



Water management challenges: conflict or cooperation

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Water resources in river basins have traditionally been regarded as a common good. The nature of water as a common resource tends to result in the excessive withdrawal/abstraction and consumption thus leading to depletion of the resource. Water management and water infrastructure are preconditions for civilization, and demands on our water resources are increasing. In some regions these demands are exceeding capacities to supply water. Our old water institutions, laws, regulations, treaties and agreements are straining to meet the new realities, especially in cases when water basin is shared among two or more countries.

With the very high numbers of international water courses which are shared between countries, water and its use is undoubtedly a cause of tension and often strains relations between countries. Water remains a security concern for many countries, it has been used as a weapon in conflicts and water systems have often been targets within conflicts which have nothing directly to do with water. An acute water conflict that exists in our world today is not even known to most practitioners in the field of transboundary waters. Throughout the world there is a growing need to build a capacity for integrated water management in order to create new opportunities for cooperation, community and peace building; to respond to scarcities; and to manage local, national and transboundary conflicts.

To capture and address this duality, water conflict is defined here as the possibility to cooperation with the availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water.

Authors considered several case studies in countries that have achieved water cooperation, including those that have harnessed hydrology, those hampered by hydrology and those that are hostage to hydrology.

To be successful the cooperation on transboundary water should not be handled separately from other national and international tasks of authorities being responsible for water management. In addition it should be noted that water management agreements are most efficient when defining clear rights and responsibilities of the signing parties with regard to water planning and use as well as duties in case of emergency conditions such as floods, drought or other force majeure situations. Moreover agreements should also include consultation arrangements and clear mechanisms to prevent, minimize and mitigate impacts from pollution sources or water abstractions that are effective on transboundary river basins. Therefore the transboundary management of water resources requires the development of legal and institutional frameworks, which might be considerably different from more traditionally, accepted approaches effective for economic collaboration.