

EXPLORING THE WATER-PEACE NEXUS BLUE PEACE IN WEST ASIA

Co-Hosted by
STRATEGIC FORESIGHT GROUP
WANA INSTITUTE

In Partnership With
SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

In Cooperation With
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GIZ

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CONFERENCE REPORT



About 100 policy makers, Members of Parliament, serving and former Ministers, media leaders, academics, and water experts from across the Middle East and the representatives of successful transboundary water cooperation institutions from Africa participated in the International Conference on '*Exploring the Water-Peace Nexus: Blue Peace in West Asia*' held in Amman, Jordan on 18-19 March, 2015. The participants strongly emphasised high level political commitment to regional cooperation and joint management of transboundary water resources as a prerequisite for sustainable peace-building in the region.

The conference was co-hosted by the Strategic Foresight Group and the West Asia North Africa Institute in partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and GIZ.

INAUGURAL SESSION

HRH Hassan bin Talal of Jordan launched the two SFG reports “Water and Violence: Crisis of Survival in the Middle East” and “The Hydro-Insecure: Crisis of Survival in the Middle East” during the inaugural session held on March 19, 2015. He presented the first copies of the report to HRH Princess Sumaya bint el Hassan and HE Helena Rietz, Swedish Ambassador to Jordan.

HRH Prince Hassan Bin Talal called for policy-makers to develop inter-state strategies with a human dignity focused approach, so as to improve water security for the people of - and countries in - the West Asia and North Africa region, at a water security conference.

HRH, the WANA Institute Chairman reiterated the call for “West Asian-North African cooperation and dialogue on water, energy, and the human environment. Only through nexus thinking, can we imagine a region fit for future generations.”

Ambassador Helena Reitz emphasized the importance of transboundary water cooperation to strengthen the relationship between riparian states and be a strong driver for peace. She underlined the growing vulnerability of women and children due to the on-going crisis in the region and stressed that it should be given the highest priority. She pointed out the need to pay heed to gender issues while tackling the water concerns as water is used for different purposes by men and women.

HE Kabine Komara, the former Prime Minister of Guinea was a special guest at the event and delivered an address at a formal dinner. As the current High Commissioner of the Senegal River Basin, he talked about his experience of regional cooperation in the Senegal River basin and the importance of finding common goals and working towards them.



EXPERIENCES FROM AFRICA

The conference provided a platform for experts from Africa to share their experiences in successful transboundary water cooperation with the participants from the Middle East. These included representatives of the Senegal River Basin Commission (OMVS), Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Kenya (IGAD).

Key Lessons

- ◆ The experiences from Africa underlined the importance of high level political will and commitment as the most important element in transboundary water cooperation. Political will makes any regional water cooperation successful. Such has been evident in case of the Senegal River where the political leaders had a common desire to exploit the transboundary Senegal River and its resources for the development of the people of the region. The common vision shared by politicians for long term development of the basin and people dependant on the basin translated into greater benefit for all stakeholders.
- ◆ The institutionalization of the cooperation is important for it to be sustainable. The institutional framework must include high-level decision makers, as well as have strong mechanisms and committees at different levels of government. These legal and institutional frameworks need to be supported by equally strong technical tools designed for a transparent management of the water resources.

- ◆ Participants learnt that when used effectively, water can be a tool to alleviate conflicts in other areas. Countries sharing transboundary water resources have the potential to make use of the shared resources for building peace in West Asia and find a way through the current crisis. The importance of water cooperation has already demonstrated benefits in the Senegal River Basin when in 1989 Senegal and Mauritania were engaged in a border conflict. It was the existence of strong water cooperation mechanisms that prevented the conflict from flaring into a full-fledged war.



- ◆ Successful river basin organizations around the world have achieved a high level of cooperation through effective exchange of data on water flow, quality, and quantity. The experiences from each African river basin demonstrated that exchange of data is essential for trust building and sustainable management of shared water resources.

- ◆ Linkages between water and other sectors can bring about greater cooperation. The intersectoral development approach has helped IGAD, the Nile Basin Initiative and the Senegal River Basin Organization to a great extent in achieving their goals of sustainable joint management of shared water resources and overall economic development of the basin. Synergies between the water and energy sectors have allowed the countries to develop their hydropower potential for the benefit of all the stakeholders.
- ◆ The participants learnt that water can also be used as a tool to build development in important areas such as trade, transportation, navigation and agriculture amongst others. These links between water and other sectors of the economy have strengthened the relationship between the riparian states. For example, the development of the International Code of Navigation of the basin has helped countries like Mali and Mauritania to develop their mining sector.
- ◆ It is important for all the riparian countries to be involved in any successful cooperation attempt, by adopting a larger basin wide approach. Water resources do not respect man-made boundaries and it is thus important to consider any water body in a holistic manner. Inclusive and consensus-based management brings stronger and sustainable results as is observed in the experiences from Africa.
- ◆ The experiences from Africa collectively stressed on the need for a strong legal basis as a step towards achieving regional water cooperation, especially as they are not bound by politics and political parties. Most of the successful river basin organizations have a legal framework marked by important texts such as conventions relating to the status of the shared river and detailed founding agreements marking the establishment of the organization. This legal framework can determine the principles



and mechanisms of water distribution, joint management of the infrastructure and the cost-benefit allocation, thus making the cooperation transparent and easier for the riparian countries in the long term. The agreements signed by countries should also consider long term implication of changes in the climate and include mechanisms for countries to address any disputes that might arise.

- ◆ It is important to remember that cooperation in such a difficult area as water is not attained overnight. Smaller confidence building measures over technical or environmental projects can be the building blocks towards achieving larger regional cooperation. Continued efforts and commitment to keep the cooperation going are equally important. The more often the countries meet, the easier it becomes to address and discuss any issues before they become large obstacles. The participants learnt that while the frequency of riparian countries meeting might differ, the African the basin organizations represented at the conference meet at least 3-4 times a year, at varying levels.

WATER, VULNERABILITY AND VIOLENCE

Key Messages

- ◆ The link between water security, agriculture and food security and the impact on vulnerable populations is extremely important and must be a part of any regional dialogue and debate. The West Asia region is one of the world's most water scarce regions. As the population continues to grow, the demand for water will escalate, especially in countries hosting refugees and internally displaced people. As the gap between water supply and demand reaches a tipping point, there is a risk that water will become a flashpoint for conflict. This has already been observed in Syria with a spill over effect into neighbouring countries.
- ◆ It is important and necessary to place the discourse of water and regional cooperation in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the West Asia region. While the Millennium Development Goals aimed at 85% population with access to clean drinking water, the SDG's should aim at a 100%. West Asia rarely shares responsibility for taking care of the environment. This needs to change and can be a driver for negotiation and cooperation. While there certainly is a power imbalance between upstream and downstream countries, it must be recognised that that all countries are responsible for the environment in the SDG context.
- ◆ The West Asia region doesn't just share bodies of water; it shares populations (refugee influx), and it shares a regional food system —85% of the water used in West Asia and North Africa goes to the agricultural sector. The water-related causes of decreased agricultural production are 'natural' factors, but are affected by human activity – for example salinity caused by over-pumping of water tables and improper irrigation practices; erosion is accelerated by deforestation and removal of native vegetation. Water security is also affected by inefficient use of water in the agricultural sector and mismanagement of resources.
- ◆ Growing water scarcity and the inability of governments to deal with this scarcity have created a large number of water refugees. It was noted that populations in West Asia are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with water related disasters in combination with existing poverty, unemployment, displacement, drought and other development factors. These vulnerable populations are found across the region in varying degrees. It is also found that refugees and IDPs and their host countries are particularly vulnerable and it is extremely important that long lasting regional solutions are found to address these issues.
- ◆ Women, especially refugee women, are most vulnerable, especially in terms of access to water. It is important to focus on the development and empowerment of women, as they can be the agents of change.
- ◆ With the advent of ISIS, the problems of populations made vulnerable by abuse of water as a weapon or a target in violent conflicts has become a growing phenomenon. In the West Asia region both state agencies and non-state armed actors have destroyed water infrastructure and used water resources as tools of war. Though similar incidents have happened in the past, they are increasing and forcing governments and

people to deal with new forms of warfare. Thus protecting water infrastructure and regional water cooperation on shared resources has become of paramount importance.

- ◆ The use of water as a weapon or a target has far reaching consequences, from death and destruction to long term effects of compromised development, increased refugee populations and IDPs and health concerns in the future.
- ◆ It is important to promote further dialogue and discussion to deepen understanding on the need for cooperation between countries over water, security, agriculture and food trade sectors.



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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