



# Water for Peace

## *An International Project aimed at the Prevention of Conflicts and Promotion of Cooperation over Water Resources in Six International River Basins*

Half the world's population and territory are located in river basins shared by two or more states. The

goals to halve the number of people lacking access to clean drinking water and improved sanitation, and reverse the loss of biodiversity and natural resources, by 2015, are therefore inseparable from the need to improve inter-state cooperation and stability regarding the management of shared water resources. Raising people out of the cycles of desperate poverty and frustration caused by water stress, and ensuring that the world's 260 transboundary rivers become avenues for cooperation rather than festering and destructive conflicts, are key to achieving security and peace throughout the world.

***“Water has the power to move millions of people - let it move us in the direction of peace.”***  
*Mikhail Gorbachev, President, Green Cross International.*

seeks answers to two questions: What is preventing the political will, active public participation, empowered institutions and investments needed to avoid conflicts and achieve co-operative basin management? How can these obstacles and conflicts be overcome?

The Water for Peace initiative is currently concentrating on six locally managed transboundary river basin sub-projects in the Danube, the Jordan, the Okavango, the La Plata, the Volga and the Volta basins. These basins are all very different, but they share at least three common factors: 1) they are the life-blood of their regions—environmentally, economically and culturally; 2) their populations all suffer from the lack of effective co-operation between the states and people who share them, and contain potential and actual areas of conflict as a result; 3) their integrated management is a potential source of great benefit to all the people in the region, in terms of political stability, economic development and environmental protection. Local-level pilot projects are being initiated to illustrate good practices in transboundary water management and the benefits to be gained through co-operation and communication. The Water for Peace initiative will ensure that the needs and concerns of civil society and the environment are integrated into the search for solutions to transboundary water conflicts, and that local level government representatives are aware of their important role and basin-wide responsibilities.

Activities are being carried-out in the spirit of wide consultation and mediation - anticipating and resolving potential conflicts at the source through dialogue, transparency and mutual understanding. This project is inspired by the mission of Green Cross to prevent and resolve conflicts arising from environmental degradation, mismanagement and injustice, through cooperation and building trust between all parties.

***“Fierce national competition over water resources has prompted fears that water issues contain the seeds of violent conflict. ... If all the world's peoples work together, a secure and sustainable water future can be ours.”*** UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, World Water Day 2002

Co-operation over water can be seen as an opportunity for some, and as the only possible salvation from severe water crises and even conflict for others. With cooperation, and stronger legal and institutional mechanisms for resolving conflicts, will come greater regional stability; with stability should come economic development, investments and better-coordinated outside support for transboundary water management initiatives in developing and transitional countries.

Green Cross International's Water for Peace project is addressing the obstacles, identifying the incentives and promoting the means to achieving the integrated, equitable and sustainable management needed to make international watercourses natural thoroughfares for stability and sustainable development across the world. The project

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**In December 2001, Green Cross International President, Mikhail Gorbachev, and UNESCO Secretary General, Koichiro Matsuura, signed an agreement for the two organisations to jointly implement the “From Potential Conflict to Cooperation Potential: Water for Peace” programme, which is in turn a contribution to the UN World Water Assessment Programme. By joining forces UNESCO and Green Cross will reach a wider constituency and forge more effective links between governments and local authorities, the private sector, academics and scientists, and civil society.**



## THE JORDAN RIVER BASIN

Alongside, and to a large extent as a result of, the political crisis in the Middle East, there is also a worsening water crisis which currently leaves thousands without adequate drinking water, threatens agriculture and the environment, prevents development and adds to the tension between the peoples of the region. The aim of this project is to demonstrate that working together to solve a real, urgent and fundamentally transboundary problem through concrete actions can help create the network of interdependencies needed to foster wider peace and stability. This project aims at raising the interest and involvement of local people all over the basin in order to send a message to the Governments that the time for unilateral management has passed. At the same time, experts from around the basin are working together to develop joint strategies, mechanisms and innovative solutions to the critical problem of water scarcity.

## THE VOLTA RIVER BASIN

The Volta basin is shared by six West African states, but over 80% of the surface area is located in Burkina Faso and Ghana. Population growth rates exceed 3%, placing increased pressure on land and water resources, which are also threatened by persistent decreases in rainfall, desertification and climate change. Insufficient communication between the countries currently hinders joint management of this shared resource, lessening the chances of peacefully resolving any future conflicts. The Green Cross project is uniquely placed to ensure the full and active involvement of civil society representatives across the basin in the development of the principles, agreements and cooperative management policies currently being negotiated in the basin. One main objective of this project is the adoption of a Basin Declaration by the political decision-makers of the six riparian countries. The Basin Declaration is being developed through regional research, consultations and workshops with all sectors of society.

## THE OKAVANGO RIVER BASIN

The Okavango river is the only perennial source of water for two growing and exceedingly arid nations, Namibia and Botswana. The former wants to further develop the river and divert water to meet the needs of its population; the latter also needs to increase its outtake, but has a very strong economic incentive to preserve the beauty of the Okavango delta – tourism. The main objective of this project is to explore the possibility of sharing benefits between Angola, Namibia and Botswana as a catalyst for peaceful development of the water resources of the basin. The project is facilitating the adoption of a framework policy by riparian states to ensure equitable and sustainable use of the Okavango river, in accordance with the guiding principles of OKACOM, the intergovernmental basin authority. Conflict prevention measures are essential if serious disputes are to be avoided when the next drought hits the region.

## THE VOLGA RIVER BASIN

The Volga basin covers 10% of the territory of the Russian Federation, contains 39 Republics, and has a population of almost 60 million. The challenge is how to change the system originally constructed for military and industrial needs of the Soviet Union into one that will support the movement towards a democratic state and the sustainable development of the basin. The basin includes several large cities, each of which pollutes a reservoir belonging to another further downstream, causing much provocation and some permanent conflict situations. This project aims to provide the first step in the transition of the management and legislation of the whole basin, to make people aware of the conflict and environmental disaster potential of leaving matters as they are, and begin to identify clear strategies to resolve existing conflicts in a transparent and regulated way. Pilot projects are being undertaken to demonstrate conflict resolution at certain flash-points in the basin. A main objective is to introduce a new law for The Protection of the Volga to the State Duma, a law which would also help protect the endangered Caspian Sea.

## THE DANUBE RIVER BASIN

The Danube basin, shared by 17 countries, is a highly complex basin. Green Cross is concentrating on the legal aspects of promoting cooperation among governments, and particularly local and regional authorities, and stakeholders with the aim of better informing all levels of society and decision makers of the myriad laws which govern the use of water resources. Several events in recent years have challenged the existing legal and management structures in the basin, namely the Baia Mare cyanide spill, the bombing of the bridges and pollution caused by the Kosovo conflict, the unresolved disputes over dams, and the more recent conflicts and questions being provoked by the privatisation of water services in large cities in the basin. Green Cross proposes to take the Danube basin as an example of how municipal decision-makers from different countries in the same basin can learn from each other's experiences, whether good or bad, with the management, and in some cases privatisation and subsequent regulation, of water services in their cities - making for better-informed decisions and reducing the risks of conflicts.

## THE LA PLATA RIVER BASIN

The La Plata basin is the fifth largest in the world and spans five countries (Paraguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay and Brazil). Cooperation over hydro-power has been credited for encouraging economic integration and regional security, however, top-level agreements on dam construction were made with little involvement or concern for the lives of the local people who would be effected, or the environment. The major Itaipu and Yacyreta projects commenced in the 1970s have left a legacy of corruption and failure to compensate for environmental damage, or disrupted lives, and have created new conflicts between effected peoples and governments. Green Cross Argentina has been working for two years to mediate between the governments, the dam authorities and people effected by the Yacyreta dam. Confidence and trust building, and facilitation of transparent discussion in the search for long-overdue solutions, are the main tools in bringing the "Water for Peace" message to the most local level. Activities being launched in Brazil are also concentrating on resolving water use conflicts and ensuring that the needs of local people and the environment are integrated into decision-making.

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*The Water for Peace project will be presented at the 3rd World Water Forum in Japan in March 2003, during which UNESCO and Green Cross will be responsible for coordinating all sessions related to the issues of water conflict prevention and sharing transboundary waters. Green Cross and UNESCO are also co-chairing a lively session on this topic in the Virtual Water Forum. Join the discussion on-line at [www.worldwaterforum.org](http://www.worldwaterforum.org)*