

The French Water Academy's commitment in Transboundary Water Resources

Management

By Jean Louis OLIVER, Secretary General of the French Water Academy

I. **Short presentation of the French Water Academy**

- **Origin:**

The French Water Academy is an institution created in 1993 and initiated by the Water Agencies and the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development

- **Organization:**

The Academy, a non profit association, benefits from the support of the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and of the six Water Agencies.

It currently has about one hundred and fifty members. These include both individuals and legal entities involved in diversified activities: life sciences, human biology, urban planning and water specialists from French and foreign public and private organizations. They combine their knowledge, expertise and experience to cover the water issues in all their complexity. The balanced nature of our membership (under 50% are water specialists, over 50% come from other disciplines) aims to facilitate cross-disciplinary thinking and objectivity on the consequences of water policy.

- **Objectives:**

- Enhance the value of water heritage by facilitating the exchange of information (technical, legal, scientific, cultural, etc.) and by creating thematic working groups,
- Contribute to the improvement of water management, especially by initiating and supporting studies, organising colloquia, preparing recommendations that take into account sustainable development,
- Develop national and international relations between stakeholders involved in water management,

- Improve public awareness concerning water-related issues.

- Main Activities and Projects:

- **Water, land planning and local action**

- Integrated Methodology on water and land planning,
- Transboundary aquifers management (in partnership with UNESCO-IHP, BRGM, OIEau, AFD),
- Management of natural risks, namely floods,
- Water supply and sanitation security, especially in crisis scenarios (natural or technological catastrophes, armed conflicts, inner disturbances, etc.) – In partnership with the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and the French Red Cross.

- The right to drinking water and sanitation; institutional water governance

- The socio-cultural dimension of water management

- International Water and Film Events (IWFE) – In partnership with ISW,
- Reference book,
- Participation of the general public in the development and implementation of the water policies: education, training, public awareness, etc.

- Water, health and environment

- Contribution to water management in Mediterranean countries

- Technology transfers in the fields of water (and sanitation); sustainable co-development between France and Morocco – In partnership with ECRIN

- Proposals for a Euro-Mediterranean water policy – In partnership with the CGPC

II. Shared management of transboundary river basins

Between 2000 and 2003, the French Water Academy focused on transboundary river basins, by analyzing 25 case studies: Rhine, Danube, Escaut, Oder, Mekong, Nile, Senegal, Niger, Orange, Limpopo, Tigris and Euphrates, Saint Laurent, Rio de La Plata, Rio Grande, Syr Daria and Amou Daria, Irtych, Indus, Brahmaputra, etc.

From these case studies, the French Water Academy learned useful lessons and best practices which helped create needed guidelines in order to develop the shared management of transboundary surface water.

The useful lessons learned from these case studies concern namely the conditions that lead to the necessary dialogue between riparian states. These conditions are as follows:

- response to crisis situations and natural catastrophes
- the realisation that non-concerted solutions are either very costly or impossible to attain
- end used pressure to increase available resources
- compliance with international law and the 1997 rules set out by the United Nations
- the conditions and obligations imposed by the financial backers before providing funding
- the resolution of latent conflicts between parties that lead to the reduction or the deterioration of shared water resources.

This work led to the creation of a special section for transboundary water resources within the International Network for Basin Organizations (INBO), which is in close cooperation with the International Office for Water (IOW).

III. Shared management of transboundary aquifer systems

In 2006, the French Water Academy shifted its focus on transboundary aquifer systems, starting with the ones that France shares with its neighbouring countries: Germany, Switzerland, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia).

In February 2007, an international conference was organized at Tournai (Belgium) aimed at developing a shared (franco-belgian) management of the transboundary underground water resources.

The French Water Academy is currently working in close cooperation with the French Development Agency (FDA), UNESCO-IHP, BRGM and IOW, in order to propose the tools and guidelines that are needed in order to develop the shared management of transboundary aquifer systems.

The French Water Academy and its partners will start by making a general analysis of the current situation concerning the shared management of transboundary aquifer systems. During this phase, the partners shall identify:

- the main transboundary aquifer systems of the world,
- the main actors in this domain,
- the current work that is undertaken on a political and technical level,
- the main treaties, and other instruments, dealing with the subject,
- the difficulties and the stakes (economic, environmental, political, cultural, etc.), mainly in Africa and the Mediterranean region, etc.

A more detailed analysis will then be undertaken concerning a number of crucial cases in Africa and the Mediterranean basin. This second phase will start with a description of the concerned aquifer system, as well as of the environmental, socio-economic and cultural contexts. The partners will then determine the state of knowledge in the studied region, as well as the publics' awareness/perception of the resource at stake and of its transboundary character.

After these preliminary steps, the partners will then propose a number of tools and guidelines that are necessary for a successful co-management of transboundary aquifer systems. These tools will take into account the socio-economic, the financial, the legal, the cultural and the institutional aspects and will thus be adaptable to the specific local conditions of each shared aquifer system.

The end result of this project will be found in a guide destined for the decision-makers, as well as in two handbooks, the first dealing with technical issues and the second with the legal aspects of the shared management of transboundary aquifer systems.

This work will mobilize the French Water Academy and its partners for some time and will, we hope, help develop the knowledge of shared management of transboundary aquifer systems.