

including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Territorial Development, Natural Resources and Environment, Governorship, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

### Knowledge management and information exchange

Effective management in transboundary basins depends on the use of knowledge that comes from reliable access to data and information. Crucially then, knowledge leads to learning, giving institutions and stakeholders tools they need to carry out effective basin planning. A key factor in the use of information in transboundary basins is trust. If data is suspicious or unreliable, conflicts can emerge making basin planning difficult, if not impossible. Joint collection and monitoring of data is an essential activity for building trust in transboundary basins. Another successful method to build trust is through dialogue and technical coordination. Working together on technical activities such as basin maps, profiles, or water information systems provides a space for dialogue and cooperation, having the effect of strengthening relationships and building trust between stakeholders and institutions.

An essential function of a transboundary basin institution is monitoring water quantity and quality through jointly managed actions and coordinating the exchange of information based on established data sharing agreements at basin and watershed levels.<sup>1</sup> Data and information should be kept in databases with transparent protocols, easily accessible to the public and updated regularly. Often it is advisable to have a third party verify data integrity.

In the 3S basin, until recently, information and data has been difficult to obtain for local inhabitants. IUCN has launched a 3S website that focuses on databases and information sharing, linking project documents and 3S basin information to provincial, national, and regional stakeholders. The 3S basin is a transboundary tributary and its data links to the Lower Mekong basin. Basin data of the Lower Mekong is managed by the Mekong River Commission which is an intergovernmental institution created by a treaty signed by Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.

1. Dublin Statement 1992

## Transboundary Water Institutions

### Key Message

Transboundary institutions build resilience in river basins and their communities by providing capacity to manage changes to physical, economic, and political stress through basin planning and sustainable water management. Institutions are the 'engine' of transboundary basin governance, providing the means, mandate, and resources necessary to implement formal and informal agreements, reflecting the needs and interests of stakeholders.

To be effective in the management of shared waters, transboundary institutions, including both organisations and networks, ideally have a high degree of autonomy, active interaction with the national system and a high level of inclusiveness. They should promote an ecosystems based approach and exchange of information to enhance decision-making in the implementation of any basin agreements.



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### Examples from the field

IUCN has provided support for creating a transboundary institution in the Catamayo-Chira basin. In February 2012, the Presidents of Peru and Ecuador signed a joint Presidential Declaration calling for the establishment of a bi-national commission for the Catamayo-Chira and Puyango-Tumbes basin. Based on the declaration and the momentum it created, under the leadership of National Water Authorities and the sub-national governments of Loja, Ecuador and Piura, Peru, a process has started toward the establishment of a bi-national commission, or joint institution with the responsibility of transboundary water management in Catamayo-Chira River basin.

In the Coatán Basin shared between Mexico and Guatemala, IUCN is supporting a bottom-up approach to formulating water institutions on both sides of the border. The project focuses on building cooperation at the local level demonstrated by the establishment of the Buena Vista Microwatershed Committee (Chiapas, Mexico) and exchange of experiences between microwatershed councils in San Marcos, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. Local water 'champions' have assembled and organised to sharpen their skills in water governance and cooperation. A range of stakeholders, including municipal leaders, are joining these local-level, informal institutions, catalysing change through joint action plans across borders, sharing information and knowledge on water solutions.



### Learn more

**WANI Toolkits**  
**RULE** – Reforming Water Governance  
**NEGOTIATE** – Reaching Agreements over Water  
**SHARE** – Managing Waters Across Boundaries

**Websites**  
[www.waterlawandgovernance.org](http://www.waterlawandgovernance.org)  
[www.iucn.org/bridge](http://www.iucn.org/bridge)

**Contact us**  
[water@iucn.org](mailto:water@iucn.org)



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### Recommendations

- Transboundary institutions should promote the ecosystems based approach. Rather than focusing on only one aspect of water management, institutions should govern holistically; an integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable and equitable use of water.
- Transboundary institutions ideally should be flexible while maintaining a high degree of autonomy with respect to the national authorities of the basin states. They can be supranational in nature and independent of other national authorities. Impartiality allows for a less political more equitable decision-making process on shared waters. They should take an adaptive management approach, incorporating a modest degree of operational redundancy and utilising conflict resolution mechanisms to address problems as they arise.
- Interconnectivity should be promoted with national agencies which support the implementation of programs, projects and activities. A transboundary institution may involve national institutions through the establishment of operational frameworks, leaving implementation to the States or, the institution may also create a decision-making structure that directly incorporates national agencies.
- Public participation and learning allows local stakeholders, often overlooked and underrepresented, to be part of the decision making and planning process. It enables access to local and traditional knowledge and increases transparency and legitimacy of the institution. *Inclusiveness* and *learning* should be the guiding principles of the institution, with capacity building mainstreamed into all levels of the basin development plan.
- A strong focus on information gathering and exchange should be present in a transboundary institution. Regular exchange of data and information are essential for building sound knowledge on shared resources, conducting basin planning, and critically, the development of dialogue and trust.

#### About IUCN

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN's work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO Members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

#### About BRIDGE - Building River Dialogue and Governance

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.

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