

UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE
22-24 MARCH 2023



INBO REPORT



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
22-24
MARCH
2023

Check out in this report the key messages and recommendations from this historic event.

INBO and its partners contributed to make basin management a political priority for the achievement of the SDGs.



Ms. Alice Aureli, Chief Groundwater Systems and Water for Human Settlements, UNESCO (UNESCO-IHP) - Mr. Nizar Baraka, Minister of Equipment and Water of the Kingdom of Morocco, President of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) - Dr. Eric Tardieu, Secretary General of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), Secretary General of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA)

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INTRODUCTION

46 years after the Mar del Plata Conference in 1977, the United Nations Water Conference (UNWC) marked a unique opportunity to make progress in addressing the most pressing issues of the ongoing global water crisis.

12

HEADS OF STATE

80

MINISTERS

7000

PARTICIPANTS

joined this historic event, representing national governments, UN Agencies, international organizations, local authorities, donors, NGOs and companies of the private sector.

The International Network of Basin Organizations took an active role in the preparation of the UNWC since its announcement 5 years ago. It worked tirelessly with its members (national and transboundary basin organizations from around the world) and partners (UN Agencies, international organizations, NGOs and development banks) to put basin management on the agenda. Securing a high level political segment dedicated to basins during the 9th World Water Forum in Dakar proved to be a decisive milestone in ensuring consideration of basin management as a political priority of the United Nations Water Conference.

During this landmark week, INBO organized and intervened in 13 sessions **to promote integrated water resources management to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Find our key messages and recommendations below.



Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLG-Africa) - Ms. María Alexandra Moreira Lopez, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) - Ms. Neeta Pokhrel, Asian Development Bank (ADB) - Mr. Nabil Ben Khadra, Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)

BET ON THE BASINS OF RIVERS, LAKES AND AQUIFERS!

Trust in the basin approach to boost the achievement of SDGs

Basin management matters, basin management delivers! Managing water at the scale of the hydrological unit that is a hydrographic basin is essential. It helps to get the most accurate diagnosis of all the resources available as well as of all the pressures of water uses. It contributes to achieving water security, of course: after all, all drinking water taps ultimately depend on the basins of lakes, rivers and aquifers! But it also is a contribution to food and energy securities.



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Dr. Rabun Ouk, Minister of Rural Development of the Kingdom of Cambodia

“Effective implementation of the integrated water resources and river basin management at the country level and in the transboundary nature need not only legal and institutional framework, but also stronger coordination mechanisms and participatory, responsible, and collaborative actions.”



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Ms. Birgit Vogel, Executive Secretary, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

“IWRM creates a dialogue with water users. It makes it easier to carry out basin-wide actions and, more broadly, to achieve the SDGs.”

Designing and implementing plans for Integrated Water Resources Management at basin level is effective in terms of:

- costs, investments in infrastructures are made based on the hydrological context rather than on purely administrative consideration,
- knowledge, sharing of information between the data producers of the basin (including but not limited to in-situ monitoring networks and remote sensing such as satellite) and the involvement of water users in basin councils improve the diagnosis of the state of water resources,
- governance, participatory basin management creates ownership of the measures adopted.

This operational approach to Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) helps to make concepts of nexus and source-to-sea a reality at basin level. Launched by INBO during the 9th World Water Forum, sponsored by UNECE, OMVS, OMVG, France, Morocco, Senegal and Switzerland, the Dakar Action Plan for river, lake and aquifer basins promotes this approach of IWRM at basin level. It provides the technical definition of the principles for actions and commitments needed to strengthen cooperation, planning, legal and institutional framework of basin organizations as well as the search for innovative financing.

[Join the Dakar Action Plan for basins now!](#) It already gathers 91 signatories from 50 countries, mobilized for this call to actions and to accelerate the achievement of SDGs by the basins and for the basins, both national and... transboundary!



Mr. Loïc Fauchon, President of World Water Council (WWC) - Mr. Abderahim Birémé Hamid, Executive Secretary of the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) - Mr. Teodoro Estrela, General Director of Water of the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge of Spain

Incubate water and climate projects at basin scale: an effective response to the challenge of adaptation

More frequent and intense floods and droughts, reduced river flows, degradation of aquatic ecosystems, rising sea levels resulting in salinization of coastal groundwater: water is one of the first victims of climate change. Investing in water and in particular in planning of adaptation to climate change at basin level is therefore a very effective solution.

This reality was acknowledged, at last, in the conclusions of the last United Nations Climate Change conference. The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan of COP27 “emphasizes the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring water and water-related ecosystems, including river basins, aquifers and lakes, and urges Parties to further integrate water into adaptation efforts”.



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Ms. Steffi Lemke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection of Germany

“As one of the biggest donors in the water sector, Germany will continue to meet its responsibility. [...] Our International Climate Initiative especially supports integrated water management as one of the key measures for climate change mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity conservation.”



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Mr. André Viola, Adour-Garonne Basin Committee, France

“The French water agencies have made the commitment to support 20 incubations within the framework of the «100 Water and Climate Projects for Africa». Incubations are effective means to prepare responses to the impacts of climate change in several African basins”.

In the aftermath of the UN Water Conference, a priority of action could be to bridge the gap between actors developing ideas of projects of adaptation to climate change at basin levels and donors of climate finance. To help adaptation projects come into existence, an incubation platform for water and climate projects was promoted during a session dedicated to integrated water resources management. Launched at the COP22 United Nations Climate Change Conference (Marrakesh, 2016), this incubator largely focused on projects for adaptation to climate change in the African continent. It now supports project development all over the world. Technical and institutional support is provided by the platform. After being detected, it is necessary to be able to make a clear description of the project, its objectives and needs and to comply with the administrative procedures of donors to access climate finance.



Dr. Eric Tardieu, INBO - Ms. Dinara Ziganshina, Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water of Central Asia - Mr. Daouda Samba Sow, Organization for the Development of the Gambia River



Mr. Olivier Thibault, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, France - Mr. Serigne Mbaye Thiam, Minister of Water and Sanitation, Republic of Senegal - Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun, Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS)

Integrate groundwater and surface water: for a conjunctive management of the resource

Groundwater resources are out of sight, but shall not remain out of mind! Groundwater is a vital resource. It provides almost half of all drinking water worldwide and 40% of the irrigation water in agriculture. The UN-Water Summit on Groundwater (December 2022, Paris) reminded these realities.

INBO pushed to maintain this political momentum at the UN Water Conference in New York and called for a greater integration of surface water and groundwater resources in development schemes.

IN PLENARY SESSION

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**Ms. Maritza Chan Valverde Ambassador and
Permanent Representative, Costa Rica**

“Costa Rica promotes Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), so that the water cycle - in basins, sub-basins or aquifers - is managed as a single system. To this end, the implementation of indicator 6.5.1 is vital.”

IN INBO SESSION



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**Mr. Nabil Ben Khatra, Executive Secretary,
Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)**

“Integrated Water Resources Management at the basin scale is today and more than ever a creative way to jointly and sustainably manage groundwater and surface water. This approach has been proven internationally to be effective and has tangible global benefits.” “I am convinced that the role of basin organizations will become more important in the implementation of IWRM in the future, particularly in difficult water circumstances and especially when it comes to transboundary groundwater.”

INBO organized a high level event on the «sustainable governance of groundwater resources», gathering its partners, including the Kingdom of Morocco, Finland, France, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, UNESCO, the International Water Resources Association, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River and the Organization for the Development of the Gambia River.



H.E. Hani Sewilam, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt - **Ms. Johanna Sumuvuori**, Deputy Foreign Minister and State Secretary, Finland - **Mrs. Sandrine Rocard**, Seine-Normandie Basin Agency - **Mr. Phetsamone Khanophet**, Mekong River Commission Secretariat

COOPERATE WITH COUNTRIES AND CITIES TO IMPROVE BASIN MANAGEMENT

Commit to concerted management of transboundary basins

At the UN Groundwater Summit (7-8 December 2022, Paris), the Dakar Action Plan for basins was followed by a specific coalition: the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition.

Transboundary basins account for 60 per cent of the world's freshwater flows. 3 billion people depend on their water resources. The management of these transboundary basins should be aligned with the principles of sustainable and equitable use, upstream-downstream solidarity and no-harm principles. In a world of limited resources, cooperative management of transboundary basins is essential to meet the challenges of our times: sustainable economic development, human and environmental health, biodiversity preservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction and lasting peace.

The [Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition \(TWCC\)](#) gathers 40 countries, regional integration and international organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, academic and research centers. It encourages concrete commitments to support the advancement of transboundary water cooperation.

IN PLENARY SESSION



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Mr. Christophe Béchu, Minister for Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, France

“At global level and in the long run, the systemic challenge of managing water cannot be met without broader and more concerted action, because water and the pressures that affect it do not know borders [...] First, we need to continue to promote Integrated Water Resources Management and cooperation at basin level, drawing inspiration from good practices on transboundary waters. This is why we are committed to supporting the development of transboundary basin organizations, particularly in Africa, and to continuing our support for the United Nations Water Convention, which provides a legal and institutional framework, as well as valuable tools to establish cooperation.”

IN INBO SESSION



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Ms. María Alexandra Moreira Lopez, Secretary General, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)

“The Amazon basin is a large, complex and interconnected system, and no less are the challenges it faces in the face of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and pollution. These challenges can only be addressed through cooperation at different levels, including South-South, cross-border and international cooperation, which has been rooted in the spirit of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization.”

IN INBO SESSION



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Mr. Anoulak Kittikhoun, CEO, Mekong River Commission Secretariat

“Given the physical and geopolitical of the Mekong river basin, and the multitude of actors with different perceptions, a shared understanding of the major changes, their drivers and impacts is necessary for further action and cooperation.”

Build dialogue between cities and their basins

Most of the world's population already lives in cities. By 2050, there will be nearly 6 billion city dwellers, 70% of the global population. This concentration of populations in urban areas creates many challenges.

Cities are singularities in a hydrographic basin: they are at the same time a source of growing pressure on water resources, a territorial unit in demand of climate adaptation solutions and a powerful actor holding significant means. Strengthening the dialogue between cities and organizations in charge of planning and managing water resources at the scale of river basins is the key for a better management of water resources: this can be referred as "City-Basin Dialogue".

IN INBO SESSION



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Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLG-Africa)

“Alongside the basin organizations, local governments should lead the implementation of the blue economy policy. This principle of subsidiarity should be applied wherever relevant.”

IN PLENARY SESSION



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Ms. Beth Dunford, Vice President for Agriculture, Social and Human Development, African Development Bank

“To promote a city-basin approach to integrated water resources management and implement upstream-downstream solidarity mechanisms, the African Development Bank (AfDB) supports mechanisms whereby downstream users financially compensate upstream users for water conservation or pollution reduction, also known as payments for ecosystem services.”

INBO has worked with the OECD on this topic and presented this shared vision on several sessions organized by the OECD at the UN Water Conference. The handbook on basin-connected cities - already including around 40 case-studies from all over the world - published by IWA and INBO to support decision making in strengthening the city's connection and integration with its river basin was promoted. This benchmark is still open to new case studies!



UN Water Conference OECD Side Event: Localising the Blue Economy: A City-Basin Approach

STRENGTHEN WATER AND ECOLOGICAL SECURITIES

Improve consistency of Water and Nature policies

The current anthropogenic biodiversity crisis and global water crisis are fundamentally intertwined. Being successful in addressing water and biodiversity crises implies recognizing these interdependencies in our policies, which are still very much fragmented. These policies are designed in silos and often implemented on a far too limited scale. It greatly limits their potential.

To make a difference, there is a need to develop a greater consistency of water and biodiversity policies and to implement ambitious water and biodiversity measures in a systematic way at the scale of the hydrographic basins of lakes, rivers and aquifers.

IN INBO SESSION



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Ms. Astrid Schomaker, Director Green Diplomacy and Multilateralism, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission

“We are in a planetary emergency and we need to step up the implementation of technological, nature-based and societal solutions. Nature-based solutions (NbS) - working with nature, with people - are not a panacea -but they deliver multiple benefits for them and for the climate.”

Accelerate the dissemination of Nature-Based Solutions

IN PLENARY SESSION

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Mr. Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, Minister of the Environment and Energy Security, Italy

“Under the Integrated Water Resource Management – IWRM and Nature-based Solutions (NBS), is the work we are carrying out on the largest Italian river. With the project “Renaturation of the Po River” we invested 357 million euros focusing on the quality of water and biodiversity.”

This is the objective of the “Water and Nature Declaration” launched during the IUCN World Water Congress (Sept. 2021, Marseille) by INBO, the International Office for Water (OiEau), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the World Water Council (WWC). It recognizes that there is no water security without ecological security, and vice versa. It encourages dialogue between the water and nature communities, to make water management and nature protection policies more coherent. It is also a call to action, for an acceleration in the implementation of aquatic Nature-based Solutions, in the form of [Natural Water Retention Measures](#) (NWRM: [aquatic NbS promoted by the European Commission](#) as efficient techniques using ecosystems for water storage). Such Nature-based Solutions are no-regret measures that delivers multiple benefits when planned in numbers at basin scale: water security, climate mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity preservation.

[Join the Water and Nature Declaration now!](#) It already gathers 100 signatories from 27 countries, mobilized for this call to actions and to accelerate the deployment of NbS at basin level!



Mr. Mario Botion, President of the Intermunicipal Consortium of the Piracicaba, Capivari and Jundia River Basins of Brazil (Consórcio PCJ) offering Environmental Merit Certificate to the Secretary General of INBO, Dr. Tardieu

CONCLUSION

The UN 2023 Water Conference provided the whole water community an opportunity to participate in constructive meetings and to renew physical dialogues, to strengthen ties with partners while building new ones.

It also provided INBO a platform to bring its values to the forefront of the international scene, to promote our key messages, which were widely relayed. This was particularly the case for transboundary cooperation.

As his closing remarks, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, called for water to be “at the centre of the world’s political agenda” : “the 2023 Water Conference demonstrated a central truth: water — as humanity’s most precious global common good — unites all and flows across a number of global challenges. [...] All of humanity’s hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the Water Action Agenda to life. They depend on realizing the game-changing, inclusive and action-oriented commitments made by Member States and others at this Conference.”

He urged all to recommit to a common future : “Without water, there can be no sustainable development,” stressed Antonio Guterres echoing the Water & Nature Declaration. “Let’s take the next steps in our journey to a water-secure future for all,” he encouraged, adding that “now is the time to act.”

His statement was backed up by the announcement of a possible appointment of a special envoy on water, the planning of regular intergovernmental meetings and the adoption of the Water Action Agenda, a set of more than 700 voluntary commitments by governments and stakeholders to accelerate implementation to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 and other water-related goals and targets.

These measures could open up prospects for strengthening international cooperation on water, as they signal a strong commitment from governments and stakeholders to prioritize and accelerate action on water-related issues and to work towards a common goal.



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Dr. Eric Tardieu, Secretary General of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)

“The United Nations Water Conference took place: that is a first cause for celebration, 46 years after the previous one. The messages voiced by INBO for almost 30 years are now well integrated and widely relayed in the expressions and debates, in particular the effectiveness of the basin approach and the merits of an integrated vision, covering water resources and ecosystems. This conference could go down in history as the beginning of a new phase, where the long-awaited political attention and ambition would finally be granted to water. But let’s not leave this paradigm shift to chance. We are collectively responsible for the pages that remain to be written.”



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Nizar Baraka, Minister of Equipment and Water of the Kingdom of Morocco, President of the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)

“Integrated Water Resources Management at the basin level is now, more than ever, an ingenious way to manage groundwater and surface water jointly and sustainably. I am convinced that the role of basin organizations will become more important in the implementation of IWRM in the future, particularly in water-stressed circumstances and especially when transboundary resources are concerned. Basin Organizations around the world can play a catalytic role in promoting integrated and holistic actions, among all stakeholders in the water sector at the basin and territorial levels, ultimately leading to more sustainable and resilient societies.”

List of INBO's commitments in the Water Action Agenda

INBO'S COMMITMENTS

COMMITMENTS SUPPORTED BY INBO



Nature Hub Session organized with The Nature Conservancy: "Nature-based Solutions: The Whole of Society Approach"



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2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

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INBO'S PROGRAM

TUESDAY 21 MARCH

Water Sustainability by Water-Energy-Food nexus with multisector participation
with Consórcio PCJ

Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security: Meeting with partners
with the OECD/UCLG

WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH

Sustainability in good governance of groundwater resources
with Morocco

Nature as the Whole of Society Approach
with The Nature Conservancy

Integrated Water Resources Management at basin level: benefits of this nexus approach to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals
with France

THURSDAY 23 MARCH

Cooperation and social participation for water management
with Consórcio PCJ

Water for Nature, Nature for Water: Policies, Solutions and Commitments for Sustainable Development
with International Association for Water Law

Achieving a balance between protection and development – Water for rural prosperity
with GWP-China

Committing to advance transboundary water cooperation worldwide for sustainable development, climate action, stability and peace
with UNECE and Slovenia

BALI 2024: On the road to the 10th World Water Forum
with the World Water Council

FRIDAY 24 MARCH

Localising the Blue Economy: A City-Basin Approach
with OECD

China-Europe Water Platform – how cooperation between regions can improve global SDG6 implementation and contribute to the UN Water Decade?
with People's Republic of China

A city-basin approach to water security in Africa: Solutions and commitments
with OECD



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