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MEDJERDA RIVER

Background

The Medjerda River Basin is among the most important ones in the Maghreb in terms of freshwater supply. Starting in North-East Algeria, it flows eastwards to the Gulf of Tunis. The availability of freshwater, due to permanent flows in most of the river, has opened up for intense agriculture in its main floodplains - a key socio-economic sector in Tunisia. The Medjerda River Basin also provides more than 40% of the Tunisian population with drinking water.

Governance challenges

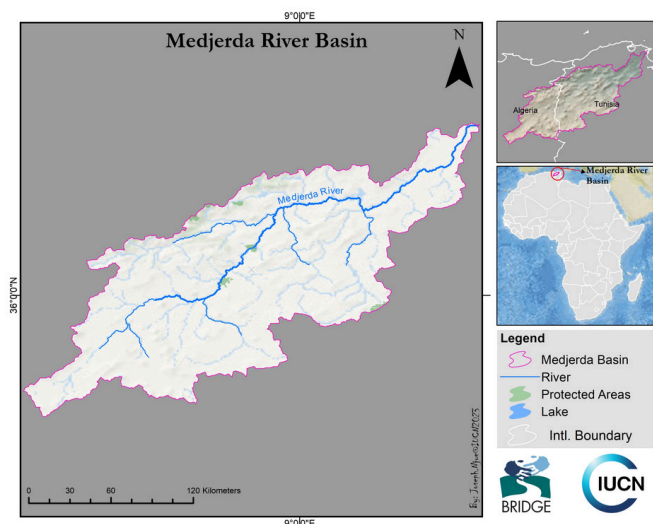
Presently, formal cooperation arrangements governing the management of the Medjerda river basin are limited. Cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia over the basin could support potential opportunities for a coordinated vision for management, conservation and sustainable development. The absence of a collaborative approach to river basin management and of collaboration between administrators, coupled with ecosystem degradation and severe drought, pose a substantial risk to the integrity of nature and the livelihoods of people depending on the waters of the Medjerda. The basin's Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP) classification of high risk underlines various shared challenges. This scenario calls for comprehensive cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination to bridge legal and institutional gaps, as well as dialogue to formulate joint approaches for the protection of the Medjerda.

BRIDGE implementation

BRIDGE has been operational in the basin since 2022. The project seeks to explore synergies for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) within the shared waters, engaging both institutional and civil society actors. At the national level, BRIDGE promotes the strengthening of the governance capacities of the various stakeholders involved in the basin and the establishment of a framework for inter-sectoral cooperation.

Basin objectives for Phase 5

- Facilitate inclusive dialogue among basin stakeholders from institutional and civil society sectors to promote a sustainable governance framework.
- Define a framework for cross-sectoral governance of the basin at national level, identifying and outlining the responsibilities of a national committee.
- Identify opportunities for NbS projects in both countries.
- Share best practices and enhance regional exchanges through, among others, participation in African and Mediterranean events on water governance.
- Promote the BRIDGE experience in Medjerda as a model for transboundary water governance in the region.



Basin at glance

- Total area (km²): 23,700
- Population: 1.4 million (of which 1 million live in rural areas)
- Climate zone: Varies across the basin (humid, semi-humid, arid and semi-arid)
- Rainfall (mm/yr): 466,41
- Countries sharing: Algeria and Tunisia
- BRIDGE operating in the basin since: 2022

CROSS-SECTORAL AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

In general, across North Africa, there is a growing awareness of the need for more information and collaborative efforts in transboundary waters. The Medjerda River stands as a unique case with relatively abundant information and having benefited from several cooperation projects. These include the MedGIRE Project coordinated by WWF North Africa and Tour du Valat, initiatives by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency for flood control, and the Enhancing the conservation of Coastal Wetlands Project, implemented by a consortium of Tunisian organisations.

At the institutional level in Tunisia, the governance of the basin involves seven Ministries across the sectors of agriculture, industries, environment, territorial planning, health, and internal affairs. Each Ministry has its directorate and district representatives at regional levels, and work with local level institutions and municipalities. Improved coordination between national institutions has been identified as an opportunity to optimise water resources management and avoid overlap of responsibilities, while mapping responsibilities for infrastructure maintenance, and a framework for addressing issues such as water loss or pollution.

The implementation of BRIDGE presents an opportunity to strengthen cooperation among stakeholders, initiating an effective common framework for a shared basin governance.

Additional information

BRIDGE website:
www.waterandnature.org/initiatives/bridge

Water Law and Governance website:
www.waterlawandgovernance.org/bridge/

Social media

@IUCN_Water (Twitter)
 @IUCN Water and Land Management (LinkedIn)

BRIDGE contacts

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