

Fourth Upper Indus Basin Network Regional Strategic Committee meeting

28 January 2021 | Microsoft Teams meeting

SECTION 1

Introduction

The fourth Regional Strategic Committee (RSC) meeting of the Upper Indus Basin Network (UIBN) was convened on 28 January 2021 to explore avenues for government ownership and sustainability of the UIBN and to discuss strategic guidelines for the country chapters focusing on the prevailing context and future needs. The meeting was attended by chair of the network; country chapter coordinators and co-coordinators from the four riparian countries (Afghanistan, India, China, and Pakistan); advisors; and members from the Secretariat (ICIMOD).

From endorsing the governance framework in 2018 to establishing four country chapters in the riparian countries with six Technical Working Groups (TWGs) each focused on enhancing climate knowledge in the Indus, the network has come a long way since its initiation as the Upper Indus Basin Monitoring Working Group in Pakistan in 2012.

Since its inception, the UIBN has been committed in its vision of a “resilient and empowered UIB region through science-based regional cooperation”. It has collaborated with other forums like the Indus Forum in partnership with the World Bank and international organizations to organize four Indus Basin Knowledge Forums, aimed at facilitating dialogues and solutions on bridging gaps in science, policy, and practice regarding climate change issues in the basin. The network has also prioritized research collaboration between country chapters, where a joint research on assessing the impact of climate change on water resources in the Indus basin has been proposed. Moreover, research collaboration between the Pakistan and India chapters is ongoing through a comparative study on climate change impacts on the livelihoods of UIB communities in Ladakh and Baltistan. Discussions have begun between the Afghanistan and India chapters on harnessing capacity-building needs and opportunities. This will be expanded to other country chapters as well. Likewise, country chapters have collaborated with the Secretariat to submit a manuscript to the special issue on the UIBN in the journal *Science of the Total Environment* (STOTEN).

The special issue sheds light on a basin-wide perspective of climatic and other meteorological factors and their influence on the current and future state of the UIB.

The fourth RSC meeting reflected on such progress of the network and discussed how the network could work towards a stronger collaboration between the country chapters and to build government ownership and support for a stronger policy influence on issues related to the Indus.

SECTION 2

Key discussions

UIBN'S RELEVANCE TO THE RIPARIAN COUNTRIES' CONTEXT AND NEEDS

While ongoing research within the network is important, RSC members agreed that national needs and priorities would have to be taken into account while preparing the UIBN's future course of action. Members noted that a careful assessment of national development and research priorities would be crucial to devise relevant interventions accordingly for the respective country chapters. Such relevant interventions would help the country chapters showcase their potential to serve as a think tank or advisory body for the respective government agencies. The Afghanistan Chapter being housed in the Afghanistan National Water and Environment Research Center (ANWERC) and the increased involvement of government bodies in the Pakistan Chapter are crucial steps towards helping integrate government needs and priorities within the respective country chapters plans.

THEORY OF CHANGE AS A STRATEGIC ROADMAP

The members noted that the theory of change (ToC) framework at a country level could be utilized to understand challenges at the national level and devise pathways to fulfill the gaps. The ToC could also align with the Sustainable Development Goal priorities of the respective countries and be linked to the ToC developed for the regional UIBN. The ToC could be pitched to relevant government and other national stakeholders to showcase the network's focus and ongoing research and strategic roadmap for the future. Engaging relevant stakeholders from the beginning of the ToC formation would not only encourage higher support for the network but also help make the ToC framework more relevant to

the needs of the diverse stakeholders. In addition, the ToC framework could also serve a purpose of providing more clarity on the future course of action for the country chapter. Another suggestion was on the need to highlight issues related to the downstream (for example, deltas) in addition to the upstream-downstream linkages as one of the focus areas under the ToC.

STRENGTHENING ONGOING COLLABORATIONS WITHIN THE COUNTRY CHAPTERS

Members also discussed avenues through which coordination between country chapters could be further strengthened. Information and experience from the ongoing/potential bilateral intervention between countries could be shared with other country chapters for harnessing support from all the riparian countries. Members also suggested that the new chair – Naim Eqrar – be invited to the country chapter meetings to help deepen his understanding about the network and also receive his inputs to further strengthen the regional perspective in the country chapters. Moreover, proactive steps by the country chapters, including by the most recently initiated China Chapter, to coordinate regular meetings, would further add to the efficiency of the network.

In addition to the ongoing discussions on the capacity-building interventions between the country chapters, members proposed a PhD project where PhD students from each of the country chapters could be brought together at an institution for research collaboration and exchange.

SECTION 3

Way forward

HARNESSING GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP AND SUPPORT

Members agreed that government support from the respective country chapters would be crucial not only for the network's sustainability but also to help position country chapters as think tanks for the respective government bodies. There have been instrumental developments towards increased government ownership of the UIBN, such as the Afghanistan Chapter being housed under ANWERC or the recommendations of the first annual Pakistan Chapter meeting being shared with the Federal Flood Commission (FFC) for potentially supporting the conceptualization of an implementation framework for the national water policy.

In addition to such developments, rigorous efforts would have to be made to garner stronger government ownership and support. The Afghanistan Chapter shared the possibility of holding discussions about the UIBN with the High Council on Land and Water for potential collaboration. Members decided that an action point would be discussing the UIBN's role as a regional network during ICIMOD's Board of Governors meeting. This would help the network gain perspective from the respective governments on aligning research priorities in accordance with national priorities. Moreover, support from ICIMOD's Board of Governors could help with better positioning of the UIBN in the respective countries and help the process of trust building among the riparian countries. The Secretariat will take this proposal forward by in consultation with the Director General of ICIMOD.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NETWORK

While government support would be crucial for sustainability, members also shared it would be important to think about other avenues to ensure that the network can be functional in the long run. As one of the action points from the meeting, it was discussed that the country chapters would deliberate on this, form a smaller team at country level to devise a strategy for the network's sustainability, and share the recommendations in the next RSC meeting.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

[Governance framework of the Upper Indus Basin Network](#)

Proceedings from previous RSC meetings
([April 2018](#), [Jan 2019](#), [August 2019](#), [June 2020](#))

Proposed next meetings

Next RSC meeting: **August 2021**

Next RUAM: **2nd half of March 2022**

Action point: Country chapters to discuss the meeting agenda outline for RUAM and RSC and share it with the Secretariat

CITATION

ICIMOD (2021). *Proceedings of the Fourth Upper Indus Basin Network Regional Strategic Committee meeting*. ICIMOD.

Additional event information and materials are available at:

<https://www.icimod.org/event/fourth-upper-indus-basin-network-regional-strategic-committee-rsc-meeting/>

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