



Finnish Water Diplomacy

A Guidebook for Practitioners

August 2026



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TIIVISTELMÄ

Suomen vesidiplomatiaa ohjaa visio **vesiturvallisesta maailmasta**, jossa yhteisten vesivarojen oikeudenmukainen ja hyvä hallinta muodostaa yhteistyön ja rauhan perustan. Vesidiplomatialla tarkoitetaan veden käyttöön liittyvien poliittisten jännitteiden ennaltaehkäisyä ja ratkaisemista yhdistämällä vesialan tekninen asiantuntemus diplomatian keinoihin. Suomen vesidiplomatialähestymistapa perustuu kahteen kansalliseen vahvuuteen, **rajat ylittävään vesiyhteistyöhön** ja **rauhanhälitykseen**, ja yhdistää ne vesidiplomatian viitekehykseksi, jota tukevat moniraiteinen diplomatia, osallistavuus ja konfliktisensitiivisyys.

Suomi hyödyntää vettä vuoropuhelun ja rauhanrakentamisen lähtökohtana. Taustalla on ymmärrys siitä, että vesi on sekä elintärkeä luonnonvara että mahdollinen jännitteiden lähde. Vesidiplomatia tarjoaa keinon rakentaa yhteistyötä myös haastavissa poliittisissa tilanteissa, ja se kytketään osaksi laajempia kysymyksiä, kuten energiaa, ruokaturvaa, ekosysteemejä, ilmastomuutosta sekä alueellisia ja geopoliittisia turvallisuushaasteita. Keskeistä on luottamuksen rakentaminen, pitkäjänteisen yhteistyön tukeminen sekä sellaisten institutionaalisten rakenteiden vahvistaminen, jotka mahdollistavat yhteistyön ja yhteisen oppimisen yli rajojen.

Tämä opaskirja tarjoaa käytännön työkaluja ja periaatteita ulkopoliitiikan, vesivarojen hallinnan ja rauhanhälityksen toimijoille. Sen tavoitteena on varmistaa, että vesidiplomatian toimet ovat kontekstisensitiivisiä, inklusiivisia sekä Suomen ulko-, turvallisuus- ja kehityspoliittisten tavoitteiden mukaisia. Sen sijaan, että opaskirja dokumentoisi olemassa olevia toimintatapoja, se esittää tulevaisuuteen suuntautuvan normatiivisen viitekehyksen, joka määrittelee suomalaisen vesidiplomatian keskeiset periaatteet ja laatustandardit. Se tarjoaa käytännön toimijoille suunnan ja yhteiset laatukriteerit sekä edistää yhdenmukaista ja korkeatasoista toimintatapaa koko vesidiplomatian kentällä. Viitekehyksen toimeenpano perustuu siihen, että sen periaatteet sisällytetään suunnitteluun, koordinointiin ja käytännön toimintatapoihin ministeriöissä ja kumppaniorganisaatioissa sekä osaksi varsinaista diplomatiatyötä.

Vesidiplomatia toimii **kolmella toisiinsa kytkeytyvällä tasolla**:

- **Mikrotasolla** toteutetaan lyhyen aikavälin kohdennettuja toimia, kuten rauhanhälitystä, konfliktianalyysyä ja teknisiä asiantuntijamissioita.
- **Mesotasolla** vahvistetaan pitkäjänteisesti yhteistyörakenteita ja hallintojärjestelyjä esimerkiksi rajavesikomissioiden ja vesistöalueorganisaatioiden kautta.
- **Makrotasolla** vesidiplomatia integroidaan ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikkaan sekä kansainvälisen hallinnan rakenteisiin, joissa käsitellään ilmastomuutoksen, turvallisuuden ja vakauden kaltaisia laaja-alaisia haasteita.

Suomen lähestymistapa korostaa **moniraiteista diplomati**aa, jossa virallisia neuvotteluja täydennetään epävirallisella vuoropuhelulla, asiantuntijayhteistyöllä ja yhteisötason osallistumisella. Tarkoituksena on ylläpitää vuoropuhelua, rakentaa luottamusta ja luoda edellytyksiä pitkäjänteiselle yhteistyölle.

Inklusiivisuus on keskeinen periaate, ja sillä pyritään varmistamaan erityisesti naisten, nuorten ja marginalisoitujen ryhmien osallistuminen. Samalla toimintaa ohjaa **Do No Harm -periaate ja konfliktisensitiivisyys**.

Keskeisiä välineitä ovat suomalaistoimijoiden kehittämät **Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy** -työkalu (Ulkopoliittinen instituutti, FIIA) sekä **Water Diplomacy Paths** -lähestymistapa (Aalto-yliopisto), jotka auttavat toimijoita arvioimaan toimintaympäristöä, ennakoimaan riskejä, laatimaan tilanteeseen sopivia strategioita ja tunnistamaan tarkoituksenmukaisia toimintavaihtoehtoja. Lisäksi Suomi edistää kansainvälistä vesiyhteistyötä vuoden 1992 YK:n rajavesisopimuksen, kapasiteetin vahvistamiseen tähtäävien aloitteiden sekä monenkeskisillä foorumeilla tehtävän vesiturvallisuuden vaikuttamisen kautta.

Suomi näkee vesidiplomatian ennakoivana välineenä vakauden ja kestävän kehityksen edistämiseksi. Tämä lähestymistapa tukee Agenda 2030:n tavoitteita sekä Suomen ulkopoliittikan painopisteitä, kuten sääntöpohjaista monenkeskisyyttä, konfliktien ennaltaehkäisyä ja ilmastokestävyyttä.

Suomen vesidiplomatian keskeiset elementit ja ohjaavat periaatteet

- **Visio:** Vesiturvallinen maailma, joka perustuu yhteisten vesivarojen oikeudenmukaiseen ja vastuulliseen hallintaan sekä hyvään hallintoon.
- **Kaksi vahvuutta:** Rajat ylittävän vesiyhteistyön ja rauhanvälityksen yhdistäminen.
- **Vuoropuhelun lähtökohta:** Veden hyödyntäminen keinona edistää laajempaa rauhanrakentamista ja alueellista vakautta.
- **Integraatio:** Vesikysymysten yhdistäminen energiaan, ruokaturvaan, ekosysteemeihin ja geopolitiisiin kehityskuluihin.
- **Luottamuksen rakentaminen:** Pitkäjänteisten suhteiden ja yhteistyötä tukevien institutionaalisten rakenteiden vahvistaminen.

Suomen vesidiplomatian keskeisten laatustandardien tarkistuslista

✓ Varmista Suomen rooli ja intressi ennen sitoutumista

Varmista, että toiminta tukee Suomen ulko-, turvallisuus- ja kehityspoliittikan strategisia tavoitteita.

✓ Tee konfliktianalyysi varhaisessa vaiheessa ja päivitä sitä säännöllisesti

Hyödynnä analyttisiä työkaluja ja tiedonlähteitä riskien ennakoimiseksi ja toimenpiteiden mukauttamiseksi muuttuvaan tilanteeseen.

✓ Hyödynnä vesiosaamista Suomen Vesidiplomatia-aloitteen kautta

Yhdistä tekninen vesiosaaminen ja rauhanvälityksen asiantuntemus kontekstista nousevien tarpeiden mukaan (esim. hydrologinen, hallinnollinen ja institutionaalinen osaaminen).

✓ Varmista osallistavuus, moniraitainen yhteistyö sekä koordinaatio

Osallista keskeisiä toimijoita, kuten valtioita, asiantuntijaorganisaatioita, kansalaisyhteiskuntaa ja kansainvälisiä kumppaneita, sekä varmista erityisesti naisten, nuorten ja marginalisoitujen ryhmien osallistuminen.

✓ Varmista inklusiivisuus, moniraitainen toiminta ja koordinointi

Osallista keskeisiä toimijoita, mukaan lukien valtionhallinnon edustajia, asiantuntijoita, kansalaisyhteiskunnan toimijoita ja kansainvälisiä kumppaneita. Varmista naisten, nuorten ja marginalisoitujen ryhmien inklusio ja koordinoi suunnitelmat ja toimet asiaankuuluvien toimijoiden kanssa.

✓ Noudata Do No Harm -periaatetta ja konfliktisensitiivistä toimintatapaa

Suunnittele ja toteuta toimet siten, että ne edistävät kestävää rauhaa. Arvioi toimien vaikutuksia ja ehkäise tahattomia haitallisia seurauksia.

✓ Hyödynnä globaaleja vesisopimuksia ja kansainvälisiä normeja yhteistyön viitekehyksenä

Perusta toiminta kansainvälisesti tunnustettuihin normeihin sekä oikeudellisiin ja institutionaalisiin puitteisiin.

✓ Dokumentoi ja arvioi toimintaa oppimisen ja institutionaalisen muistin vahvistamiseksi

Vahvista toiminnan jatkuvuutta ja kehitä käytäntöjä kokemusten ja arviointien pohjalta.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finland's water diplomacy is driven by the vision of a **water-secure world**, where fair and well-governed management of shared water resources serves as a foundation for cooperation and peace. Water diplomacy is the practice of preventing and resolving political tensions over water by combining technical water expertise with diplomatic tools. Finland's approach builds on two national strengths—**transboundary water cooperation** and **peace mediation**—and integrates them into a framework supported by multi-track engagement, inclusivity, and conflict sensitivity.

This Guidebook outlines Finland's aspiration to use water as an entry point for dialogue and peacebuilding, recognising that water is both a critical resource and a potential source of tension. It provides practical tools and principles for actors in foreign policy, water governance, and peace mediation, helping ensure that interventions are contextsensitive, inclusive, and aligned with Finland's foreign, security and development policy objectives. Rather than documenting existing procedures, it presents a forwardlooking normative framework that defines the principles and quality standards for future water diplomacy, offering practitioners a compass with benchmarks and promoting a harmonised, highquality approach across the field. Its implementation relies on integrating these principles into planning, coordination, and operational practices across ministries and partners, ensuring that the framework translates into consistent action in realworld diplomacy.

Water diplomacy operates across **three interconnected levels**:

- **Micro-level** – short-term, targeted actions such as peace mediation and technical advisory missions.
- **Meso-level** – long-term institution-building and governance arrangements through joint commissions and basin organisations.
- **Macro-level** – strategic integration of water diplomacy into foreign policy and global governance frameworks, addressing systemic drivers like climate change and security.

Finland's approach emphasises **multi-track diplomacy**, combining official negotiations with informal and community-level engagement to sustain dialogue and build trust. **Inclusivity** is central—ensuring the participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups—alongside adherence to the **Do No Harm principle** and conflict-sensitive planning and implementation of water diplomacy activities.

The guidebook introduces practical tools and approaches such as **Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy** (developed by FIIA) and **Water Diplomacy Paths** (developed by Aalto University), which help practitioners design adaptive strategies and identify suitable actions. It also highlights Finland's leadership in global water governance through the 1992 **UN Water Convention**, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy for water security in multilateral forums.

Ultimately, Finland positions water diplomacy as a proactive tool for stability and sustainable development, aligning with the 2030 Agenda and its own foreign policy priorities of rules-based multilateralism, conflict prevention, and climate resilience.

Core Elements and Guiding Principles for Finnish Water Diplomacy:

- **Vision:** A water-secure world based on equitable and responsible water management and governance.
- **Dual Strengths:** Combining transboundary water cooperation with peace mediation.
- **Entry Point for Dialogue:** Using water as a lever for broader peacebuilding and regional stability.
- **Integration:** Linking water issues with energy, food, ecosystems, and geopolitical dynamics.
- **Trust-Building:** Promoting long-term relationships and institutional frameworks for cooperation.

Checklist of Key Quality Standards for Finnish Water Diplomacy:

✓ Confirm Finland's role and interest before engagement

Ensure alignment with national priorities and strategic objectives of Finland's foreign, security and development policy.

✓ Apply conflict analysis early and update it regularly

Use analytical tools to anticipate risks and adapt interventions.

✓ Mobilise water expertise via the Finnish Water Diplomacy Platform

Leverage and combine technical knowledge and mediation capacity on a needs-basis (e.g. hydrological, administrative and institutional).

✓ Ensure inclusivity, multi-track engagement and coordination

Engage different key stakeholders, including state actors, experts, civil society, and international partners, while ensuring participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups. Coordinate plans and activities with relevant actors.

✓ Adhere to the Do No Harm principle and conflict sensitivity

Plan and implement actions that contribute to sustainable peace. Assess the impacts of actions and prevent unintended negative consequences.

✓ Use the Water Conventions as a framework for cooperation

Anchor efforts in internationally recognised norms and legal instruments.

✓ Document and evaluate processes for learning and institutional memory

Strengthen continuity and improve future practice.

Introduction

Water diplomacy is the practice of preventing and resolving political tensions over water and its use by combining water expertise with diplomatic tools. It recognises water as both a vital resource and a potential source of cooperation or conflict. Shared water resources—rivers, lakes, and aquifers—cross political boundaries and sustain lives, ecosystems, and economies. As climate change intensifies, populations grow, and water demand rises, competition over scarce resources is becoming more frequent. Transboundary waters account for over 60% of global freshwater flows and support more than three billion people, making cooperation indispensable for water security and regional stability. With 313 shared rivers and lakes and 468 aquifers spanning 153 countries globally, disputes over allocation and infrastructure have grown in recent decades, underscoring the need for effective governance.¹ Water diplomacy provides a framework to transform potential or emerging conflicts into opportunities for collaboration, fostering peace and sustainable development.

Finland's approach to water diplomacy builds on two national priorities and areas of expertise: transboundary water cooperation and peace mediation, supported by strong national and international networks and partnerships. International legal instruments—the 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 Watercourses Convention—anchor transboundary water cooperation. The Water Convention is further complemented by institutional platforms for dialogue and joint management. Finland has been a global leader in shaping these norms and advancing inclusive, multi-track diplomacy, combining technical expertise with trust-building. Through bilateral agreements, regional initiatives, and capacity-building projects worldwide, Finland demonstrates how water can serve as an entry point for dialogue and conflict resolution, reinforcing its role as a pioneer in transboundary water governance.²

Finland brings decades of experience in peace mediation to the field of water diplomacy, combining its reputation for impartiality and inclusivity with a strong normative role in global frameworks. Finnish mediation emphasises equality, transparency, and local ownership—principles that are vital also for resolving water-related disputes involving diverse stakeholders across borders. Through multi-track diplomacy and inclusive processes aspiring to engage women, youth, and community actors, Finland integrates technical expertise with dialogue to foster sustainable cooperation. Practical experience from regions such as the Nile River basin and the South Caucasus demonstrates Finland's ability to use water as an entry point for peacebuilding, aligning environmental security with broader conflict resolution efforts.³

Effective water diplomacy requires more than technical expertise—it depends on trust, long-term engagement, and strategic alignment with foreign policy and development cooperation goals. Finland's position in each context, its ability to sustain relationships, careful background analysis as well as ensuring inclusivity, conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm approach are critical for success in water diplomacy processes. This guidebook provides practical tools and principles to help actors apply these priorities in real-world contexts.

Purpose and Intended Audience

Water diplomacy has attracted growing attention in recent years from both academia and practice, generating new approaches and an expanding body of literature. Among the most comprehensive recent contributions is *The Water Diplomacy Handbook* (Islam et al., 2025), published in autumn 2025, which offers practical and conceptual guidance on water diplomacy. Drawing on global experiences, this Finnish Guidebook presents the background, principles, tools, and context of the Finnish approach to water diplomacy in a living document.

¹ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/progress-transboundary-water-cooperation-2024-update>

² See Annex 1: Background, History, and Finnish Experience in Transboundary Water Cooperation

³ See Annex 2: Finland's Background, Experience and Priorities in Peace Mediation

This guidebook is designed for Finnish ministries and government officials involved in foreign and security policy, water governance, and peace mediation; experts and practitioners from research institutions and academia, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and the private sector contributing to water diplomacy processes; international partners and stakeholders seeking to understand Finland's approach and collaborate on transboundary water cooperation and peacebuilding; as well as for capacity-building facilitators and trainers working with Finland on water diplomacy and conflict prevention.

The purpose of this Guidebook is not to document current procedures, but to provide a normative framework—defining the principles and quality standards that should shape future water diplomacy efforts. It thus aims to serve as a practical compass for professionals, offering clear benchmarks and aspirational practices that can guide decision-making and collaboration. Rather than reflecting the diversity of existing ways of working, it seeks to harmonise them under a shared framework of excellence, ensuring that practitioners have both direction and confidence in pursuing sustainable and equitable outcomes in Finnish water diplomacy processes.

Summary of Key Objectives of the Guidebook

- Describe foundations, key considerations and operational phases of the Finnish water diplomacy approach.
- Offer a theoretical and conceptual framing for increased shared understanding of water diplomacy.
- Introduce practical tools and methods to be used in support of water diplomacy processes.
- Serve as a living document and knowledge product to enhance institutional memory and continuous learning.
- Enable benchmarking and collaboration with international partners.
- Define a guiding framework of principles and quality standards that set an aspirational benchmark for water diplomacy, moving beyond current practices toward a shared vision of excellence.

Structure and Content of the Guidebook

This guidebook is organised into three main parts (Part I: Basics and Background; Part II: Process, Principles and Tools; Part III: International Context and Cooperation), complemented by annexes and a material bank for further learning. Part I begins with an overview of water diplomacy and its relevance to global peace and security, followed by an explanation of three levels of water diplomacy engagement—micro, meso, and macro—and the dynamics of conflict and cooperation in transboundary water contexts. The final section details Finland's water diplomacy approach, including its principles, actors, and multi-track diplomacy model. Part II explores the role of water in peace mediation through a structured process design. Practical tools and approaches such as *Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy* and *Water Diplomacy Paths* are introduced to support decision-making and adaptive strategies. Part III of the guidebook examines Finland's contributions to international water governance, particularly through the Water Convention, and outlines priorities for capacity building and global advocacy. Annexes provide background on Finland's experience, peace mediation principles, and process design matrices, while the material bank offers presentations, case studies, and reference resources for practitioners. Together, these sections form a comprehensive resource for applying water diplomacy in policy, practice, and international cooperation.

Part A: Basics and Background

1. Relationship of water diplomacy, transboundary water cooperation and peace mediation

Water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation are closely connected though distinct approaches. Transboundary cooperation is mandated in international treaties, whilst water diplomacy brings a political element to it and broader interaction on water. The legal basis for transboundary cooperation rests on the UN Water conventions and regional agreements, whilst water diplomacy broadens the scope to various other treaties and norms concerning relations between states. Transboundary cooperation is led by competent ministries and bi-lateral arrangements such as river basin commissions, whilst in water diplomacy foreign ministries play a leading role.⁴

Peace mediation does not rest on a single treaty framework but draws on the UN Charter and international norms on the peaceful settlement of disputes. Rather than being legally mandated, it is guided by principles such as consent, impartiality and inclusivity. Peace mediation is primarily led by foreign ministries and political leaders, supported by international organisations such as the United Nations and regional bodies, as well as specialised mediation actors and CSOs.

This Guidebook is built from the perspective of water diplomacy, seeing transboundary cooperation and peace mediation as its core foundation while fully acknowledging their distinct and in themselves central roles.

2. Three Levels of Water Diplomacy Engagement

Water diplomacy operates across interconnected levels and timeframes, requiring both short-term responses and sustained institutional efforts. These levels—**micro, meso, and macro**—shape how Finland and other actors engage in conflict prevention, cooperation, and peacebuilding around shared water resources. Each level has distinct characteristics, actors, and objectives, yet they reinforce one another in building resilient transboundary water governance.⁵ Finland has historically contributed mainly to “marathon” processes on the meso level, supporting institution building and multilateral cooperation. Additionally, Finland is currently seeking to increase its engagement in micro level “sprints” of peace mediation. Both the sprints and marathons take place in the macro “ultra run” context, which is defined by socio-hydrological and geopolitical changes.

Impactful water diplomacy requires vertical integration across levels: Interventions on the micro level gain legitimacy and sustainability when embedded in meso level institutions; meso level regimes thrive when macro level policies and global norms support cooperative behaviour; and macro level strategies are informed by lessons from micro and meso engagements, creating a feedback loop that strengthens resilience.

⁴ Keskinen, M., Salminen, E., and Haapala, J. (2021) Water diplomacy paths – An approach to recognise water diplomacy actions in shared waters, *Journal of Hydrology*, Volume 602, 2021, 126737, ISSN 0022-1694, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2021.126737>.

⁵ This section draws on Salminen, E. et al. (2020). *Vesidiplomatia: Konseptin edistäminen ja suomalainen lisäarvo*.

Levels of Water Diplomacy Engagement



Figure 1: Illustration of a horizontal flowchart with three boxes depicting levels of water diplomacy engagement on a timeframe of short-term to long-term activities along a left-to-right timeframe arrow: Micro–“Sprint” (short-term), Meso–“Marathon” (medium-term), and Macro–“Ultra run” (long-term).

Micro-Level – “Sprint”

Nature of Engagement:

Short-term, targeted interventions designed to address immediate tensions or seize windows of opportunity for dialogue. These actions often occur during critical junctures, such as political crises or technical disputes over water allocation.

Timeframe:

Weeks to months.

Typical Activities:

- Conflict analysis.
- Facilitation of peace mediation talks and supporting mediation ecosystem beyond ad hoc talks.
- Technical advisory missions to resolve urgent operational issues.
- Confidence-building measures between riparian states.

Examples:

- Finland has provided ad-hoc facilitation and expert support in politically sensitive negotiations, such as discussions around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the Nile Basin.
- Through the Water Diplomacy Platform, Finland offers rapid analytical products and mediation expertise to parties in need of a trusted facilitator or observer.

Strategic Role:

Micro-level actions are agile and responsive, but their impact depends on linkages to longer-term processes at meso and macro scales.

Meso-Level – “Marathon”

Nature of Engagement:

Institutional and governance arrangements that evolve over years, creating frameworks for cooperation and dispute resolution. This scale focuses on building trust, norms, and shared mechanisms for managing water resources.

Timeframe:

Several years to decades.

Typical Activities:

- Support for basin-wide organisations and joint commissions.

- Capacity-building for water governance institutions.
- Development of legal agreements and monitoring systems.

Examples:

- Nile Basin Initiative (NBI): Finland has been a long-term supporter of NBI, contributing technical expertise and funding to strengthen cooperative regimes in one of the world's most conflict-prone basins.
- Mekong Region: Finland has supported governance frameworks and capacity-building for transboundary water management in Southeast Asia.
- Central Asia: Finland has engaged in projects that combine transboundary knowledge exchange and capacity building.

Strategic Role:

- Meso-level diplomacy provides continuity and institutional memory, ensuring that short-term gains at the micro level are consolidated into durable governance structures.

Macro-Level – “Ultra run”

Nature of Engagement

Strategic, long-term integration of water diplomacy into foreign policy and global governance frameworks. This scale addresses systemic drivers—climate change, demographic trends, and security dynamics—shaping water cooperation over decades. It focuses on creating enabling environments for collaboration and embedding water issues into international agendas through multilateral and cross-sectoral approaches.

Timeframe

Decades or longer

Typical Activities

- Strategic foresight and scenario planning for water-related risks.
- Mainstreaming water diplomacy into foreign and security policy.
- Active participation in global platforms (e.g., UN-Water, EU-funded initiatives).
- Advocacy for water security and transboundary cooperation in multilateral forums.
- Development of analytical tools for conflict prevention and foresight (e.g., conflict analysis for water diplomacy).
- Capacity-building and competence development for water diplomacy actors globally.

Examples

- Finland initiated both global water conventions: the 1992 Water Convention (Helsinki Convention) and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, shaping international water law.
- Finnish Water Diplomacy Platform (2021–ongoing)⁶: Builds on the Finnish Water Way strategy, funded by three ministries (Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and Forestry, Environment) and implemented by Syke and FIIA. The platform strengthens Finland's role in preventive peace mediation by linking water expertise with diplomacy. Key outputs include:
 - Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy: Used in contexts like the Finland–Namibia Twinning Project under the Water Convention to identify tensions and promote benefit-sharing.
 - Training and Competence Development: Responding to global needs for water diplomacy skills and integrating water into peace processes.

⁶ The Finnish Water Diplomacy Platform was preceded by a joint ministerial water diplomacy project called Water Cooperation and Peace – Finnish Water Way (from 2019–2020), which provided the institutional and conceptual basis for the ongoing work in the framework of the Platform.

- Cross-sectoral Cooperation: Engaging ministries, academia, CSOs, and private sector through the Finnish Water Diplomacy Network.
- Finland advocates for water security in multilateral forums and co-chairs the Interactive Dialogue (d) on “Water for Cooperation” of the UN Water Conference in 2026.⁷
- Regional Engagements: Finland supports accession to global water conventions (e.g., Twinning project together with Namibia under the UN Water Convention) and promotes cooperation in complex basins and regions such as the Nile, Mekong, and Central Asia.

Strategic Role

Macro-level diplomatic engagement sets an enabling environment for cooperation, influences priorities and resources at lower scales. It ensures that water diplomacy remains adaptable to systemic changes, and creates the foundation for cooperation by shaping norms, legal frameworks, and strategic narratives. Finland’s approach combines peace mediation and water expertise, positioning water as both a security issue and a catalyst for cooperation under Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.⁸

3. Conflict and Cooperation Dynamics in Water Diplomacy

In all water diplomacy interventions, it is crucial to recognise that **conflict and cooperation often co-exist**. Transboundary water interactions rarely fall neatly into categories of pure conflict or pure cooperation; rather, they form a **continuum shaped by political, economic, societal, and hydrological realities**. Understanding this complexity—and the power asymmetries behind it—is essential for designing effective diplomatic actions and building trust among parties.⁹

Water-related interactions can range from **technical collaboration** to **politicised disputes** or even **violent conflict**. This spectrum reflects both the intensity of conflict and the depth of cooperation. (See Figure 2 below)

Conflict Intensity Levels:

- Non-politicised: Technical disagreements over data or operations.
- Politicised: Water issues linked to national interests and political agendas.
- Securitised: Water framed as a security threat, often tied to sovereignty.
- Violent: Armed clashes or sabotage targeting water infrastructure.

Cooperation Intensity Levels:

- Confrontation: Minimal dialogue, defensive positions.
- Ad hoc: Issue-specific agreements without institutionalisation.
- Technical: Joint studies, data sharing, and monitoring.
- Risk-averse: Cooperation limited to low-stakes areas.
- Risk-taking: Innovative, trust-based collaboration on sensitive issues.

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Finland%20inputs.pdf>

⁸ <https://fiia.fi/en/project/water-cooperation-and-peace-finnish-water-way>

⁹ Mirumachi, N. (2015). *Transboundary Water Politics in the Developing World* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203068380>

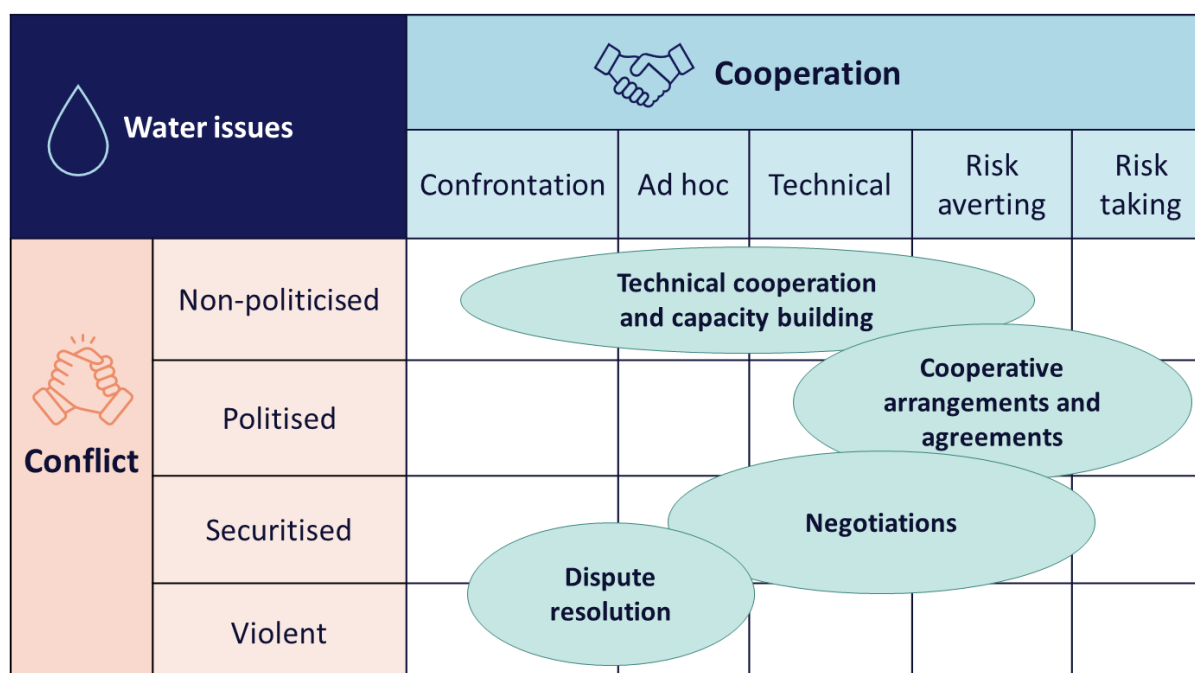


Figure 2: Illustration of co-existing water cooperation and conflict interaction with examples of potential water diplomacy actions to be applied based on conflict intensity and cooperation levels (diagram adapted from Mirumachi 2015). The content of the diagram is explained in the above section.

The interaction between conflict and cooperation in shared waters is not a simple either–or scenario; it is a dynamic spectrum that fundamentally shapes water diplomacy. The implications for water diplomacy are threefold, impacting situational analysis, adaptive strategies, and power dynamics. First, effective engagement starts with **rigorous situational analysis** to pinpoint where actors fall along this continuum, from technical disagreements to securitised disputes or violent clashes. Second, diplomats and other actors involved in water diplomacy processes must adopt **adaptive strategies** that respond to shifting conditions, moving from confidence-building in politicised contexts to institutionalising cooperation when trust deepens. Third, **power dynamics**—whether rooted in geography, economic strength, or political leverage—also need to be considered as part of conflict analyses; they influence negotiation outcomes and risk reinforcing asymmetries if left unchecked. By actively addressing these factors, water diplomacy transforms from reactive crisis management into a proactive tool for stability and shared benefit.

4. The Finnish Approach to Water Diplomacy

Finland’s approach to water diplomacy is rooted in **the vision¹⁰ of a water-secure¹¹ world**, where fair and well-governed management of water resources serves as a foundation for cooperation and peacebuilding. *Water diplomacy is understood as the prevention and resolution of political tensions over water and its use by drawing on both water expertise and diplomatic processes.* In this framing, water is not only a vital

¹⁰ Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2018) Finnish Water Way – International Water Strategy of Finland. Available at: https://um.fi/publications/-/asset_publisher/TVOLgBmLyZvu/content/finnish-water-way-suomen-vesialan-kansainvalinen-strategia

¹¹ Water security entails two parallel objectives: first, enabling sustainable use and management of water for human and the ecosystem’s well-being, livelihoods and development; and second, protecting societies, economies and ecosystems from water-related hazards and conflicts at all levels and scales (after Sadoff, C., Grey, D., & Borgomeo, E. (2020). *Water Security*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389414.013.609>).

resource but also an entry point for dialogue and proactive peace mediation, creating opportunities to address broader regional challenges.

Finland combines two national priorities and complementary areas of expertise—**transboundary water cooperation** and **peace mediation**—to build trust and foster collaboration in regions where water security is under pressure. These pillars reflect Finland’s long-standing commitment to fostering collaboration over shared water resources and its recognised role as an impartial and pragmatic mediator in international peace processes. The approach emphasises the integration of technical and political perspectives, multi-track engagement, inclusivity, and conflict sensitivity.¹²

Water diplomacy encompasses far more than managing water resources; it is deeply connected to broader societal and environmental challenges. Finland’s approach to water diplomacy recognises that water issues are interconnected with energy, food security, ecosystems, and geopolitics, requiring holistic and context-sensitive solutions. The Finnish approach emphasises practical cooperation between riparian states, focusing on arrangements such as equitable water allocation, shared infrastructure development, and joint monitoring and assessment of water systems.

An example of Finnish water diplomacy in action is the **Finnish–Russian cooperation on transboundary waters**, through which Finland has supported joint monitoring programs for Lake Saimaa and the Vuoksi River, promoting data transparency and fostering trust between the two countries. Similarly, in the **Mekong Basin**, Finnish expertise has contributed to benefit-sharing initiatives that link water management with hydropower planning and agricultural development, illustrating how water diplomacy can create tangible economic and social gains. These cooperative mechanisms are complemented by strategies that recognise water’s interdependencies with land use, energy, food security, and ecosystems. Further, Finland’s engagement under the UN **Water Convention** promotes integrated approaches that align water governance with climate adaptation and biodiversity protection. Such cross-sectoral linkages are essential for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as isolated solutions often fail to address systemic risks. Finland’s water diplomacy efforts thus prioritise integrated analysis and multi-sector collaboration with the aim of ensuring that water serves as a catalyst for stability and sustainable development rather than a source of tension.¹³

Core Elements and Guiding Principles of Finnish Water Diplomacy:

- **Vision:** A water-secure world based on equitable and responsible water management and governance.
- **Dual Strengths:** Combining transboundary water cooperation with peace mediation.
- **Entry Point for Dialogue:** Using water as a lever for broader peacebuilding and regional stability.
- **Integration:** Linking water issues with energy, food, ecosystems, and geopolitical dynamics.
- **Trust-Building:** Promoting long-term relationships and institutional frameworks for cooperation.

4.1. Actors and Partners in Finland’s Transboundary Cooperation and Water Diplomacy

Water diplomacy involves a broad set of actors working across multiple tracks. In transboundary cooperation, which provides core experience and knowhow to Finland’s water diplomacy, the primary actors are riparian governments and bilateral commissions. These are supported by technical experts,

¹² For an account on mediation as part of Finland’s foreign and security policy, including key thematic priorities, see <https://um.fi/peacemediation>.

¹³ Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2021/6B) [WATER AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR PEACE MEDIATION EVALUATION ON FINNISH WATER DIPLOMACY Volume 2](#)

research institutions, and other stakeholders. While Finland's foreign relations form the foundation of its water diplomacy, current efforts focus strongly on external engagement—supporting other countries in peace mediation and transboundary water cooperation.

National Level: Institutional Frameworks for Governance of Transboundary Waters

Finland's cooperation on shared water resources with Norway, Sweden and Russia is based on inter-state agreements and their implementation structures such as bilateral joint commissions and collaboration between the relevant ministries with each neighbour. Technical cooperation focuses on joint water resources management under bilateral agreements and is carried out by authorities and state research institutions.

Coordination: Platforms and Networks Driving Finland's Water Diplomacy

External water diplomacy engagement is organised through the Finnish Water Way for Peace – Water Diplomacy Platform (Finnish Water Diplomacy Platform), steered by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and Ministry of the Environment. External engagements are coordinated by the implementing organisations of the Platform, the Finnish Environment Institute (Syke) and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA).

The Finnish Water Diplomacy Network, launched in 2019, serves as the key forum for capacity building and mobilisation of expertise. Hosted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and coordinated by Syke and FIIA in the margins of the Finnish Water Diplomacy Platform, the network brings together over 130 experts from public administration, academia, CSOs, and the private sector. It is central to Finland's multi-track diplomacy approach, providing cross-sectoral expertise for water diplomacy processes.

International Partnerships

Finland collaborates with state and non-state actors and intergovernmental organisations to advance transboundary cooperation and water diplomacy globally. For transboundary cooperation, the two global UN water conventions form the key collaborative framework, within which Finland engages in various working groups and task forces and bi-lateral knowledge exchange (for further details, see Section C). Water diplomacy collaboration has to date included joint activities with initiatives such as the Water, Peace and Security Partnership (IHE Delft), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Blue Peace Initiative, and the Geneva Water Hub. Finland also works alongside countries like Slovenia, Switzerland and Senegal, recognised leading promoters of transboundary water cooperation, and engages with emerging water diplomacy actors. Independent peace mediation organisations, including Conciliation Resources and CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, are also increasingly active in water-related dialogues.

While the international water diplomacy space is dynamic and growing, Finland seeks to add value through alliances and coordinated efforts, ensuring its contributions strengthen conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and cooperative water governance.

Actors and partners in Finnish Water Diplomacy

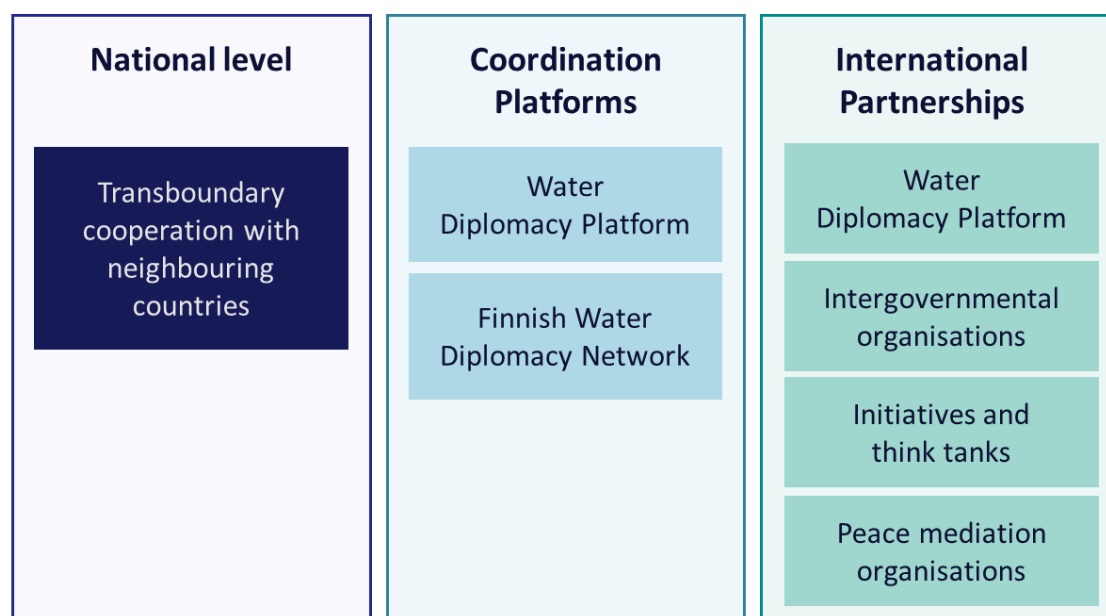


Figure 3: Key actors and partnerships in Finnish water diplomacy, illustrating national structures, coordination platforms, and international alliances that enable multi-track engagement. The content of the figure is described in the above section.

4.2. Finland's Multi-Track Approach to Water Diplomacy

Finland's water diplomacy engagements have historically centred on **intergovernmental relations**, leveraging formal negotiations and treaty processes to advance transboundary cooperation. However, experience shows that water diplomacy rarely succeeds through a single channel. Disputes and opportunities for collaboration often involve diverse actors beyond governments—research institutions and academia, civil society, private sector, and local communities. Recognising this complexity, Finland aspires to adopt a **multi-track approach** that combines official government-led diplomacy with complementary informal and multi-stakeholder processes. A layered model strengthens trust-building, sustains dialogue even when official relations are strained, and creates space for innovation and inclusivity.¹⁴

A multi-track approach matters because it enables Finland to support in keeping dialogues alive even when formal negotiations stall, ensuring continuity during political deadlocks. By combining formal Track 1 state-to-state diplomacy with complementary tracks, Finland aims to integrate science, policy, and practice to deliver evidence-based decisions that are both credible and actionable. This layered model promotes inclusivity and equity, giving women, youth, and marginalised groups a voice in shaping solutions. At the same time, it builds resilience by linking local trust-building efforts to global norms and frameworks, creating a coherent system that strengthens cooperation from community level to international platforms.

¹⁴ Keskinen, M.; Häkkinen, E.; Haapala, J. and Sharipova, B. (2023). Trust in transboundary waters: Identifying trust-building in water diplomacy literature. *Water Alternatives* 16(3): 949-977

Three layered tracks of Water Diplomacy

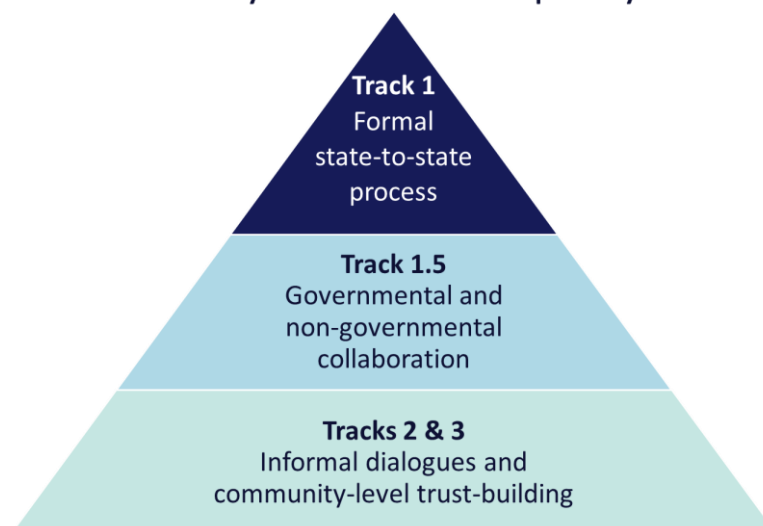


Figure 4: A three-layer pyramid showing the tracks of water diplomacy: Track 1 (Formal State-to-State Processes) at the top, Track 1.5 (Governmental and Non-Governmental Collaboration) in the middle, and Tracks 2 & 3 (Informal Dialogues and Community-Level Trust-Building) at the base.

Track 1: Formal State-to-State Processes

Water diplomacy at the highest level often takes the form of formal negotiations between and among governments, grounded in international law, structured through binding agreements, and as part of the multilateral context. Finland has played a pivotal role in shaping global water governance frameworks, notably through its leadership in the development of the 1992 UN Water Convention and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, underscoring its commitment to rules-based cooperation. This engagement continues today through initiatives such as Finland's co-chair role in the Interactive Dialogue on Water for Cooperation at the 2026 UN Water Conference, supporting countries in their accession to the Water Convention, and facilitating the creation of new transboundary water arrangements and agreements. Finland also contributes actively to regional platforms, including the Team Europe Initiative on Transboundary Water Management in Africa, which promotes integrated solutions and strengthens institutional capacity across borders. These efforts exemplify how formal state-to-state processes serve as a cornerstone of water diplomacy, fostering stability and shared benefits through legal and institutional frameworks.

Track 1.5: Governmental and Non-Governmental Collaboration

Hybrid water diplomacy processes operate at the intersection of formal governance and technical expertise, bridging science and policy, and creating channels that unite ministries, research institutions and academia, private sector and civil society actors. These mechanisms strengthen confidence-building and technical cooperation while maintaining political legitimacy. Finland exemplifies this approach through the Finnish Water Way strategy, which brings together five ministries alongside multiple partners under a shared vision for water security. Complementing this, the Water Diplomacy Platform offers confidential expert guidance, capacity-building, and methodologies for conflict-sensitive engagement, ensuring that scientific insights inform diplomatic decisions. Finland also advances inclusivity and equity through partnerships with networks such as the Women in Water Diplomacy Network (WWDN), promoting gender equality in decision-making and amplifying diverse voices in transboundary water governance. These efforts demonstrate how Track 1.5 diplomacy transforms knowledge into actionable solutions, aiming to reinforce trust and resilience across borders.

Tracks 2 & 3: Informal Dialogues and Community-Level Trust-Building

Beyond formal negotiations, water diplomacy also thrives through informal and community-level initiatives that build trust in politically sensitive contexts where official processes may stall. Understanding these local

dynamics is vital, as they reveal how conflict shapes social cohesion and determine communities' ability to adopt governance solutions for shared resources. These tracks complement state-led diplomacy by addressing the social dimensions of water governance and ensuring inclusive participation. Here, the approach refers to independent, parallel workstreams rather than a subsidiarity-based division of responsibilities, with different actors contributing simultaneously. Finland actively promotes such engagement e.g. through pre-dialogues and online consultations in conjunction with the UN Water Conferences, creating space for diverse voices to shape global water agendas. Youth-focused initiatives—such as reverse mentoring programs and pop-up debates on water cooperation—further strengthen youth engagement as well as intergenerational dialogue and innovation. Collaboration with networks like the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition (TWCC) amplifies the role of non-state actors in advancing shared water solutions. At the local level, Finland aims to support community-based trust-building and capacity development projects in politically sensitive basins, fostering resilience and cooperation from the ground up. These efforts illustrate how informal and grassroots diplomacy can complement formal tracks, bridging divides and reinforcing peace through inclusive water governance.

Part B: Process, Principles & Tools

5. Water in Peace Mediation – Enhancing Peace Through Water

Water can serve as a powerful entry point for dialogue in peace mediation processes, turning potential disputes into opportunities for collaboration. In many contexts, technical cooperation on water may continue even when political relations are strained, making water a potentially constructive lever for trust-building. The key aim in Finland's approach is to integrate water into peace mediation to foster stability and cooperation in regions where water security is under pressure.

5.1. Process Design in Three Phases: Scoping, Active Mediation and Review

The role of water in peace mediation is always context specific. In some cases, water may serve as the primary entry point for dialogue; in others, it becomes a strategic lever for building trust within broader peace processes. While water diplomacy in the Finnish context often refers to official state-to-state negotiations, water can also play a meaningful role in informal or multi-track mediation efforts, where governments, experts, and civil society actors work in parallel to support dialogue.

To guide these efforts, Finland aims at applying a structured yet flexible process for integrating water perspectives into peace mediation. The process is iterative rather than linear: phases may overlap, fluctuate in intensity, and recur as conditions evolve. Nonetheless, it offers a practical and structured approach for delivering knowledge-based, resource-efficient, and effective water diplomacy interventions. The model focuses on three key phases:

1. **Scoping:** Identifying needs, assessing feasibility, and mobilising expertise. Ongoing throughout a process.
2. **Active Mediation:** Designing the process, mapping actors and issues, and facilitating dialogues.
3. **Review:** Reviewing outcomes, ensuring sustainability, and exploring institutionalisation opportunities.



Figure 5: Scoping, mediation and review are three interconnected, overlapping and iteratively emergent phases of peace mediation processes related to water diplomacy processes. Each phase is described in the sections below.

Each of the phases of the process design format are described below in more detail, supported by a corresponding set of three process design matrices as an annex specifying relevant steps, tasks and division of roles and responsibilities among Finnish water diplomacy actors in more detail. (See Annex 3: Three Phases of Water Diplomacy Processes Matrix)

Scoping Phase



The scoping phase determines **whether and how Finland can engage in a mediation process**. It begins with **identifying demand or need**, typically triggered by a request from a party or third party to the MFA. At this stage, rapid issue mapping and initial contact are made, supported by tools such as conflict ripeness assessments, political economy scans, and hydrological baselines. Permission to proceed is required; in some cases, approval from the relevant regional department is sufficient, while in others authorisation from the Minister for Foreign Affairs' Cabinet is needed. Key considerations of the scoping phase include inclusivity, impartiality, and alignment with ongoing processes. The MFA leads intake and diplomatic contact, supported by the Water Diplomacy Platform and water experts.

Next, an **early assessment** is conducted to define the issue, explore Finland's feasibility to engage, and make a YES/NO decision. This involves clarifying objectives, assessing risks, and consulting parties and partners using structured conflict analysis, stakeholder mapping, and UN preparedness checks. Impartiality, coherence, and managing asymmetries or uncompromising actors are critical. The MFA is in the lead through its regional departments, supported by the Water Diplomacy Platform and partners.

If engagement is confirmed, the process moves to **early action planning**, where a core team is established, external water expertise mobilised, and Finland's approach concretised. Activities include drafting Terms of Reference, contracting experts, and deepening situational awareness. Tools such as joint fact-finding protocols, process design plans, non-papers, and agenda skeletons guide this step. Considerations include confidentiality, decision-making modalities, gender inclusion, and benefit-sharing. MFA leads team formation and resourcing, supported by the Water Diplomacy Platform and water experts.

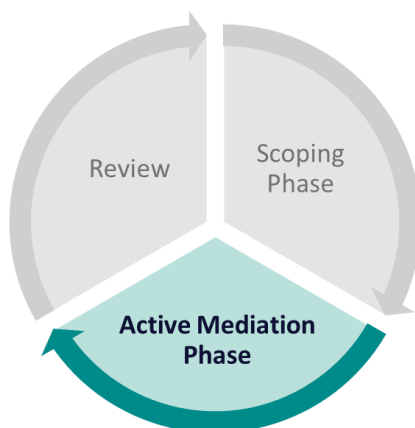
Note on Mobilisation of Water Expertise – Mobilisation of water expertise begins at the request of the MFA (see Annex 3, Table 1). External experts may be engaged early during the assessment phase through the Water Diplomacy Platform and later invited to join the core team for a specific case. MFA and the Platform prepare a Terms of Reference for the needed expert support outlining the required profile, areas of expertise, and tasks. Because water diplomacy processes are confidential, experts must sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) before accessing case materials—sometimes even at the early assessment stage.

Assignments are typically part-time and short-term, with contracts arranged between the Finnish Environment Institute (Syke) as the Platform Coordinator and the expert's home organisation. Roles and responsibilities are agreed clearly in the contract and in communications with MFA and other parties. The core team lead briefs the expert, who is also expected to familiarise themselves with the case independently.

At the end of the assignment, experts provide a written self-evaluation of their contribution and feedback on the briefing, their involvement, and recommendations for future processes.

Finally, the **start of the mediation process** formalises the engagement through an opening meeting, confirmation of mandates, and finalisation of agenda and documentation protocols. The decision to start a mediation process is done in consultation with relevant departments at the MFA. Mediation-launch checklists, codes of conduct, and logistics plans ensure readiness. Timing, confidentiality, cultural sensitivities, and media optics are managed carefully. The core team facilitates, MFA acts as process owner, and the Water Diplomacy Platform provides convening support alongside technical briefings from water experts.

Active Mediation Phase



Once engagement is confirmed, the process moves into **designing and implementing the mediation framework**. This phase ensures that dialogue is structured, inclusive, and effective.

It begins with **designing the process**, where responsibilities are defined, governance structures established, and links to other negotiation tracks clarified. The core team leads facilitation, with MFA acting as process owner and diplomatic lead, supported by the Water Diplomacy Platform for coordination and expert

sourcing. E.g. Swisspeace guidelines¹⁵ on structure of talks—covering format, ground rules, agenda sequencing, and decision-making— can be used to inform this design.

Next, attention turns to **mapping issues and actors**. Joint fact-finding is conducted to identify key questions, stakes, and sensitivities related to water. Technical tools such as hydrological modelling, shared databases, and benefit-sharing analysis support this step. Actor mapping ensures inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, sponsors, and neighbours, with gender and diversity considerations integrated. MFA and the core team lead outreach, while the Water Diplomacy Platform connects civil society and expert networks.

Objective setting follows, establishing clear, realistic goals for the process and each dialogue session. Success indicators and adaptive triggers are agreed upon, guided by SMART objectives and UN principles for quality peace agreements. This ensures flexibility for climate variability and political feasibility.

The phase then focuses on **organising dialogues**. This includes planning facilities and logistics, verifying mandates, and defining roles for facilitators and experts. Dialogue formats—plenary, caucus, or shuttle diplomacy—are chosen to balance confidentiality and transparency. Documentation protocols and background materials are prepared to ensure accuracy and legitimacy. Throughout, considerations such as neutrality of venues, cultural sensitivities, and optics management are prioritised.

Actors play distinct roles: the core team manages facilitation and logistics; MFA oversees optics and security; the Water Diplomacy Platform sources expertise and supports coordination; water experts provide technical input; and parties engage actively in discussions.

Review Phase



Water diplomacy processes often pause for long periods and then resume, making it difficult to determine whether a process has truly ended or will continue. Reviews (and evaluations) should therefore prioritise a learning-oriented, adaptive mindset. Because each case is shaped by distinct hydrological, political, social, and geopolitical contexts, reviews cannot follow a rigid template. A standstill is not necessarily failure, nor is short-term progress proof of durable outcomes. Planning of reviews should be guided by contextual judgement, and all assessments and reviews should avoid premature labels such as “completed.” Instead, the recommendation is to apply flexible practices that emphasise learning and long-term engagement. Taking this into consideration, general guidance for the review phase can be drawn from the following.

After dialogues and talks conclude, the review phase ensures **learning, accountability, and sustainability**. It begins with **assessing outcomes**: reviewing whether the process thus far met its objectives, evaluating the durability of results, and agreeing on next steps. This involves post-process reviews, monitoring

¹⁵ The Swisspeace Mediation Process Matrix (2016) provides mediation practitioners with a structured tool for assessing key challenges in formal mediation processes—including the design of talks, the role of the mediator, and engagement with parties—by outlining process dimensions, guiding questions, and strategic options.

frameworks, and learning workshops also during ongoing processes. Core actors include the mediation team, MFA for policy follow-up, the Water Diplomacy Platform for capturing lessons, and water experts for technical reflections, alongside joint reviews by the parties.

Next, the **mediation process itself is reviewed** to determine if it fulfilled its objectives and adhered to principles of impartiality, inclusivity, and coherence. Self-evaluations and independent reviews may be conducted by using e.g. UN mediation fundamentals and Swisspeace trade-off tools. The MFA oversees learning integration, while the Water Diplomacy Platform serves as a repository for lessons learned.

The focus then shifts to **sustainability and continuity**, ensuring agreements can adapt to changing conditions. This includes defining implementation mechanisms, setting adaptive triggers, and planning capacity-building initiatives. Tools such as adaptive management pathways and joint implementation committees support resilience against climate and socio-economic changes. MFA and basin organisations lead implementation, supported by the Water Diplomacy Platform and water experts.

Finally, **institutionalisation of arrangements** is explored to secure long-term cooperation. Options include formalising agreements through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or treaties and considering accession to frameworks like the Water Convention. Political feasibility, sovereignty concerns, and transparency are key considerations. MFA leads institutionalisation efforts, with technical and legal support from the Water Diplomacy Platform and decisions by the parties.

6. Key Considerations for Balancing Competing Interests

Water's role in peace mediation is always context-specific: it can be either a source of conflict or a platform for cooperation. Technical water experts often share a common language and interact regularly, which can create opportunities for constructive dialogue. However, water diplomacy and related peace processes also require the involvement, expertise, and mandate of key actors from the foreign policy sector. Within a single country, ministries engaged in transboundary water issues—such as those responsible for water, agriculture or irrigation, and foreign affairs—may hold differing, sometimes competing, perspectives. These divergences can complicate the development of a unified national position.

Water diplomacy works best when political, technical, and economic dimensions are integrated. Technical cooperation alone is fragile and insufficient for peacebuilding; linking water issues to trade, security, and regional development creates stronger incentives for collaboration. Innovative dialogue spaces, institutional frameworks, and transparent data-sharing further strengthen trust and long-term cooperation.

Key Policy Directions:

- **Link Political and Diplomatic Frameworks to Technical Approaches:** Design technical cooperation with political realities and power dynamics in mind to avoid reinforcing inequities.

Approaches that focus solely on technical water cooperation have limited impact on broader peace processes. Technical collaboration does not automatically spill over into political or diplomatic spheres and often collapses when political tensions rise. For technical cooperation to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, it must be designed with political realities and power dynamics in mind. This includes mitigating risks such as reinforcing unfair water distribution, creating external dependencies, or entrenching unequal power relations.

- **Link Water to Economic Interests:** Connect water diplomacy to trade, development, and innovation to create shared benefits and leverage for dialogue.

Water diplomacy can be strengthened by connecting it to economic and trade agendas. Cooperation over water should be linked to issues such as trade, development, and innovation to create incentives for collaboration. This approach is particularly valuable for downstream countries

that lack other leverage to encourage upstream counterparts to negotiate fairer water-sharing agreements. Integrating water discussions into bilateral trade and economic development frameworks can open space for dialogue, foster shared interests, and enable benefit-sharing mechanisms. These economic linkages can also be framed as matters of national security, stability, and regional integration, promoting fairer and more sustainable water arrangements.

- **Utilise Track-Two Dialogues:** Foster cross-sectoral collaboration and informal spaces for creative policy solutions and trust-building.

Track-two diplomacy offers informal spaces for creative policy thinking and trust-building beyond official agendas. These dialogues bring together diverse actors—such as security experts, diplomats, scientists, and civil society representatives—creating opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration. Mixed spaces that combine technical and non-technical professionals or governmental and non-governmental actors can generate innovative ideas and address issues not yet on formal negotiation tables. Such platforms are particularly valuable in contexts where official entry points for cooperation are limited.

- **Strengthen Institutional Frameworks:** Build or reinforce regional water governance platforms to sustain cooperation and confidence-building.

Water-sharing agreements often serve as some of the most successful examples of bilateral or multilateral governance structures. In regions where broader institutional frameworks are weak or absent—such as the MENA region—water agreements can demonstrate the benefits of building robust regional platforms. Strengthening existing institutions or creating new ones can help move cooperation from bilateral to regional levels, providing sustained spaces for dialogue and confidence-building. This is especially critical given the accelerating water-related challenges in many regions.

- **Promote Data Transparency:** Establish joint mechanisms for data sharing to reduce misconceptions and prevent politicisation of water disputes.

Joint mechanisms for data collection and sharing are essential for reducing misconceptions and preventing water disputes from being politicised. Misinformation about water use and availability often escalates during periods of political tension, fuelling accusations and propaganda.

Transparent data-sharing initiatives can establish “facts on the ground,” fostering trust and cooperation. For example, in January 2025, Iran and Afghanistan resolved a bilateral water dispute through the Helmand River Treaty’s permanent committee, allowing Iranian technical teams to verify Afghan data on reduced river levels. While sensitivities around national security remain, data-sharing can be structured to protect these concerns while promoting mutual understanding.

7. Principles and Tools for Water Diplomacy Processes

7.1. The Do No Harm Principle and Conflict Sensitivity

The **Do No Harm principle** requires that **interventions avoid causing unintended negative consequences**, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. In water diplomacy, this means ensuring that agreements or projects do not exacerbate tensions, marginalise vulnerable communities or degrade ecosystems. Importantly, Do No Harm is not only about preventing harm—it also seeks to **actively support positive and sustainable peace**. This involves designing water-related initiatives that foster cooperation,

strengthen trust and build inclusive governance structures, turning shared water challenges into opportunities for dialogue and resilience.¹⁶

A conflict-sensitive approach is a practical way to ensure compliance with the Do No Harm principle while enhancing the potential contribution of water diplomacy to peace and stability. Conflict sensitivity recognises the two-way interaction between water diplomacy activities and their context. Its aim is to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict dynamics. It applies in all contexts and phases of conflict, regardless of the level of violence, and across all types of water diplomacy work—including transboundary negotiations, basin cooperation, peacebuilding and rehabilitation efforts. It does not require organisations and water diplomacy actors to change their mandate or objectives; rather, it calls for mainstreaming the approach into existing priorities.

The approach involves three key steps:

- **Understanding the context:** Developing a nuanced understanding of peace and conflict dynamics around water diplomacy engagement.
- **Identifying interactions:** Recognising how water diplomacy activities may affect or be affected by the conflict context, both positively and negatively.
- **Adapting activities:** Adjusting water diplomacy efforts based on this understanding to avoid exacerbating tensions and to enhance opportunities for peace.

Conflict sensitivity is relevant to, but distinct from, peacebuilding or conflict resolution, which explicitly aim to reduce conflict. Instead, it focuses on optimising water diplomacy initiatives to minimise harm and potentially support peace. It requires ongoing analysis of the operating context and adaptation throughout the project cycle—not just during initial planning. Water diplomacy actors can apply conflict sensitivity on a spectrum, from minimalist (avoiding harm) to maximalist (actively strengthening peace through water diplomacy). Conflict analysis (see below) is a key tool for the conflict sensitivity approach and adhering to the Do No Harm principle.¹⁷

7.2. Ensuring Local Ownership, Meaningful Participation and Inclusivity

Local ownership and inclusive participation are fundamental to effective and sustainable water diplomacy. When stakeholders—especially those directly affected—are genuinely involved in decision-making, agreements are more likely to reflect local priorities, build trust, and endure over time. Inclusivity ensures that marginalised groups, including women, indigenous communities and vulnerable populations, have a voice in shaping solutions, which strengthens legitimacy and equity. Meaningful participation also enhances conflict prevention by addressing grievances early and fostering shared responsibility for outcomes.

These participatory principles are not standalone; they are embedded in Finland's broader foreign and development policy. Finland's HRBA requires that all water diplomacy processes reflect non-discrimination,

¹⁶ In the context of the UN Water Conventions the do no harm principle refers to the obligation of states to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction do not cause significant harm to other states sharing the same watercourse, extending the meaning of the principle to the state of watercourses as well (for further details, see Section C)

¹⁷ See Annex 5: Material Bank for links and resources for further learning about conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm principle.

participation and accountability. This normative foundation is echoed in the Finnish Water Way strategy, which explicitly links rights-based water governance with conflict prevention and peace mediation.¹⁸

Finland's international water policy and the **Finnish Water Way** strategy explicitly commit to these principles. The strategy emphasises **inclusive governance**, transparency, and collaboration as guiding values for transboundary water cooperation and peacebuilding. It promotes multi-stakeholder engagement—bringing together governments, civil society, research institutions and the private sector—to ensure that water diplomacy processes are participatory and context-sensitive. Finland's development policy further reinforces these commitments through its human rights-based approach and cross-cutting objectives of **non-discrimination, gender equality and "Leave No One Behind"**, aligning with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

How can these aspects be ensured in practice?

- **Early and continuous stakeholder mapping:** Identify all relevant actors, including local communities, women's groups, and marginalised populations, from the outset.
- **Participatory design and dialogue platforms:** Create spaces for meaningful engagement, such as multi-stakeholder forums and basin committees, ensuring voices from different social groups are heard.
- **Capacity-building and empowerment:** Provide training and resources to local actors so they can participate effectively and influence decisions.
- **Transparency and feedback mechanisms:** Share information openly and establish channels for feedback throughout the process to maintain trust and accountability.
- **Gender and social inclusion mainstreaming:** Apply tools and guidelines that integrate gender equality and social inclusion into all phases of water diplomacy initiatives.
- **Partnerships with local institutions:** Work through and strengthen local governance structures to embed ownership and sustainability.

These practical steps operationalise Finland's policy commitments and help ensure that water diplomacy contributes to equitable, resilient, and peaceful outcomes.

7.3. Conflict Analysis

For water diplomacy efforts to be impactful, they need to be based on a sound assessment of the politics, societal structures and power relations that are at play in each conflict context. Conflict analysis provides crucial insight to and situational awareness of fragile and conflict-affected situations. Conflict analysis is initially conducted in the scoping phase of water diplomacy engagements, but it should be carried out as an ongoing activity also during an eventual second (active mediation) phase.

Conflict analysis is based on a systematic examination of the aspects related to a (potential) conflict and its prevention and resolution. Its objectives are threefold: first, to provide a conflict perspective to a situation; second, to ensure conflict-sensitivity and the "do no harm" principle of water diplomacy engagements; and

¹⁸ Finland's commitment to local ownership, inclusive participation, and rights-based governance is grounded in its Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Policy, which embeds non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency across all areas of cooperation. These principles are further operationalised in the Finnish Water Way / International Water Strategy, which promotes inclusive, multi-stakeholder water governance and links equitable access to water with conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Finland's mediation policy reinforces these commitments globally by advancing human rights, inclusivity, and participatory dialogue as core elements of peace mediation, including through its leadership in the UN Group of Friends of Mediation. See e.g. Development Policy Committee. (2023). A human rights-based approach to Finnish development policy; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (n.d.). International water policy and cooperation. <https://um.fi/international-water-cooperation>; and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (2020). Mediation as part of Finland's foreign and security policy.

third, to identify opportunities and spaces for actions that foster peaceful development. Conflict analysis sheds light to the web of actors, factors, and dynamics that shape and would be shaped by a (potential) water diplomacy intervention. It therefore informs the setting of objectives and clarification of the scope of engagement and supports setting realistic expectations and feasible means of achieving them through water diplomacy.

The **Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy**¹⁹ draws attention to the role of water in disputes and broader conflicts as well as peacebuilding efforts. It is designed to be a flexible and adaptive tool to varied contexts and needs. It allows for the examination of different types of situations ranging from relatively peaceful to escalated conflict, while also enabling a multi-level approach to water-related issues. Contextual realities in each given context have an impact on how conflict analysis is conducted, which elements are examined with special attention, and how often the analysis needs to be updated.

The conflict analysis tool for water diplomacy directs inquiry into the profile, actors, conflict factors, and dynamics of a situation. Water-related aspects are considered throughout the analysis rather than isolating them into a separate category. This makes it possible to discern the multisectoral dimensions of water, such as the water-food-energy nexus.

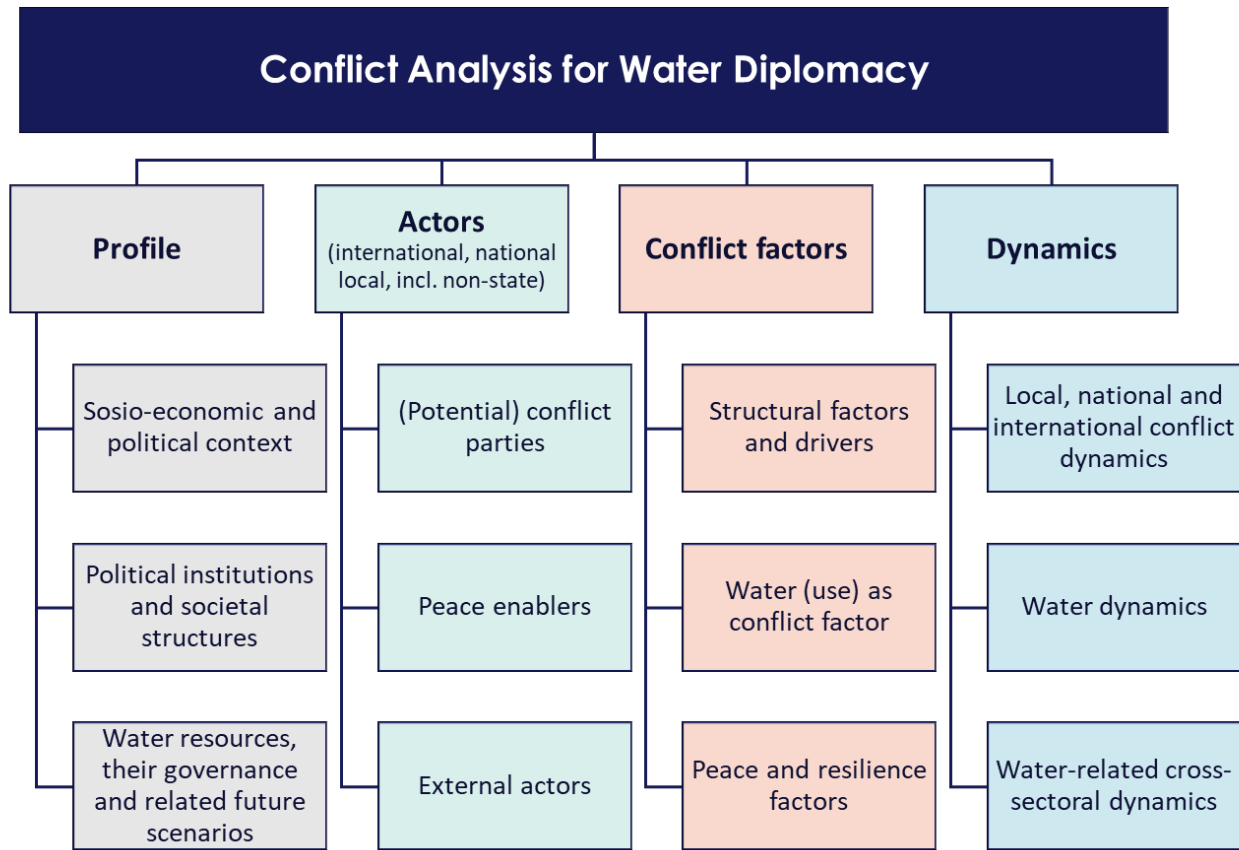


Figure 6: Elements of a structured framework for analysing conflicts in a water diplomacy context, organised into four interconnected dimensions: Profile, Actors, Conflict factors, and Dynamics, each capturing a key aspect of the conflict context. (Mustasilta & Hakala 2024)

¹⁹ Mustasilta, K. & Hakala, E. (2024) Conflict analysis for water diplomacy: Why, what, how? Water Cooperation and Peace – Finnish Water Way, Finnish Environment Institute and Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Available at: <https://helda.helsinki.fi/items/edb2c3c1-393f-4a38-a89d-867ca65ab189>. For further guidelines and manuals, see Annex 4: Material Bank

7.4. Identifying Water Diplomacy Paths

The **Water Diplomacy Paths** (WDP) approach²⁰ is a **decision-support framework** designed to navigate complex water-related conflicts by integrating technical, political, and social dimensions. It can be used for identifying feasible water diplomacy actions, detailing suitable approaches and methods. The approach recognises that water disputes are rarely just about hydrology—they involve competing interests, governance structures, and power asymmetries. Instead of prescribing a single solution, the approach maps multiple “paths” or scenarios that stakeholders can follow, each reflecting different trade-offs, risks, and benefits.

How it works in practice:

1. **Joint Problem Framing** – Based on an analysis of the conflict context, stakeholders collaboratively define the problem, ensuring that technical and political aspects are considered together.
2. **Path Identification** – Multiple solution pathways are developed, combining hydrological modelling with socio-political analysis. Each path outlines potential actions, expected outcomes, and implications for equity and sustainability.
3. **Scenario Evaluation** – Paths are assessed against agreed criteria such as feasibility, resilience, and benefit-sharing potential. This helps parties understand consequences before committing.
4. **Adaptive Decision-Making** – Rather than locking into one rigid agreement, the approach promotes flexibility, allowing adjustments as conditions (e.g., climate, governance) change.

The WDP approach strengthens water diplomacy by encouraging inclusive dialogue and making trade-offs explicit, bridging the science–policy gap through joint fact-finding and scenario planning, and building confidence through transparent, data-driven options. It provides a clear pathway from negotiation to cooperation, even in highly politicised contexts.

Importantly, WDP aligns with the Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy tool introduced above progressing from recognising key themes and actors, assessing the current state, and identifying drivers and scenarios, to defining concrete water diplomacy actions. It frames water diplomacy as addressing five interconnected aspects—political, preventive, integrative, cooperative, and technical—and adapts possible water diplomacy activities depending on which aspects dominate in each case. (See Figure 5).

²⁰ Keskinen, M., Salminen, E., & Haapala, J. (2021). Water diplomacy paths—An approach to recognise water diplomacy actions in shared waters. *Journal of Hydrology*, 602, 126737. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2021.126737>

Actions

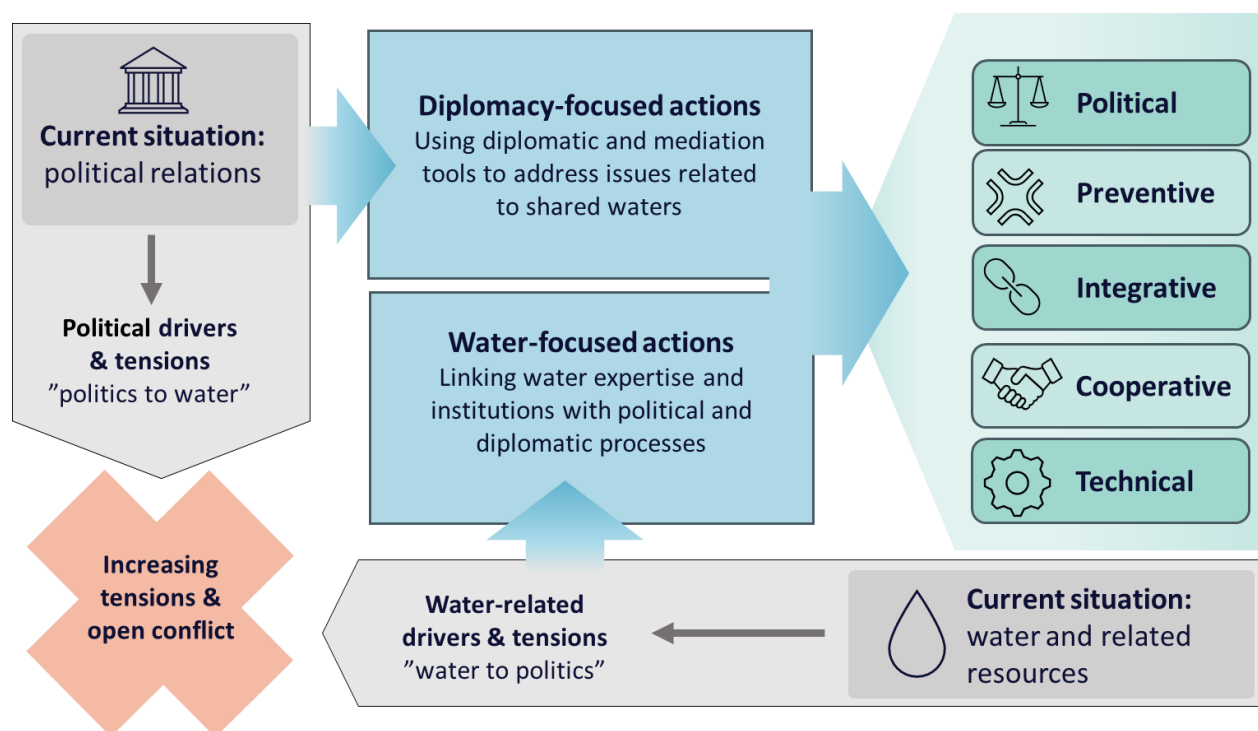


Figure 7. The Water Diplomacy Paths approach supports the identification of suitable water diplomacy actions. The diagram (adapted from Keskinen et al., 2021) illustrates progression from conflict analysis to water diplomacy actions and shows how political and water-related drivers and tensions inform water diplomacy responses. It links diplomacy-focused and water-focused actions to a range of responses, including political, preventive, integrative, cooperative, and technical approaches.

Part C: International Context and Cooperation

8. Transboundary Water Cooperation and the UN Conventions

According to UN estimates (2024), there are 313 rivers and lakes and 468 aquifers shared by two or more countries. Altogether 153 UN Member States depend on waters that either originate from or flow into another country. These transboundary rivers carry about 60% of the world's freshwater, and their basins are home to over three billion people.²¹

Historically, countries have been more likely to cooperate over shared water resources than to engage in armed conflict. However, since 2000, disputes—often linked to water allocation or unilateral infrastructure projects—have become more frequent.²² Water-related violence reached an all-time high in 2024, with water increasingly used as a weapon or strategic resource in conflicts.²³ Despite these challenges,

²¹ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/progress-transboundary-water-cooperation-2024-update>

²² Turgul, A., McCracken, M., Schmeier, S., Rosenblum, Z. H., de Silva, L., & Wolf, A. T. (2024). Reflections on transboundary water conflict and cooperation trends. *Water International*, 49(3–4), 274–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2024.2321727>

²³ Pacific Institute (2025) *Water Conflict Chronology*. Pacific Institute, Oakland, CA. <https://www.worldwater.org/water-conflict/>

institutional arrangements such as conventions, agreements, and joint bodies remain vital for reducing tensions and fostering cooperation.²⁴

Building on this foundation, **SDG target 6.5** of the global Agenda 2030 calls for the implementation of integrated water resources management at all levels by 2030, including through transboundary cooperation. SDG indicator 6.5.2 focuses on measuring the transboundary basin area covered by ‘operational arrangements’²⁵. Two global UN conventions provide the legal basis for such cooperation:

- **1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses** (UN Watercourses Convention or New York Convention) – Entered into force globally in 2014; 40 parties as of August 2025.
- **1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes** (UN Water Convention or Helsinki Convention), serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) – Initially for the pan-European region, opened to global accession in 2016; 59 parties as of April 2026.²⁶

The two global water conventions are fully compatible with each other and mutually complementary.²⁷

Notably, the UN Water Convention offers an intergovernmental platform that is centred around the Meeting of the Parties, as well as tools and activities (e.g., working groups and task forces) that support countries in implementing the Convention and foster cooperation at political and technical levels. The institutional framework also allows the Convention to adopt its programme of work and activities based on the evolving needs of the Parties.

²⁴ Turgul et al. (2024)

²⁵ Operational agreements entail that 1. there is a joint body or mechanism (e.g. a river basin organisation) for transboundary cooperation; 2. there are at least annual meetings between riparian countries (either at the political or technical level); 3. there is a joint or coordinated water management plan(s) or joint objectives; 4. there is at least annual exchange of data and information.

²⁶ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-5&chapter=27&clang=en#1

²⁷ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/faqs/3>

8.1. The UN Water Convention at the Heart of Finland's Work on Transboundary Water Cooperation

Finland has been actively involved in the development of both UN water conventions. Thanks to its strong institutional framework and growing global relevance, the UN Water Convention (signed in Helsinki in 1992) remains central to Finland's own transboundary cooperation. Finland has been represented in the Convention's Bureau since its inception and has held chair positions in several Working Groups and Task Forces. In 2022, Finland and Estonia co-hosted the Convention's 30th anniversary meeting, underscoring Finland's leadership role. Finland is also one of the largest financial contributors to the Convention's work, with Finnish experts serving in key positions within the UN Water Convention Secretariat hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), providing technical and policy expertise to advance its implementation.

The Meeting of the Parties (MoP) of the UN Water Convention is the only global UN forum dedicated exclusively to transboundary water cooperation. It is open to both Parties and non-Parties, with around 130 countries actively participating. Alongside other Convention events, the MoP has created dialogue channels even between countries whose relations are otherwise strained. Meeting every three years, the MoP adopts a Programme of Work that sets priorities and activities for the next three-year period²⁸.

Two main subsidiary bodies/**working groups** implement this work: the *Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment*, currently co-chaired by Finland and Senegal, and the *Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management*, currently co-chaired by Hungary and Namibia. The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment assists countries in establishing and implementing joint programmes for monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, addressing issues such as droughts, floods, and transboundary impacts. It also seeks to promote data-sharing, facilitate reporting under the Convention and on SDG Indicator 6.5.2 and support the global exchange of experiences in monitoring, assessment and data-sharing. In the past it also prepared periodic assessments of rivers, lakes, and aquifers in the UNECE region.²⁹ Finland contributes with expertise and experience in joint monitoring and data sharing—areas of high interest for new Parties. The meetings of the Working Groups provide an annual intergovernmental platform to discuss transboundary water cooperation globally.

In addition to these groups, the Convention operates **Task Forces** on specific topics. For the 2025–2027 work program and since the beginning of the work area in 2013, Finland leads the *Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus*, which focuses on cross-sectoral challenges (the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus) and water allocation³⁰—issues growing in importance due to resource scarcity and climate change³¹. Another key body, the *Task Force on Water and Climate*, supports countries in developing transboundary adaptation strategies and implementing priority measures through guidance, projects, and knowledge exchange³². Other areas of work include financing transboundary cooperation and basin development (2025–2027)³³ and previously, assessing the benefits of cooperation (2013–2021)³⁴.

The **Water Convention Secretariat** is responsible for servicing all meetings under the Convention, supporting accession processes and assisting countries in implementing the Convention. It works together

²⁸ For the current Programme of Work 2025-2027, see https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/ECE_MP.WAT_75_Add.1_advance_copy.pdf

²⁹ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/convention-bodies/working-group-monitoring-and-assessment>

³⁰ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/convention-bodies/task-force-water-food-energy-ecosystems-nexus>

³¹ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-convention/water-food-energy-ecosystem-nexus>

³² <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-convention/water-and-adaptation-climate-change>

³³ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-convention/financing-transboundary-water-cooperation>

³⁴ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-convention/benefits-transboundary-water-cooperation>

with a wide range of partners to implement its three-year programme of work. Its approach—leveraging technical knowledge and partnerships to advance cooperation—aligns closely with Finland’s commitment to water diplomacy. Finnish ministries and the Water Diplomacy Platform frequently collaborate with the Secretariat on knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives.

Water diplomacy addresses the political dimensions of transboundary water cooperation. **Political tensions over water can be prevented or mediated using the principles, frameworks, and institutional mechanisms of the UN Water Convention**³⁵. Expanding participation in Convention activities and promoting joint institutional arrangements and agreements strengthens cooperation and reduces conflict risks.

Encouraging more countries to accede to and implement the UN Water Convention is a key priority for Finland. Under the Programme of Work (PoW) of the UN Water Convention for 2025-2027, Finland is a Lead Party, together with France, Ghana and Hungary, for the target of the Programme Area 1 on Increasing awareness of and supporting national processes towards accession to the Convention. This goal is strongly aligned with the efforts of other international actors. The **United Nations system**, including the UN Secretary-General and the High-Level Committee on Programmes, has repeatedly called for accelerated accession and implementation of the UN Water Convention as part of its global water and peace agenda. Upon receipt of a formal expression of interest, the **Water Convention Secretariat** facilitates accession processes and, after accession, provides technical support for countries to implement the Convention. In addition, UNECE and **UNESCO** serve as co-custodians for SDG indicator 6.5.2, which tracks progress on transboundary water cooperation (UNECE, 2025), developing regular progress reports on transboundary water cooperation.³⁶

Several **regional organisations and financial institutions** also champion this objective. The **African Development Bank**, the European Commission (**DG INTPA**), the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, and the **World Bank** have all partnered with the UN Water Convention to provide resources and capacity-building for new Parties (IISD, 2024). Intergovernmental bodies such as the **African Union** and basin organisations like the **Nile Basin Initiative** promote accession to strengthen regional stability and integrated water resources management (SDG Partnership Platform, 2023).³⁷

On the state level, countries that have recently acceded—such as **Senegal, Namibia, Nigeria, Iraq, and Panama**—are now active advocates for expanding membership, often through twinning projects and peer-learning initiatives supported by the Water Convention secretariat and EU funding (UNECE, 2025; The Water Diplomat, 2025). This growing coalition reflects a shared recognition that operational arrangements for transboundary basins are pivotal for managing water sustainably, preventing conflicts, and achieving climate resilience.³⁸

8.2. Becoming a Party to the UN Water Convention

Engaging in the work of the UN Water Convention offers numerous advantages for countries and stakeholders. It provides a **solid international legal framework that ensures predictable and fair rules for managing shared water resources, supported by a developed institutional platform for dialogue and cooperation**. Participants gain recognition by the international community, reinforcing their commitment to sustainable water governance, and benefit from advice and sharing of experience, including access to

³⁵ Turgul et al. 2024. See Annex 4: Principles, Frameworks and Institutional Mechanisms of the Water Convention.

³⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/water-peace-world-water-day-momentum-builds-cross-border-cooperation-through-un-water-convention>; UNECE: [Module Title Case Study Title](#)

³⁷ <https://enb.iisd.org/mop10-water-convention-summary>; <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/finalize-accession-un-water-convention-and-implement-provisions-water-convention-upon>

³⁸ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water>; <https://www.waterdiplomat.org/story/2025/02/analysing-progress-transboundary-cooperation>

global expertise and best practices. The Convention facilitates support to bilateral and basin cooperation, helping countries establish agreements and joint bodies, while also driving improved management of transboundary waters and better water management at the national level. Engagement opens doors to access to financial assistance and donor cooperation, alongside support from the community of Parties, creating strong partnerships. Moreover, it contributes to international and regional peace and security, strengthens resilience through climate change adaptation and sustainability, and promotes networking and partnerships among governments and experts. Finally, participation directly supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring progress toward integrated water resources management and global water security.³⁹ (See Figure 8 below)

WHAT DOES MY COUNTRY ACHIEVE BY BECOMING A PARTY TO THE WATER CONVENTION?



Figure 8. The diagram illustrates the main benefits of joining the Water Convention: a clear legal framework for cooperation, capacity building through knowledge exchange, and enhanced international collaboration and funding opportunities for sustainable water management. (UNECE 2025)

Potential new Parties to the UN Water Convention increasingly seek to learn from Finland's experience. As an upstream state in relation to Russia, Finland challenges the common tendency of upstream countries to rather avoid transboundary cooperation due to perceived advantage over downstream states. Finland demonstrates, instead, that **transboundary watercourses offer benefits far beyond managing upstream–downstream discharges**. By adopting cooperative arrangements, Finland taps into these broader economic, environmental, and social gains, showing that collaboration creates shared value and long-term sustainability.⁴⁰

The UN Water Convention has been open to global accession since 2016. When a country formally expresses interest to accede, the Secretariat initiates a **non-binding preparatory process**, which often includes a national workshop to introduce the Convention and discuss country-specific issues.⁴¹ These workshops usually involve experienced Parties—such as Finland, to share perspectives and lessons learned. For Finland, these workshops provide a strategic venue to present its views and engage with key actors in transboundary water cooperation and water diplomacy.

³⁹ <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/faqs>

⁴⁰ For details, see presentations in Annex 4: Material Bank

⁴¹ See Roadmap for Accession to the Convention for details: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/faqs/7>

Both the UN Water Convention and Finland also participate in the **Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition (TWCC)**, a global alliance of international and intergovernmental organisations and states that seeks to **catalyse and accelerate action on transboundary cooperation within UN processes and beyond**.⁴²

8.3. Finnish Contributions to the Work of the Convention

Active participation in the Water Convention has enabled Finland to advance its water diplomacy objectives and strengthen its role as a global advocate for transboundary water cooperation. Finland works closely with Senegal, co-host of the forthcoming UN Water Conference in 2026 alongside the United Arab Emirates, through joint chairing of the Monitoring and Assessment Working Group and its global workshops. This collaboration not only informs preparations for the UN Water Conference but also enhances Finland's visibility and influence in shaping the global water agenda.

By holding chair and lead positions in Working Groups and Task Forces, Finland has played a pivotal role in shaping key Water Convention outputs. These include authoritative assessment reports and guidance documents on critical issues such as data sharing, nexus assessment, and water allocation in transboundary contexts. Such contributions help operationalise principles of equitable and reasonable use and “no significant harm” under international water law, reinforcing Finland's commitment to rules-based multilateralism.⁴³

Between 2023 and 2025, Finland partnered with Namibia—a newly acceded Party to the Convention—in a Twinning initiative, which focused on sharing Finland's experience in implementing the Convention and building Namibia's capacity for transboundary water governance. The project proved highly successful, laying the foundation for continued collaboration on knowledge exchange and institutional strengthening. Right after the Twinning initiative, Namibia was selected to the Convention's Bureau and now serves as co-chair of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, which also demonstrates the long-term impact of Finland's support.

Beyond these specific initiatives, engagement in the Water Convention aligns closely with Finland's broader foreign, security, and development policy goals. By promoting cooperation over shared water resources, Finland aims to contribute to conflict prevention, regional stability, and sustainable development—key priorities in its foreign policy. These efforts also advance Finland's commitment to inclusive governance, gender equality, and climate resilience, ensuring that water diplomacy serves as a tool for peace and sustainable growth globally.

9. Capacity Building for Water Diplomacy and Transboundary Water Cooperation: Key Considerations for Engagement

In recent years, Finland has received numerous requests to provide training and capacity building on water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation to foreign services and government officials from e.g., Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, as well as to units within the EU and the UN. These activities offer Finland a valuable opportunity to advance its foreign policy objectives and complement its recognised role in peace mediation—particularly for a small country with limited resources but strong credibility.

To ensure that such training is impactful and aligned with Finland's strategic aims, the following key considerations should guide design and delivery of capacity building engagements:

⁴² <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/transboundary-water-cooperation-coalition>

⁴³ https://unece.org/publications/oes/welcome?f%5B0%5D=program%3A441&f%5B1%5D=work_area%3A1046

- **Focus on added value and strategic relevance:** Training should contribute to broader peace and water security objectives, responding to genuine needs rather than duplicating existing offers. It should be embedded in a wider cooperation or mediation context.
- **Leverage Finland's profile as a neutral facilitator:** Finland is widely perceived as impartial and constructive. Its experience in transboundary water cooperation and mediation provides a unique perspective that enhances credibility.
- **Match expertise to demand and build partnerships:** Ensure Finland has the necessary technical and practical expertise. Where gaps exist, collaborate with recognised partners such as SIWI, GWH, IHE Delft, and UNECE, as well as regional actors, to guarantee relevance and ownership.
- **Define geographical priorities and engage local actors:** Each region has specific needs and networks. Involve regional experts and local trainers to strengthen legitimacy and ensure cultural and political sensitivity.
- **Ensure trainer competence and delivery quality:** Trainers must combine subject-matter expertise with proven facilitation skills. This avoids credibility risks and ensures participants can apply knowledge effectively.

Specific Training Themes/Audiences

Training on transboundary water cooperation and the UN Water Convention

- Clarify objectives and relevance: Ensure the training supports broader goals of transboundary water cooperation and peacebuilding, not just technical compliance.
- Highlight Finland's added value: Emphasise Finland's experience as an active Party in the work of the Convention, which has offered practical insights into implementation.
- Adapt to audience needs: Tailor content for diplomats and officials who may have limited technical background—focus on governance, negotiation, and institutional mechanisms.
- Engage partners and experts: Collaborate with the Water Convention Secretariat and regional actors to ensure accuracy and legitimacy.
- Include practical case studies: Use examples from Finland's own cooperation and twinning projects to illustrate real-world application.

Training on Water Diplomacy – Finland's Approach

- Position water diplomacy strategically: Emphasise its role in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and climate resilience.
- Showcase Finland's strengths: Highlight experience in mediation and leadership in global water fora.
- Connect to global frameworks: Link to SDG 6, UN water conventions, and multilateral cooperation.
- Focus on practical skills: Negotiation, stakeholder engagement, and confidence-building measures.
- Highlight importance of conflict analysis.
- Promote inclusivity: Integrate gender equality and local ownership, reflecting Finland's human rights-based approach.
- Use real examples: Draw on Finland's water diplomacy experience and twinning projects.
- Blend technical and political dimensions: Cover hydrology basics and geopolitical dynamics.
- Engage partners: Work with international partners (e.g., SIWI, GWH, UNECE) and regional actors for relevance.
- Interactive learning: Include simulations and scenario-based exercises.

Training on Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy

- Explain the purpose clearly: Position conflict analysis as a tool for risk prevention and informed decision-making in transboundary water contexts.
- Focus on practical application: Teach participants how to integrate conflict sensitivity into water diplomacy strategies and project cycles.

- Combine theory with tools: Introduce frameworks such as stakeholder mapping, scenario planning, and Conflict Sensitivity and the Do No Harm principle.
- Highlight Finland's expertise: Showcase the conflict analyses conducted by Finnish actors and how they have been applied in mediation processes.

Promote inclusivity and ownership: Encourage approaches that involve local actors and marginalised groups in analysis and dialogue. **Training for Foreign Services Personnel**

- Assess baseline knowledge: Participants' familiarity with water issues may range from elementary to advanced—design modular content to accommodate different levels.
- Connect water to foreign policy priorities: Frame water diplomacy as part of security, climate, and development agendas to make it relevant for diplomatic roles.
- Draw on previous experience: Incorporate lessons from earlier capacity building sessions on water, peace, and security.
- Use interactive methods: Simulations and negotiation exercises help diplomats apply concepts in realistic scenarios.
- Ensure cultural and regional relevance: Involve local experts and examples to make training relevant and sensitive to each context.

10. Advancing Water Diplomacy on International Forums

Finland's efforts to advance water diplomacy on international fora are built on a comprehensive approach that combines foreign policy, peace mediation, and technical water expertise. **Anchoring water diplomacy in international law and multilateral frameworks** is a cornerstone of this work. Finland actively promotes the UN water conventions—the UN Water Convention and the UN Watercourses Convention—as global rules-based frameworks for transboundary water governance. Finland advocates for water security and cooperation in UN processes, including the UN Water Conference and the implementation of SDG 6, and supports strengthening international water law as a foundation for peace and stability.⁴⁴

Another key element is **linking water diplomacy with peace mediation**. Finland leverages its recognised strength in mediation by integrating water issues into preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts. The Water Diplomacy Platform serves as a practical tool for mediation, facilitation, and technical support in transboundary basins, offering conflict analysis and tailored expertise to prevent and resolve water-related tensions.⁴⁵

Finland also prioritises **inclusive and multi-stakeholder engagement**. Its policy emphasises local ownership, inclusivity, and gender equality, ensuring that water diplomacy processes involve governments, civil society, research institutions, and the private sector. This approach aligns with Finland's human rights-based foreign policy and its commitment to "Leave No One Behind", ensuring that women and youth have a meaningful role in water governance and peace processes.⁴⁶

A further pillar is **strengthening capacity and knowledge sharing**. Finland invests in training and competence-building for water diplomacy actors, both nationally and internationally. It has developed tools such as the Conflict Analysis for Water Diplomacy framework to integrate water considerations into foreign and security policy and to anticipate risks before they escalate.⁴⁷

Finally, Finland is committed to **advocating water for peace in global agendas**. It positions water as a driver of peace and security in international forums, including the UN, EU, and OSCE. During its 2025 OSCE

⁴⁴ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n.d.; Government of Finland, n.d.

⁴⁵ Finnish Institute of International Affairs [FIIA], n.d.; The Water Diplomat, 2025

⁴⁶ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n.d.; Vastapuu & Lyytikäinen, n.d.

⁴⁷ Mustasilta & Hakala, FIIA.

Chairpersonship, Finland highlighted comprehensive security approaches that include environmental and water dimensions, reinforcing the link between water cooperation and stability in fragile contexts.⁴⁸

Alignment with Finland's broader foreign, security and development policy goals

Advancing water diplomacy is fully aligned with Finland's foreign and security policy objectives of promoting rules-based multilateralism, conflict prevention, and sustainable peace. It also supports Finland's development policy priorities, which include a human rights-based approach, gender equality, and climate resilience. By integrating water diplomacy into these broader frameworks, Finland contributes to global stability, sustainable development, and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Government of Finland, n.d.; The Water Diplomat, 2025

⁴⁹ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n.d.; Prime Minister's Office, n.d.

Annex 1: Transboundary Water Cooperation – Background and Finnish Experience

Global Context

Transboundary waters are critical for global water security. According to UN estimates, there are 313 rivers and lakes and 468 aquifers shared by two or more countries, with 153 UN Member States reliant on waters that cross borders. These rivers account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows, and their basins are home to over three billion people.⁵⁰ Historically, countries have tended to cooperate over shared waters rather than engage in armed conflict, but disputes—often linked to water allocation or unilateral infrastructure development—have increased since 2000. Institutional arrangements such as conventions, agreements, and joint bodies remain essential for reducing tensions and fostering cooperation.

International Legal Framework

The two global UN water conventions form the foundation for transboundary water governance:

- 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) – Initially for the pan-European region, now open for accession by all UN member States since 2016, with 60 parties as of 2026.
- 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention) – Entered into force in 2014 and has 41 parties as of 2026.

The Water Convention stands out for its institutional mechanisms, including the Meeting of the Parties and subsidiary bodies, which makes the Convention operational with adoption of decisions, a programme of work and a budget, soft-law development and provides platforms for experience sharing, dialogue, and capacity building.

Finland's Role and Contributions

Finland has been a pioneer in transboundary water cooperation, actively shaping global norms and frameworks:

- Foundational Role: Finland contributed to the development of both UN water conventions and the earlier Helsinki Rules (1966).
- Institutional Leadership: Finland has held chair positions in the Water Convention's Working Groups and Task Forces. Currently, Finland co-chairs with Senegal the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment and leads the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus.
- Hosting Milestones: Finland and Estonia hosted the Water Convention's 30th anniversary meeting in 2022.
- Financial and Technical Support: Finland is among the largest funders of the Water Convention's work and provides expertise on joint monitoring, data sharing, and water allocation.

Finnish Bilateral and Regional Cooperation

Finland has and implements effective transboundary water agreements with all neighbouring countries:

- Sweden and Norway: Bilateral cooperation focuses on coordinated basin planning according to EU directives and technical collaboration e. g. in monitoring and in fisheries issues.
- Russia: Cooperation focuses on coordination in water management, including flow regulation and monitoring rooted in post-WWII agreements.
- Regional Engagement: Finland promotes cooperation in the Baltic Sea, Barents Sea, and Arctic regions.

⁵⁰ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/progress-transboundary-water-cooperation-2024-update>

- International cooperation supports initiatives in the Nile Basin, Mekong region, and Central Asia as well as cooperation with specific countries, e.g. Zambia, Namibia.

Finland's approach emphasises trust-building, inclusivity, and multi-track diplomacy, integrating technical expertise with political dialogue.

Global Experience Sharing

Finland actively shares its experience through:

- Capacity Building: Training foreign services and government officials in water diplomacy and transboundary cooperation.
- Experience sharing on the Water Convention platform, notably in implementing the Convention, through presenting at events, sharing lead roles and through twinning.

International Alliances: Member of the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition (TWCC), advocating for stronger global action on water security.

Annex 2: Peace Mediation – Background, Priorities and Finnish Experience

Long-standing Expertise in Mediation

Finland has a well-established reputation in international peace mediation, known for its pragmatism, impartiality, and solution-oriented approach. Finnish mediation emphasises equality, local ownership, inclusivity, and transparency, ensuring that all parties are involved in the process to create sustainable peace. This approach is particularly relevant for water-related conflicts, which often involve multiple stakeholders across sectors and borders.

Normative Leadership

Finland has played an important role in strengthening the normative basis for peace mediation in multilateral fora, including the United Nations. Finnish efforts have contributed to global frameworks that promote inclusive and effective mediation practices.

Inclusive Processes

Special attention is given to measures that enhance inclusive peace, such as ensuring the participation of women, youth, and traditional or religious actors in mediation processes. These principles are integrated into Finland's water diplomacy activities, recognising that water disputes often intersect with broader social and cultural dynamics.

Multi-Track Diplomacy

Finland applies a multi-track approach to peace mediation, combining official state-to-state processes (Track 1) with Track 1.5 collaborations involving governmental and non-governmental actors, and supporting Track 2 and Track 3 initiatives led by civil society and local communities. This layered approach strengthens trust-building and complements formal negotiations.

Experience in Water-Related Mediation

Finland has actively integrated water issues into peace mediation efforts. Examples include the cases of Euphrates and Tigris (Iraq) and South Caucasus, which illustrate Finland's ability to leverage water as an entry point for dialogue and conflict resolution, aligning technical expertise with diplomatic processes.

Euphrates and Tigris (Iraq) – Dialogue on Shared Water Resources through CMI

Since 2021, the CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation has facilitated informal regional dialogues on transboundary water management in the Euphrates–Tigris basin, promoting institutional capacity building and multi-sectoral exchange on economic, environmental, and security issues. High-level participation has strengthened cooperation and advanced discussions on environmental security. In September 2021, CMI convened experts from countries sharing major river basins—including Jordan, Yarmouk, Orontes, and the Mountain Aquifer—to explore sustainable management strategies. Key topics included institutional design, data sharing, capacity building, and the application of international water law to foster effective negotiation and cooperation frameworks.

South Caucasus – Regional Dialogue on Early Warning for All

Since 2023, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has facilitated regional dialogue on “Early Warning for All” in the South Caucasus, engaging Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan. The dialogue has focused on opportunities for regional cooperation, including the exchange of meteorological and hydrological data. The process has drawn on Finnish and international expertise in areas such as transboundary water management and meteorological observation and data sharing. It has been organised in close collaboration with international partners, including the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In addition, experts from the Finnish Water Diplomacy Network, mobilised through the Water Diplomacy Platform (and the project preceding it), have provided technical expertise to the OSCE Special Representative in the South Caucasus to support water-related discussions within the OSCE Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM).

Annex 3: Three Phases of Water Diplomacy Processes Matrix

Explanatory Note

The below tables on the scoping, active mediation and evaluation phases of water diplomacy processes integrate key aspects of the Swisspeace Mediation Process Matrix dimensions—structure of talks, role of the mediator, and engagement with parties—with water diplomacy process design features, including multi-track coordination, joint fact-finding, benefit-sharing, adaptive pathways, and institutionalisation. (See Annex 5: Material Bank for references and links to tools and methods mentioned in the matrix.)

Table 1. Scoping Phase

Process Step	Objectives	Key Activities	Tools / Methods	Considerations	Actors & Roles
Step 1: Demand or need identification	Identify request/need, map issues, and confirm whether an acute need exists	Receive request by party/third party; conduct rapid issue mapping; open initial contact; set preliminary confidentiality and information management	Rapid conflict/ripeness assessment; issue-mapping canvas; political economy scan; hydrological baseline; early joint fact-finding	Inclusivity and gender balance; consent and impartiality; alignment with ongoing processes; initial confidence-building opportunities; sponsors & neighbours	MFA: Lead intake and diplomatic contact; permission to proceed. Water Diplomacy Platform: Support scoping and convening Water expert: Technical scoping input MFA Regional department: Strong involvement
Step 2: Early assessment	Define the issue, explore Finland's possibility to engage, and conduct light analysis leading to a YES/NO decision	Clarify scope and objectives; assess feasibility and risks; consult parties and partners; decide and declare interest (or no interest)	Structured conflict analysis; stakeholder/actor mapping; SWOT & risk register; Swisspeace mandate/objectives checklist; UN preparedness & consent checks	Impartiality, national & parties' ownership, coherence and complementarity; potential asymmetries, intransigent actors/un-compromising parties, fragmentation; track coordination (1/1.5/2/3)	MFA: Lead with strong involvement of the regional department Water Diplomacy Platform: Support and connect to networks Water expert: Light engagement as needed Partners (e.g., UN/OSCE/EU): Coordination

Step 3: Early action planning	Establish a core team and mobilise external water expertise; deepen situational awareness; concretise Finland's approach and secure resources	Team setting: draft and approve ToR for external expert(s); identify and contract expertise; undertake in-depth analysis and familiarisation; define approach, roles, and resourcing	ToR templates; data-sharing MOUs; joint fact-finding protocol; process design plan; ground rules and agenda skeleton; risk matrix; budget & communication plan	Confidentiality vs public outreach; decision-making modalities; agenda sequencing; leverage and coordination with other mediators; gender and inclusion; early CBMs; benefit-sharing lenses	MFA: Lead team formation and resourcing Water Diplomacy Platform: Support recruitment and coordination Water expert: Provide in-depth technical analysis Facilitating partners: Align efforts
Step 4: Start of the mediation process	Launch a formal process with agreed format, ground rules, and schedule	Hold opening meeting; confirm mandate and roles; finalise agenda and calendar; set documentation and information security protocols	Mediation launch checklist; codes of conduct; venue/logistics plan; documentation templates	Timing/frequency; confidentiality; media engagement; cultural sensitivities; opt-out/letting-go criteria	Core team: Facilitation and logistics MFA: Process owner Water Diplomacy Platform: Convening support Water expert: Technical briefing Parties & partners: Participation

Table 2. Active Mediation Phase					
Process Step	Objectives	Key Activities	Tools / Methods	Considerations	Actors & Roles
Step 1: Designing the process	Define governance and coordination across tracks; align with related processes	Assign overall responsibility and coordinator; map links to other negotiations and actors supporting the process; clarify role in the process; design multi-track coordination (1/1.5/2/3)	Process design canvas; Swisspeace structure-of-talks (format, ground rules, timing, agenda, decision-making modalities); coordination MOUs	Coherence and complementarity; consent and impartiality; inclusivity and national ownership; leverage and mediator coordination	Core team: Lead facilitator MFA: Process owner and diplomatic lead Water Diplomacy Platform: Track coordination and expert sourcing Facilitating partners: Complementary roles Water expert: Advisor
Step 2a: Issue mapping (based on conflict analysis and party consultation)	Identify key issues, stakes, and the role/sensitivities of water	Conduct joint fact-finding; define data needs and transparency rules; map uncertainties and scenario ranges	Hydrological modelling and scenarios; shared databases and data protocols; political economy analysis; benefit-sharing analysis	Data reliability and transparency; uncertainty management; sensitivities and taboo topics; science-policy translation	Parties: Co-produce knowledge Water expert: Lead technical inputs Water Diplomacy Platform: Data-sharing facilitation Core team: Integrate findings
Step 2b: Objective setting	Agree on clear, realistic objectives for the process and each session	Develop shared objectives and criteria; define success indicators and adaptive triggers	SMART objectives; Theory of Change; UN quality peace agreement fundamentals; adaptive management pathways	Feasibility and political acceptability; mutual gains and equity; flexibility for climate/flow variability	Core team: Facilitate objective setting Parties: Validate objectives MFA: Ensure policy alignment

Step 2c: Actor mapping	Identify and plan inclusion of key actors, sponsors, neighbours	Map influence, interests, and capacities; design inclusion and consultation formats (gender, youth, indigenous, private sector)	Stakeholder mapping tools; Swisspeace participation, sponsors & neighbours, gender lenses	Asymmetry management; fragmentation; handling intransigent actors/ un-compromising parties; security/legal constraints	Core team: Lead mapping MFA: Diplomatic outreach Water Diplomacy Platform: Civil society actors and expert networks
Step 2d: Facilitating partners	Select and clarify roles of facilitating partners	Define mandates and complementarities; set coordination mechanisms and information-sharing rules	Mediator coordination protocols; MOUs; confidentiality agreements	Coherence; duplication avoidance; role clarity	MFA: Lead external coordination Core team: Operational coordination Partners (UN/OSCE/EU/river basin orgs): Facilitation support
Step 2e: Involving experts	Integrate external expert contributions appropriately	Define expert ToRs and scope; establish data protocols; brief experts on conflict sensitivity and confidentiality	Expert ToR templates; data-sharing agreements; conflict sensitivity training	Impartiality and perceived neutrality; confidentiality and attribution; role boundaries	Water expert: Provide technical analysis Water Diplomacy Platform: Identify and contract experts Core team: Integrate experts into talks
Step 3a: Facilities and logistics	Ensure conducive venues and logistics for dialogue	Choose location; plan security and access; set room layout and breakout spaces; manage travel/logistics	Venue/host agreements; security plans; accessibility checklists	Neutrality of venue; safety; cultural considerations; inclusivity	Core team: Logistics lead MFA: Protocol and security Partners: Host support

Step 3b: Roles and mandates	Clarify representation , levels, and facilitation roles	Confirm who represents whom; verify mandates; appoint main facilitator(s); define role of external water expert	Mandate verification checklist; role descriptions; facilitation brief	Level parity; mandate sufficiency; conflict of interest checks	Core team: Facilitation Parties: Mandated representatives Water expert: Technical advisor
Step 3c: Dialogue format	Design opening, sequencing, and closing formats	Set opening statements and ground rules; choose formats (plenary, caucus, shuttle); schedule closing and next steps	Swisspeace format/ground rules; agenda sequencing; caucus protocols	Confidentiality vs transparency; timing and frequency; managing asymmetry	Core team: Design and facilitate Parties: Engage/take part in dialogue MFA: Oversee optics and messaging
Step 3d: Documentation, notes and reporting	Ensure accurate records and agreed reporting	Assign note-takers; agree on document classification and access; produce minutes and communiqués	Documentation templates; information security plan; communiqué templates	Confidentiality and public outreach; verification and sign-off	Core team: Documentation MFA: Information management Partners: Distribution as agreed
Step 3e: Manuals and background documents	Anchor discussions in validated references	Compile core background documents and manuals (e.g., UN guidance, basin data, legal frameworks)	UN Guidance for Effective Mediation; basin treaties and laws; technical manuals and datasets	Authoritative-ness; accessibility; translation needs	Core team: Curate materials Water expert: Technical review Parties: Access and use

Table 3. Evaluation Phase

Process Step	Objectives	Key Activities	Tools / Methods	Considerations	Actors & Roles
Evaluation of the dialogues and talks	Assess results vs. objectives and agree on next steps	Conduct session/post-process reviews; evaluate sustainability; agree on regular expert-level meetings and follow-up actions	Monitoring framework (KPIs); after-action reviews; learning workshops	Result durability; feasibility of ongoing meetings; resource implications	Core team: Lead evaluation MFA: Policy follow-up Water Diplomacy Platform: Capture lessons Water expert: Technical reflections Parties: Joint review
Evaluation of the peace mediation process	Assess whether the process fulfilled its objectives	Conduct self-evaluations to the Water Diplomacy Platform; independent process review if needed	UN mediation fundamentals checklist; Swisspeace options trade-off review; process scorecard	Impartiality, inclusivity, coherence; mediator leverage and coordination effectiveness	Core team: Self-evaluation MFA: Oversight and learning integration Water Diplomacy Platform: Repository and dissemination
Sustainability and continuity of the intervention	Guarantee continuity and adaptive capability	Define implementation/coordination mechanisms; agree on adaptive triggers and review cycles; plan capacity building	Adaptive management pathways; joint implementation committees; capacity-building plans	Institutional resilience; climate and socio-economic change; resource commitments	MFA: Support continuity mechanisms Water Diplomacy Platform: Capacity building Basin organisations/parties: Implementation Water expert: Ongoing technical support
Institutionalisation of arrangements	Explore formalisation and accession options	Assess possibilities for institutionalising arrangements; consider accession or cooperation under UN Water Convention; define next-process entry points	Legal reviews; MOUs/treaties; UN Water Convention guidance	Political feasibility; sovereignty concerns; transparency and accountability	MFA: Lead on institutionalisation and/or support accession Parties: Decide and implement Water Diplomacy Platform: Technical/legal support; Note: begins a new process

Annex 4: Principles, Frameworks and Institutional Mechanisms of the UN Water Convention

The following principles, frameworks and institutional mechanisms are summarised from the official website and documents of the UN Water Convention as of spring 2026 and may be subject to change.

Key Principles⁵¹

- Prevention, control and reduction of transboundary impact – States must avoid causing significant harm or negatively impacts other riparian countries. This creates a legal and moral basis for cooperation.
- Equitable and reasonable utilisation – Shared waters should be used fairly and sustainably by all Parties, reducing perceptions of injustice that often fuel tensions.
- Sustainable management of transboundary waters – Integrated water resources management (IWRM) is central to the Convention.
- Cooperation and joint arrangements – Parties are obliged to cooperate through agreements and joint bodies for shared basins.
- Exchange of information and data – Transparency and regular information sharing between riparian states. This builds trust by reducing uncertainty and suspicion about water use and availability.
- Public participation – Encouraging stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes, helping to include local voices and preventing grievances from escalating into interstate disputes.
- Precautionary and polluter-pays principles – Preventive measures and accountability for environmental damage.

Frameworks⁵²

- Legal Framework – The Convention provides binding obligations for Parties and complements the UN Watercourses Convention.
 - The Convention's institutional architecture allows for neutral facilitation by UNECE and partners, which can mediate disagreements, and provide capacity-building. Twinning projects and joint monitoring initiatives (e.g. Finland – Namibia) demonstrate how cooperative frameworks prevent disputes and strengthen trust.
 - Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) under the Convention promotes holistic planning across sectors, reducing competition between water uses.
- Programme of Work – Three-year plans adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to guide implementation globally.
- Guidance Documents – Technical and policy guidance on topics such as water allocation, nexus assessment, and climate adaptation.
- Protocol on Water and Health – A legally binding instrument under the Convention to protect human health through improved water management and sanitation. The protocol addresses health-related water issues collaboratively, aiming to prevent crises that could trigger conflict.

Institutional Mechanisms⁵³

- Meeting of the Parties (MOP) – The main decision-making body that adopts strategies, work programmes, and guidance. Offers a high-level forum for dialogue and consensus-building among states.
- Convention Bureau – Provides leadership and coordination between sessions of the MOP.

⁵¹ <http://www.unwatercoursesconvention.org/>;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Protection_and_Use_of_Transboundary_Watercourses_and_International_Lakes;

⁵² <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water>; <https://cawater-info.net/library/eng/unece-wc1992-en.pdf>

⁵³ <http://www.unwatercoursesconvention.org/>; <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water>

- Working Groups and Task Forces – Cover areas such as IWRM, Monitoring and Assessment, WFEE-Nexus (Water–Food–Energy–Ecosystems Nexus) and Water and Climate; and provide technical platforms to resolve disputes through evidence-based solutions.
- The Water Convention Secretariat – is responsible for servicing all meetings under the Convention and assisting Convention bodies in implementing the triannual programme of work.
- Implementation Committee – facilitates dispute prevention and provides practical case-oriented assistance through nine members (legal and technical experts on transboundary water cooperation) helping to resolve difficulties before they escalate.
- Global Network of Basins – Platform for sharing experiences and best practices among transboundary basins worldwide, aims to reduce isolation and foster cooperative norms.

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