



THE SANLIURFA OPPORTUNITY

An international workshop on regional cooperation for sustainable water management held at Sanliurfa, Turkey on 26-27 September, 2010 recommended the establishment of a cooperation council. The workshop was hosted by the Strategic Foresight Group and co-hosted by AK Party of Turkey and the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works (DSI). It was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with Political Affairs Division IV (Human Security) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Swedish Agency for International Development (Sida).



Some of the most distinguished Members of Parliament from the ruling AK Party of Turkey took the initiative to convene the workshop - in particular Mr. Yasar Yakis, former Foreign Minister and Chairman of the European Union Committee of the Parliament; Mr. Saban Disli, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister; Mr. Emin Onen, Deputy Chairman of External Affairs, AK Party. The participants included prominent

decision makers, parliamentarians, and opinion makers from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. Mr Nuri Okutan, Governor of Sanliurfa, inaugurated the workshop. Prof. Dr. Hasan Zuhuri Sarikaya, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Environment, delivered the keynote address. Both Governor Okutan and Prof Sarikaya set the tone of the workshop by emphasising rationale for regional cooperation. Latest archaeological findings indicate that Sanliurfa was the site of the first human settlement 11,500 years ago, where farming was introduced and the concept of using water for social and economic development of people came into being.



Yasar Yakis at the Opening Session



Saban Disli, Nayla Moawad, Bassem Shabb at Closing Session

The Sanliurfa Workshop was the third in the series of workshops to bring together key stakeholders from the Middle East. It was launched at Montreux, Switzerland, on February 15-16, 2010. As a second step, a High Level Plenary on 'Our Common Future: Water, Environment and Energy Community' was organized at the WANA Forum on May 17, 2010 in Amman, Jordan. It was hosted by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan who introduced the concept of Concentric Circles of Cooperation to break political deadlock. He recommended that the first such circle could be formed by Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan for the sustainable management of water and environment. The Sanliurfa Workshop moved the process ahead by recommending an institutional structure for these five countries to facilitate cooperation and policy coordination for sustainable management of water resources.

The participants suggested that such an initiative could lead to standardization of measurements, joint strategies to combat climate change and drought, development and dissemination of cutting edge technologies and better mutual understanding of legal frameworks and practices for environmentally conscious water management. Senior government officials, parliamentarians, former ministers from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey indicated the possibility of political will for creating a regional mechanism to make systemic cooperation possible. They also underscored the importance of engaging Syria, as that country was represented by independent scholars. Thus, the Sanliurfa Workshop has created an opportunity which can go a long way to forge a common vision and a practical mechanism among five countries in the Middle East.



Clockwise: Munther Haddadin and Hussein Jabir Al-Wasetti;
Murat Ates, Salim Catafago, Karma Ekmekji, Francois Munger, Al-Wasetti;
Karma Ekmekji, Ilmas Futehally, Maysoun Al'Zoubi;
Mohammed Saidam, Hazim El-Naser, Kamal Field Al Basri, Chamel Mouzaya



Some of the key observations made in the workshop were as follows:

- The five countries in the region have demonstrated strong preference for peace and cooperation. At present, specific policy measures and action programmes for cooperation have discussed on trade, travel and telecommunications. It should be possible to harness the prevailing political will and extend cooperation to water resources.
- A number of meetings at bilateral and trilateral level of ministers dealing with water resources have been taking place, particularly involving Iraq, Syria and Turkey. It is necessary to strengthen the underlying spirit of cooperation reflected in these meetings and include Lebanon and Jordan as surface and underground water resources run across borders. Some participants pointed out that some of the resources, particularly including underground resources also extend to some of the other countries in the Middle East. However, the most pragmatic and politically viable approach would be to strengthen cooperation among the five countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey) where political will is present.
- In view of bilateral and trilateral meetings at the ministerial level, and existence of significant trans-boundary academic and civil society networks, what is required is a systemic approach to promote cooperation by establishing a political mechanism at the highest level.
- A high level political mechanism will need to be supported by a small but effective secretariat to ensure follow up and implementation of decisions taken at

- the political level. It also needs to be supported by a network of think tanks and civil society groups within the region, and a group of donors from the international community.
- Such a mechanism will only be sustainable if it is designed, created, owned and financed by countries in the region. The role of the international donors can be to provide specific technical and financial inputs to implement cooperation strategies and joint projects.
 - Such a mechanism should be clearly of a political nature and not duplicate the work of existing technical organisations. In fact, it may develop productive relationship with existing organisations to utilise their experience and expertise to implement strategies agreed at the political level.
 - Some participants pointed out that any effort for regional cooperation should recognise that there are internal differences in the availability of resources, application of laws and institutional infrastructure within countries. It is important to address internal needs of the riparian countries while exploring improvement of relations between them.
 - Some participants pointed out that there were a large number of government organisations and agencies dealing with water in each of the five countries. The success of any regional coordination effort would depend on the streamlining of internal institutional architecture. On the other hand, institutionalisation of the cooperation process between countries can provide impetus for internal reform and efficiency.
 - It is important to bear in mind that water resources are to be harnessed not for their own sake, but for managing social and economic needs of growing populations in all countries. In this context, it is important to develop, disseminate and exchange cutting edge technologies.
 - While much of the discourse on water addresses the problem of quantity, the participants emphasized the need to focus on quality issues. They discussed the appropriateness of various international standards for different categories of water depending on the purpose of consumption.
 - The workshop recommended that it was necessary to introduce efficient demand management practices and in this context build awareness of common people. Some participants advised to recognise fine differences between water security and food security and adopt appropriate foreign trade policies in agriculture to minimise high water consumption where resource scarcity is severe.
 - There is a growing recognition of the impact of climate change and drought on human development. The practise of applying global models to the regional situation is not the most optimum. It is important to develop regional models and regional strategies through joint efforts.
 - Some participants emphasised the need to harmonise laws, while others felt that this was an ambitious objective. It could be considered in the distant future. While standardising laws is important, the step before that should be to review existing water laws in each country and to identify and rectify gaps in existing legislation. However, most participants agreed on the need to have consensus on certain common principles.

In conclusion, prominent political leaders, government officials and opinion makers from the region endorsed the rationale for creating a regional cooperation mechanism and advised Strategic Foresight Group to assess the political will and commitment in the countries concerned. They said that the Sanliurfa Workshop had created an opportunity and it was now for the decision makers in the region to examine the idea and decide how to take it ahead.

The workshop ended with a visit to Ataturk Dam, one of the largest dams in the world on the Euphrates River, hosted by the State Hydraulics Works of Turkey.



Emin Onen and Akif Ozkaldi at the Closing Dinner

This report reflects the understanding of the proceedings of the Sanliurfa Workshop by SFG. It is neither a statement of agreement by participants nor does it represent endorsement by any of the supporting parties, including agencies and departments of the Government of Sweden and Switzerland, and the Government of Turkey.

A report on workshops at Amman, Montreux, the texts of keynote speeches delivered on the occasion, notes on conversations with cabinet ministers and other decision makers in the region, and other details of the SFG initiative on water security in the Middle East are available on our website:

www.strategicforesight.com

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Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Government of Switzerland

El Ruha Hotel
Sanliurfa, Turkey

September 26-27, 2010

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