

5 governance strategies to leverage water for peace

The theme for World Water Day 2024 is leveraging water for peace. What does it mean for cooperation and water governance?

1 Recognize water is finite

Freshwater use has transgressed its safe limit at the global scale. Shortages continue in several regions, and are projected to increase. It may be obvious to say that water is the source of all life but as long as both water quantity and quality drop, many fragile and conflict-affected regions will continue to suffer from unrest. Cooperation among nation states is essential to treat water as a global common, a need for all.

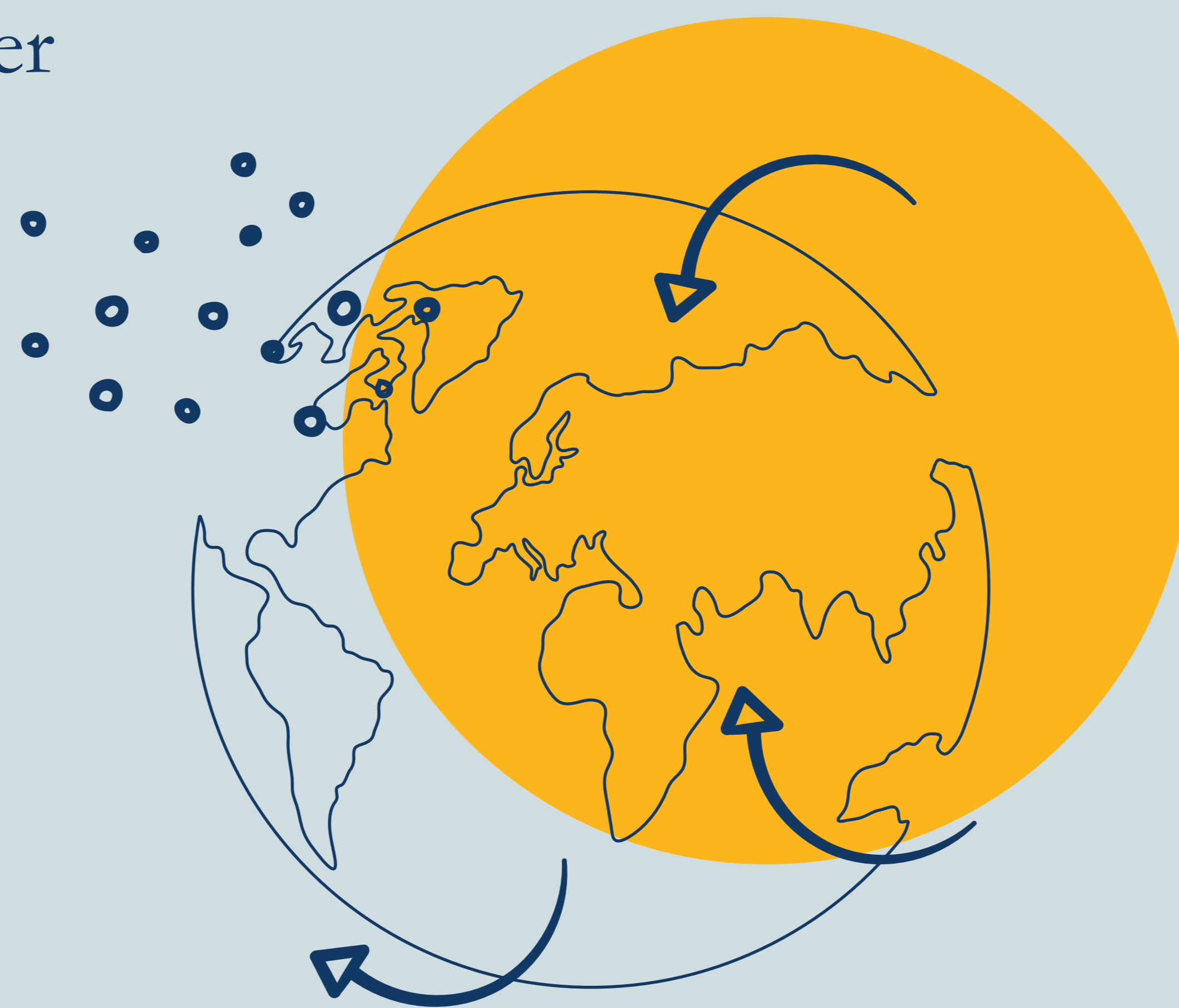
3 Use water as an entry point for dialogue

Water is a 'softer' issue for certain regions, than discussing resources like military or oil. Countries should prioritize relationship building through dialogue over shared waters.

When it comes to water cooperation itself, even if river basin agreements exist, they may serve as mere tick marks. Recurring water dialogues can establish sustainable relationships, that may also tackle larger security issues, should hostile situations occur.

2 Build water management into climate action

In regions with low water quality or quantity, climate change can create risk multiplication. For example, water scarcity induced by climate change can become a source of conflict by causing food insecurity, livelihood instability or displacement of populations. Effective water management to tackle climate change can help regions alleviate potential reasons for unrest.



4 Redistribute power

Mechanisms are needed that give power to basin level institutions. River Basin Organizations are key to water governance, as they provide a platform for information sharing, dialogue, and capacity development. They are most effective in contributing to water diplomacy having a strong institutional mandate and high degree of local knowledge.

5 Decolonize water governance

Today's dominant Western narrative of water management doesn't match the pluralistic nature of problems of the world. Water also holds aesthetic, cultural, spiritual, relational and ecological values. As these values diminish for some but not for others, water management can become less inclusive of diverse needs. To maintain peace, governments must work actively to decolonize current approaches.