



Session Run of Show

WATER SECURITY AND WATER COOPERATION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS: Lessons from MENA and the Sahel

Session summary:

The availability of adequate water resources and infrastructure is a fundamental requirement to sustain livelihoods, improve wellbeing, and build resilient societies. Given its criticality, competition over the resource can devolve into conflict, especially in regions of the world that already suffer from heightened fragility and water scarcity. At the same time, cooperative management of shared water resources can prove to be a catalyst for broader cooperation amongst countries and communities.

When does the balance tilt? How can the associated risks be mitigated? How to effectively reach local actors – who have often proven to be able to continue to manage basic services in the absence of central state actors – so they can be effectively supported and funded? And what are the opportunities to be leveraged? How to protect civilian populations at the forefront of local resilient capacities? How do interventions may contribute to reinforce social cohesion while contributing to sustainable endogenous institutions and service providers? This session explores these questions and the dynamics at the nexus of water security, fragility, and economic development in two water scarce and fragility-prone regions, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the Sahel.

Session objectives:

Present practical experiences of collaboration between grassroots, humanitarian, security, and development actors that (1) addressed basic (water) service needs and (2) built long-term resilience at multiple scales from community to national, with case studies from the MENA region and the Sahel.

Lessons Learned:

In fragile contexts, built-in flexibility and permanent local political dialogue backed by an institutional mandate of peacebuilding are key for securing water access for domestic and productive uses while fostering peaceful relations between communities. Innovative bottom-

up approaches are instrumental to tailor incentives towards cooperation and stability. Empowering local actors to perform development activities, in particular local private sector, enables more leverage on effective accountability mechanisms.

Understanding the complex dynamics around water is critical to lay the ground for sustainable cooperation. Competition over (water) resources in high-scarcity settings can be a trigger for conflict without adequate safeguards. Water is key to accessing all major livelihoods, hence fashions social relationships far beyond water points. At the same time, it shows that as institutional arrangements adapt to high-scarcity settings, cooperative arrangements can be achieved. While tensions over water tend to receive more media coverage, there is in fact more historical evidence crediting cooperation over the sharing of the resource over conflict – and by working in a coordinated way, development cooperation and emergency and peacekeeping efforts can maximize the chances for this collaboration to build the basis for a sustainable peace.

Key Messages (in bullet form):

1. The needs of communities in complex crises cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actors operating within the strict confines of humanitarian relief, development assistance, or peacebuilding independently.
2. Communities needs to be approached as experts of local context and as contributors to crisis solutions with flexible funding sensitive to field priorities
3. In fragile contexts, securing water access for domestic and productive uses while fostering peaceful relations between communities relies on building flexibility into projects and maintaining political dialogue in the field, backed by an institutional mandate of peacebuilding.
4. Particularly in water scarce and fragile regions like MENA and the Sahel, understanding the complex dynamics around water is critical to lay the ground for sustainable cooperation.
5. Safeguards must be put in place to protect the most vulnerable groups that States cannot afford to alienate (social safety nets to protect from drought, rights of displaced persons and migrants to access clean drinking water,...).

Background documents, PPTs, links to blogs, downloadable videos, etc.

[Rapport de la table ronde des acteurs locaux sur l'eau comme vecteur de paix au Sahel](#)
[Ebb and Flow, Volume 2 : Water in the Shadow of Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa](#)
[Strengthening Regional Water Security for Greater Resilience in the G5 Sahel](#)
The humanitarian [development](#)-peace nexus in practice

- **Format:** combination between Panel and South South Knowledge Exchange, with a combination of speakers from the countries affected by fragility, and humanitarian, development, and security experts (90min)
 - Moderator: Jean Willemin, Geneva Water Hub
 - 2 speakers offering a grassroots perspective
 - Mr Nouradine Zakaria Toure, President of the Regional Coordination of Natural Resources Users of the nine countries of the Niger Basin
 - Nada Majdalani – Co-Director, EcoPeace Palestine
 - 3 humanitarian, development, and security experts:
 - Humanitarian: Guillaume Pierrehumbert, Head of Water and Habitat Unit, Representative from the International Committee of the Red Cross
 - Security: Mr Hannes Lambrecht (GIZ, Head of Programme / Support to the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC), ECOWAS) and Mrs Boukar Yagana Dioula - High Authority for Peace Consolidation of Niger and for the Sahel (or, Nouradine Zakaria Toure, President of the Regional Coordination of Natural Resources Users of the nine countries of the Niger Basin)
 - Development: Laura Bonzanigo, Senior Water Specialist, World Bank

- **Structure of the session**
 - We suggest to start the discussion from a grassroots to a more regional perspective
 - Tentative questions to start up the conversation:
 - In the context of fragile institutions or central providers, how do local communities manage to cope with organizing access to water and other basic services?
 - Can you tell us about your experience in the (Liptako region/Palestine) on addressing access to basic services as part of a strategy to increase social cohesion (and therefore, peacekeeping)
 - What are some of the key lessons learnt in your region that other water scarce and fragile region(s) may benefit from?
 - How are you integrating aspects from the other sectors (humanitarian, development, security) in your strategy/work? Examples from both regions
 - Water has been shown to be both a source and a solution to conflicts in water-scarce regions like MENA and the Sahel. When working in areas where migration or transhumance are common, what are the key elements for future interventions to ensure water services are an integrator rather than a divider?
 - ...