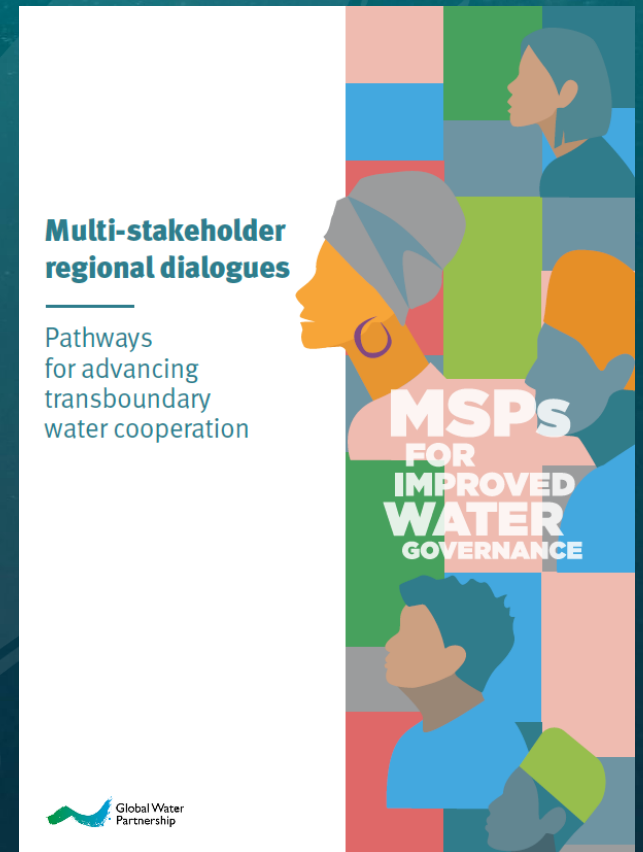


Multi-Stakeholder Regional Dialogues as Catalyzer for Transboundary Water Cooperation

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Background and Rationale

What are regional MSDs?

- Regional multi-stakeholder dialogues (MSDs) convene different stakeholders around the same table, providing an avenue for reaching a common understanding on regional issues.
- Multitrack processes
- Some but not all MSDs relate to transboundary water cooperation.

Why did we study regional MSDs in advancing transboundary water cooperation?

1. **Dialogue at basin vs regional level:** regional level dialogues do not focus on specific basin issues, they often use other common goals as starting point for anchoring the conversation.
2. **Research gap:** No study specifically focusing on how regional multistakeholder dialogues can advance transboundary water cooperation.
3. **Emerging number of regional dialogue experts:** Potential to create “Community of Practice” of regional dialogue experts who can potentially drive cooperation on the ground.

What are the key enabling factors?

Analytical Approach:
4 enabling factors examined through case study analysis

Key enabling factors for multi-stakeholder dialogues

One of the objectives of this paper is to reflect upon key factors that enable regional MSDs to positively influence transboundary water cooperation. In this context, this paper proposes a conceptual framework composed of four key enabling factors as a starting point to discuss how MSDs function and identify what helped or prevented their progress.

Inclusion and role of facilitators



MSDs should demonstrate convening power and stakeholder inclusivity while managing power relations. The role of dialogue facilitators is key in carefully balancing this aspect.

Using existing regional political and economic processes



MSDs should be anchored in regional priorities and create synergies with ongoing processes and alliances.

Fostering social learning across scales



Designing and structuring of MSDs should sustain long-term engagement and be geared towards enhancing social learning processes on key identified priorities in the region.

Leveraging sustainable finance



MSDs should seek to diversify their finances beyond the initial source of funding and become financially sustainable in the long run.

3 Case Studies

1

South East Europe Dialogue



The regional MSD process was initiated in a post-conflict environment where countries were rebuilding nations and regional integration was high on the political agenda. The dialogue process which started in 2006 and is still ongoing has created an enabling environment for advanced transboundary water cooperation in the region, as well as catalysed spin-off action in four specific basins and one aquifer system: the Drin Basin, the Mesta/Nestos Basin, the Drina Basin, the Dinaric Karst Transboundary Aquifer System, and the Sava River Basin.

2

South Asia Dialogue



The regional dialogue process began with the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) which took place in 2006–2012. The ADD aimed at creating knowledge-based partnership of States managing the Himalayan river systems. A key conclusion from this process was to continue the dialogue at the basin level under the South Asia Water Initiative (SAWI), which was carried out between 2013 and 2021. Subsequent basin-level dialogues proceeded in the Indus, the Brahmaputra, and Sundarbans while national-level project developments followed for the Ganges. The regional dialogue under SAWI has catalysed basin-wide and multi-stakeholder exchanges, in a context where much of the cooperation had historically been on a bilateral intergovernmental basis.

3

Southern Africa Dialogue



Through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional programme, SADC and GWP Southern Africa (GWP SA) have been convening SADC regional water dialogues since 2007. The process has resulted in a ministerial-level political commitment: the adoption of the Water–Energy–Food (WEF) nexus approach towards managing water resources, including transboundary waters in the SADC region. This nexus approach has been implemented in several transboundary water basins.

South East Europe

Date: Started in 2005 and ongoing

Engagement: A series of regional roundtables along with thematic studies, capacity building workshops, study visits.

Outcome: agreements and enhanced cooperation in

- Drin basin:
- Mesta/Nestos River Basin
- Dinaric Karst Transboundary Aquifer System
- Sava River Basin
- Drina Basin

1

South East Europe Dialogue



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South Asia

Date:

- 2006: Abu Dhabi dialogue
- 2012: participants agreed to continue the dialogue at basin levels
- 2013-2021: World Bank SAWI

Engagement: A series of basin wide multi-stakeholder engagements, mostly track 3.

Outcome: national level basin initiatives in the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra Basin enhanced cooperation in Sundarbans landscape

2

South Asia Dialogue



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Southern Africa

Date:

- 2007: SADC Regional Dialogues, 3 phases

Engagement: A series of multi-stakeholder engagements on WEF Nexus supported by GWP SAF

Outcome:

- Adoption of regional NEXUS policy framework.
- Integration of nexus approach at Save river, Zambezi river, Limpopo river

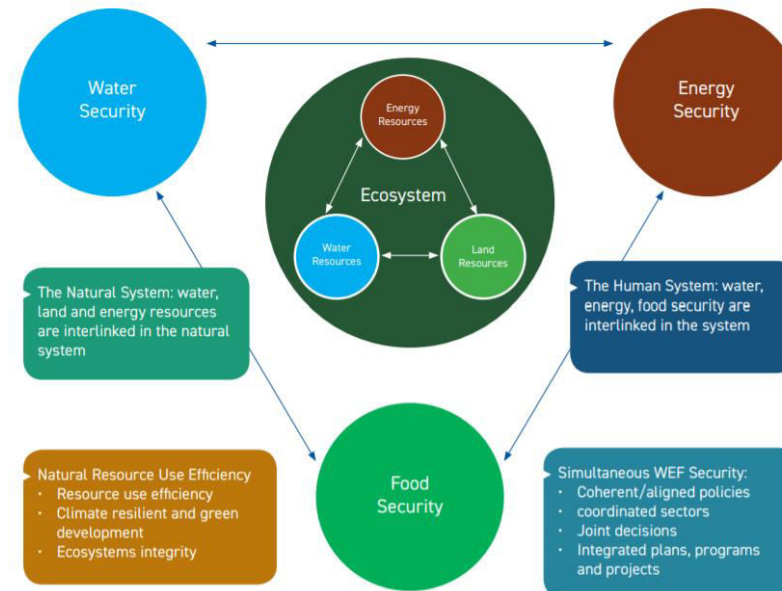
3

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SADC WEF NEXUS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



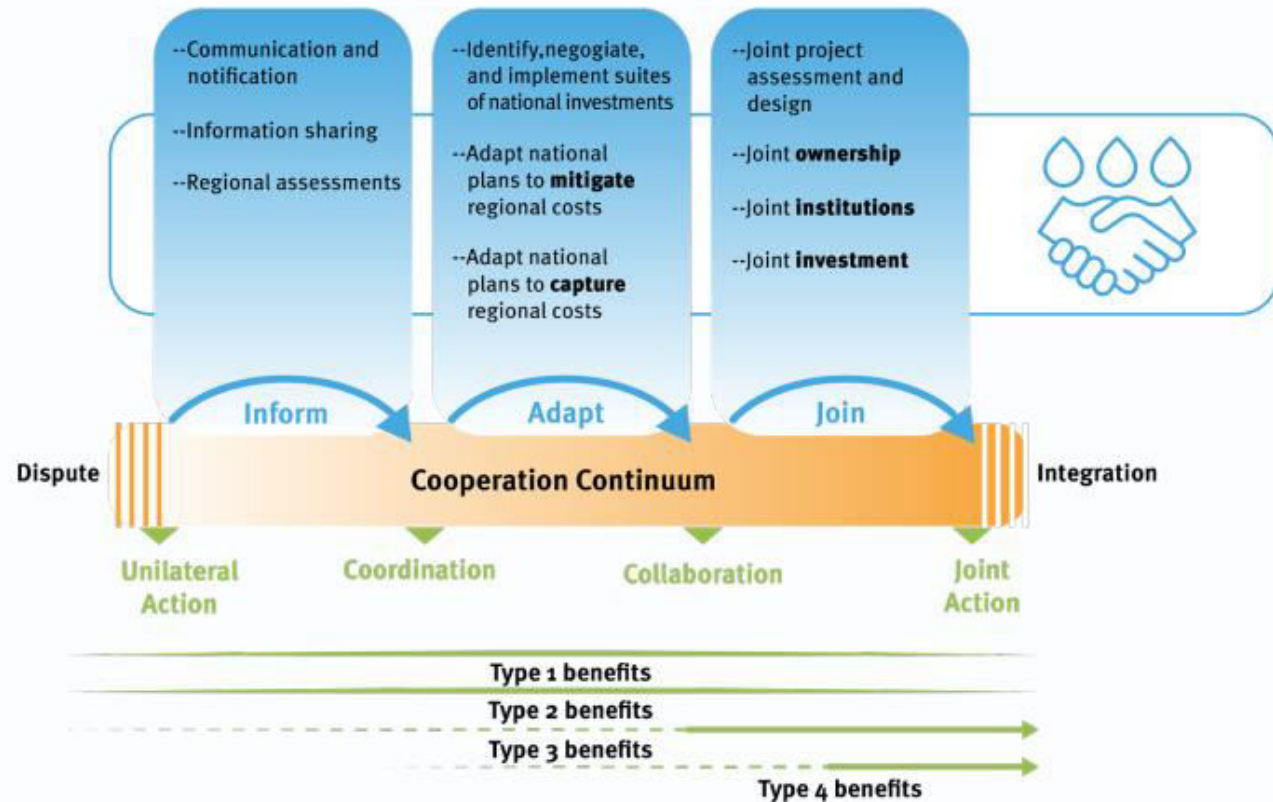
Conclusion

- In places where basin-wide cooperation was previously non-existent – regional MSDs led to spin off basin dialogues
- In places where basin wide cooperation existed – regional MSDs led to enhancement of cooperation agreement and greater ownership

Key takeaway

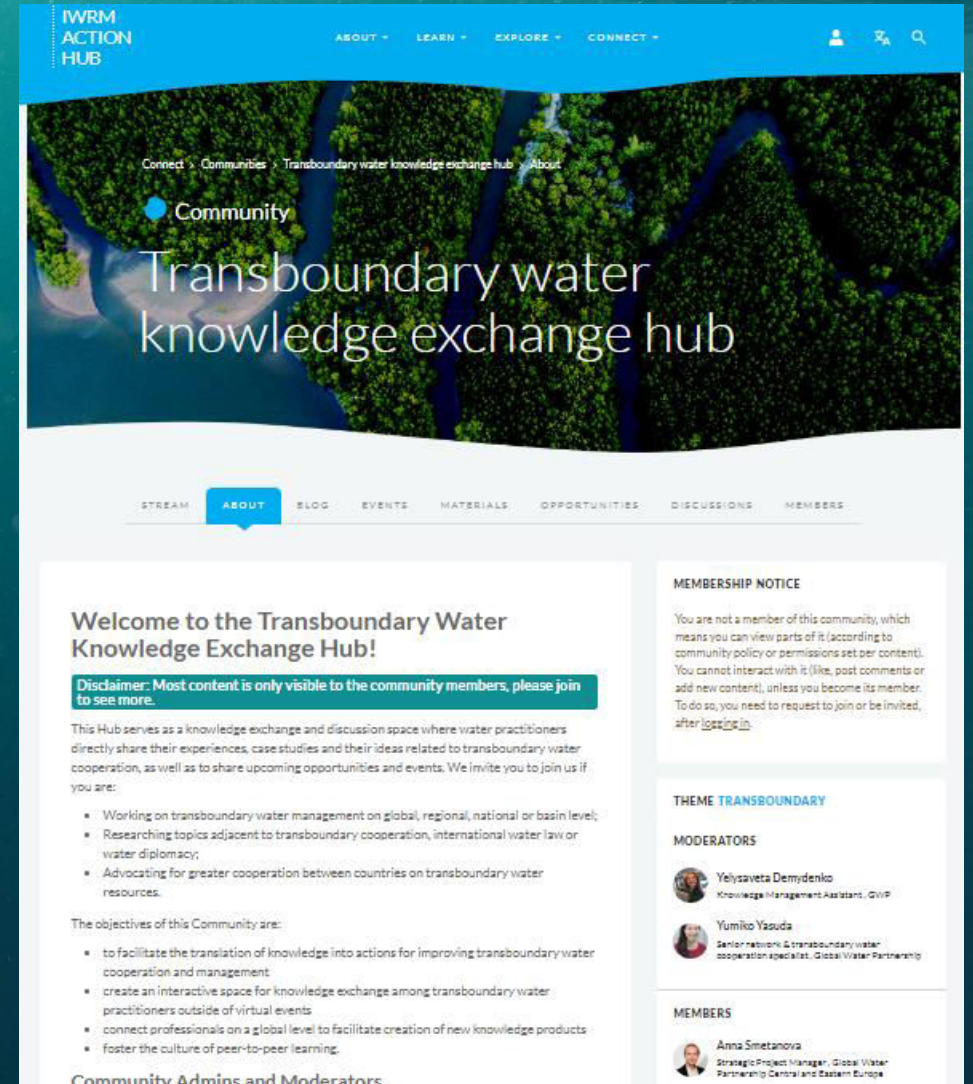
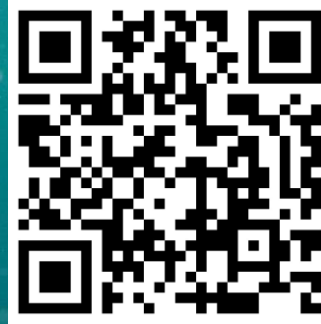
The comparative analysis of case studies shows that regional MSDs can be a powerful mechanism to advance cooperation over shared waters (Figure 1). In places where basin-wide cooperation was previously non-existent, regional dialogues have often resulted in initiating spin-off basin dialogue processes, which in some cases have resulted in countries signing agreements or taking joint action over shared waters. In cases where basin-wide cooperation is already in place, regional dialogues offer a unique opportunity for stakeholders to take greater ownership of existing cooperation arrangements, as well as for raising capacities of staff of joint institutions or creating further entry points for advanced cooperation.

Figure 1. Cooperation continuum. Source: Adapted from [Sadoff and Grey \(2005\)](#)



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- Researching topics adjacent to transboundary cooperation, international water law or water diplomacy;
- Advocating for greater cooperation between countries on transboundary water resources.

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- to facilitate the translation of knowledge into actions for improving transboundary water cooperation and management;
- create an interactive space for knowledge exchange among transboundary water practitioners outside of virtual events;
- connect professionals on a global level to facilitate creation of new knowledge products;
- foster the culture of peer-to-peer learning.

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