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**WATER
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Coping with the Floods

The Role of Track II Diplomacy in South South Cooperation

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Track II Diplomacy for South South Cooperation

Track II diplomacy refers to unofficial, informal dialogue between non-state actors—such as academics, retired officials, think tanks, civil society, journalists, and community leaders—to address sensitive issues where formal (Track I) negotiations are limited or stalled.

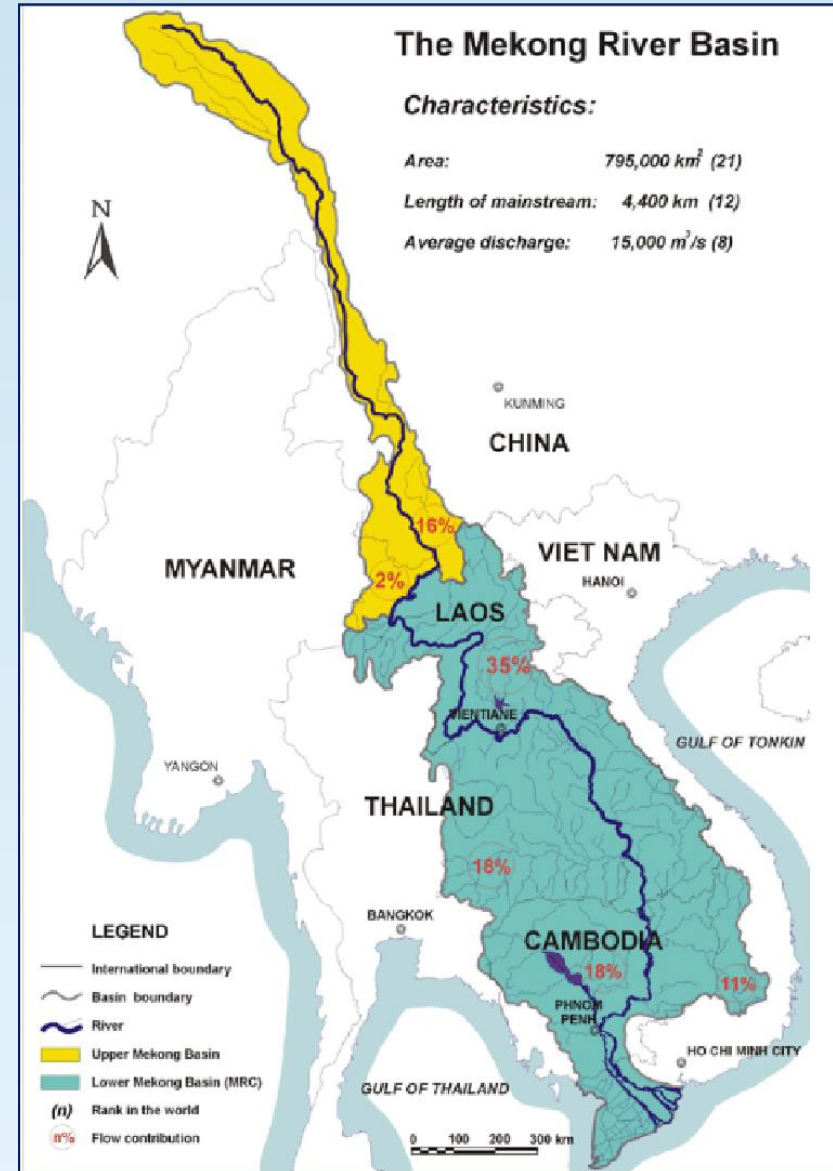


Mekong River Basin

Formal Track I negotiations through the Mekong River Commission were often stalled due to China's non-member status and regional mistrust.

Countries involved: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Myanmar

Track II actors: M-POWER (Mekong Program on Water, Environment and Resilience), CGIAR, regional universities, civil society networks



Nile River Basin

Countries: Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, others

Disagreements over the Nile Waters Agreement (1959) blocked formal negotiations for decades.

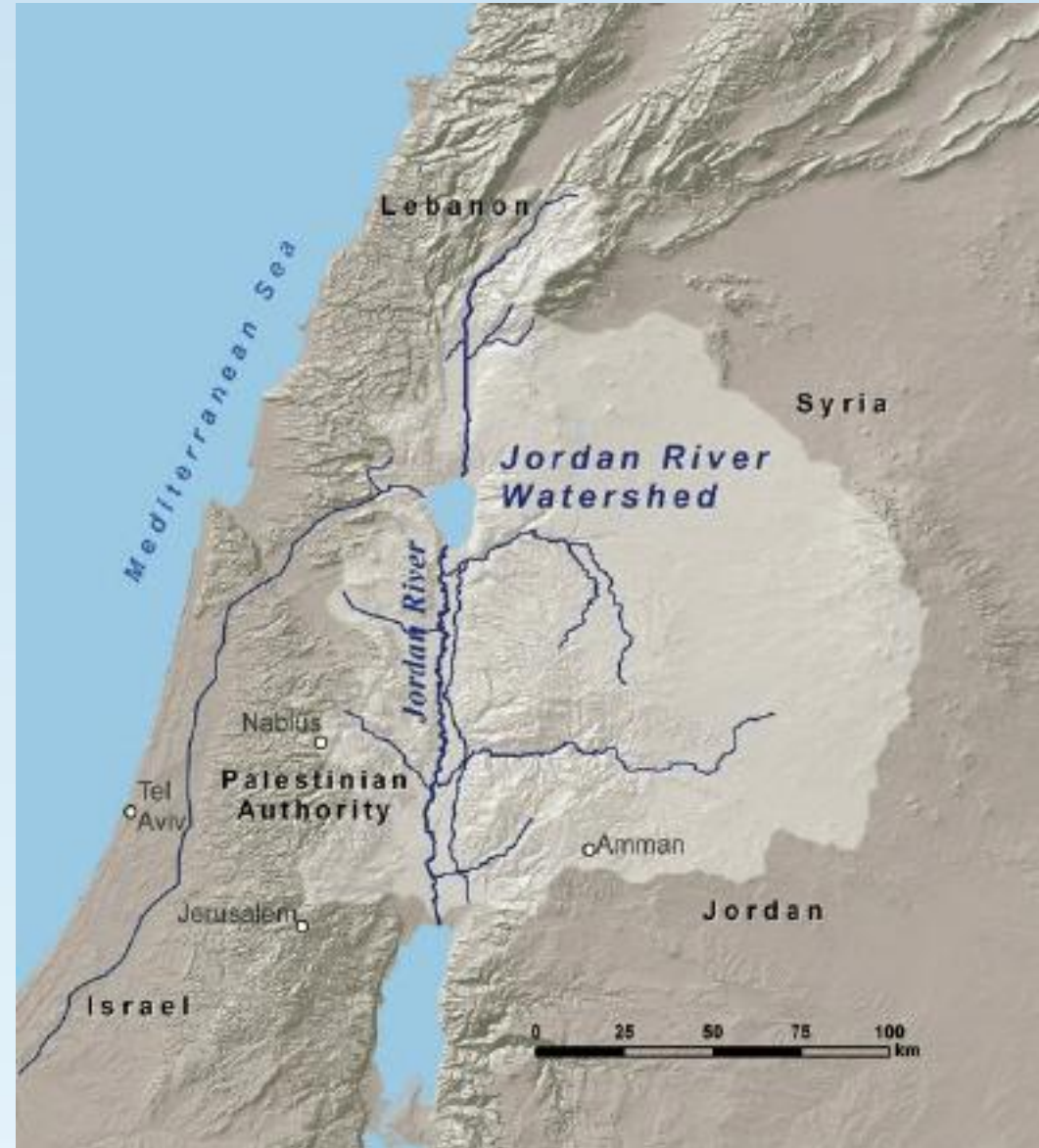
Nile Basin Discourse :1990s, Track II actors formed the, a civil society and research platform across 11 countries.

Created the political space for the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) in 1999 — a Track I intergovernmental platform.



Jordan River Basin

- In the late 1980s–early 1990s, official negotiations between Israel and Jordan were frozen.
- EcoPeace facilitated joint scientific assessments, trust-building workshops, and community exchanges on shared river degradation.
- These dialogues fed directly into the 1994 Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty, which included a water-sharing annex.
- Track II/III diplomacy influenced a binding water agreement.



Track II feeding into Formal Negotiations

- Track II can act as “diplomatic scaffolding” during or before formal negotiations.
- Shared science (data, modelling, research) is a powerful depoliticizing tool.
- Track III (community, media, youth) keeps pressure for cooperation alive and shapes narratives.
- Success often comes from neutral conveners (regional networks, third-country hosts).



Track II Initiatives in the Indus Basin

- **Atlantic Council “India–Pakistan Track II Water Dialogue,” Lahore (2012)**
- **Stimson–SDPI–ORF “Connecting the Drops” (2012–13)**
- **World Bank’s South Asia Water Initiative (SAWI) Indus Forum / Indus Basin Knowledge Forum (since 2013):** basin-wide Track II platform (not just India–Pakistan; also Afghanistan & China)
- **ICIMOD’s Indus Knowledge Partnership Platform**
- **Aman ki Asha “Water is Life” (2010–14):** media-led peace campaign (Jang Group & Times of India)
- Many Others...



Have they been effective?

- **Kept channels open when Track I froze**
- **Reframed disputes from “zero-sum” to shared risk** (glacier melt, floods/droughts) and pushed for joint/neutral data and cumulative-impact assessment—now common talking points in policy circles.

BUT....

- **Hard policy change is scarce.**
- **Data transparency remains patchy.**
- **People-to-people efforts ebb with politics.**



Have Track II Initiatives in the Indus lost Momentum in the last decade?

Track II and Track III diplomacy on the Indus Basin hasn't disappeared entirely, but it has shrunk dramatically and lost momentum over the last decade.

- 1. Geopolitical Tensions Have Deepened (Post-2015)
- 2. Formal Track I Mechanisms Became Stalled or Highly Securitized
- 3. Funding and Donor priorities
- 4. Rise of Hyper-Nationalism and Narrative Polarization



New approaches to Track II Diplomacy?

- AI can act as a bridge for Track II and Track III diplomacy — creating shared evidence, enabling joint action on non-political issues like air pollution and flood forecasting, and unlocking climate finance for resilience in the Indus Basin.
- Oman Water and Environmental Collaboration Dialogue 2024



AI for track II diplomacy in the Indus Basin

AI as a Technical Tool for Trust-Building

Depoliticizes water disputes through common scientific baselines

Joint Action on Shared Environmental Challenges

Builds trust on non-controversial issues beyond water allocation.

AI + remote sensing to identify smog and air pollution sources (crop burning, brick kilns)

AI for Flood Forecasting & Early Warning

Strengthens real-time transboundary disaster preparedness (EFAS, KFEWS)

- Joint early warning systems protect lives & livelihoods

Unlocking Climate Finance Through AI Cooperation

Joint AI-enabled resilience programs can access global climate funds (joint application to LDF?)



