



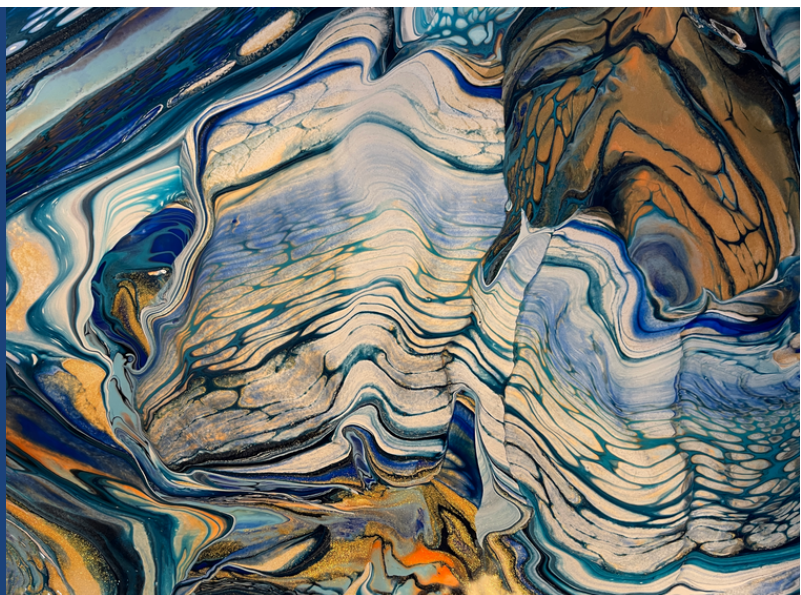
Using the Environment in Service of a Peace Process

An Institutional Mechanism in Practice

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This brief proposes a new approach to environmental peacebuilding. This resilient, transferable multilateral approach is based on the MEDRC model. It supports the core parties to a conflict in using transboundary environmental issues in support of a peace process. Through this transferable institutional mechanism, the full spectrum of practical initiatives and mediation mechanisms to support peace can be put in place.



Conflict and Cooperation

Transboundary Natural Resource Management

Pressure on natural resources such as climate change, population expansion, desertification, deforestation, and the over-extraction of finite resources, may lead to or exacerbate conflict. If these natural resources cross borders, there is a further risk of these natural resources becoming politicized and becoming a driver of conflict between states. Perceived ownership over transboundary natural resources is often embedded in culture and religion, meaning national resources often become heavily politicized.

Natural resources management can also be advanced as entry points for bringing people, and even states, together. However, it is important to understand the complexity of causes, drivers in the conflicts and the interplay between the environment and conflict.

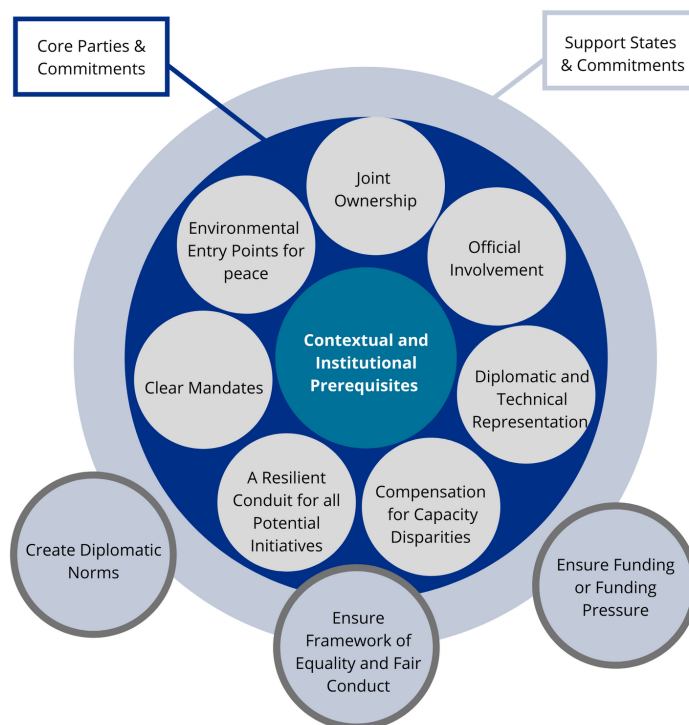
A significant challenge in transboundary natural resource management is to bring all stakeholders together to negotiate solutions to critical problems [1].

It is critical, therefore, that the motivations and interests of actors involved, especially at Track 1 diplomatic level, are represented through a diplomatic mechanism.

Environmental issues such as water, climate change, and desertification also present an entry point into a peace process for conflict parties. In this brief, water presents a fitting example.

Water risks can be caused by a range of environmental conditions and various water uses across economic sectors, including domestic water supply, hydroelectricity, and agriculture. These risks can occur at varying transboundary scales and deeply impact the stability of societies as well as inter-state relations. When disputes over water resources occur, cooperation becomes dysfunctional, and the productive management of shared water resources becomes impaired.

The centrality of institutions in hydro-diplomacy and effective transboundary water management cannot be overemphasized. Studies have shown that the existence or absence of cooperative transboundary institutions such as river basin organizations (RBOs) or third-party international organizations present indicators toward cooperation capacity or likelihood of dispute over shared water resources [2].



The Institutional Mechanism in Practice: The MEDRC model

Since its establishment as a multilateral international organization, MEDRC has acted as a practical institutional model for environmental peacebuilding. Its multilateral framework suggests six contextual prerequisites that should inform an effective multilateral approach. These elements are further developed below.

- Clear mandate
- High-level political will (government exists as the operating system)
- Political engagement in activities alongside technical capacity
- Inclusivity and membership in the organization
- A resilient structure for all potential initiatives necessary to use water for peace including financial resilience
- Mechanisms to overcome differences in capacity between riparian countries

Its legal framework includes the 1996 MEDRC Establishment Agreement which established the mechanism through an intergovernmental agreement, and the 1997 MEDRC Headquarters Agreement between the organization and the government of the Sultanate of Oman.

The latter provides recognition of the organization as an autonomous non-profit international institution with an international juridical personality. The latter recognizes the inviolability of the Headquarters Seat and guarantees freedom of assembly and full freedom of discussions and decisions at meetings convened by the Center in relation to its official activities.

Clearly mandated

MEDRC's mandate was determined through the 1996 Establishment Agreement and reaffirmed and added to in 2015. The three mandates that inform MEDRC's activities are:

1. To assist in the Middle East Peace Process
2. To find solutions to freshwater scarcity
3. To be a 'model organization' for States seeking to use transboundary environmental issues in the service of a peace process.

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Being clearly mandated enables MEDRC to move beyond narrower definitions of water cooperation. Joint management of a shared water resource and pro-active peacebuilding requires a broader approach; the core parties provide a mandate to generally support peace and find solutions to the freshwater shortage. Where this is not possible the mandate should focus on any common water challenge or non-contentious technology, research area or geography of interest to the core parties. The goal is to find an initially narrow basis for dialogue that can be expanded as conditions permit. For MEDRC, the use of desalination as a non-contentious technology, initially allowed states to engage. The flexibility of the mandate has meant that MEDRC is able to expand into covering issues around water scarcity such as wastewater and reuse as well environmental issues impacting the region more broadly such as climate change.

Cultivating high-level political will

Successful peace processes are co-equal partnerships between core party governments and supporting states where appropriate.

A successful mechanism should involve all core parties to the conflict and supporting states, as joint and equal partners. The United States, Oman, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Qatar, Netherlands, Spain, South Korea, Japan and Germany are member states of MEDRC and co-equal guarantors of the MEDRC process. The member states provide a wider multilateral framework through financially supporting the mechanism and showing tangible support for the peace process whilst also enforcing broader multilateral norms.

The parity of esteem that is advanced enables the core parties to the conflict to be involved at an official international level. Initiatives centered solely on civil society, the academy and non-state actors do not provide sufficient linkages or bearing on a formal peace process that is intergovernmental, political and diplomatic.

Government participation and leadership provide the ability to include the broad spectrum of technical, academic, state agency and system-wide expertise and coordination as required. It also ensures easy diffusion of progress across broader leadership, government systems and sectors within the conflicting countries. It links progress in water directly to all other elements or final status areas for discussion between governments.

Practically, this structure facilitates the success of initiatives undertaken through the mechanism. This may include general official buy-in, visa support, access to contested spaces, and ready access to clearances and permissions amongst others.

Diplomatic and technical representation

The institutional framework should allow political and diplomatic considerations to permeate all transboundary interactions. Thus, structures should go beyond the technical to embrace the diplomatic and political. Core party governments must be represented at the technical and diplomatic level in the governance of the organization and should meet at regular intervals. In the context of MEDRC, every Member State has a diplomatic Executive Council member and a Technical Representative, typically from a national water agency/ministry.

Despite the clear limits to what technical cooperation alone can achieve in conflicting political contexts, water issues remain largely a topic for technical and development cooperation [3]. The integration of environment and natural resources into peacebuilding is a security imperative, any new mechanism must reach beyond the purely technical and include diplomatic representation in its leadership and activities [4].

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The core issues in transboundary water management; property rights, customary and modern property rights, water pricing and technical approaches between countries are political. As a result, they cannot be effectively concluded by technical water experts alone. Similarly, the most common transboundary mediation mechanisms are highly political. On a practical level, a diplomatic presence also provides protection for technical experts working with an opposing side in the context of conflict.

In addition, such a structure provides a valuable link and space for ongoing and additional cooperation and understanding between technical and diplomatic strands within and between countries. The involvement of diplomats ensured immediate connection between water and other elements of diplomatic negotiation. Finally, government involvement can minimize principal-agent, academic-practitioner, and rational-reality gaps.

Resilient conduit for potential initiatives

The mechanism can propose and become directed by member states to pursue various peacebuilding initiatives. This could include mediated dialogue, information management, modeling and scenario building, and capacity building. Member states exercise complete control over the nature and extent of the initiatives.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to a peace process or conflict resolution. A peace process can take decades of varying degrees of conflict.

Any effective mechanism should provide a resilient framework for a broad array of technical and political peacebuilding initiatives, including Track 1 through to Track 3. The nature and extent of the initiatives will depend on the state of the peace process.

The mechanism must be capable of pursuing initiatives in all of the three categories of risk-prone international basins identified by Yoffe et. al. and broaden its focus further as required [5]. In the context of MEDRC, a resilient and adaptable framework is facilitated through consistent biannual meetings since 1996 and a range of activities including research, joint training, development cooperation, capacity building and support for core party dialogue. All initiatives that are advanced as part of MEDRC are subject to Member State evaluation and approval.

At its most basic, the mechanism provides a regular and resilient framework for intergovernmental contact. At its most advanced it might be the support mechanism for final status negotiations on water or other environmental issues.

Minimize harmful capacity disparities

Capacity disparities are a common cause of treaties, institutions, development regularly being seen as inefficient, ineffective, and sometimes a cause for tension themselves [6]. In recognizing this, MEDRC actively conducts activities to minimize harmful capacity disparities between the core parties through a dedicated bilateral capacity building program.

This program is split into training and research components.

It is important to note that bilateral programs conducted by MEDRC are not programs between member states that MEDRC mediates as a third party. Bilateral programs are between MEDRC as an intergovernmental entity with member states who are eligible as OECD-DAC listed receivers of donor aid. For MEDRC, this includes bilateral programming in Palestine and Jordan.

How MEDRC is structured and operated enables it to exist as a small-scale core organization that can expand and contract depending on member state political will and available finances. MEDRC is inherently designed to be able to be closed, thus avoiding the trap of the organization becoming a solution looking for a problem. Should core party governments no longer seek to engage in its multilateral framework, it can be closed in six months and have its research facilities ascertained by the host nation.



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