



2015 UN-Water Annual
International Zaragoza
Conference
15–17 January 2015

Water and Sustainable Development
From vision to action

UN WATER



UNECE Water Convention: from regional to global instrument, and its implementation on the ground

Minna Hanski, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland

Short summary

The UNECE Water Convention has led to strengthened transboundary water cooperation, peace and security through intersectoral and transboundary coordination and cooperation. Initially negotiated as a regional instrument, the Convention was amended in 2003 to allow accession by all the United Nations Member States.

The Water Convention and the UN Watercourses Convention, which entered into force in 2014, are based on the same principles and they complement each other. The former is focused more on the prevention of adverse transboundary impacts and the latter on the fair and reasonable use of shared water resources among states. The globalization of Conventions brings new opportunities for experience sharing.

Finland has a long tradition in transboundary cooperation and in participating in the development of international water law and in promoting international water conventions. The agreement between Finland and Russia concerning frontier watercourses is already 50 years old. It has a wide coverage, both geographically and in terms of the topics included. It meets the principles of transboundary cooperation: equitable and reasonable use of the water resource, no harm principles and common institutional body.

Key Words:

Water Convention, transboundary water cooperation

Issues addressed:

Water resources management (water-use efficiency, integrated water resources management, transboundary cooperation, sustainable extraction and supply of freshwater)

UNECE Water Convention: from regional to global instrument, and its implementation on the ground.

Case study: Finnish – Russian transboundary water cooperation.

Water quality (pollution, dumping of toxic materials, wastewater management, recycling, reuse, restore ecosystems and aquifers)

Common monitoring of water quality.

Risks (mortality, economic losses caused by natural and human-induced disasters)

Common risk management program under development.

Tools for implementation

Financing/economic instruments: Compensation mechanism.

Governance: Institutions / legal framework: Institutional basis: Joint Finnish-Russian Commission on the Utilisation of Transboundary Watercourses.

Legal framework: Agreement signed by Finland and the Soviet Union in 1964, Lake Saimaa and River Vuoksi Discharge Rule in 1991.

Who is involved?: Joint Commission: members appointed by the governments and experts. Public servants in national and regional level, research institutes, hydropower companies.

What were the objectives of the intervention?: Flood and drought risk management.

Implementation challenges: Planning, assessments and discussions took almost 20 years (initiative 1973, implementation 1991).

Main task/activities undertaken: Legal framework: Lake Saimaa and River Vuoksi Discharge Rule.

Main outcomes / impacts (what has changed?): The Rule has been beneficial instrument for both countries. Both the detrimental effects of floods and potential losses to hydropower companies have decreased.

Lessons learned

Triggers: Flooding and low water levels in the lake Saimaa and river Vuoksi, spill discharges at high flows in hydropower plants.

What has worked well?: Practical cooperation in different level: between the states, regional authorities, power companies.

What can be improved?: Solutions and recommendations for adapting to climate change, real time data and better forecasting crucial for optimal flow control.

The way forward: Common risk management program for exceptional hydrological situations under development.

Links:

<http://www.rajavesistokomissio.fi>