

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY FRESHWATER BODIES

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There are numerous rivers, such as the Danube, that are shared by two or more countries. Management of transboundary freshwater bodies in a manner that is environmentally sound, as well as socially, economically and politically acceptable poses, a challenge to the international community. The issues involved are complex and cover both quantity and quality of water for competing uses, including water supply, industry, agriculture, energy production, navigation, recreation, and ecosystem needs.

Governance refers to the complex set of values, norms, processes, and institutions by which society manages its development and resolves conflict, formally or informally. It involves the State, but also civil society at the local, national, regional and global levels. For environmental governance, it is necessary to develop international legal instruments and mechanisms that set the rules for dealing with the various issues. In Chapter 39, the UN Agenda 21 called for the review and development of international environmental law in order to evaluate and to promote the efficacy of that law, and to promote the integration of environment and development policies through effective international agreements or instruments taking into account both universal principles and the particular and differentiated needs and concerns of all countries.

Considerable work has gone into developing international governance mechanisms and legal instruments for the management of transboundary water resources for non-navigational uses. A global water convention is still not finalised. The reasons for this are both technical and political. A basic question concerns the sovereignty of countries over their natural resources. Another main issue, especially in developing and newly industrialised countries, is the right to development vs. environmental protection. Several fairly successful cases of basin-wide treaties and agreements of co-operation can nevertheless be found in the world, ranging from the Danube, through the Nile, to the Mekong. These can be utilised as a basis for seeking broader understanding of the global governance mechanisms.

The United Nations University project on Hydropolitics and Eco-political Decision-making aims at a comprehensive and objective study of water as a limiting factor for regions sharing major international water bodies, in view of providing bases for sustainable environmental and political management of critical resources. The project aims to identify the issues in dispute concerning water resources, select alternative scenarios that could lead to the solution of complex problems related to water and the environment, and recommend processes through which the concerned countries are likely to agree on mutually satisfactory solutions to the problems, by sharing resources and benefits. One of the studies under the project is concerned with the disputed case of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Barrier System in the Danube, between the Slovak Republic and Hungary.

Dr. **Juha Ilari Uitto** is Academic Officer at The United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan. He studied Social and Economic Geography at the University of Lund in Sweden, and Geography at the University of Helsinki, Finland, and subsequently worked as a Consulting Manager for Finnconsult, where he dealt with population and rural development projects. He has also been a Research Fellow at the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala, Sweden, and an Associate Expert at the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome, Italy. He has produced over 30 publications, including books, monographs, chapters in books as well as original and review articles in scientific journals. His main fields of interest include: regional development, population, natural hazards and sustainable development. He is a Member of the Board of Directors at the World Seismic Safety Initiative, Vice-Chairman of the Japan-Finland Science Club, and a Visiting Lecturer at Nagoya University.