








BRIDGE: Building River Dialogue and Governance

Greater Cooperation through Water Diplomacy and Transboundary Water Management



BRIDGE (Building River Dialogue and Governance) supports the capacities of countries sharing a river basin to implement effective water management arrangements through a shared vision, benefit-sharing principles and transparent, coherent and cost-effective institutional frameworks. Its goal is to enhance cooperation among riparian countries through applying water diplomacy at multiple levels.

BRIDGE works through 5 key implementation strategies:

-  **Demonstration** – using demonstration and testing of how to make cooperation operational in a basin as the basis for confidence and trust building, shared learning and joint action on concrete steps in building national and transboundary water governance capacity;
-  **Learning** – using training and capacity building for multiple stakeholders, including municipal and civil society actors, as well as high-level national officials in water governance, international water law and benefit sharing to enhance knowledge and understanding;
-  **Dialogue** for consensus building – using demonstration actions and learning events to catalyse new dialogues on technical, development, and political matters;
-  **Leadership** – supporting empowerment of champions for transboundary water cooperation and better water governance who can effectively advocate for mobilisation of water diplomacy;
-  **Advice and Support** – providing advice on demand and technical assistance to governments and stakeholders including on institutional and legal frameworks.



STORY FROM THE FIELD:

01

GOASCORÁN HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR



Membership includes associations of municipalities and local economic development groups from sectors such as farming, fishing, microfinance and crafts. These are the new actors. They have brought in a new dynamic – both in quantity and quality.”

These are the words of **Luis Maier** who manages the BRIDGE project in the Goascorán Basin, an area of 2,345 km² on the Honduras-El Salvador border. By approaching and incorporating new stakeholders, including entrepreneurs and private sectors, participation in the Goascorán BRIDGE project has tripled and gained attention from national authorities to support its water cooperation efforts and assist in the economic growth of the region.



How BRIDGE Implements Water Governance

Water governance sets the ‘rules of the game’ for the way water is managed. It determines whether and how water resources management is implemented. Poor water governance results in over-allocation and pollution of water resources, and in the degradation of the ecosystem services that people rely upon for water storage and management of drought and flood risks. Without water governance that is effective, planning for water management remains unimplemented and water-related vulnerabilities of poor people go unaddressed, leading to less resilient livelihoods and economic growth.

Through water diplomacy, countries are able to reach negotiated agreements on water management. Because of the importance of water for development and poverty reduction at local levels, agreements among national governments often do not lead, by themselves, to implementation. For transboundary agreements on water management to be effective on the ground, they need buy-in and agreement of water users. Water diplomacy is a process that operates under the authority of States, but which unlocks cooperation among multiple stakeholders, including at the level of municipalities and provinces.

BRIDGE strengthens Water Governance Capacity

Water management is also a technical issue that is strengthened by in-depth scientific knowledge and extensive legal information. Effective water governance capacity is therefore the art of building and facilitating convergence of technical expertise, information, stakeholder dialogue and local and international politics. Water diplomacy calls on State and local politicians, decision makers, scientific and technical experts to work hand-in-hand to reach negotiated agreements on policies, laws and institutions for transboundary water management.

The IUCN Environmental Law Centre provides technical advice and organises training, learning workshops and events. A support platform has been developed to offer a series of online resources, case studies and technical publications and papers.

BRIDGE steps towards greater Water Cooperation

The goal of BRIDGE is to enhance cooperation among riparian countries through the use of water diplomacy to gain agreement on the socio-economic, environmental and political benefits derived from water.

With over 275 transboundary basins worldwide, cooperation over water management is essential for people’s wellbeing, political stability and the sustainability of ecosystems. Approximately 40% of the world’s population lives in river and lake basins that comprise two or more countries. Today, the complexities of sharing water between and among States requires innovation and change within the otherwise traditional approaches to water governance, calling in the need for improved water diplomacy across multiple levels.

Cooperation among countries in the management of transboundary waters is a building block of international security and regional stability. Likewise, water management is also a local activity because clean, safe and dependable water is intrinsic to health, food security and economic opportunities. The costs of failing to manage water are often reflected in poverty, disease, loss of biodiversity, and can lead to conflict.



STORY FROM THE FIELD:

02

SEKONG VIETNAM-LAOS-CAMBODIA



*From that meeting came better understanding and a shared vision,” said **Tek Vannara**, Deputy Executive Director, The NGO Forum on Cambodia. “One of the major issues that came up was that better coordination between different agencies and better mechanisms for data sharing across countries was needed.”*

In the Sekong, a Mekong tributary, information and dissemination were identified as the two main issues for successful transboundary cooperation. A BRIDGE initiated meeting convened authorities and communities alike to share and work out solutions in order for action to be taken for better basin management on the Sekong river. Getting the right data into the right hands led to a good start resulting in better cooperation, highlighting the importance of information gathering and dissemination to all stakeholders.

SIXAOLA PANAMA-COSTA RICA

“ Since we have someone on the commission, we know what is going on,” said **Mitzela Dávila**. “We can go to a community and tell them what the commission is doing. And we can take information from the community back to the transboundary commission.”

Mrs Dávila is a member of the Champions Network, a group created following a BRIDGE meeting with the aim to promote exchange and empowerment of local basin stakeholders. The Champions Network organise watershed activities and have recently offered collaboration to the Sixaola Binational Commission, enabling a direct link between the official transboundary body and the communities affected by its decisions.



BRIDGE projects worldwide

BRIDGE is applied in three regions with support for learning, communications, dissemination and advisory services at the global level. The three regions are Mesoamerica, the Andes and the Mekong. BRIDGE supports demonstration actions for improvements in water governance in three transboundary river basins in each region.

»» BRIDGE ACTIVITIES IN MESOAMERICA

Goascorán basin – a Binational Management Group for the basin was strengthened with the participation of State institutions, municipal and local economic associations, and NGOs. The Binational Management Group developed a strategic plan for territorial development in the basin.

Sixaola basin – Bylaws were approved for the Sixaola Binational Watershed Commission. This was crucial in moving the process forward making the basin Commission operational.

Coatan basin – Formation of the Buena Vista microwatershed committee and exchanges between microwatershed councils from México and Guatemala, enabled action plans on both sides of the border.

»» BRIDGE ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH AMERICA

Zarumilla basin – BRIDGE facilitated the progress of an IWRM Plan and kickstarted a water information system which led to

new agreements on river basin maps. In the development of the Zarumilla Commission, these steps now serve as a model for water cooperation between Peru and Ecuador.

Catamayo-Chira basin – Dialogue over water cooperation in the basin was renewed, leading to a process of building a Water Information System for the basin and setting the foundation for a binational institution mandated by the Presidents of both countries.

Titicaca basin – Collaboration was put in place between the hydro-meteorological institutes of Bolivia and Peru, as well as among water supply companies in the basin. A Water Information System was developed and a plan to revise basin organization mandates was carried out.

»» BRIDGE ACTIVITIES IN ASIA

Sekong river – National and provincial authorities initiated the process of establishing a River Basin Committee for the Sekong in the case of Lao PDR, and a Coordination Team in the case of Cambodia, as necessary precursors to potential future cross-border technical coordination, as well as capacity building on transboundary cooperation.

Sesan and Sre Pok rivers – Priorities were set for a country-driven approach to building cooperation in consultations with government, national agencies and civil society in Cambodia and Vietnam. These priorities focused on complementing the 3S River Initiative led by the Mekong River Commission, through support for development of an information platform and capacity building.



BRIDGE Phase 2

By demonstrating how water diplomacy functions at the local level, the first phase of BRIDGE showed that cooperation at local levels can be scaled up to reach multiple layers. To further build upon this strategy, the second phase of BRIDGE will strengthen this approach by reinforcing demonstrations of cooperation at the watershed level. While recognizing that formal agreements require legitimacy and authority of States, phase 2 will place more emphasis and resources on capacity building and technical support at the national level. BRIDGE will also work with regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), and the Central American Integration System (SICA), among others, emphasizing the principles of integrated water resources management and international water law.

Further developing cooperation through local leadership and advocacy of transboundary water management, BRIDGE will continue to support and develop Champion Networks to promote exchange and empowerment of local stakeholders in transboundary water cooperation (see field story 3). Building and strengthening good water governance through water diplomacy gives water users the basic building blocks for cooperation to safeguard water quality, quantity, and the protection of ecosystems.



+ STORY FROM THE FIELD:

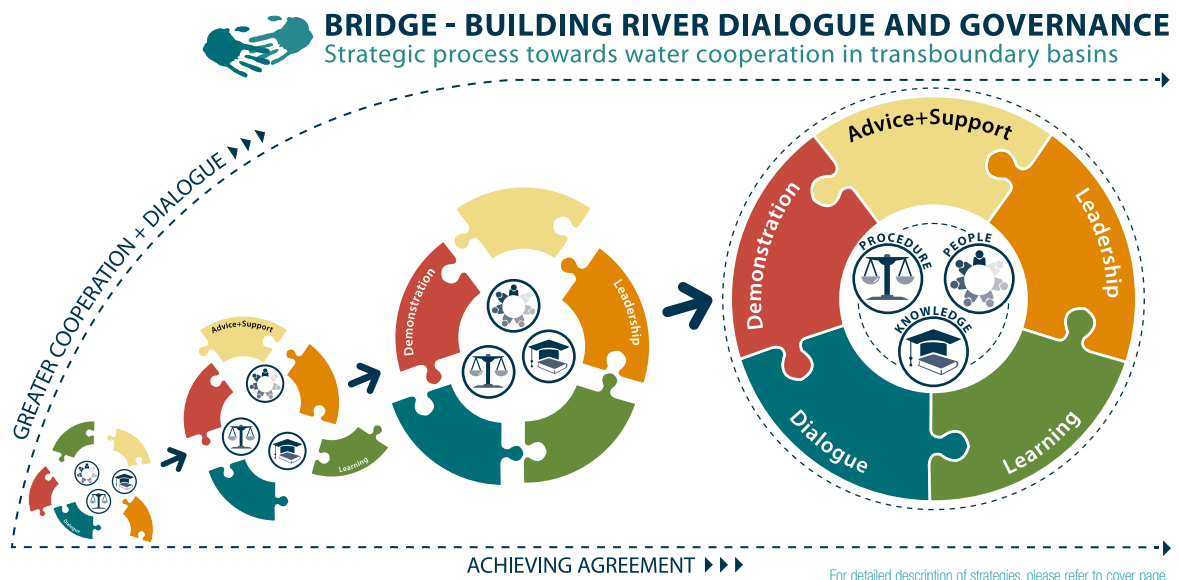
04

ZARUMILLA PERU-ECUADOR

“Why was there a presidential decree?” Benites Agüero asked rhetorically. “Since the end of the conflict in 1998, there has been room for dialogue. The plans for the two binational efforts dealt not only with water, but it created the opportunity for collaboration and cooperation, a dynamic between the two counties.”

Jorge Benites Agüero is Director for Water Resources Planning and Management at the National Water Authority in Peru. In South America, BRIDGE has guided policymakers and presidents towards sustainable transboundary watershed management. “Now the approach is more multisectoral with an ecosystem view of water,” Agüero noted.

The BRIDGE project is led by the IUCN Global Water Programme and the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, in collaboration with the IUCN Asia, Mesoamerica, and South America offices. It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.



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MORE INFORMATION

BRIDGE website: www.iucn.org/bridge

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