

**Summary Report on the thematic session 1
“Institutionalizing cooperation and stakeholder involvement”**

Facilitator/Rapporteur: Torkil Jønch-Clausen, DHI/GWP / Gulnara Roll, Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation

Question 1:

How to formalize cooperation for the trans-boundary water management

What are the experiences and challenges for the Lake management structures for Prespa, Ohrid and Shkoder?

How to secure the viability and how do we improve what we have obtained.

When projects stop, how can we secure the results achieved. Are the structures created within projects are sufficient?

What is required to improve their viability, effectiveness and sustainability?

What are the first steps to take?

Question 2:

How to develop joint Agreements and national legislation to improve water resources development and management in the Drin Basin

What type of Agreements is required for trans-boundary water management in the region?

What would be the implications for national legislation (including harmonization to EU legislation)?

What are the first steps to take?

Joint institutions for management of transboundary waters in different transboundary lakes' regions are different first of all because they are on different stages of institutional maturity. For instance, cooperation in the Lake Ohrid Basin is ahead in its institutional development and it serves as a useful example for the development of institutional arrangements for lakes Prespa and Shkoder where no agreements signed as yet and no cooperative institutional arrangements exist as of today. It is important to keep in mind that building the transboundary water cooperative institutions is a long – term process and there are no quick-fix solutions.

There are diverse institutional structures for cooperation in transboundary lakes basins as they reflect specific regional cooperation topics, histories and traditions of the countries involved in the cooperation as well as the geopolitical realities. Therefore, each time one needs to “invent” common rules for the management of each transboundary water basin.

Having in mind a need in an integrated approach to management of transboundary waters it is important that the joint bodies' responsibilities go beyond narrow sectoral issues such as just protection of water resources. When possible, the responsibilities of joint bodies should include also socio-economic development issues such as land use in the lake basins, fisheries, navigation and/or biodiversity conservation. This will ensure a holistic approach to management of transboundary waters and a wider base of support from different interest groups in transboundary water basins.

Structures of joint bodies shall be developed to be flexible in order to accommodate economic and environmental challenges in transboundary lakes' basins. For instance, new thematic working groups could be established when necessary to tackle new for a region issues and challenges such as natural hazards (floods, climate change related influences to lake basins).

Despite the diversity in structures for transboundary cooperation and even in names of joint bodies (i.e., Commissions, Secretariats or Basin Committees), there are basic common points for all the transboundary water cooperation institutions. The cooperation is possible when there is political wills of riparian governments, the political wills that are reflected in prepared and adopted transboundary water cooperation agreements.

The agreements commit riparian governments to the tasks implementation of which is to ensure sustainable use of natural resources in the transboundary water basins in a long run perspective. The political commitment of the governments to the transboundary cooperation is the key issue – without the commitment the cooperation is not possible. The political commitment shall be translated into the financial commitment of the government to support the transboundary cooperation. Salaries of members of international secretariats and/or commissions shall be covered when possible by the riparian governments; this ensures a long term sustainability of the cooperation.

The transboundary cooperation is costly; implementation of transboundary agreements depends on availability of minimum financial and human resources necessary for implementation of the transboundary cooperation agreements. Support of donors to the cooperation is critically important however there should be a balance between the national and international support for the sake of the long term sustainability of the cooperation.

At this initial stage of the development of the cooperation it is also important to create thematic links to overarching international cooperative arrangements - multilateral conventions such as Ramsar or Helsinki Convention on Transboundary Waters. Creation of these links with the conventions helps to promote important for the lake regions agendas such as nature conservation or sustainable use of water resources.

Question 3:

How to involve stakeholders and civil society in the process

What is the appropriate level of stakeholder involvement? The level of the three lakes basins?

What structures are required to involve stakeholders in the three lake basins – with and without external donor support?

What are the main challenges in stakeholder involvement (awareness, information, education etc.), and what are the first steps to take to address them?

Already at the stage of the initiation of the transboundary water cooperation involvement of key stakeholders is necessary. If major stakeholder groups are not included in the initial discussions of transboundary cooperation agendas, some important issues (environmental, economic or social ones) that need to be addressed in transboundary water basins could be left out of the discussion. This may result in higher costs on a later stage in addressing risks that earlier were not taken into account.

Involving local stakeholders, such as local municipalities, into the decision-making structures of joint institutions for management of transboundary waters is of utmost importance. This could be done through special working groups or committees formally linked to joint bodies. Those local stakeholders should have possibilities to

meet and discuss the cooperation issues once or twice a year. Local actors, first of all municipalities, are the major drivers of the transboundary cooperation.

What concerns involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it is necessary to make distinctions between different types of NGOs. In the situation of availability of the donor funding, the NGO sector is “mushrooming” where there are many NGOs who are basically technical/consultancies or enterprise-like non-profit organizations that are involved in the international projects’ implementation. Their role is important however, those NGOs should be invited into the cooperation especially at the initial stage of the cooperation development that represent the local communities in lake basins and help to build the local capacity. Involvement of such NGOs could be done through inviting them to become members of lake basin management committees and multistakeholder dialogues.

Question 4:

How to combine the lake initiatives into a larger Drin Basin context?

A “vision” for the Drin?

An Agreement? An institutional structure?

Stakeholder involvement at the basin level?

In other regions of Europe, for instance, in the Danube River basin there are multilateral basin commissions with subbasin commissions that are established under the transboundary water commission. In the Southern Europe region the situation is in a way opposite – there are three lakes and three processes of institutionalization of the cooperation is taking place on the individual lakes basins and in the future there is a need to develop a common platform for the cooperation in the large Drin River Basin that encompasses the lakes of Ohrid, Prespa and Skodra. Based on the cooperative arrangements that are being developed for the three lakes, there is a need to create an umbrella cooperative organization. This requires developing a common vision for the Drin River basin that is to be based on the national and regional (transboundary lakes) visions.

For the regional visions it is important to take into account that different national and regional priorities need to be negotiated among the riparian government. It should be kept in mind that each country has its own national priorities on the use and protection of natural resources. These priorities for countries, such as for instance, FYR of Macedonia may be changing in the future in connection with the prospective of the EU accession. There will be a need in harmonization of the national legislation with the EU legislation and lining up national priorities with the EU priorities and this will impact what will be national priorities of EU accession countries in the future.