



Kathmandu Declaration on Inclusive Water Cooperation

Preamble


Water cooperation among different users, sectors, and countries is essential for harnessing the benefits of shared water resources, preventing and mitigating conflicts, and addressing the challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and human overuse of resources, among others. Water diplomacy, as we understand it, is a process of empowering and representing diverse voices and transcending traditional negotiations by integrating the interests and needs of both state and non-state stakeholders in water cooperation. However, diplomatic processes are often constrained by dominant interests and narrow perspectives of a few powerful actors. Therefore, to achieve true inclusivity in water cooperation, we must rethink established norms and embrace relational and holistic ways of thinking when addressing crucial issues such as water, food and energy security, biodiversity preservation, wetland conservation and climate resilience.

The Kathmandu Declaration is a result of the 7th Water and Peace Seminar held in Kathmandu. It serves as an open invitation to diverse actors to reflect on their roles and actively participate in fostering inclusivity in water diplomacy and water cooperation, tailored to their regional contexts and specific contributions.

This Declaration is based on:

- The acknowledgement that a comprehensive approach to water governance must integrate various intersecting issues;
- The need for innovative solutions and adaptive strategies in water diplomacy to meet evolving challenges;
- The recognition of the importance of state sovereignty in water governance while balancing it with the need for regional cooperation;
- The acknowledgement that inclusivity is fundamental for ensuring diverse voices and perspectives in water management and governance, hence in both operational and political decisions on water;
- The recognition that inclusiveness extends beyond NGOs to include academia, media, research institutions, grassroots movements, local communities and non-human actors;
- A strong belief that true democratic engagement requires the active involvement of community representatives in water governance decisions, also regarding transboundary issues;
- The acknowledgement of the difficulties civil society and local communities face in engaging with formal governmental processes and negotiations, which limits their influence on water policy;
- A concern about how current geopolitical conflicts and tensions can disrupt water diplomacy and hinder collaborative efforts among nations sharing water resources.

We, participants of the 7th Water and Peace Seminar, commit to the following articles and call on actors involved in water diplomacy and water cooperation to join us:





Article 1: Commitment to inclusive water cooperation

- Advocate for participatory democracy that actively engages local communities, indigenous groups, civil society organizations, gender and disability representative groups, marginalized groups and private sector actors in water governance decisions, especially in transboundary contexts.
- Advocate for solutions that provide mutual benefits, emphasizing that cooperation can strengthen state sovereignty while contributing to sustainable management of shared waters.
- Foster a culture of collaboration by encouraging collaborative practices and conflict resolution mechanisms that enhance mutual understanding and foster peaceful dialogue among countries sharing water resources.


Article 2: Embracing diversity beyond human actors

- Advocate for the inclusion of all living entities within water ecosystems, integrating biodiversity considerations into water cooperation.
- Promote the recognition of rivers and ecosystems as key stakeholders in water diplomacy, ensuring their integrity is considered.

Article 3: Further development of tools for participation

- Emphasize the necessity for robust legal frameworks that promote cooperation for effective implementation of agreements on shared resources.
- Encourage the integration of diverse stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, and non-state actors, into the processes and decision-making structures of international water conventions and basin treaties to ensure comprehensive and equitable water governance.
- Advocate for adaptive governance models within these treaties that strengthen inclusive practices and facilitate dialogue among all parties, so that the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders are addressed.
- Identify and tackle barriers that hinder participation, including through training and capacity-development for marginalized voices.
- Support structured participation mechanisms that facilitate input from stakeholders, including local communities and youth, and take into account cross-generational considerations for sustainable water resource management.

Article 4: Building the basis for transformative water diplomacy

- Emphasize the need for increased investment in Track Two and Track Three diplomacy, which facilitates non-governmental dialogue and cooperation among conflicting parties (Track Two) and among the broader public (Track Three).
 - Develop and promote innovative, flexible and creative environments and frameworks that enable informal actors to participate meaningfully in water cooperation and complement formal diplomatic efforts.
 - Promote efforts to build trust and overcome social and cultural differences among diverse stakeholders, facilitating more unified and cooperative efforts.
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We call for concrete measures to

- Mobilize funding and resources to enable effective participation and influence in water cooperation and diplomacy of civil society, local communities and marginalized groups.
- Reduce restrictions on civil society activities imposed by some governments, cultivating a more supportive environment for these actors.
- Support the advocacy of working with nature, emphasising 'soft' nature-based solutions rather than 'hard' engineering options where this is possible, in respect of the voice of nature and non-human beings.
- Make essential data on river systems and related human activities more accessible in order to strengthen the agency of non-state actors.
- Support the formation of stronger networks and alliances to unify voices from different human and non-human actors, enabling more effective collaboration and advocacy in water diplomacy.

This Declaration was jointly drafted by participants of the 7th Water and Peace Seminar, taking place in Kathmandu, Nepal, and online on 26-27 March 2025.



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