



A clearer definition of water diplomacy can help improve policy implementation for transboundary river systems, such as the Mekong, shown here. Source: Wikipedia.

What is Water Diplomacy?

Water diplomacy can be defined as the use of diplomatic instruments to existing or emerging disagreements and conflicts over shared water resources with the aim to solve or mitigate those for the sake of cooperation, regional stability, and peace.

Water diplomacy is about applying diplomatic instruments, not technical ones. Water diplomacy's diplomatic instruments may include negotiations, dispute-resolution mechanisms, the establishment of consultation platforms, and the organization of joint fact-finding missions. Technical instruments—such as establishing basin-wide management plans or joint monitoring networks—are not part of water diplomacy. While diplomatic and technical instruments often build on each other and can be directly linked, consistently defining water diplomacy merits this strict differentiation as will become clear later on.

Water diplomacy focuses on disagreements and conflicts. Disagreements and conflicts are not narrowly defined as official, full-fledged disputes being fought with diplomacy, or even violence. Instead conflicts include situations in which user groups (nationally or internationally) have competing uses for a scarce resource that can lead to disagreements that destabilize communities, countries or regions. Conflicts can relate to different