



Contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, are invited to share relevant input and deliberations as to how they address goals and targets from the perspective of “*Ensuring that no one is left behind*”.

Inputs could follow the following template, inspired by the report of the Secretary-General on Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (A/70/684).

Submissions will be publicly posted online at the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, at sustainabledevelopment.un.org, as input to the 2016 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Please send the completed form no later than **16 May 2016** to the Secretariat’s e-mail pietracci@un.org

Submission Form

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

- a. This submission describes, firstly, the situation globally regarding transboundary cooperation in integrated water resources management which is an integral part of target 6.5, “By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate”; and, secondly, the contribution that the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention; Helsinki, 1992) can make to progress towards this target.
- b. Most of the world’s water resources are shared: Transboundary lake and river basins cover nearly one half of the Earth’s land surface and account for an estimated 60% of global freshwater, and some 600 transboundary aquifers have been identified. Approximately 40% of the world’s population lives in river and lake basins shared by two or more countries. Development of water resources has impacts across transboundary basins, potentially on co-riparian countries, and use of surface water or groundwater may affect the other resource, these usually being interlinked. Intensive water use, flow regulation or pollution risks going as far as compromising co-riparian countries’ development aspirations and therefore transboundary cooperation is required. However, cooperation is in most cases not advanced.
- c. Since its adoption in 1992, the Water Convention has promoted transboundary water cooperation in the pan-European region, supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of commissions for the management of transboundary water resources. Based on such success and convinced about the importance and relevance of the Water Convention’s framework at the global level, Parties to the Water Convention amended it in 2003 to allow accession by United Nations Member States outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region (UNECE). The amendments entered into force in February 2013, turning the Convention into a global instrument for water cooperation. Several countries from outside the UNECE region have already started the process of accession and more than 60 of them have participated in the Convention’s meetings and activities. The Convention supports in practice countries in many ways: by providing advice



and assistance, guidelines and other tools, joint or coordinated assessments, and projects on the ground. Using its intergovernmental platform, Parties can discuss and resolve challenges and address new, more advanced issues in cooperation in specific basins through the exchange of experiences and good practices. Thanks to the global opening, but also due to the openness of most of the meetings and activities under the Convention also to non-Parties, guidance, support and related opportunities provided by the Convention can now benefit any UN Member State, ensuring that nobody is left behind.

2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

- a. Among gaps and risks likely to constrain progress in meeting target 6.5 (with implications to other targets under SDG 6 as well as to food security (SDG 2), sustainability of energy (SDG 7) and ecosystems (SDG 15)) is the presently limited coverage of transboundary cooperation arrangements: Many transboundary basins are not covered by agreements or other cooperation arrangements, or the cooperation does not cover all the countries sharing these basins, or is limited to few water issues and does not cover all water uses and aspects of integrated water resources management. Consequently not all countries and their populations can reap the benefits that transboundary cooperation brings in terms of peace and security, economic and social development and environmental protection. Improving water management and related cooperation supports meeting basic human needs (water, sanitation, food), livelihoods and environmental services on which the poorest and most marginalized groups heavily depend. Groundwater is commonly not covered by cooperation arrangements, and therefore the scope of their application to groundwaters should be extended.
- b. Whereas many transboundary water cooperation agreements were concluded in the last decades, recently this trend has slowed down: only very few transboundary agreements have been concluded since 2010 and numerous already developed and even signed agreements have not yet entered into force due to lacking ratifications. It is therefore crucial to highlight the benefits of transboundary cooperation which by far outweigh the costs and to foster the entering into long term sustainable cooperation through agreements and other arrangements, based on the principles of international water law and the Water Convention.
- c. A further major related gap and risk is a lack of implementation of international legal treaties on transboundary waters: Both of Conventions on the global level as well as of bilateral and basin specific agreements. The reasons vary, including – for example – a lack of financing for transboundary cooperation, low institutional and human capacities, but also low political attention and priority given.

3. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

- a. Transboundary cooperation overall in the pan-European region has improved and notably during the past two decades the cooperation between its Western and Eastern parts has developed and intensified, contributing to reducing potential for conflict and friction. The experience shows that water can be an element of cooperation, despite tensions in other areas.
- b. The Water Convention has contributed to this positive development. In particular, the Convention has served as a model for a wealth of bilateral and multilateral agreements, and has supported the strengthening of institutional arrangements for transboundary water cooperation. Many of the river basin commissions and bilateral commissions have very successfully regularized and developed further cooperation between the riparian countries.
- c. The key contributions of the Water Convention to such progress have been: a sound and respected legal framework, the development of soft law tools to promote its implementation,

in particular in relation to emerging issues - such as climate change adaptation in the transboundary context or the minimization of tensions and trade-off between sectors through a “water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus lens” – the continuous intergovernmental framework to exchange experiences and lessons learned and focus political attention to the issue, evidence based work sustained by regular assessments under the Convention.

- d. The interest shown in the Water Convention by highly diverse countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America demonstrates that there is great potential in the Water Convention’s globalization, and a lot can indeed be done to improve cooperation and to make management of waters more sustainable.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

- a. Climate change and variability lead to increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts. Most climate change impacts are felt through changes in the water cycle. Transboundary basins are particularly vulnerable and many experience already changes in intensity and frequency of floods and droughts. Existing transboundary agreements are often not designed flexibly enough to address increasing flow variability due to climate change.
- b. Water scarcity is growing in many basins worldwide. By 2025, two thirds of the world population are expected to live in water stressed regions due to climate change, inefficient water distribution and use, over-use by agriculture, energy and other sectors etc. Global water withdrawals have tripled over the last 50 years. The scientific information available shows that water demands may reach planetary boundaries in the coming decades. Thus, there is an urgent need for more sustainable water use, but also for improving cooperation and synergies between sectors.
- c. Water pollution is also growing in many parts of the world due to economic development, discharges of untreated or insufficiently treated wastewaters, intensive agriculture (diffuse pollution), mining, new micropollutants (e.g. antibiotics) which puts at risk downstream populations dependent on the water.
- d. In recent years, water is increasingly used as a weapon in conflicts, including by terrorists. Considering that access to water and sanitation is now recognized as a human right, such instrumentalization of water is unacceptable.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

- a. Need for more funding for transboundary water cooperation and investments: Compared to funding for health, military or water supply and sanitation, funding provided for transboundary water cooperation as well as investments in transboundary basins (for infrastructure, monitoring and early warning, restoration etc.) is still very limited and needs to be increased. In contrast to private funding, public funding is more likely to ensure respecting principles and procedures of international water law.
- b. HLPF could highlight the benefits of (accession to and implementation of) the two global Water Conventions (UNECE Water Convention and 1997 UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses) which will help countries achieve SDG target 6.5.
- c. HLPF could highlight the benefits of participation in the UNECE Water Convention and application of its tools, to support countries in these efforts

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:



- a. International water law needs to be respected and implemented. This entails the respect of certain procedures as well as development, ratification and implementation of transboundary water agreements. Various tools and soft law instruments are available for application that help make management of waters less conflictual and more sustainable.
- b. Since more than 600 aquifers cross borders, their joint or coordinated management by all aquifer sharing countries is crucial. The Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers (2008; UN General Assembly resolutions 63/124, 66/104, and 68/118) and the UNECE Water Convention's Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters (2014) can help in this regard.
- c. The global UNECE Water Convention with its institutional structure, Meeting of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies in the meetings in which more than 100 United Nations Member States have already participated, can serve sustainable development and protection of shared waters globally. This platform creates a home in the United Nations system for transboundary water cooperation which has been missing until now and should be strengthened. This platform will be crucial for the political debate needed on the challenges mentioned above, including the implementation of target 6.5.
- d. On behalf of UNECE Water, the UNECE Water Convention secretariat, together with UNESCO, has led the development of the methodology for SDG indicator 6.5.2. The proposed role of UNECE as custodian agency, together with UNESCO, for this indicator will ensure coherence of the UN system on this issue and will benefit from regular activities under the Convention. For example, the reporting mechanism recently introduced under the Convention and planned to be tested in late 2016/ early 2017, will gather much of the data needed for determining the baseline situation of that indicator and will also contribute to regular monitoring of progress in transboundary water cooperation.
- e. Since ecosystems do not respect borders and water is a cross-cutting issue, transboundary cooperation on water and other ecosystems is crucial also for other global priorities and processes such as climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity etc. It is therefore important to recognize the importance of transboundary cooperation in other global negotiation processes such as under UNFCCC, UNISDR, etc. in order to make sure that climate change adaptation and other measures taken do not increase vulnerability of neighbouring countries.
