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 river or lake basins to implement effective water management arrangements through a shared vision, benefit-sharing principles and transparent and coherent institutional frameworks. Its goal is to enhance cooperation among riparian countries by 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 through confidence and trust building, shared learning and joint action 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 and technical assistance on demand to governments and stakeholders, including legal and institutional 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 BRIDGE in the Goascorán Basin, an area of 2,345 km^2 on the Honduras-El Salvador border. By approaching and incorporating new stakeholders, including the private sector, 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 effective water governance, 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 from 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 provinces and municipalities.

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 dialogues. The Water Law and Governance Support Platform (www.waterlawandgovernance.org) 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 and to increase 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, conflict and instability.

+ 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.

BRIDGE projects worldwide

BRIDGE is applied in five regions with support for learning, communications, dissemination and advisory services at the global level. BRIDGE projects are active since 2011 in the Andes, the Mekong, and Mesoamerica, and since 2014 in West and Central Africa, and East and Southern Africa. BRIDGE supports demonstration actions for improvements in water governance in three transboundary river basins in each region.

BRIDGE ACTIVITIES IN MESOAMERICA

Goascorán – 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 the development the basin.

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

Coatan – 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 – BRIDGE facilitated the progress of an IWRM Plan and kickstarted a water information system which led to new agreements on 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 – 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 the riparian countries.

STORY FROM THE FIELD: 03

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."*

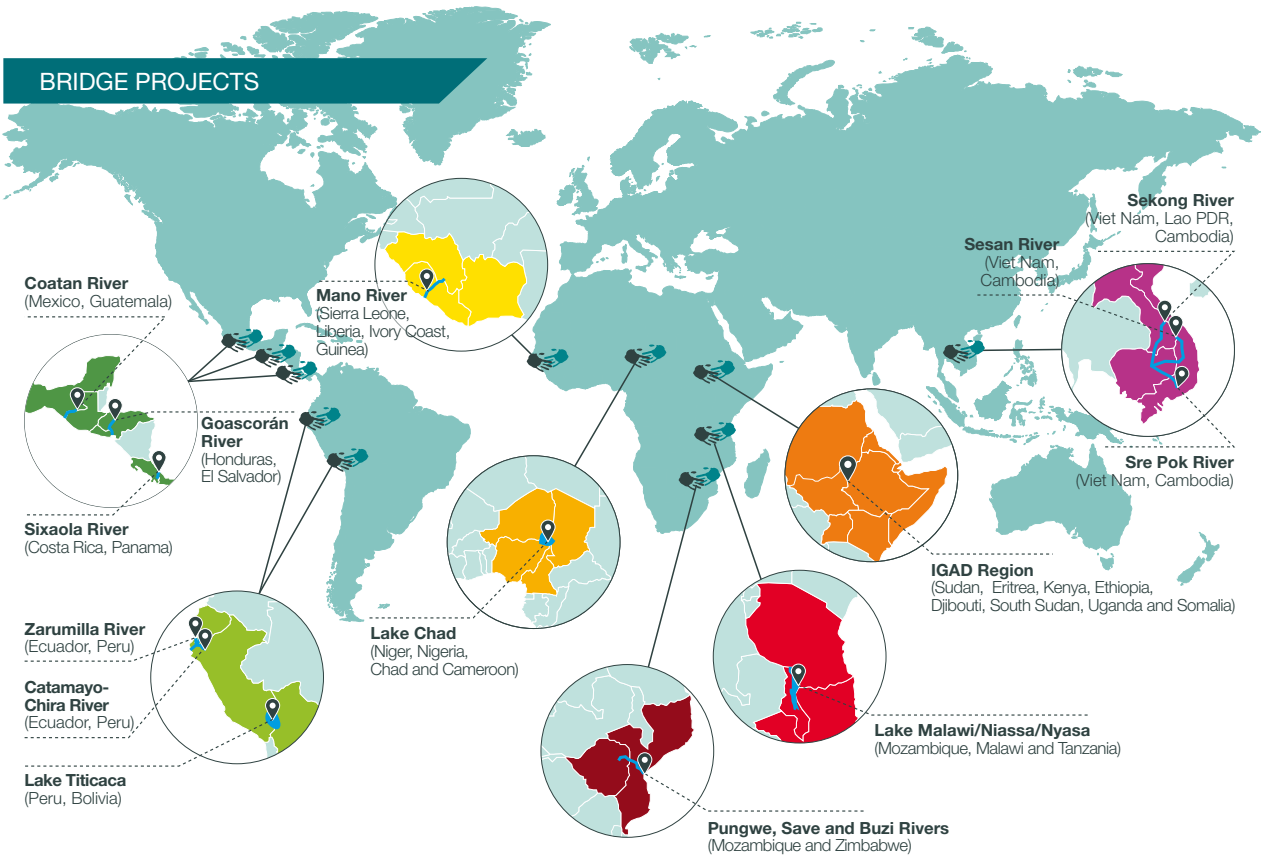
Mrs Dávila is a member of the Champions Network, a group created following a BRIDGE meeting with the aim to promote exchange and empowerment of local basin stakeholders. The Champions Network organises watershed activities and has recently offered collaboration to the Sixaola Binational Commission, enabling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

Titicaca – 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, Sesan and Sre Pok – In the Mekong region, BRIDGE has helped to catalyze transboundary dialogue in the Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok River Basins. 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. A number of workshops on water diplomacy have been conducted. A network of national champions for water cooperation has been established, and an online GIS information platform was launched (3sbasin.org). BRIDGE also supported the process of ratification by Viet Nam of the UN Watercourses Convention.

BRIDGE PROJECTS



BRIDGE ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA:

Mano – A priority of BRIDGE work in the Mano River basin is the promotion of, and support to the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks for water governance reform. The project will initially focus on the facilitation of a shared vision for the Mano, supported by an action plan for sustainable development, as a starting point for potential development of a water charter for the Mano river basin.

Lake Chad – BRIDGE will support existing initiatives and strengthen institutional arrangements already in place. BRIDGE will support the Lake Chad Basin Commission to facilitate the implementation of IWRM in the basin and the production and distribution of thematic basin maps. During its initial phase, the project will also focus on supporting countries with the ratification process of the Lake Chad Basin Water Charter.

Horn of Africa – BRIDGE will support the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in coordinating member states' efforts in the water sector. It will help to develop mechanisms for coordination and information sharing, including drafting of protocols. BRIDGE will support capacity building and facilitate dialogues around shared water resources.

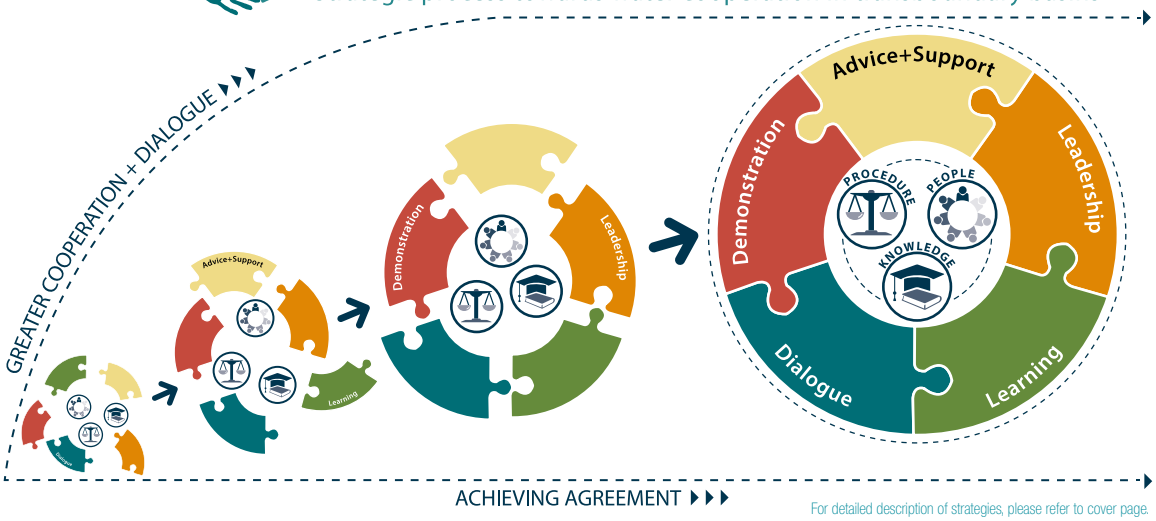
Pungwe, Save and Buzi – BRIDGE will address cooperation needs in the Pungwe, Save and Buzi River Basins, bilaterally and locally. Dialogue and consensus building, along with technical support in operationalizing the Joint Water Commission, will be provided. BRIDGE will build on the existing bilateral agreement between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Best practises derived from local experience will serve to further strengthen existing, and support the establishment of new forums for stakeholder participation.

Lake Malawi/Niassa/Nyasa (LMNN) – BRIDGE will collaborate with the recently established Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM). Training and capacity building will focus on agreed priority areas for cooperation. The project will benefit regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and ZAMCOM, national and local water institutions, and communities in the basin to support an ecosystem approach to IWRM implementation.

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

BRIDGE - BUILDING RIVER DIALOGUE AND GOVERNANCE

Strategic process towards water cooperation in transboundary basins



For detailed description of strategies, please refer to cover page.

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Photographs
©Shutterstock/Thanyapat Wanitchanon; ©Carla Vaucher/IUCN; James Giambrone/WFP; ©Shutterstock/erichon
Design: Maro Haas, France
Infographic: Carolyne Daniel, Zoï Environment Network

MORE INFORMATION

BRIDGE website: **www.iucn.org/bridge**

WATER LAW AND GOVERNANCE website: **www.waterlawandgovernance.org**

CONTACTS

Mark Smith
Director IUCN Global Water Programme
Mark.smith@iucn.org

Alejandro Iza
Director IUCN Environmental Law Centre
Alejandro.iza@iucn.org