CONCEPT

Water Diplomacy and Transboundary Water Cooperation: Shared Basins, Water Law and Negotiation

21 – 25 December 2026
Paris - Right Bank business hotel



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Introduction:

Water diplomacy decides whether states sharing a river, lake or transboundary aquifer turn competing demands into agreed rules or into lasting tension. Many water and foreign affairs teams still enter basin talks with allocation figures alone, without a legal position, shared data or options for joint benefits. This Core Concept course equips officials to apply international water law principles, design joint institutions, use hydrological evidence in negotiation and prevent disputes through mediation. Participants rehearse a multi-party basin negotiation and finish with a Shared Basin Cooperation Framework and Negotiation Brief.

Course Objectives:

- Assess water security risks and interdependencies in a shared river, lake or transboundary aquifer using a basin diagnostic
- Apply equitable and reasonable utilisation, no significant harm, notification of planned measures and cooperation duties to a planned project in a shared basin
- Design benefit-sharing options and joint institutional arrangements that go beyond volumetric water allocation
- Structure data and information exchange and use hydrological scenario results as evidence at the negotiating table
- Plan negotiation, mediation and stakeholder engagement strategies that prevent escalation of transboundary water disputes
- Draft a Shared Basin Cooperation Framework and Negotiation Brief for a hypothetical multi-country basin

Target Audience:

- Water ministry managers responsible for national positions on shared rivers, lakes and aquifers
- Foreign affairs managers who lead or advise delegations in transboundary water talks
- Water authority planners responsible for allocation, drought response and cross-border project assessment
- River basin organisation and joint commission secretariat managers who coordinate member states
- Development agency and financing institution managers who design and fund basin cooperation programmes

Course Outline:

Day 1: Water Security and Shared Waters: Basin Context and Diagnostic

- Water Diplomacy Defined: Science, Politics and Problem-Framing of Shared Water Questions
- Shared Water Typology: Transboundary Rivers, International Lakes and Transboundary Aquifers
- Water Security Drivers: Demand Growth, Upstream-Downstream Asymmetry and Ecosystem Needs
- Integrated Water Resources Management and the Dublin Principles at Basin Scale
- Transboundary Basin Diagnostic Sheet: Riparian Map, Uses, Pressures and Existing Arrangements

Day 2: International Water Law Principles and the Global Water Conventions

- Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses: Scope and Structure
- Equitable and Reasonable Utilisation: Relevant Factors and Weighing Matrix
- Article 7 Obligation Not to Cause Significant Harm and Due Diligence Standard
- Notification of Planned Measures: Information Package, Reply Period and Consultation Steps
- Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes: Joint Bodies, Monitoring and Alarm Systems

Day 3: Cooperation Instruments: Benefit-Sharing, Joint Institutions and Shared Data

- Benefit-Sharing Framework: Benefits to the River, From the River, Because of and Beyond the River
- Basin Commission Design: Mandate, Membership, Secretariat and Decision Rules
- Data and Information Exchange Protocol: Hydrometric Networks, Common Formats and Access Rules
- Hydrological Modelling for Negotiation at Overview: Water Balance Scenarios and Shared Model Governance
- Joint Monitoring Programme and Early Warning Arrangements for Floods and Pollution Incidents

Day 4: Climate Stress, Negotiation Strategy and Conflict Prevention

- Climate Change and Drought in Shared Basins: Variability Clauses and Adaptive Allocation Rules
- Interest-Based Negotiation for Water: Positions, Interests, BATNA and Zone of Possible Agreement
- Third-Party Mediation, Good Offices and Fact-Finding for Water Disputes
- Stakeholder Engagement Map: Basin Communities, Water Users, Women and Civil Society
- Financing Transboundary Cooperation: Joint Investment Projects, Development Partners and Cost-Sharing Formulas

Day 5: Role-Play: Hypothetical Basin Negotiation and Cooperation Framework

- Case Brief: Three Fictional Riparian States Sharing a River and an Aquifer Under Drought Stress
- Delegation Preparation: Mandate, Legal Arguments and Hydrological Evidence Pack per Country
- Multi-Party Negotiation Role-Play with a Neutral Mediator on a Planned Upstream Dam
- Cooperation Framework Drafting: Principles, Benefit-Sharing Package and Basin Commission Terms
- Shared Basin Cooperation Framework and Negotiation Brief Presentation and Peer Challenge

Skills You Will Gain:

- Transboundary Basin Diagnostics
- International Water Law Application
- Benefit-Sharing Design
- Basin Institution Design
- Hydrological Evidence Interpretation
- Water Negotiation Strategy
- Water Dispute Mediation
- Cooperation Finance Structuring

Why Attend This Course:

- Return with a Shared Basin Cooperation Framework and Negotiation Brief tested in a multi-party role-play
- Enter basin talks with a legal position, a data plan and benefit-sharing options instead of allocation figures alone
- Answer a neighbouring state's notification of planned measures with a structured, principle-based reply
- Compare approaches with ministry, basin organisation and development agency peers from several countries

Conclusion:

Shared rivers, lakes and aquifers are managed through agreed principles, trusted data and institutions that outlast individual negotiations. The course moves from water security, shared water types and IWRM, through the principles of the two global water conventions, to benefit-sharing, basin commissions, data exchange and hydrological scenarios, then to drought clauses, negotiation, mediation, stakeholder engagement and financing. The final day applies this to a hypothetical three-country basin and produces a Shared Basin Cooperation Framework and Negotiation Brief.