

Draft outline:

Time	Topic
11:10-11:15	Introduction and explanation of the session Moderator: Mr. Ales Bizjak , Vice-Chair of the Water Convention
11:15-11:25	Foundations of public participation in river basin management: What are the legal provisions, core principles and examples of stakeholder engagement in river basin management? Speaker: Ms. Anastasia Giadrossi , Secretariat to the Aarhus Convention, UNECE [PPT – 8min]
11:25-12:00	Stakeholder engagement in practice: Examples from different regions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising public awareness in communities: Mr. Gidon Bromberg, Israel Director, Ecopeace Middle East [PPT – 6min] • Empowering women to be actors of change in transboundary basins: Ms. Priscilla Achakpa, Executive Director, Nigeria Women Environmental Programme [PPT – 6min] • Public engagement: Ms. Karima Lince, National Director of Water Security, Ministry of Environment, Panama [PPT – 6min] • Public engagement: Ms. Hélène Masliah-Gilkarov, Technical Expert for Public Participation, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) [PPT – 6min] • Public engagement in West Africa: Mr. Jean Bosco Bazié, Eau Vive Internationale [PPT – 6min]
12:00-12:10	Questions from the floor
12:10-12:15	Introduction to group exercise, explanations for reporting back
12:15-12:55	Small-group discussions
12:55-13:00	Quick wrap-up
13:00-15:00	Lunch break
15:00-15:20	Reporting back from small-group discussions