



Water Diplomacy



Summary

Water diplomacy aims to ensure regional cooperation, using water resources management as entry point to create solution spaces for broader cooperation. The technical and diplomatic mechanisms used to unpack complex water issues are indeed great means to improve peace and regional stability. This Tool defines water diplomacy, explains the several tracks that can be used in water diplomacy (Track 1, Track 1.5, Track 2 and Track 3) and introduces regional and basin dialogue pathways for water diplomacy.

Introducing Diplomacy in the Water Context

Diplomacy is represented by the skills of managing international relations and conducting negotiations between or among States and their agencies ([SIWI, 2017](#)). Diplomatic processes play a crucial role in the formalisation of transboundary cooperation over water. Water diplomacy recognises the existence of numerous different actors, which have the ability to create solution spaces for water conflicts as well as water cooperation opportunities. Besides the official diplomatic efforts, civil society and academia play a great role in building trust and resolving conflicts among parties. By combining technical and diplomatic tools, water diplomacy enables the stakeholders to unpack the complex water issues in the region and respond to broader political frictions.

The concept of water diplomacy involves five key aspects: political (manifesting in geopolitics and foreign policy), preventive (conflict prevention and mediation), integrative (applying IWRM and bridging institutional levels), cooperative (good governance and benefit-sharing) and technical (data sharing and hydrological models) ([Keskinen et al., 2021](#)) (Figure 1).

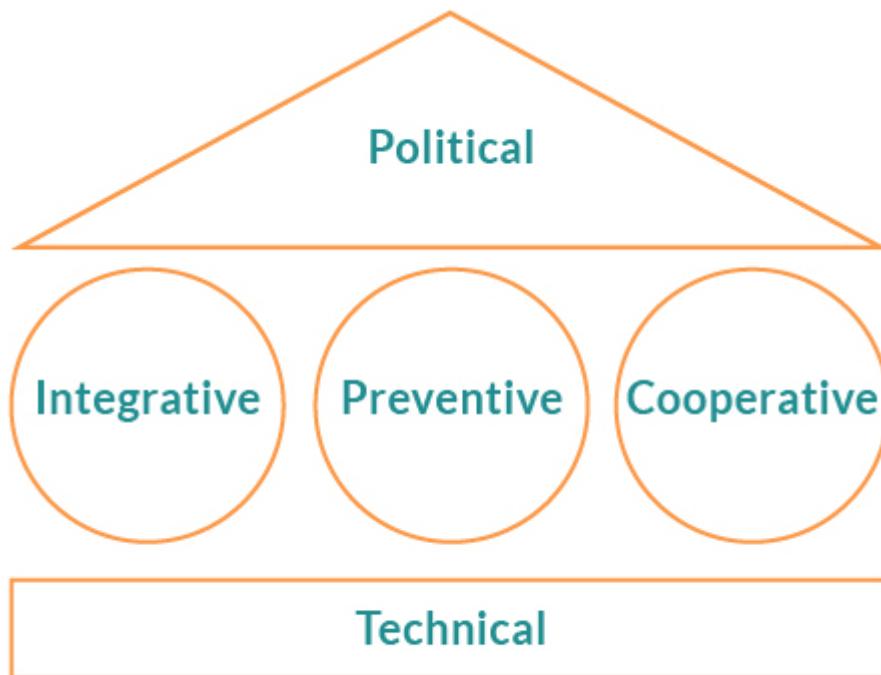


Figure 1. The five water diplomacy aspects and their main relations (Adapted from [Keskinen et al., 2021](#))

Water diplomacy includes all measures by state and non-state actors that can be undertaken to prevent or peacefully resolve (emerging) conflicts and facilitate cooperation related to water availability, allocation or use between and within states and public and private stakeholders ([Huntjens et al., 2016](#)). Such measures can include, for instance, regional and basin level dialogues, agreements and Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) signed among government actors, formal mediation, arbitration, to legal fact-findings, trainings and capacity building, benefit sharing, information and knowledge exchange, data exchange, as well as establishing formal and informal institutions and mechanisms of cooperation.

Term water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation are often used in a similar context. While transboundary water cooperation primarily aims to foster the cooperation over shared water, water diplomacy often has a broader aim of fostering cooperation beyond water, including regional peace and stability ([Molnar et al., 2017](#)). In this context, water diplomacy recognises importance of understanding linkages between shared water resources conflicts and its geopolitical and socio-economic contexts ([Keskinen et al., 2021](#)). Water diplomacy complements water cooperation with the use of diplomatic instruments, engaging a wider range of stakeholders through multiple tracks of engaging different stakeholders.

Different Tracks of Water Diplomacy

In order to respond to changing political landscape, as well as to address the need for integrating science into policy, there is a need for water diplomacy process to be more flexible, allowing collaboration of state and non-state actors. Similarly to regular diplomacy tracks, water diplomacy processes may follow several tracks (SIWI 2019):

- **Track 1:** Represents a state-centred diplomatic process, embodied in an official bilateral or

- multilateral dialogues between officials of riparian States, involving high-level political leaders;
- **Track 1.5:** Refers to the situation where governmental and non-governmental actors jointly work together towards resolving conflicts, issues at hand, or fostering the dialogues and collaborations;
- **Track 2:** Comprises an unofficial dialogue among non-State actors aimed at influencing official negotiation processes, involving individuals and private groups, who could interact more freely than high-ranking officials;
- **Track 3:** It is a people-to-people diplomacy, driven by individuals and non-governmental groups to promote cooperation at multiple levels including community, local levels, as well as national and global levels;
- **Multi-track:** Refers to a situation where different tracks of diplomacy taking place simultaneously.

As the sharing of common water resources encountered more complex water problems, multi-track diplomacy proved to be critical for maintaining dialogue under uncertain political conditions. Multi-track approach can also be useful when formal negotiations between conflicting parties have come to a halt. The concept of Water Diplomacy Framework (WDF) facilitates identifying interventions points and suggests actions to account for diverging opinions and competing demands, prescribing to “know why” before “knowing how” (Islam and Repella, 2012). It is seen as an alternative to technically-focused approaches and seeks to create value-based opportunities, exploring underlying interests for stakeholders’ perspectives (Islam and Repella, 2015). Since water diplomacy processes are aimed at finding mutual gains for all stakeholders, integrating scientific knowledge with the contextual reality is crucial to reconcile diverging interests. Assuming that water is flexible resource, the WDF suggests an adaptable approach to decision-making, involving multiple stakeholders to find sustainable solutions and mutual gains.

Dialogues on transboundary water management facilitate establishment of cooperation platforms on different levels (e.g. regional, sub-regional, national, basin-wide) and facilitate the creation of a shared vision among the participants from different sectors and riparian States. These dialogues bring together people and institutions from adjacent countries to set up regional data sharing schemes, design common solutions and regional strategies.

While many transboundary water dialogues tend to focus at basin scale, regional dialogues can provide a unique approach allowing stakeholders to focus on common challenges in water management as starting point, facilitating general agreement on importance of collaborating towards addressing such challenges (Huntjens, de Man, 2017). Regional dialogues also facilitate open discussion on key issues of transboundary water, which can be potentially followed by the national water planning (Tool A3.01). Unlike discussions within river basin organisations, regional dialogues are informal and may include a broader range of stakeholders. They are not necessarily driven by government activities but are instead often facilitated by international organisations or civil society. Regional dialogues constitute a series of events and activities (conferences, workshops, study visits, seminars) focusing on policy and technical instruments to address transboundary water management, assisting in highlighting the benefits of cooperation, and leading to improved capacity for practitioners and stakeholders. Among the most notable examples of regional and basin dialogues are:

1. **Drin Dialogue:** Initiated in 2008 and formally launched in 2009, the Drin Dialogue represents a multi-stakeholder process for the establishment of a shared vision for the sustainable management of the Drin river basin (GEF, 2018). This regional water dialogue has enabled numerous advancements on basin level, such as conclusion of the MoU among riparian States on Drin basin management, several successful nexus assessments, enhancement of cooperation and adoption of public participation plans (Sava River Basin). These activities under

the umbrella of regional dialogues were used to enable stakeholders identifying solutions for application in their respective basins.

2. **SADC Multi-Stakeholder Water Dialogue:** First held in 2007, the South African Development Community (SADC) Multi-Stakeholder Water Dialogue is a region-wide initiative, a biennial event hosted by the SADC Directorate of Infrastructure. The dialogue gathers water practitioners, decision and policy makers from related sectors to have a dialogue on regional development challenges, in particular, water-food-energy nexus (GWP SAF, 2019). Activities within the dialogue contributed to introducing the SADC framework for nexus governance and investments, promoted regional approach to integrated planning, as well as helped adopt the SADC Business Plan on Youth Participation and Empowerment for Sustainable Development 2015-2020, using youth engagement as a unique tool for cross-sectoral response.
3. **Brahmaputra Dialogue:** The multilateral Brahmaputra Dialogue, initiated in 2013 by the South Asian Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies (SaciWATERS) is a basin-wide dialogue, aiming to improve transparency and cooperation over the transboundary Brahmaputra River. The dialogue initially focused on a bilateral exchange between India and Bangladesh but has since broadened to include the other two riparian to the Brahmaputra River, China and Bhutan. Starting as a Track II dialogue that brought together civil society actors from non-governmental organisations and academia, the Brahmaputra Dialogue has evolved to include governmental actors on the national and sub-national level (Yasuda, Aich, Hill, Huntjens, 2017).

Thematic Tagging

Transboundary

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