



International Year of  
Water Cooperation



Coordinated by  
UNESCO

United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



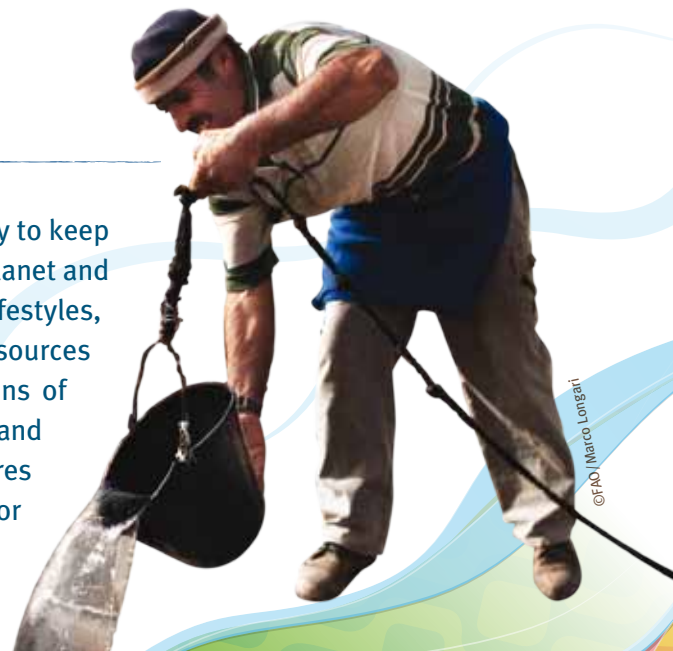
Water water everywhere,  
only if we share

[www.watercooperation2013.org](http://www.watercooperation2013.org)



# Overview

Water is vital for life, pivotal for human development and necessary to keep our environment healthy. There is a fixed amount of water on the planet and with increasing population, economic development and changing lifestyles, undue pressure has been put on the world's limited water resources leading to increased competition for water and creating situations of potential conflict. But water can be used as an instrument of peace and development as every action involving water management requires effective cooperation between multiple actors whether at the local or international scale.



©FAO/Marco Longari



© UN Photo/Fred Noy

**Building a village water pump in sub-Saharan Africa requires local actors to cooperate.**

**Bringing water from a river to irrigate farmland requires regional cooperation.**



© UN Photo/Shaw McCutcheon

**Rivers cross political boundaries and international cooperation is necessary to share the water resources of a transboundary river basin between upstream and downstream users with different and sometimes conflicting needs, claims and cultures.**

**Countries also need to cooperate on the sharing of transboundary groundwater, an important and increasing source of freshwater.**

**If any of the people involved in water management do not cooperate, the 'cooperation chain' is broken and water resources will not be managed in the most effective way, with adverse effects on human lives and the economy. When water resources are cooperatively shared and managed, peace, prosperity and sustainable development are more likely to be achieved.**

# 1. Why care about water cooperation?

## WATER IS ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE

Water is a vital element for human existence and all ecosystems on Earth, naturally shared through the hydrological cycle. It is the most precious resource on our planet. The fulfillment of basic human needs, our environment, socio-economic development and poverty reduction are all heavily dependent on water. Although there is enough freshwater on the globe for everyone, resources are unevenly distributed in time and space. In many regions, clean freshwater is becoming increasingly scarce due to population growth, urbanization, changes in lifestyle, economic development, pollution and climate change. The growing pressure on water resources creates potential competition between different uses and users and makes it more difficult to manage water in a sustainable and equitable manner. Good management of water is especially challenging due to some of its unique characteristics: the hydrological cycle is highly complex and perturbations have multiple effects on quantity, quality and availability elsewhere; water cuts across all social, environmental and economic activities and touches upon multiple sectors; and water does not respect political and cultural boundaries, be they local, regional or national. Water is a shared resource and its management needs to take into account a wide variety of conflicting interests.

## WATER COOPERATION IS CRUCIAL TO PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Cooperation is essential to strike a balance between the different needs and priorities for sound water management. The potential for water cooperation is great. Evidence indicates that good examples of water cooperation greatly outshine water-related conflicts. All water systems are extremely complex, be they management systems at the local or national level, internationally shared river basins or parts of the natural hydrological cycle. Managing these systems requires multiple actors, from users to practitioners and managers, experts from various disciplines and policy- and decision-makers.

Water cooperation between different social groups, economic sectors, regional governments, countries, and present and future generations, is crucial not only to ensure the sustainable and equitable use of water but also

### The Water Tribunal in Valencia, Spain



**I**n the fertile region of Valencia, a century-old water tribunal settles disputes between irrigators. The region is famous for its network of irrigation canals which was built by the Romans two thousand years ago. Field owners who derive their water from the same canal form communities with their own statutes. Violations of these statutes are adjudicated by the Water Tribunal. The eight administrators of the Tribunal are elected every two years by a total of 11,691 members, and gather once a week to decide on matters of irrigation. The Tribunal has existed for more than a thousand years and has been recognized by UNESCO as an outstanding example of Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2009.



to create and maintain peaceful relations between people. Water cooperation requires the integration of all relevant interests and perspectives, fostering innovation, building trust, developing capacities and making decisions that are acceptable and understood by all. In this context, water cooperation needs to embrace multiple perspectives, be informed by a variety of disciplines and extend to all levels, from the local to the national to the international level, and across all socio-economic sectors.

At the government level, different ministries can cooperate and mainstream awareness on water management into other sectors; at the community level users can cooperate through water users' associations; at the transboundary level joint management institutions can help to distribute and protect shared resources; and at the international level different UN agencies can work together to promote the sustainable management of water.

Cooperation mechanisms vary in terms of decision-making structures, levels of participation and rules and regulations. They can take the form of informal agreements or formal institutions, and they range from a simple exchange of information to joint management mechanisms and activities such as capacity development.

### WATER COOPERATION AS A PEACEMAKING STRATEGY

Water can also be a catalyst for cooperation and for building peaceful relations beyond the resource itself. Often negotiations over a practical issue such as water provide a basis for dialogue even when political relations are strained. For example, Jordan and Israel held secret talks over the management of the Jordan River from the 1950s even though they were at war until 1994. Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam continued to exchange information on the Mekong River throughout the Vietnam War. Water cooperation can thus also serve as an avenue for peacemaking, building trust and mutual understanding.



©FAO/Pietro Cenini

## Transboundary water cooperation in Latin America

UNESCO's Potential Conflict Cooperation Potential (PCCP) programme facilitates multi-level and interdisciplinary dialogue to foster peace, cooperation and development by building capacity to manage transboundary water resources. For example, research on Lake Titicaca involved stakeholders from both Bolivia and Peru.

A joint document was prepared outlining the status of conflict and cooperation in this transboundary water body. In 1992, Bolivia and Peru created the Bi-national Autonomous Authority of Lake Titicaca recognizing the importance of the joint management of the lake. The PCCP programme worked to build on this cooperative will and to facilitate a joint vision common to all stakeholders through a joint case study providing a forum for cooperative action, and a joint management strategy while at the same time increasing knowledge of the shared water body.



© Skykid 123ve; CC 3.0 Wikimedia Commons



## 2. What are the key messages?

### ✓ **Water cooperation builds peace**

Access to water can be a source of a conflict, but it is also a catalyst for cooperation and peace building. Cooperation on such a practical and vital issue as water management and drinking water supply and sanitation services can help overcome cultural, political and social tensions, and can also build trust and social peace between different groups; genders, communities, regions or states.

### ✓ **Water cooperation is key to socioeconomic development, poverty eradication, social equity, gender equality and environmental sustainability**

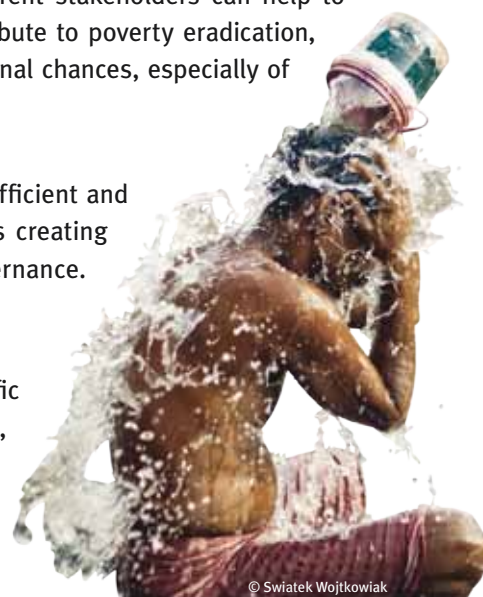
Universal access to efficient drinking water supply and sanitation services is the foundation for the fulfillment of basic human needs and contributes to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals. Inclusive, participatory and gender sensitive governance of water and cooperation between different stakeholders can help to overcome inequity and prevent conflicts in access to water and thus contribute to poverty eradication, socioeconomic development and improve the living conditions and educational chances, especially of women and children.

### ✓ **Water cooperation creates tangible economic benefits**

All economic activities depend on water. Cooperation can lead to a more efficient and sustainable use of water resources, e.g. through joint management plans creating mutual benefits and better living conditions, and gender sensitive water governance.

### ✓ **Water cooperation is crucial to preserve water resources, ensure their sustainability and protect the environment**

Water cooperation makes possible and promotes the exchange of scientific knowledge, including gender disaggregated data and information, management strategies and best practices, which is fundamental for the protection of the environment and to achieve sustainable development.



© Swiatek Wojtkowiak

### The Strategic Partnership for groundwater in the Mediterranean Sea (MedPartnership)



© Stefanie Neno

**A**ddressing the over-extraction and degradation of the groundwater of Mediterranean coastal aquifers requires the collective effort of countries and leading organizations to protect the marine and coastal environment.

The MedPartnership supports the creation of an inventory of coastal aquifers in the region including transboundary aquifers to assess the legislative, policy and institutional reforms that can contribute to their more effective collaborative management by Mediterranean countries.

Case studies can highlight innovative approaches and tools for water resource management that subsequently contribute to capacity building activities and technology transfer and the establishment of regional action plans for coastal aquifer management.

### 3. What are the objectives of the year?

The International Year and the World Water Day 2013 aim to encourage and nurture water cooperation to:

- Raise awareness on the importance, benefits and challenges of water cooperation;
- Enhance knowledge and develop capacity for water cooperation;
- Spark concrete and innovative action towards water cooperation;
- Foster partnerships, dialogue and cooperation around water as a top priority, during and beyond 2013;
- Strengthen international cooperation among institutions, users, social and economic sectors and others in order to reach a consensus on Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 era which will effectively address our future water needs.

#### Water cooperation in the Arab and Western Asian Regions

**A**rab countries are cooperating on the management of shared water resources through various inter-governmental fora. These include the Arab Ministerial Water Council, which adopted the Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region to meet the challenges and the future needs of sustainable development (2010-2030), highlighting the importance of regional cooperation among Arab States for the management of shared water resources, the protection of Arab water rights, and the improvement of access to water supply and sanitation services. Regional cooperation at the basin level is also being pursued to improve the management of shared surface and groundwater resources by adopting a common vision and the establishment of an inventory of shared surface and groundwater resources in the Western Asia sub-region, which is being prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA).

#### The UNECE Water Convention - a unique legal framework for transboundary cooperation - is going global



©FAO/Vasily Maksimov

**T**he UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) facilitates water cooperation to protect and ensure the quantity, quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources. Since 1992, the Convention has provided a legal and institutional framework, and a programme of work involving knowledge exchange, capacity building, projects on the ground, policy advice, soft-law instruments and regular assessments. In 2013 the Convention is expected to 'go global' contributing to the International Year of Water Cooperation. The Protocol on Water and Health jointly serviced by UNECE and the World Health Organization aims to protect human health and well-being through the sustainable management of water resources and the provision of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.



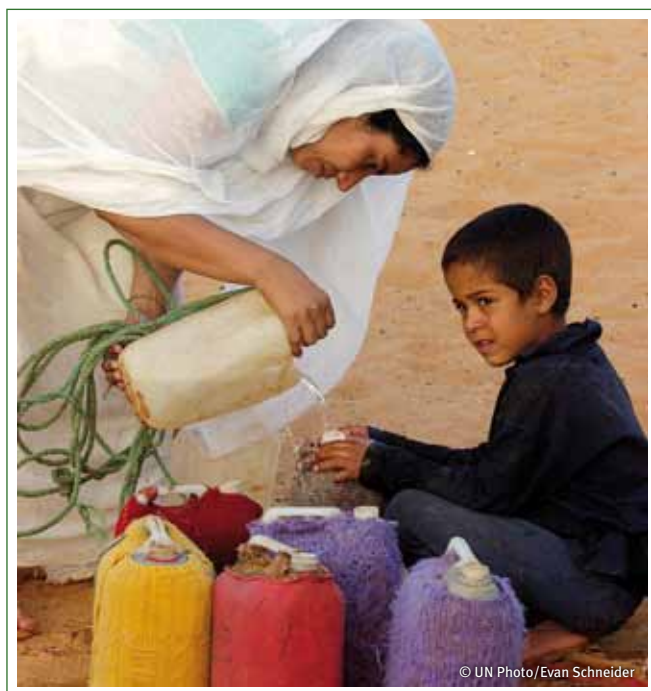
## 4. How can you get involved?

The success of the International Year of Water Cooperation and the World Water Day and the legacy it will leave depends on the involvement of everyone. Member agencies of UN-WATER and their numerous partners will catalyze action; they will also support and coordinate efforts around the world. So how can you help?

- ✓ Disseminate the campaign message, using our advocacy guide.
- ✓ Organize events that help to communicate the key messages of the campaign (e.g. a conference, an exhibition or a workshop on water cooperation in your community).
- ✓ Organize an activity that contributes to achieving the objectives of the campaign (e.g. training, development of research material, production of research work). Share your success stories or case studies on water cooperation on the Year's official website.
- ✓ Build partnerships to support water cooperation.
- ✓ And above all, be innovative and share your own ideas!

You will find many helpful resources on the Water Cooperation Campaign 2013 website. You can also share your projects and events and see others' work on the website:

[WWW.WATERCOOPERATION2013.ORG](http://WWW.WATERCOOPERATION2013.ORG)



### Water cooperation to manage floods



**T**he International Flood Initiative (IFI) aims to persuade policy-makers to change from a model of defense against floods towards the integrated management of floods to maximize the long-term benefits and to minimize the hardship, loss of life and damage to goods. Its guiding principles are living with floods, equity for all stakeholders, empowered participation, inter-disciplinarity and trans-sectorality, and international and regional cooperation. UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP), WMO, UNU, UN-ISDR and IAHS cooperate on the International Flood Initiative (IFI). The secretariat of the IFI is based at the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM) a UNESCO center, hosted by the Public Works Research Institute in Tsukuba, Japan.

## FRIENDs of water cooperation: sharing scientific data across borders



©FAO/Noah Seelam

**I**n order to understand hydrological processes at a regional or global scale, in particular concerning shared water resources and in the context of climate change, it is vital that nations collaborate on analyzing and sharing hydrological data and knowledge. Flow Regimes from International and Experimental Network Data (FRIEND), an international network supported by UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP) aims to foster and consolidate cross-disciplinary networks that facilitate cooperation for research and capacity building, development of analytical tools and data sharing. FRIEND has eight regional groupings and over 162 participating countries.

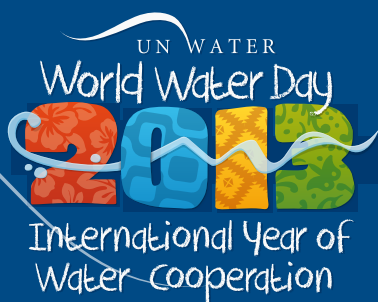
## AT A GLANCE: WATER COOPERATION 2013

The UN proclaimed 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation (UN General Assembly Resolution 65/154). Diverse activities around the world will help raise awareness of the potential of and challenges to water cooperation, facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, and promote innovative solutions. World Water Day on 22 March 2013, also on the theme of water cooperation, will be one of the key events of the Year.

UNESCO will lead the coordination of the activities, with support from UNECE, UNDESA, UNW-DPC, and UNW-DPAC, on behalf of UN-Water, and will encourage stakeholders at international, regional, national and local levels to take action on water cooperation so as to create a momentum that goes beyond the year itself. UN-Water is the inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater and sanitation-related issues. Based

on a history of close collaboration among UN agencies it was established in 2003 by the UN High Level Committee on Programmes. UN-Water aims to foster greater co-operation and information sharing among its 31 UN Members and 27 other international partners. UN-Water monitors and reports progress towards global objectives related to water, for example through the World Water Development Report (WWDR) and organizes the annual World Water Day on 22 March.

UN-Water has called upon UNESCO to lead the 2013 United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation, in view of the Organization's mandate to pursue the goals of peace and sustainable development and its multi-dimensional mandate in the natural and social sciences, culture, education and communication and its significant and longstanding programmes contributing to the management of the world's freshwater resources.



**World Water Day:**  
[wwd2013@unesco.org](mailto:wwd2013@unesco.org)

**International Year of Water Cooperation:**  
[iywc2013@unesco.org](mailto:iywc2013@unesco.org)

[www.watercooperation2013.org](http://www.watercooperation2013.org)



UN WATER