



A 3-step Framework for Water Conflict Management

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Increased competition between water users is challenging cooperation and heightening potential conflicts at all levels. To address these, a sound understanding of the challenges being faced is required to formulate sustainable solutions. Challenges are often multi-dimensional and articulated differently depending on the actors involved. Thus, a thorough analysis is required to identify relevant factors and actors and from there, appropriate points of entry for possible solutions tailored to each situation.

Various approaches and tools have been proposed by academics and practitioners to prepare and conduct these processes. Many are skills oriented and favour action over a comprehensive understanding of the why. Others concentrate principally on analytical approaches. However, few adopt a rounded and multi-focus approach that identifies all relevant components and finds new entry points.

This paper proposes a water diplomacy framework that aims to direct the understanding of potential water conflict from a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective by concentrating on three key interconnected elements: system analysis, decision-making and implementation. The proposed methodology is based on a combination of instruments and tools drawn from the disciplines of general water resources management and conflict management.

Water management and its planning channel important public investment with long-ranging impacts, including on the emergence or resolution of conflicts. In water management, dealing with different actors and interests effectively is key to achieving implementable strategies and outcomes that contribute to cooperation and in turn to sustainable development. A sound understanding of underlying issues, interests and needs linked to potential and existing conflicts is crucial to engage in meaningful processes for conflict prevention and resolution. These issues can be of hydrological and biophysical nature, but most often are linked to the socio economic drivers and the governance system around the water. While the negotiation process itself is characterized by often highly emotional and potentially irrational dynamics, a factual understanding of drivers, causes and effects of potential or actual conflicts within the water system prepares the ground for fruitful processes.

Competition over water is occurring at different levels. This framework is designed to apply in various contexts and be used by different actors. In addition to supporting the preparation, conduct and conclusion of negotiations in the context of a potential or existing conflict, others involved, such as third parties, may utilise the framework to improve their understanding of the situation and strategize their involvement. Moreover, the framework is relevant at different levels: the analysis process it offers a way forward whether in relation to transboundary waters or at a local level, and whether in relation to community implementation or political strategic decision-making.