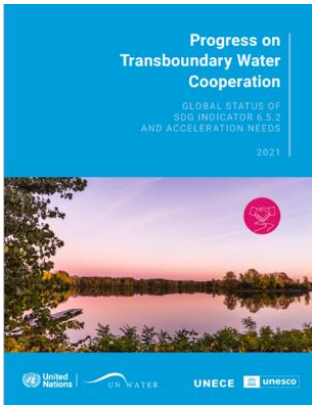

Why Transboundary Water Cooperation Progress is Very Slow? What needs to be changed?

What does the global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 show us?

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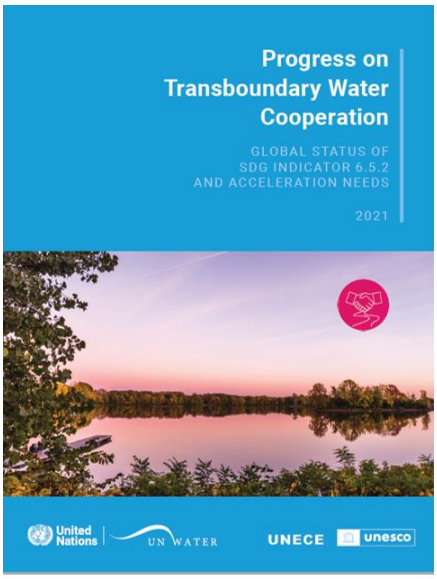
Abstract

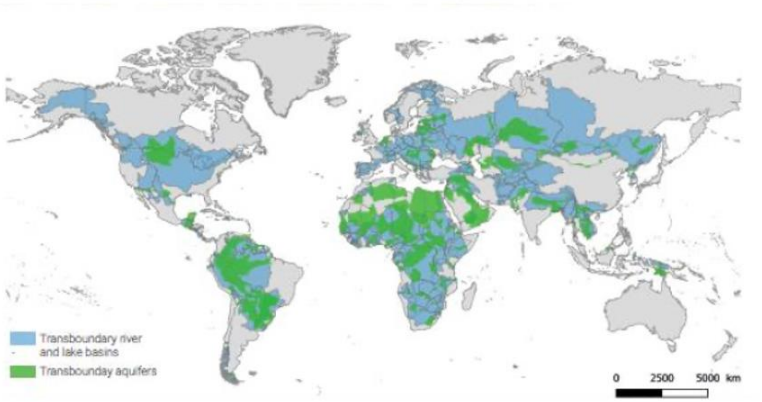
Transboundary waters account for 60 percent of the world's freshwater flows. 153 countries have territory within at least one of the transboundary rivers and lake basins; transboundary aquifers underlay almost every country. Transboundary water cooperation is crucial for peace, sustainable development, and regional stability. The related indicator 6.5.2 measures progress in this regard. The results of the second monitoring on SDG indicator 6.5.2 show that only 24 out of 153 countries have all their transboundary waters covered by operational arrangements. A major effort is therefore needed to accelerate progress in ensuring that operational arrangements cover all transboundary basins by 2030(1).

Therefore it is worthwhile to analyze what does the global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 shows us and what has to be done in terms of the fundamental approach to step further.

Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 shows us that advancing transboundary water cooperation needs a broader approach more than that of trying to accelerate the adoption of operational arrangements between countries Therefore before we focus on how to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation in support of the SDG 6.5 target, we need to have broader analyze the situation and how to progress in regional cooperation between states.

Keywords: Transboundary Water, SDG 6.5.2, regional cooperation,





Introduction

Over 80% of countries sharing transboundary waters engaged in the 2nd monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2. (2020-2021). Reporting on transboundary water cooperation has helped to highlight the importance of cooperation and started to address data gaps previously identified. However, despite the potential of transboundary water cooperation to support both "Water for All" (SDG6), and several other SDGs related to poverty, food, health, land and marine ecosystem, climate action, and peace and security, SDG indicator 6.5.2 data suggests that only 24 out of 153 countries have all theirs waters covered by operational arrangements. A major effort is therefore needed to accelerate progress. Where arrangements for transboundary water cooperation are lacking what can countries do to address any bottlenecks they face, and accelerate progress towards making those arrangements operational? What concrete action can third parties, such as UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, scientific and civil society groups, take to support countries in their efforts? Where arrangements are not operational, are there certain factors of operationality, such as the holding of regular meetings or exchanging data, that can result in 'quick wins' that accelerate the achievement of the SDG 6.5 target, i.e. implementing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at all levels by 2030?

Status of Transboundary Cooperation Worldwide (2)

In finding answers to the questions above we need to explain the status of transboundary water cooperation worldwide.

Transboundary waters account for 60 percent of the world's freshwater flows and 153 countries have territory within at least one of the 286 transboundary river and lake basins and 592 transboundary aquifer systems.

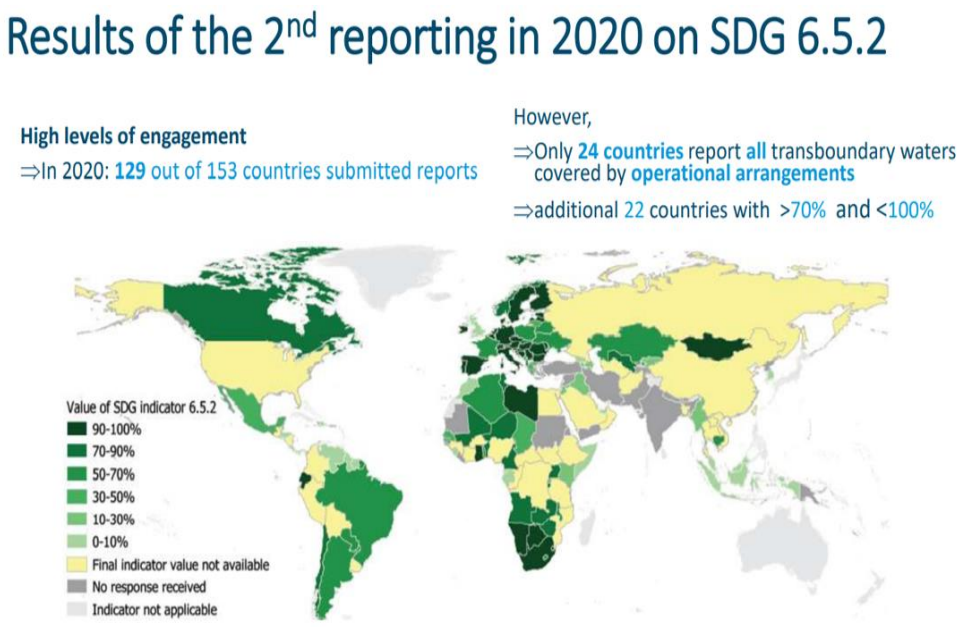


Figure 1. The global map on SDG 6,5,2 indicator value per country (1)

As shown in Figure 1,129 out of 153 countries sharing transboundary basins (rivers, lakes, and aquifers) submitted reports, compared with 107 in 2017. However, only 32 countries have 90 percent or more of their transboundary basin area covered by operational arrangements, of which only 24 countries have all of their basin areas covered. (Based on 101 of the 153 countries sharing transboundary rivers, lakes, and aquifers having on average 58 percent of their basin area covered by operational arrangements (figure based on combined data from 2017 and 2020).

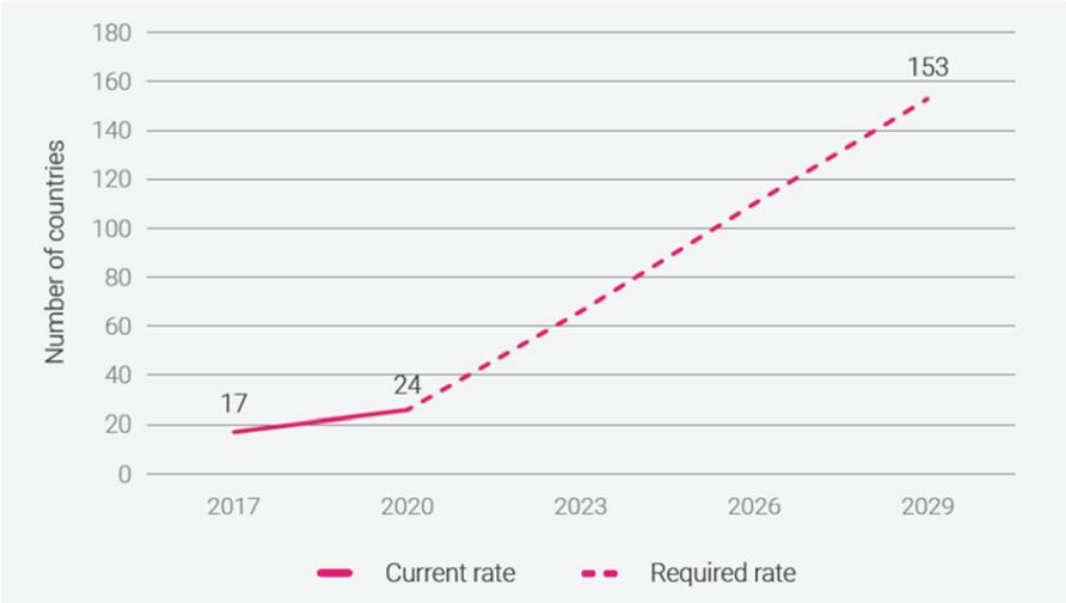


Figure 2. The number of countries that have all transboundary waters covered by operational arrangement (3).

As shown in Figure 2, ensuring that operational arrangements cover all transboundary basins by 2030 will therefore require a significant acceleration in the effort. (2).

The situation in Europe and North America is the most advanced for transboundary aquifers, with 24 out of 36 countries sharing transboundary aquifers reporting that operational arrangements cover 70 percent or more of their transboundary aquifer area. However, for most countries in Central, Eastern, Southern, and South-Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern Africa and Western Asia, despite the importance of groundwater within the arid and semi-arid climates found in large parts of these regions, operational arrangements cover only 30 percent or less of their transboundary aquifer area. Sub-Saharan Africa presents a more intermediate situation, although the majority of countries still report that operational arrangements for transboundary aquifers are lacking, or they have reported difficulties in obtaining the requisite aquifer data (2).

In summary, Europe, North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa show the greatest levels of progress while Latin America and Asia is in need of much more progress for water cooperation. At least 128 basins reported a lack of agreements and insufficient knowledge on groundwater systems, despite an unprecedented opportunity for countries to consider their transboundary aquifers.

What is 'operational' arrangement?

• Treaty, convention, agreement, or other formal arrangements

• Joint body for transboundary water cooperation

• Annual meetings

• Annual exchange of data and information

• Adoption of joint/co-ordinated water management plan, or joint objectives

Some Regional Progress in Central Asia

Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the Syr Darya, between Mozambique and Zimbabwe on the Buzi River Basin, and between Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa on the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer highlights that sometimes countries can take relatively straightforward steps to trigger cooperation and accelerate progress towards ensuring that operational arrangements cover all their transboundary basins.

As indicated in Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation report (2), key components in support of these steps include financing, capacity development, political will, and data collection and exchange.

We can summarize this perfect analysis expressing that the "**Institutionalized Regional Development Approach"** This approach firstly requires regional political will then the United Nations and its partners can play an important role in supporting this approach through the leveraging, mobilization, and coordination of expertise.

Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 shows us regional-specific conditions play an important role to make barriers or progress in advancing transboundary cooperation.

Institutionalized Regional Development Approach

Even if we accelerate the progress of operational arrangements indicated in SDG 6.5.2 in some developed countries, it doesn't show us the real progress that will be sustainable to enhance the relationship between the riparian state in the developing world.

If cooperation over the transboundary water is essential for peace, sustainable development, and regional stability, it requires a multidimensional approach than that of only signing an agreement between riparian states.

What Needs to be Changed

What are key barriers to advancing transboundary water cooperation? Although we find some universal barriers that are blocking the progress, it will not help us open the way. We need a much broader approach considering the specific characteristics of the regions to enhance regional cooperation.

If we try to find key factors that help to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation we need to shift the paradigm and rethink the arrangements that are in place. Because it is not only a matter of wishing to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation by 2030. It is a matter of understanding the regional dynamics, regional needs that put barriers in front of the regional development and agreement.

Therefore instead of trying to find a miracle key to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation by 2030, it is better to analyze the international and regional systems that transboundary basin shared countries are in.

What are key barriers in advancing transboundary water cooperation...Although we find some universal barriers that are blocking the progress, it will not help us open the way. We need a much broader approach considering the dominant characteristics of the regions to enhance regional cooperation.

Conclusions

Over 80% of countries sharing transboundary waters engaged in the 2nd monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2. (2020-2021). Based on SDG, reporting on transboundary water cooperation has helped to highlight the importance of cooperation and started to address data gaps previously identified.

However, despite the potential of transboundary water cooperation to support both “Water for All” (SDG6), and several other SDGs related to poverty, food, health, land and marine ecosystem, climate action, and peace and security, SDG indicator 6.5.2 data suggests that only 24 out of 153 countries have all theirs waters covered by operational arrangements. A major effort is therefore needed to find barriers and key factors to accelerate progress.

Only accelerate this ongoing progress may not be an ultimate goal, if we try to help setting up transboundary water cooperation. It is therefore we need to shift the paradigm and rethink the arrangements that are in place. Because setting up sustainable cooperation is not only a matter of finding key factors to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation by 2030. It is

a matter of understanding the regional dynamics, regional needs, and conflicts that put barriers in front of the regional development and agreement.

Therefore instead of trying to find a miracle key to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation by 2030, it is better to analyze the international and regional systems that transboundary basin shared countries are in.

A few Last Words

International Community may change its ongoing approach to encourage all riparian states to sign in International Water Conventions in any case. It needs to be realized that regional priorities for action are important to leverage investments and improve water management in conflict-affected regions through financial support that can lead to further regional cooperation.

As it is stated by Hassan Aboelnga, Hazim El-Naser at all(1) "These can include the promotion of the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus approach for its implementation and financing in the region; and the promotion of Water and Climate Change Action."

Therefore, it may not be so useful to try to find some general advice to be shared for countries to trigger cooperation. Because setting up cooperation is essential and it is not only a matter of how to accelerate progress on transboundary water and ensure that operational arrangements are in place. It is also not a matter of making the most of the SDG 6.5.2 monitoring process to advance transboundary water cooperation by 2030.

Essentially, it is a matter of paradigm shift to "**Institutionalized Regional Development Approach"**

It requires;

- Institutions focusing on innovative hydro-diplomacy based on mutually beneficial nexus approach
- Apart from governments cooperation among multiple stakeholders including media, municipalities, and civil society
- Instead of "more signed white papers" as so-called agreements between riparian states, regional development-based rational and flexible hydro diplomacy operated by regional institutions.

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Biography

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He is also part time lecturer at the IZTECH International Water Resources Department since 2020