Sharing Basins, Sharing Destinies – International River Commissions

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Dr. Susanne Schmeier, IHE Delft
Introduction
• Transboundary basins transcend the boundaries of nation states
• Can lead to disagreements that can lead to undesired costs for all states
  – Unequal distribution of water resources (or benefits)
  – Impacts of unilateral projects or activities
  – Non-complementarity of water uses
• Can generate benefits of cooperation that can only be harvested because of the transboundary nature
  – Integrated basin planning
  – Flood and drought management
  – Joint/coordinated water development projects
• Requires cooperation in basin management and development

Shared basin – shared destiny
A momentary commitment to cooperation is often insufficient to maintain cooperation over time and harvest benefits of cooperative management. International water treaties and basin organizations can institutionalize cooperation further and:

- Define joint principles and rights and obligations of riparian states
- Provide platforms for continuous exchange
- Ensure implementation of joint activities/coordination of national activities
- Contribute to data and information exchange
Basin organizations in the multi-level governance system

- Global level
- Regional level
- Transboundary basin level
- Transboundary sub-basin level
- National level
- Sub-national level
- Local level
Various design elements shape basin organizations

- Legal basis/international water treaty – legal personality
- Functional scope and mandate

- Organizational structure

- Role of the secretariat
- Funding of the basin organization and its activities
Basin organizations provide governance mechanisms to basin states and others

- Decision-making mechanisms
- Dispute-resolution mechanisms
- Data and information management
- Notification and consultation
- Accident warning
- Stakeholder engagement
- …
What makes institutionalized cooperation effective?

• Effectiveness can mean many different things
  – Prevention/mitigation of conflicts
  – Sustainability and environmental protection
  – Water-related economic development

• Effectiveness depends on many different aspects
  – Internal factors
  – External factors
Conclusions

• Institutionalized cooperation provides benefits beyond simple commitment to cooperation and ensures
  – Agreement on water resources management principles, joint vision, RBMP, etc.
  – Regular exchange on (possibly contested) issues
  – Exchange of data and information
  – Availability of governance mechanisms

• Basin organizations play different roles – dependent on key water management issues in the basin
• Basin organizations need to be designed in way that allows them to do so (and be funded accordingly)
• Effectiveness of basin organizations depends on different factors – both internal and external