UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Too much and too little – Accelerating IWRM for climate-resilient water management and ecosystem conservation

22.03.2023, 1.15 – 2.30 p.m., UN HQ Conference Room 2

Organized by: Federal Republic of Germany, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger Basin Authority

Background on the event
Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as well as holistic approaches considering the Nexus between water, energy, food security and ecology are critical to manage the available water resources sustainably while protecting and conserving ecosystems that play an essential role for climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity conservation. This joint side event showcased two new projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Niger Basin as part of the German government's International Climate Initiative (IKI). The side event demonstrated how water-related challenges can be tackled both at national and transboundary level by strengthening the interlinkage between water, ecosystems conservation and climate.

The side event was jointly hosted by the **Ministers for the Environment** from the **Federal Republic of Germany**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo,** and the **Executive Secretary** of the **Niger Basin Authority** (NBA). Furthermore, during the high-level segment the **Ministers** of the **Republic of Guinea**, the **Niger Republic** and the **Federal Republic of Nigeria** highlighted how IWRM and cross-sectoral Nexus approaches can function as catalyzers for the achievement of the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the UN Convention for Biological Diversity and other relevant international agreements.

Water Action Agenda
The future projects showcased during this side event have been submitted as **joint commitments** to the Water Action Agenda of the UN 2023 Water Conference and will contribute to tackling the specific water- and climate-related challenges of DRC and the Niger basin.

1) The "Water-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (WEEN) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo" project aims at bringing about a paradigm shift away from a separate and sector-oriented approach towards a holistic view, reflecting the interlinkages between water resources, ecosystems conservation, climate action and economic and social development. Through the promotion of Integrated Water Resources Management, the project will contribute to enhancing co-benefits and mitigating trade-offs between various development needs, environmental

protection, climate change mitigation and measures to increase resilience against climate change and enhance adaptation capacity.

2) The "Climate-Water-Nexus: Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in the Niger Basin" project seeks to improve implementation of transboundary IWRM measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation in the Niger basin, which will drive long-term positive impacts on the resilience of livelihoods and ecosystems in the basin and on reduction and avoidance of GHGs emissions.

Key Issues discussed

- The side event recognized the water-related challenges that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the riparian states of the Niger Basin, but also many other Sub-Sahara African countries face, including issues related to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution.
- The Congo Basin is considered as the "lungs of Africa". It fulfils an important function for natural carbon storage on a global scale and needs to be protected. Water serves as the blood stream for the forests and wetlands in the Congo Basin. At the same time, water plays a key role in addressing the various development needs in the DR Congo; from access to WASH and sustainable energy supply to the transport of people and goods within the vast country. Despite its abundant water resources, the DR Congo must face increasingly devastating effects of climate change, such as heavy rains, changes in river hydrology, and increasing unpredictability of onset and duration of rainy and dry seasons threatening food security. It is only through cross-sectoral approaches and IWRM that the various water needs can be reconciled, and that climate resilience can be achieved.
- The riparian countries of the Niger Basin are heavily hit by the climate crisis and highly dependent on degraded natural resources, making this basin one of the poorest, most food and energy insecure and fragile in the world. Holistic IWRM approaches considering the Nexus between water-energy-and food security and adaptation measures are urgently needed to strengthen the resilience of livelihoods and ecosystems.
- Speakers and panellists discussed the key role of water-related ecosystems such as rivers, lakes and wetlands to tackle the climate crisis, increase food and energy security as well as to reduce poverty.
- The political partners asserted the importance of international cooperation and highlighted the excellent cooperation between the Government of Germany and the Government of DRC as well as the Niger Basin Authority.

Key recommendations for action

- As one of the regions being most strongly hit by the negative effects of the climate crisis, Sub-Saharan Africa should receive more assistance in tackling water- and climate related challenges.
- Water-related ecosystems, such as lakes, rivers and wetlands in the DRC and Niger Basin must be protected to harness the potential to act as natural carbon sinks and increase ecosystem resilience. For this, targeted measures, both at national but also at transboundary level, are needed.
- The two projects of the International Climate Initiative are positive examples of North-South cooperation to tackle the water- and climate related challenges in the regions. Targeted and tangible projects of this kind should be part of the Water Action Agenda to create transformative change.
- Transboundary cooperation in Africa bears great potential to take joint and increased action to solve the water-related challenges. The establishment of intergovernmental agreements on transboundary water cooperation and the accession and ratification of African states to the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) can be a catalyzer for a more water-secure future.