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THE WATER BLOG

# Managing Water Across Boundaries

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Most of the planet is covered in water, yet less than one percent of it is available for human use. Access to water and sanitation is a key component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the emerging Post-2015 agenda. Water also directly contributes to goals of health, food security, biodiversity, energy, and peace and security.

Today at least 780 million people lack access to safe drinking water. Feeding a planet of nine billion people by 2050 will require approximately 50 percent more water in 2050. These challenges are exacerbated by increasing scarcity of water, extreme weather due to climate change, and a rapidly growing population.

Responding to the global crisis in water requires a more deliberate approach to managing trans-boundary water. Forty percent of the world's population lives in international river basins, which account for 80% of global river flow. Despite this and the proven benefits of cooperation, such as reduced chances of conflict, improved river sustainability, and access to external markets, 166 of the world's 276 international basins have no treaty provisions covering them. Moreover, many multilateral basins are subject to bilateral treaties that preclude participation by other riparian countries.

The World Bank has been involved in promoting international cooperation across shared waters since its earliest days, demonstrating the constructive role this organization is uniquely placed to play in facilitating agreement. It played a key role in helping India and Pakistan reach agreement on the Indus River Treaty in 1960, and today it is involved in promoting collective management of many river basins across the world. For example, the World Bank is working with the Arab Water Council and the governments of Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, to transfer NASA's expertise in remote-sensing technology and enable each country's water agency to validate the data at the local level. This improves data quality while helping build trust at national and regional levels.

A recent work by the World Bank, "Reaching Across the Waters - Facing the Risks of Cooperation in International Water", distills lessons based on several decades of experience with brokering trans-boundary water cooperation. It highlights the importance of nurturing trust among stakeholders, developing strategies and institutions along the way that increase shared benefits and reduce risks. Three critical actions for improving management of trans-boundary water resources are identified:

- First, establish cooperation on water management at several levels: sectors, communities and countries;
- Second, determine why cooperation does not always take place even when the economic benefits of cooperation are clear, and what might be done about this;
- Third, identify how institutions can foster dialogue and share knowledge to help find common ground.

During a recent field visit to an irrigation project in the Jaloliddin Rumi district of southern Tajikistan, we

observed the building blocks of good water management: strong cooperation between small-scale farmers, NGOs, and local authorities; strong coordination on the ground between local, national, bilateral and international agencies; and a strong role for women in leadership positions in NGOs working to implement the project. The World Bank is supporting this collaboration with a powerful combination of technical knowledge, convening power, institutional support and investments.

The World Bank, working with governments, multilateral development banks, the United Nations, and civil society, is uniquely placed to catalyze global, regional and national-level water cooperation. Timely action could forestall the potential of disputes and conflict, and facilitate a more constructive and sustainable approach to management of this vital and scarce global resource.

*-Mahmoud Mohieldin, President's Special Envoy, World Bank*

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