

Report from 3.1.1:

Boundless Basins: What are the successes and failures of *hydro-solidarity*?

Three questions posed by the
Chairman:

1) Are there any examples of international water agreement based on *hydro-solidarity*?

First of all, what is “hydro-solidarity”(HS) in an international context?

One interpretation could be that “hydro-solidarity” forms the basis for any agreement; if there are not any compromises on either side, there will probably not be any agreement!

Another interpretation is that the signatories in a water agreement have developed this in “good faith and intentions”.

However, it is wise to assume that “states act according to their strategic interests – whether that is social, economic, security, and/or political interest”.

In essence, no concrete examples of HS were presented in the Session, although the “French experience”, “Prust-river (East Europe), and the Orontes Rivers (Lebanon and Syria), as well as agreements on the Rhine, Rhone and Danube rivers – and not at least the water commissions of US/Mexico and US/Canada shed light of interesting lessons learnt.

The latter “water commissions examples” are probably the closes to HS – However, they might better been terms as lasting agreements due to sustained bilateral relationships.

2) To which extent is “power-asymmetry” determining the outcome of water agreements or lack of such?

- Cooperation among riparians might - in some cases when they are not ‘effective’ – function as a “smoke-screen”
- Asymmetric power influences control over allocation of shared waters.
- Prevailing practice is “hydro-sovereignty” *versus* “hydro-solidarity”

- “The notion of benefit-sharing” as to be assessed in each case, but it will probably not replace “water sharing - including water allocation/quality concerns.
- Some sort of “perceived water cooperation” might also cement “hydro-hegemonies”.

3) Is the notion of “sharing benefits” a way forward?

- Today, there are no international water agreements world-wide that are solely based on “sharing benefits”!
- There are several that contain internationally accepted principles like allocation and water quality – as well as sharing benefits (e.g., dams) (cf. the ‘international water-agreement data-base of Oregon State University, US).
- Sharing water (quantity and quality) and benefits should also include provision of risk management – due to climate change.

Two points for further reflection:

1) Is “transboundary water” a dubious term?

a) Does it include only water that is not divided along a (water) ‘mid-line’, or, if not;

b) Is “transboundary water” replacing the commonly accepted term (by the UN), “international water resources”?

2) ‘Great nations’ tend to take environmental, social and economic responsibilities that go beyond the narrow definition of ‘national sovereignty’