



The Principles to Foster Peace before, during, and after Water-related Disasters

Rationale of the Principles

As water is a fundamental source for lives and livelihood of people and a key element of the environment, excess, shortage, and/or pollution of water have been of major concern by leaders, politicians, diplomats, stakeholders, and citizens. Such concern and awareness are heightened particularly when water is in an extreme status. Women, children, and vulnerable populations are particularly at higher risk in emergencies.

There are cases in which water hazards such as floods, droughts, and accidental water pollution due to natural hazards trigger technological disasters and other following consequences such as water-related diseases in national and international watercourses leading to tensions among countries. For example, flood may cause contamination of drinking water resources with chemical or other polluting substances. In that case, natural disasters in the form of flood can pose significant public health issues because of their environmental consequences. In addition, devastating natural disasters combined with the lack of comprehensive response to natural disasters can further worsen political instability of a country. Mismanagement of water sources and regional water conflicts have the potential to cause transboundary water hazards such as dam failure. These cases show the significance of joint management of shared basins to prevent longer water conflicts.

At the same time, there are more cases in which water-related hazards become opportunities to foster peace among riparian countries by their sharing critical information and extending support to affected countries by neighboring countries. Countries and stakeholders can hope for better relations by jointly overcoming water hazards. Peace through water hazards, however, does not automatically happen, and people should be prepared and take necessary actions to build peace through water hazards.

The Principles to Foster Peace before, during, and after Water-related Disasters proposed by the HELP, in collaboration with the Geneva Water Hub, other participating organizations and key experts who provided feedback during the process, are a set of recommended actions that parties can take before, during, and after possible water hazards to foster peace among countries and parties. Countries and stakeholders can make use of the Principles to effectively and smoothly build peace by adopting and tailoring the principles.

Principle 1: Enhance leaders' awareness and actions to foster peace before, during, and after water-related disasters

- Promote awareness among leaders that disasters have brought more cooperation than conflicts in the past, and that cooperation in time of water hazards can foster, establish, and maintain peace.
- Include discussion on disaster management/cooperation in regional/basin-wide summits by Heads of State and Government. Include discussion on conflicts at international and national dialogues on disaster risk reduction (DRR).
- Include transboundary cooperation before, during and after disasters in statements by Heads of State and Government in bilateral, regional and international Summits.
- Discuss cooperative actions among leaders at the time of major disasters, including disaster information sharing, relief and recovery, and critical infrastructure. Discuss not only ordinary disasters but include slow-onset ones such as droughts and their impacts including migration.
- Jointly declare that leaders will cooperate at the time of disasters. Prepare and list a leaders' set of actions before, during and after disasters.
- Support transboundary cooperation and the establishment of agreements on the cooperative management of basins among countries, including a dedicated reference to cooperation at the time of disasters.
- Encourage countries to accede to/ make use of the two United Nations global Water Conventions, which provide crucial frameworks and useful tools for reducing disaster risk in transboundary basins
- Raise awareness among leaders, stakeholders, and citizens on the alarming fact that climate change is impacting peace and regional stability, including in transboundary basins.
- Include discussion on accidental pollution by disasters on transboundary watercourses and develop monitoring mechanisms and early warning systems based on a precautionary approach.
- Be aware that the protection of women, children, and vulnerable population is critical for emergency management, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including and particularly in fragile context.
- Promote transnational resilience so that countries in regions including riparian ones can effectively cooperate in holistic manners at the time of emergency.

Principle 2: Ensure the respect of human rights law and international humanitarian law before, during and after water-related disasters

- Human dignity shall be respected and protected in the event of disasters. Persons affected by disasters are entitled to the respect for and protection of their human rights in accordance with international law.
- The human rights to water and to a healthy environment as an aspect of the fundamental right to life may also be used to demonstrate a right to assistance under human rights law as well as customary international law.
- Response to disasters shall take place in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and on the basis of non-discrimination, while taking into account the needs of the vulnerable communities.
- Be fully aware that instruments such as the 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross

and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief’ state that there is a right to receive and to offer humanitarian assistance. There is a right to receive humanitarian assistance in disaster situations under customary international law.

- In the case of an armed conflict, international humanitarian law applies together with other legal frameworks, including human rights law and international disaster law.

Principle 3: Integrate and link disaster, natural resources, and crisis management sectors within and among governments

- Integrate disaster, natural resources, and crisis management sectors and connect the integrated mechanisms internationally and/or transboundary-basin-wide.
- Include the health sector in plans and discussion on transboundary DRR and reflect lessons and experiences of pandemics such as COVID-19 in the plans and actions. “The Principles to Address Water-related Disasters under COVID-19 Pandemic” may help to do so.
- Link transboundary disaster discussion with climate change dialogue. Connect discussion on transboundary cooperation during, before and after disasters in global/regional dialogue on climate change. Position the subject as a core part of discussion and actions on climate change adaptation.
- Include discussion on disasters in regional climate dialogue.

Principle 4: Clarify ex-ante the missions of countries and transboundary organizations before, during, and after disasters

- Conduct jointly ex-ante discussion on possible problems/troubles across borders at the time of hazards, e.g. transportation, border protocols, communication lines and protocols, shared critical infrastructure, and mobility of people including those across borders.
- Establish mechanisms of cooperation ex-ante among riparian countries in case of hazards/emergencies and include it in a formal agreement.
- Articulate mandates, mission, and responsibilities of transboundary/basin organizations and their secretariats before, during and after disasters.

Principle 5: Upgrade existing protocols, agreements and documents on transboundary cooperation

- Check if existing agreements/protocols address the current transboundary situation and disaster management needs. Follow international water law commitments and principles stated in the Water Conventions and in the Sendai framework for DRR, and improve them if needed.
- Build an international process to develop what the needs are and make recommendations to states to update and improve existing mechanisms and protocols.
- Include and/or improve chapters on cooperation arrangements at the time of emergency, including water-related hazards. Upgrade them whenever lessons and experiences are obtained through recent disasters

- Make cross-border arrangements for accepting materials, rescue workers, and volunteers during and after disasters.
- Include in DRR policies and actions to address internal and cross-border migration immediately before, during and after disasters.

Principle 6: Establish regular dialogue mechanisms/procedures to address transboundary disasters

- Establish a data platform to facilitate common understanding and decisions on emergency operation by all sectors.
- Share information on the whereabouts and safety status of individual citizens affected by disasters.
- Monitor and share Social Networking Service (SNS) information so that false information will not spread. Take appropriate measures - jointly if possible - to provide accurate information. Jointly disseminate through SNS accurate and timely information on disaster status, response and relief, etc. in a transparent manner.
- In the case of industrial facilities established on transboundary rivers, develop contingency plans for emergency response.

Principle 7: Share disaster information before, during and after disasters

- Establish regular dialogue among each of related sectors such as civil protection, water, transportation, border control, and energy to discuss cooperation at the time of emergency.
- Promote open access to meteorological, hydrological, and other data as an important contribution to regional stability and peace.
- Create networks to support and mobilize cooperation efforts for integrated multi hazard warning systems. Establish mechanisms/centers in regions/basins to share disaster-related information on a 365/24/7 basis. International attention/support should be given to this area to enhance capacity and capability to ensure effective data and information sharing.
- Share hydrological and climate information, including forecasts of extreme events. Share disaster-related information including current status, forecasts, and possible impacts of disasters.
- Share information on critical infrastructures, their preparedness, impact status and prospects of recovery before, during and after disasters.
- Share socio-economic data and information so that they can be a basis for effectively collaborating for DRR and building back better in a trans-boundary manner.
- Jointly inform disaster status to the population. Jointly give press releases/statements on disaster status and cooperation by leaders/top officials, followed by detailed reports by the administration in charge. Joint press conferences will also help.
- Give appropriate and early information to the population about areas which risk being affected by disasters. Include the population in disaster management plans and include their knowledge on how to address possible risks. The population should be included in decision-making processes and emergency planning and exercises.
- The UN Secretary-General should include disaster information in his report on these situations in the agenda of the UN Security Council.

Principle 8: Collaborate and coordinate for swift relief and recovery actions

- Jointly cooperate with the UN and international agencies to coordinate relief and recovery activities.
- Coordinate and cooperate to smoothly send and receive relief materials. Make use of international agencies/frameworks to facilitate the fair and smooth provision of essential materials in case acute shortage occurs in more than one riparian country.
- Report on receipt and use of relief materials on a regular basis in transparent manners. Sharing the voices of citizens who received help will also facilitate mutual understanding.
- Involve the humanitarian assistance community and the insurance industry in policy formulation of disaster preparedness, management and reconstruction including policy to build back better.

Principle 9: Jointly mitigate direct/indirect impact of disasters

- Jointly mitigate financial markets crisis by sharing information on disaster impacts in transparent manners.
- Identify major value chains among riparian countries before disasters and alternative chains to prevent sudden chain disruption.
- Jointly discuss to ensure smooth transportation across borders, including alternative routes in case of major disruptions occur due to failure of infrastructure. The same applies to energy sharing.

Principle 10: Promote international disaster law that may contribute to foster peace before, during and after water-related disaster

- International disaster-related law may contain relevant principles and rules dealing with the preparation for, response to and recovery from various natural hazards, including water-related disasters. Reflect them in plans and actions for DRR nationally and transnationally.
- Support the adoption of a global treaty containing fundamental rules and principles of international cooperation in disaster response and prevention based on the Draft Articles on the protection of persons in the event of disasters adopted by the International Law Commission in 2016.

Principle 11: Learn from histories, experiences and good practices

- Jointly visit countries/basins in which disasters occurred across borders to learn from past experiences.
- Collect, keep and analyze historical records of past disasters that happened across borders, and archive and share them locally, nationally and internationally. Establish a centre/mechanism that makes it happen.

Principle 12: Fully use science and technology for DRR and peace

- Promote science-based decision-making mechanisms such as synthesis systems of DRR data and information and DRR facilitators to give scientific advice to leaders and stakeholders. Share and connect them internationally, particularly among riparian countries.
- Promote trans-academic research bridging social and natural science that can advance scientific evidence based diplomacy.
- Establish enhanced support at the national level for institutions which prioritize innovative research on transboundary issues related to water and peace.