

International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC)

STRATEGY 2021 - 2026

ICWC supports transboundary water cooperation
of shared water resources.



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Executive Summary

ICWC supports transboundary water cooperation of shared water resources. The objective is to contribute to sustainable governance and management of shared water resources by improving cooperation on such resources.

Through its work, ICWC contributes to the implementation of the UNESCO IX Strategic Plan, particularly priority areas 4 “integrated water resources management under global change”, and 5 “water governance based on science for mitigation, adaptation and resilience” (intermediate goal), which in turn will support the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and ultimately support economic development and welfare of developing countries (long term goal).

ICWC follows a Theory of Change (Figure 1) which outlines anticipated positive linkages between generation and dissemination of knowledge on water cooperation and sustainable water governance. The theory is that such knowledge leveraged to support capacity strengthening of technical and political actors will help pave the way for informed decisions, and increased willingness and ability to cooperate on shared waters for the benefit of socio-economic development.

The work feeding into the Theory of Change is carried out through three action areas:

1. conduct research and generate knowledge;
2. undertake trainings and capacity building; and
3. facilitate platforms and networks for interaction among practitioners.

Communication and outreach are used to highlight benefits of transboundary cooperation to experts and the general public, thereby contributing to an enabling environment, which will help pave the way for sustainable governance of transboundary waters. In this way ICWC contributes to the implementation of two priority areas of the IHP IX Strategic Plan. Namely, to support “integrated water resources management under global change” and “water governance based on science for mitigation, adaptation and resilience”.

A main strength of ICWC, is its solid anchor in research which will ensure strong linkages between science and policy. ICWC led initiatives contributes with a high degree of science-based solutions, made available for policy and decision-makers included in transboundary water contexts. ICWC uses its considerable expertise on water diplomacy to engage and support technical experts, policy- and decision-makers engaged in governance of shared water resources.

At the end of the strategy period, as a direct outcome, awareness of, and capacity to undertake, shared waters governance is anticipated to be strengthened among key stakeholders. The ultimate outcome is that fundamental prerequisites and conditions to peacefully share, use and protect water resources have improved, and thus contributed as a basis for strengthening human security and economic development in target areas.

Setting the scene

Challenges for water cooperation

There is an ever-increasing pressure on the world's water resources. Population growth and an improved economic situation, particularly in low-income countries and emerging economies, are leading to an increasing demand for access to water resources. In addition, climate change combined with socio-cultural factors compounds the risks to food and energy production, human health and security, economic development, and poverty reduction, thereby seriously jeopardizing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (World Water Development Report 2020).

In 2020, COVID-19 emerged as the biggest challenge of our time, highlighting the importance of access to safe water and hygiene in all communities around the world. The impacts on poor and vulnerable groups are disproportionately grave. Human insecurity is likely to increase in fragile and conflict affected states, and the burden on women, as the main water and care providers for households and communities, will increase.

Water resources are often shared between countries, subnational administrative units, sectors, and stakeholders. Sharing a water resource puts extra demands on the operationalization of effective water governance systems since governance is bound by political boundaries while water is determined by natural boundaries. At the core of this challenge is the need to establish effective water cooperation between stakeholders who are connected by a resource but divided by administrative and/or political borders.

In the past, most initiatives for water cooperation focused on the blue water itself and the actual sharing of the resource. Current cooperation facilitation is much more multidisciplinary, taking the benefits derived from the water resource, e.g., agricultural products, ecosystem services etc. into account. Focus is thus both on understanding the context in which cooperation processes occur and on the multi-sectoral benefits that the water resource may provide, and how these benefits can be optimized and shared.

Water cooperation and water diplomacy have also established firm linkages to other sectors ranging from agriculture and food security to geopolitics and regional security. During the 1990s, the risk of 'water wars' was often raised, referring to zero-sum thinking about water cooperation and benefit sharing. However, some important water cooperation foundations were laid during this time. The two global

UN Water Conventions, the 1992 Water Convention¹ and the 1997 Watercourses Convention², have each entered into force and contain rules of international law that have been codified and progressively developed under each of these instruments. Some of the rules contained in these global conventions apply as customary law that govern all transboundary water states. The work on the law of transboundary aquifers pursued by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) where UNESCO-IHP is encouraged to provide scientific and technical assistance is also recognized.

In the last two decades, the impacts of water scarcity and lack of cooperation regarding shared water resources on peace and security have been elevated with urgency in numerous international relations and global security fora. This included the first thematic discussion on climate and security in the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2007, which a decade later, led to further UNSC discussions on water cooperation and climate-related security risks.

Worldwide there are 310 international river basins, shared by 150 countries. More than half of the world's population³ live in these basins, meaning that substantial land areas and populations will benefit from any improved water cooperation. Water cooperation is also essential on a subnational level, such as between different administrative units or neighbouring communities, and when water is shared between different sectors in a society (e.g., urban/rural). There is a need to facilitate water cooperation for effective water governance of shared waters, and benefit sharing beyond water, on multiple scales and between sectors. In addition, the management of water is highly gendered, and there is an urgent need to support efforts to enhance equal participation of all genders and sectors of society in leadership, decision-making, management and use of water.



Old Tigris Bridge, Turkey (Photo: Shutterstock)

Water cooperation is a heavily context-dependent field, and it is essential to understand the environment in which cooperation on shared water resources takes place. Any shared water resource may be subject to a varying degree of cooperative action, from strict unilateral action to jointly integrated development of the shared resource. This has been described as a cooperation continuum (Figure 1). However,

1 The 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, entered into force 1996 and became a global instrument in 2016.

2 The UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (adopted 21 May 1997, entered into force 17 August 2014) 36 ILM 700.

3 McCracken, M. and Wolf, A. 2019. Updating the Register of International River Basins of the world. *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, Vol. 35.

cooperation continuum (redrawn from Sadoff and Grey, 2005)Figure 1). However, further research in the field has also clarified that the path to increased water cooperation seldom follows a straight line. Although the processes are often slow in general, it may take large steps forward when the situation is conducive, and it may move backwards (or sideways) when it is not. Countries or parties may agree to cooperate in one field while they continue to disagree in another. So, multi-track and multi-sectoral water diplomacy approaches are essential.

While there are many examples of effective water cooperation, 60 per cent of international river basins still lack any form of cooperative governance structure, and out of those 40 per cent where it does exist, there is little monitoring of compliance. Studies show that compliance monitoring mechanisms are conspicuous by their absence in international water agreements. As the pressure on finite water resources increases and many transboundary basins face more uncertainty about future availability of freshwater, institutionalized water cooperation needs to move from occasional to becoming the norm.

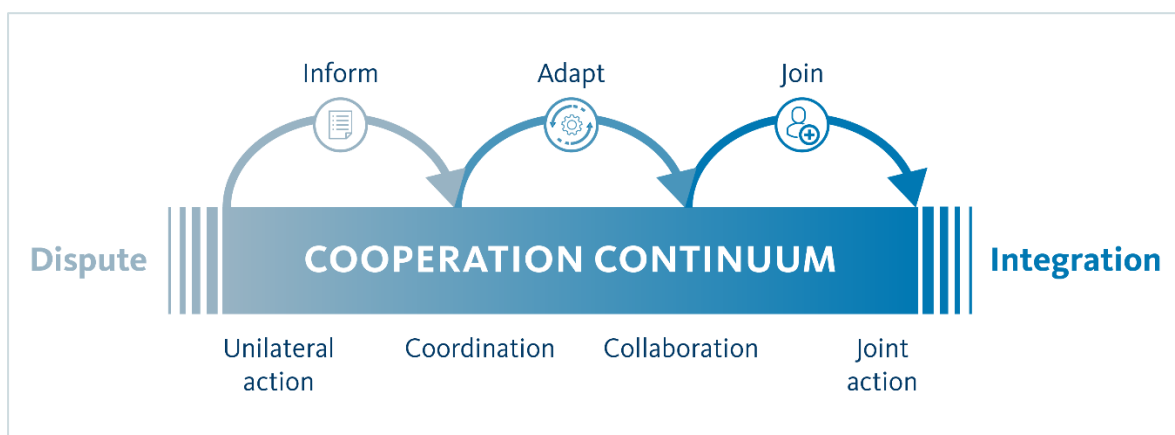


Figure 1: The cooperation continuum (redrawn from Sadoff and Grey, 2005⁴)

⁴ Sadoff, C. and Grey, D. 2005. Cooperation on International Rivers: A continuum for securing and sharing benefits. *Water International*, Vol 30: 420-427.

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR WATER COOPERATION (ICWC)

The International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC) was established in 2014 as an independent research institution, hosted by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), with the purpose to advance knowledge on water cooperation within and between countries. It is part of the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme (IHP) Category 2 Centres family, currently encompassing 36 centres focusing on water.

ICWC is the only UNESCO Centre located in Sweden and among the first focusing on issues of transboundary water management in connection with peace, conflict, and regional development. The Centre provides a unique environment, combining highly developed capacity to conduct multidisciplinary research with strong policy advice. Working in both research and policy areas, ICWC is set to achieve scientific results as well as policy impacts from its operations. Through its work, ICWC will contribute to the implementation of the UNESCO IHP IX Strategic Plan for 2022-2029.

As part of ICWC, the Research School for International Cooperation is hosted by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. The research school provides basis for in-depth research on water cooperation with a primary focus on water for peace and development.

Responding to water cooperation challenges

Increasing climate change impacts, including water scarcity, floods, flash floods and rising sea levels, in combination with changes to society, underscore the urgency for sustainable management of freshwater resources.

An important question is how to reach agreement on sustainable management of shared water resources – often in a very context-dependent and fragmented environment. The process of finding effective solutions for cooperation on shared resources is frequently caught up in existing disagreements which may have sparked tensions and conflicts.

The International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC) responds to the need to find effective, innovative, inclusive, and context-specific solutions for cooperation on shared freshwater resources. In doing this, it strives to build shared knowledge on water and climate-related challenges across boundaries and sectors. This includes creating a knowledge base for understanding the diverging perspectives on

water reality of the various actors and their decision-making processes. The operational space for ICWC varies from an international level to the lowest administrative units, and at whatever state of cooperation the parties may be, the focus is on supporting cooperation on shared freshwater resources.

Activities led by ICWC focus to a large extent on fragile and conflict-prone regions and river basins where tensions related to the access to natural resources, such as water, energy, and food, are challenging peace and stability. ICWC does not exclude working in regions or basins where cooperation is already well under way if ICWC-led activities could contribute to strengthening cooperation further or lead to deepened dialogues on the benefits of water cooperation.

Of particular concern is the impact on human and national security (internal displacement, forced cross-border migration, resource competition, political tensions, and armed conflicts) from climate-induced water stress, often referred to as climate security. ICWC can, through its experience and knowledge of water and climate, dialogue facilitation and international relations, disentangle the different parts of climate and security and address them through different tracks of water diplomacy and other tools.

The ICWC can identify trends and lessons learned, share experiences across and within basins, and elevate local knowledge with a focus on basins where shared water-related challenges can be an opportunity for cooperation or a source of political tensions or armed violence. This is realized through extensive cooperation with local networks, as deep understanding of the case specific context generates more tailored support and sustainable results. Identifying opportunities for contextual solutions on sustainable management of shared waters will contribute to realizing joint benefits across scales, sectors, and stakeholders.

The need for different levels of analysis and implementation (local/lowest administrative units, national/sub-basin, basin/regional) reflects the complexity and interconnectivity of issues related to shared waters. Different tracks of cooperation (political, technical) are essential for equitable, effective, and efficient water management and finding joint solutions based on shared knowledge of existing and upcoming water and climate-related issues. This can include coordinated basin-wide decisions on management of shared waters during floods and droughts, regulation of water pollution and water abstraction, and financing and operation of water infrastructures.

AREAS OF BENEFITS FROM COOPERATION ON SHARED WATERS

1. Contributing to achieving the SDGs

Since water underpins sustainable development, inclusive governance including gender equality and youth empowerment, and cooperation between users, can help to achieve the SDGs.

2. Supporting peace and stability

By facilitating dialogues and knowledge sharing for sustainable utilization of shared waters and reduction of water hazards, peaceful collaboration and stability in fragile and conflict-affected regions can be promoted.

3. Supporting enabling environments for water cooperation

Public awareness and communication are essential in fostering an enabling environment for water cooperation across boundaries and sectors. Transparency, inclusivity, and data sharing play a key role in reducing the impact of disinformation or information influence campaigns on water cooperation processes.

4. Enhancing shared economic benefits

Economic benefits can be immense if countries and basin stakeholders cooperate in production value chains to overcome the challenges of increasing water scarcity and limitations for agriculture, industry, and other sectors.

5. Promoting knowledge and data sharing

Water is essential to protect environment and ecosystem services and cooperation contributes to exchanging data and information and finding joint management strategies and tools to ensure environmental flow and sustainable conservation.

6. Promoting cooperation on effective mitigation of climate-induced water hazards

The effective mitigation of climate-induced water hazards such as floods and droughts requires cooperation between countries for the exchange of hydrometeorological data and inclusion of stakeholder and sectors on all levels in a basin for effective Early Warning Systems (EWS). In this way, both the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is relevant.

7. Strengthening gender equality for improved transboundary water governance

Improved gender equality in water governance on all levels is necessary to support sustainable management. While women are often the main custodians of water on a household and smallholder farm level, men are disproportionately represented in water governance and infrastructure on regional, national and district levels. Improved gender equality in leadership, decision-making, and governance is strongly correlated with the resilience and effectiveness of water agreements.

8. Water and human rights-based approaches

Marginalized and vulnerable groups are often deprived of participation and influence in transboundary water decision making processes, including development of new infrastructure and water allocation between geographical areas and sectors.

ICWC vision and mission

Our vision

“A world where water is peacefully shared, used, and protected for the well-being of people, society, and nature.”

Our mission

“To generate and share knowledge on the state, trends, and benefits of water cooperation and strengthen capacity of technical and political actors for increased cooperation on shared waters.”



(Photo: Juliana Nan / Shutterstock)

Goals and objectives

The goals, objective, and strategic activities for ICWC derive from the instructions provided in the agreement between UNESCO, Sweden and SIWI.

This agreement provides the main platform for the ICWC implementation over the period 2021-2026. To this end, the long-term goal at the higher level is to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is anticipated to support economic development and welfare in developing countries.

All 17 Sustainable Development Goals are partly or fully underpinned by the need for good water governance. However, for ICWC the long-term goal focuses particularly on Global Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation for all), Global Goal 13 (Climate action), and Global Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).



Being part of the UNESCO Category II water family, the intermediate goal is to contribute to the implementation of the ninth UNESCO IHP strategic plan (2022-2029), Science for a Water Secure World in a Changing Environment. In particular, ICWC will contribute to implementation of priority area 4: “integrated water resources management under global change”; and 5: “water governance based on science for mitigation, adaptation and resilience”.

The objective for ICWC is to contribute to sustainable governance and management of shared water resources by improving cooperation on such resources. The objective constitutes the common ground between the Centre and SIWI’s programmatic objective on shared water governance. The results achieved by ICWC will also contribute to fulfilling SIWI’s mission and vision.

The work of achieving the objective is based on strategic activities with the intention to develop and advance knowledge on transboundary water cooperation through carrying out research and through compilation of existing research results. The knowledge produced and compiled will form the basis for capacity building and policy support of target audiences.

ICWC GOALS AND OBJECTIVE

Long-term goal

To contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for support of economic development and welfare of developing countries.

Intermediate goal

To contribute to the implementation of priority areas 4 and 5 of the strategic plan of the ninth phase of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP-IX), covering 2022-2029.

Objective

The objective of ICWC is to contribute to sustainable governance and management of shared water resources by improving cooperation on such resources.

Reaching our goals through the ICWC Theory of Change

As part of the work to develop this strategy, ICWC has developed the Theory of Change (Figure 3) with a series of steps to achieve its intermediate and long-term goals.

The Theory anticipates that a target audience, well equipped with knowledge of sustainable management of shared water resources, is more likely to make decisions leading towards sustainable governance of such resources. The anticipated outcome is improved water cooperation, with positive effects both at national and regional levels, which should ultimately lead to less tension and conflict.

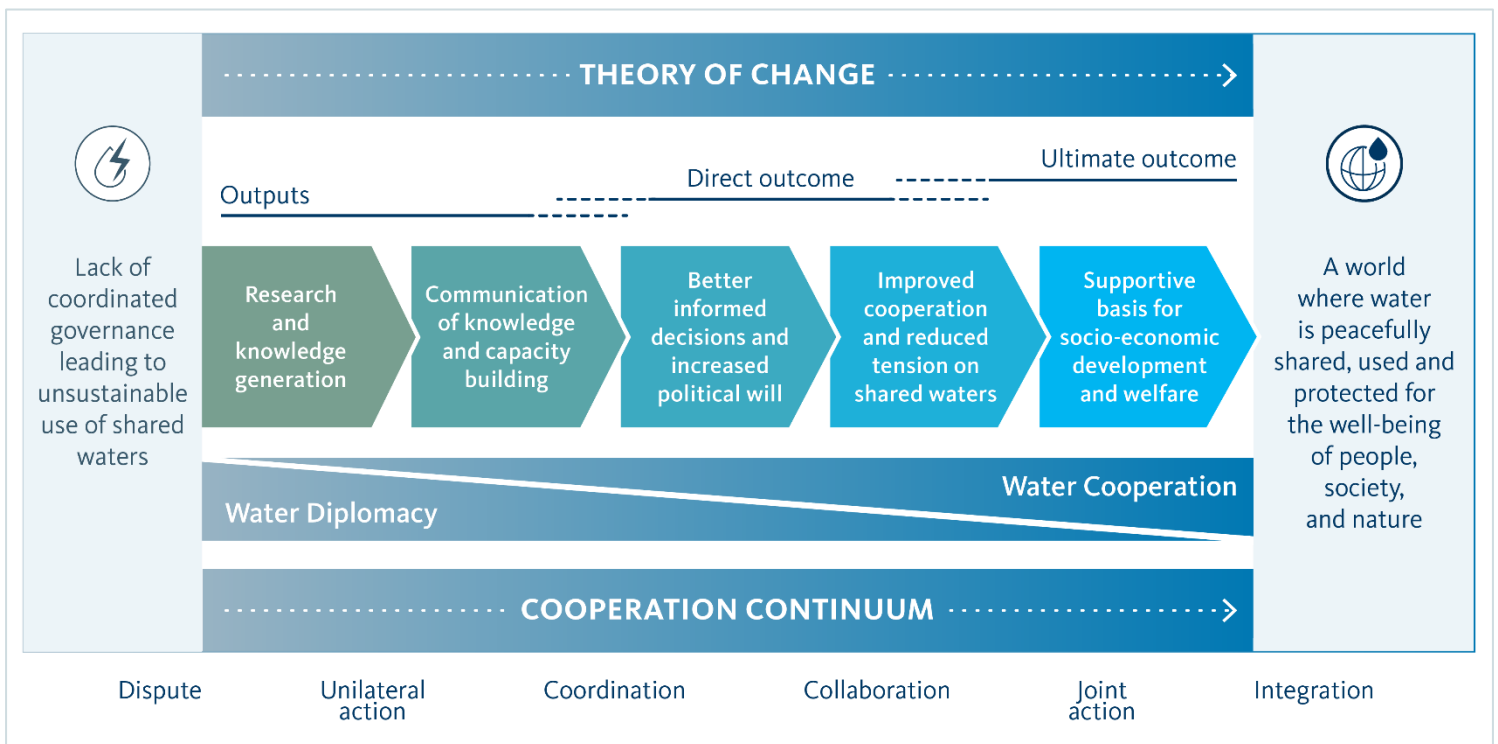


Figure 2: The ICWC Theory of Change outlines anticipated positive linkages between generation and dissemination of knowledge on water cooperation, which if leveraged to support capacity strengthening of technical and political actors will help pave the way for informed decisions, and increased willingness and ability to cooperate on shared waters for the benefit of socio-economic development.

The work ICWC will do to feed into the Theory will be across three action areas:

- conducting research and compiling knowledge;
- undertaking trainings and capacity building; and
- facilitating platforms and networks for interaction among practitioners.

Communication and outreach are used to highlight benefits of cooperation to experts and the general public, thereby contributing to an enabling environment, which will help pave the way for achieving sustainable governance of shared waters. In this way ICWC contributes to the implementation of two priority areas of the IHP IX Strategic Plan. Namely, to support “integrated water resources management under global change” and “water governance based on science for mitigation, adaptation and resilience”.



Empirical research, co-produced with experts from regions where ICWC is engaged, will underpin ICWC activities. ICWC will use research results to support science-based decisions within water governance. New evidence-based knowledge, combined with compiled existing knowledge, will form basis for trainings, capacity building and outreach activities for all sectors involved in water governance and management. ICWC will use the research-based approach to help bridge science and policy for improved cooperation on shared water.

Dialogues and networking will be at the core of the research and capacity building, which will also encourage knowledge-sharing among technical and political actors on international and national levels (Figure 3), to whom ICWC will also provide advisory services and policy support.

ICWC strives to build evidence-based knowledge within the realm of water cooperation and thereby contribute to preventing, mitigating, and resolving conflicts and tensions, with positive effects for human security and economic growth.

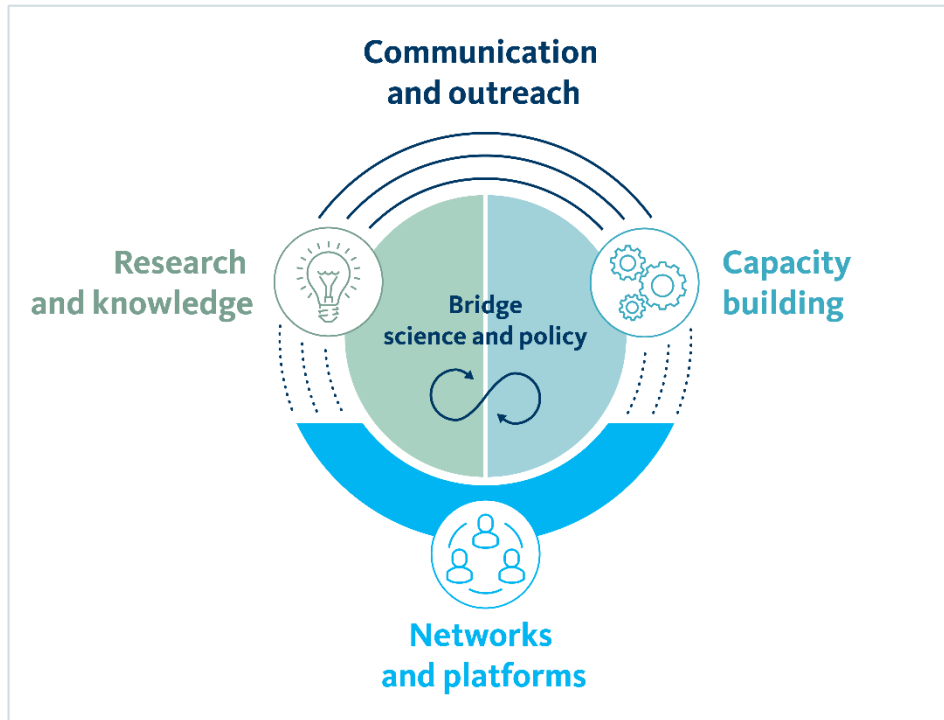


Figure 3: ICWC will undertake knowledge generation and use this knowledge as the basis for capacity building of target audiences. Strong emphasis on communication and dialogues will ensure close ties between different work areas.

Water diplomacy will be used pro-actively in a multi-track and multi-sectoral approach, to encourage water cooperation among technical experts, and policy- and decision makers engaged in governance of shared water resources.

It is crucial for ICWC to incorporate cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, youth empowerment and human rights-based approaches in its activities. The Centre will align its event guidelines with the [World Water Week's Gold Standard](#). Implementing the cross-cutting issues will also contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

ICWC DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

The work of ICWC requires a common understanding of a few concepts related to transboundary water cooperation. Here we present our understanding of three key concepts important for this work.

Transboundary:

Boundaries and borders exist in many ways and forms in the global community: for example, political, sectoral, and societal boundaries. For ICWC, rivers, lakes, and groundwater aquifers shared between nations, communities and sectors are prime targets for engagement and support. ICWC identifies three types of transboundary settings.

International boundaries:

The main transboundary setting addressed by ICWC is international boundaries and comprises of river basins, lakes or aquifers shared between two or more national states.

Subnational boundaries:

ICWC also engages at a subnational level, where formal and informal borders between different entities within countries, such as boundaries between different local government units and other administrative units (i.e., provinces, governorates, municipalities, communities), can be of importance when supporting transboundary water governance. On this local level, the potential for tension and armed conflicts related to water resources are in many cases more pronounced than at international levels.

Sectorial boundaries:

In some cases, sectoral interests drive water priorities. Competition for water use between domestic users, agriculture and industry, or water for ecosystems, are examples where tension may appear in society. Rapidly growing cities exacerbate urban-rural competition for water. Moreover, management of freshwater and coastal and marine water in which a river discharges are examples of silos which would benefit from being bridged.

Therefore, ICWC focuses primarily on political boundaries at international and subnational levels but may address water shared between sectoral boundaries when relevant in a local context, particularly when the use of existing shared water resources is disputed.

Water cooperation:

Water cooperation refers to a wide range of interaction between parties sharing a water resource, such as a river in a source-to sea context, a lake, wetland, or groundwater resource. Such cooperation (technical and political) may occur in a variety of processes, from unilateral action to sparse uncoordinated dialogues across boundaries for example, and to the signing of e.g., framework agreements and institutionalization of management of a shared freshwater resource.

Such cooperation is built on the utilization of shared benefits derived from the water resource. More technical cooperation on water can extend to other areas such as trade and economic integration, prosperity by having impact on human and food security, power sharing pools and trade, and international relations aimed at peace and regional stability at large. Political will is, however, needed for dialogue and cooperation on shared benefits beyond water, even when dialogue is limited to technical issues.

Water diplomacy:

Water diplomacy is a process leading to establishing and/or enhancing technical and political cooperation on shared water among a wide range of actors at multiple levels: formal and informal, intra and inter-state⁵. Water diplomacy is a discipline that can be exercised at different hierarchical levels in society. It has the goal of catalysing regional cooperation, contributing to stability and peace, and it may therefore go beyond discussing only water to include other sectors.

Water diplomacy can be an important part of conflict prevention, particularly in regions affected by increasing water scarcity. In cases where water is not a primary source of dispute, but may be part of underlying historical grievances, a dialogue among technical experts can serve as a vehicle for cooperation beyond water issues. Water diplomacy can thus be used as a confidence building measure among countries or states sharing a water resource.

⁵ Klimes, M., Michel, D., Yaari, E.A. and Restiani, P. 2019. Water diplomacy: The intersect of science, policy and practice. *Journal of Hydrology*, Vol. 575: 1362-1370.

Expected results

To contribute to reaching the goals and objective of ICWC, strategic activities will be carried out within the three action areas listed above. Through these activities a series of outputs will be achieved, which over time, building on each other in a concerted manner, will contribute to ICWC being a global key entity in water cooperation.

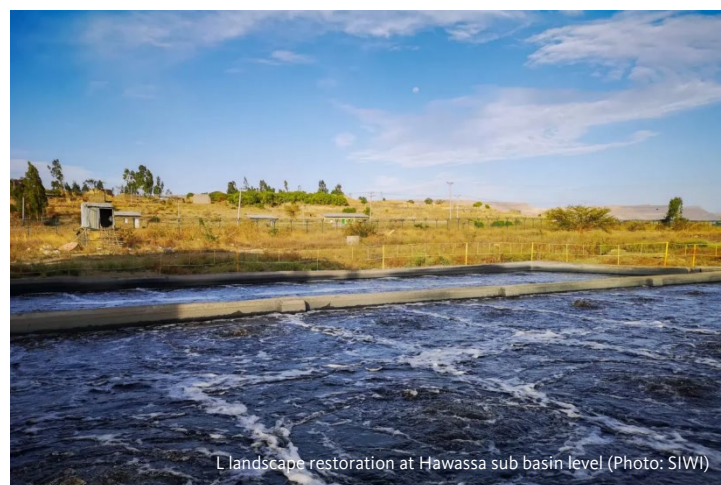
Expected Outputs

Knowledge generation and communication (reports, articles, multimedia)

ICWC will – together with strategic partners – generate new knowledge and novel ideas through undertaking empirical research on the status and use of shared water resources, and on cooperation mechanisms linked to such resources. Focus will be placed on elevating and sharing local knowledge and new voices as part of ongoing basin analysis. The results of the joint partner research will be communicated in reports, peer-reviewed articles, and policy briefs, designed for a variety of specific target audiences as well as for the general public.

ICWC will also compile existing knowledge and produce syntheses of available research for easy access and use by political and technical actors. Such syntheses may be complemented by local examples and case studies to exemplify and highlight particular dimensions.

Recognizing the need to take stock on the status and trends in water cooperation globally, as basis for prioritisation of knowledge generation and policy advice, ICWC plans to produce a publication on the status and trends in water cooperation on shared water resources across the globe. The intention is to make this a recurrent publication, focusing on different regions and themes. Over the six-year agreement period for ICWC, this series of reports on water cooperation is intended to become a firmly established publication in the water cooperation community with reach beyond the water sector.



Landscaping restoration at Hawassa sub basin level (Photo: SIWI)

It is expected that as part of its knowledge generation, ICWC will highlight lesser known but important water cooperation ventures on a more local scale such as cooperation of shared water resources for water supply and sanitation purposes at municipality level. Elevating examples of functional cooperation at this level could serve as inspiration for other countries or regions. Cross-cutting issues and other dimensions of relevance in transboundary water contexts will be highlighted. Among these are gender dimensions, youth empowerment and human right based approaches.

ICWC also intends to shed light on matters such as communication about water cooperation, fair climate adaptation, and digitalization of water diplomacy, all within the framework of transboundary water cooperation.

Capacity building (trainings, courses, workshops)

The knowledge generated and compiled by ICWC will become important building blocks for curriculum development on water diplomacy, water cooperation and governance of shared water resources. Requested training courses, capacity strengthening events, experience exchange opportunities, seminars and webinars will be tailor-made and designed to facilitate shared learning. The participants of such events may be technical experts, policy and decision-makers, academics, youth or advocacy specialists, such as journalists and media representatives.

SHARED WATERS PARTNERSHIP (SWP)

During the past strategy period, ICWC has worked closely with the SIWI-hosted Shared Waters Partnership (SWP) programme. SWP supports cooperation on shared water in regions where water is, or may become, a source of conflict or where water can serve as a catalyst for peace and stability. The programme directly provides opportunities for stakeholders (governments, regional organizations, river basin organizations, civil society, media, academia etc.) to engage in processes to strengthen cooperative transboundary water management practices that play a critical role in building and maintaining peace within and between countries sharing the same river basin, lake, or aquifer.

Furthermore, SWP puts a strong focus on emphasizing gender equality, youth empowerment and a human rights-based approach in its analysis and engagements. The programme works as a catalytic mechanism addressing political hurdles to cooperation, thereby complementing the more traditional support from development agencies. SWP works in close partnership with ICWC in research, analysis, and in the development of its water diplomacy curricula and trainings.

Training events may be implemented in collaboration with other SIWI-led initiatives, such as the Shared Waters Partnership (SWP), Water Governance Facility (WGF), Accountability for Sustainability Partnership (AfS), International Policy (IP) and the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management (S2S Platform). ICWC expects capacity building events to take place every year, involving participants from regions in focus, either as physical events, online activities, or hybrid engagements. ICWC may also act as a bridge between regions, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and experiences among stakeholder groups and sectors from different river basins or countries.

Dialogues and multistakeholder platforms (key stakeholders involved in ICWC activities)

An important component in the encouragement and support of water cooperation is the facilitation of multistakeholder platforms for dialogues and exchange of information and experiences among technical and political actors working in transboundary settings. Together with SWP, ICWC will continue to support inclusive networks among e.g., journalists and women water experts and leaders in several regions. For instance, the “[Women in Water Diplomacy in the Nile Network](#)” and its Nile and Beyond Strategy.

ICWC will also engage in, and contribute to, dialogues facilitated by the S2S Platform in relevant river basins. ICWC and the IP team can also offer access to multistakeholder platforms to foster dialogues within the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Direct outcome

Shared waters governance is anticipated to be strengthened among key stakeholders, as a result of the combined efforts in:

- research and knowledge generation,
- capacity building and
- support of dialogues and network platforms, awareness of, and capacity to undertake.

This support allows for an environment for cooperation on shared water resources.

Ultimate outcome

As a result of the strengthened awareness and capacity to undertake governance of shared waters, the fundamental prerequisites, and conditions to peacefully share, use and protect water resources have improved and thus contribute as a basis for strengthening human security and economic development in target areas.

Cooperating partners

ICWC will implement the strategy in partnership with a variety of partners from different levels, representing governments, academia and civil society.

First and foremost, ICWC will join hands with its two close partners, SIWI and Uppsala University. With SIWI as the host institution, ICWC will build on SIWI-led programmes and initiatives. SIWI will benefit from ICWC as a platform to extend its reach further with results deriving from its activities. Uppsala University, represented by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, hosts the ICWC Research School for International Water Cooperation (see Section 8).

By combining local knowledge and situation analyses with more regional and international experience and perspectives, ICWC can reach further in its strive to advance knowledge and identify gaps for capacity building. Examples of regional collaborating partners are the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), the Blue Peace Initiative and The Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC). ICWC also liaises closely with governments, academia, and civil society organizations for implementation of its activities.

On a strategic level, ICWC collaborates with other UNESCO Category II Centres and like-minded institutions for joint organization of trainings, workshops, and public awareness activities. Examples are the International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change (ICWRGC), the International Centre for Integrated Water Resources Management (ICIWaRM), the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), and the Geneva Water Hub (GWH).



(Photo: Shutterstock)

The Research School for International Water Cooperation

As part of ICWC, the Research School for International Water Cooperation has been established at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University.

The Research School aims to address water cooperation in its broadest sense with a primary focus on water for peace and development. By critically analysing existing research on the linkage between water scarcity and international conflict and cooperation, the school aims to produce cutting-edge research to improve our understanding of water, peace, and conflicts. The research objective necessitates an interdisciplinary approach and collaborative understanding of water management and its contribution to peace and development.

The research school has been an important platform for the facilitation of academic work within ICWC to date. During the first phase of the ICWC, three doctoral students and several research associates and short- and long-term guest researchers contributed with numerous publications, lectures, field studies, seminars, and webinars, all of which have advanced knowledge about water cooperation and its linkages to peace and development.

For the current phase of ICWC (2021-2026), a new partnership agreement with Uppsala University will determine the scope and content for the Research School. This joint platform will be important for continued collaboration as well as being an asset when competing for research funds.

Other strategies to align with

The operational space of ICWC is aligned with the strategies of the agreement partners.

SIWI strategy (2018-2023) and the one to follow (2024-2029)

SIWI's vision is a “Water Wise World” – a world that recognizes the value of water and ensures that it is inclusively shared and used sustainably, equitably and efficiently for all. The mission is to “strengthen water governance for a just, prosperous and sustainable future”. To help implement this strategy, SIWI has set six strategic objectives, and from 2021, four programmatic objectives. Of the latter, the objective to “Contribute to Sustainable Management of Shared Water Resources by Improving Water Governance” is the anchor point for ICWC at SIWI, and as such, ICWC is an important vehicle for SIWI to reach this objective.

UNESCO IHP, IX strategic plan (2022-2029)

The new strategic plan for the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme, “Science for a water secure world in a changing environment”, is currently under development and will be valid for the coming eight years (2022-2029), overlapping with the second ICWC strategy period. Science, education, knowledge, and informed decisions are key words that underpin the UNESCO IHP strategy. The UNESCO IHP has identified five priority areas: 1) Scientific research and innovation; 2) Water education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution; 3) Bridging the data-knowledge gap; 4) Inclusive water management under conditions of global change; and 5) Water governance based on science for mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

Although the work of ICWC is relevant to all these priority areas, the need to facilitate transboundary water cooperation is seen most strongly in areas 4 and 5. This is where the support of ICWC will have its main matching points to the IHP IX strategic plan.

Strategy for Sweden's cooperation with UNESCO (2018-2021)

The cooperation between Sweden and UNESCO is guided by a four-year strategy valid from 2018-2021. A new strategy for the coming period is currently being developed. In the current strategy, Sweden stresses the importance of five areas where Swedish expertise can be useful: i) Human rights and freedom of speech; ii) Sustainable, democratic, and inclusive societies; iii) Gender equality; iv) Environment, climate, and oceans; and v) An efficient and modern organization. ICWC contributes to the fourth area, where strengthening of water cooperation is particularly in focus.

The Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030)

Speaking to the long-term goal of ICWC, the Centre aims to contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to support the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Water governance is an important and intrinsic component of all the 2030 Agenda SDGs. However, ICWC has chosen to focus on three SDGs with particular importance for transboundary water cooperation: SDG 6 on sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; SDG 13 to combat climate change and its impacts; and SDG 16 to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions.

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is an international treaty on climate change, legally binding to its signatories, which entered into force in November 2016. Since this international agreement brings all countries together to tackle the largest challenge of our time, it also has a very strong impetus at both regional and national levels, with the development of the National Determined Contributions as the main vehicles to implement the agreement.

ICWC incorporates the key principles of the Paris Agreement into its work as an additional cross-cutting issue. Climate change impact has a particular relevance to transboundary cooperative dimensions as it contributes to enhancing existing human and national security challenges. Such climate and security linkages, in addition to being local and national concerns, often also drive regionally transboundary impact chains. Climate driven water hazards, such as drought and floods, are prime examples with cascading effects on water and food security, forced migration and competition to access natural and other resources leading to political tension and conflicts.

The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015. It specifies four target areas to prevent and reduce existing disaster risks: i) Understanding disaster risk; ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage risk; iii) Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response.

Since most disasters are water related, including lack of water, the implementation of the Sendai Framework is closely linked to water governance and management, incorporating management of water as a risk in addition to water as a resource. Furthermore, most water related disasters do not know borders, regardless of whether they are subnational or national, or even sectoral. So, preparedness and response must also be transboundary. All in all, taking the implementation of the Sendai Framework into account is of great relevance to ICWC.



(Photo: Shutterstock)

About ICWC

The International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC) was established in 2014 as an independent research institution, hosted by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), with the purpose to advance knowledge on water cooperation within and between countries. It is part of the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme (IHP) Category 2 Centres family, currently encompassing 36 centres focusing on water. ICWC is the only UNESCO Centre located in Sweden and among the first focusing on issues of transboundary water management in connection with peace, conflict, and regional development. The Centre provides a unique environment, combining highly developed capacity to conduct multidisciplinary research with strong policy advice. Working in both research and policy areas, ICWC is set to achieve scientific results as well as policy impacts from its operations. Through its work, ICWC will contribute to the implementation of the UNESCO IHP IX Strategic Plan for 2022-2029.

As part of ICWC, the Research School for International Cooperation is hosted by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. The research school provides basis for in-depth research on water cooperation with a primary focus on water for peace and development.

