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4. Capacity-building

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1. Building Peace through Water Diplomacy

“Our experience shows that water – when adopted as a central element of the peacebuilding, sustainable development and humanitarian aid agendas – is a powerful driver of peace.”

Water knows no borders and is essential to all sectors of society. Competition for and tensions over water rise as we over-exploit water with inadequate governance in the face of a changing climate. The complexity of the challenge is multiplied by the crisis of multilateralism, resurgence of a multipolar world, and questioning of the foundations of international law.

The Geneva Water Hub’s experience around the world has shown that in the current complex and challenging times, water brings people together. Cooperation over the resource itself proves a useful tool to address the challenges – and related grievances. The Hub knows that when water is shared equitably and spared the ravages of pollution and armed conflict, peace can prevail. After all, water can build trust among users, keep the door to dialogue open, and dissolve tensions.

The Geneva Water Hub positions water at the heart of peacebuilding efforts between communities and states – as an instrument of sustainable development and conflict transformation.

2. Water in Times of Armed Conflict

“If the SDGs are really to leave no one behind, they must apply to civilians living in fragile contexts and conflict-affected areas. Human dignity is in peril when water systems are damaged by armed conflict and the unintended impact of trade sanctions.”

More than two billion people live in fragile contexts or conflict-affected areas, where the destruction and pollution of water systems has serious consequences for the environment, human health, in post-conflict settings, the reconstruction of water systems and the restoration of freshwater ecosystems damaged by war obliges further adoption of peacebuilding measures.

By systemizing the norms of International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, International Environmental Law, related to the protection of water during and after armed conflict, the Geneva Water Hub, develops the Geneva Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure.

By investigating the extent to which damages to water resources and water systems affect water quality, human health, and livelihoods, the Hub advances the evidence base to better protect water from the reverberating effects of armed conflict and the unintended impact of trade sanctions.

3. Shaping Policy and Law

“The Geneva Water Hub places the inherent political weight of water at the heart of the multilateral law-building and policy-making agendas.”

The Geneva Water Hub advocates for progressive, innovative, and inclusive policy and law everywhere. Based on our analysis of the benefits of transboundary and inter-sectoral cooperation, and the merits of harmonising national and international legal frameworks, the Hub shapes policy and law for the sustainable use and sharing of water.

The Hub supports the development of good practice through multi-stakeholder and confidential platforms and facilitates exchanges with key actors in the humanitarian, development and peace communities – all in alignment with the principles of international law.
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While the world’s population has tripled in the last century, freshwater use has increased six fold. Competition for water is driven by an unending need to secure food, energy, public health and ecosystems – and can strain relations severely.

With the utmost confidentiality, the Geneva Water Hub uses water to initiate processes to defuse tensions, build trust and create the conditions for equitable water arrangements. Tensions are high, the Hub guides joint analysis or spots pathways to use water for détente or rapprochement, both locally and regionally.

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Hosting:
- Platform for International Water Law (UNIGE)
- Global Observatory for Water and Peace (GOWP)
- UNESCO Chair in Hydropolitics
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

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March 2023

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4. Capacity-building

5. Setting the Research Agenda

“A Matter of Survival”

“Tools for transboundary management of water and water uses in the greater Geneva area.”

“The Drama of Water in a Time of Global Transformation”


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Sharing and Sparing Water for Peace

Centre of Competence on Water for Peace
based at the University of Geneva and the Geneva Graduate Institute

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