



## Editorial

Water brings everyone together on our planet called blue. We value this essential resource so highly because of its scarcity and uneven quality. Is it destined to be a source of endless conflict, as some people fear? Or will it allow dialogue and cooperation – the foundations for peaceful societies – to take root?

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) firmly believes in the latter scenario, advocating a positive approach to water issues over the past years. It boldly launched an international movement called Blue Peace, inspired by the understanding that countries that actively work together to resolve water-related concerns do not go to war with each other. That same observation underpinned the key role played by Switzerland in having cross-border cooperation included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as part of Goal 6, which addresses water issues.

Water resources can be highly contentious. But these tensions can be defused by creating a space for dialogue between countries, or between communities and industrial groups, for example. And the SDC is not alone in this belief. Many private companies and research institutes, not to mention young people, have joined the effort.

This shows that the goals of sustainable development and sustainable peace are both within reach.

Happy reading!

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## BLUE PEACE: AN IDEAL TURNS INTO AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT



The SDC relies on the unifying movement "Blue Peace" in its activities at international and local level. Peaceful water management requires the involvement of a variety of actors. © SDC

**It took just a few years for the Blue Peace initiative to become a recognised international movement. Everyone agrees that available water resources must be managed wisely to reduce the risks of conflict. When it comes to water access, the SDC is supporting both cross-border cooperation mechanisms and national dialogue platforms.**

"If we succeed together, we will look back on 2017 as the year in which the notion of water as an asset for peace was turned into a widespread mechanism of diplomacy." Danilo Türk, former president of the Republic of Slovenia, highlights the historical importance of the September 2017 publication of an international report promoting the peaceful management of water resources. For some people, this report embodies the breakthrough of the Blue Peace initiative launched by Switzerland in 2010.

This initiative is based on the idea that managing water resources around the world

fairly and efficiently can help to achieve sustainable peace.

"Since water 'connects' individuals and groups of people, we concluded that the best solution would be based on cooperation mechanisms that are in everyone's interest," says Johan Gély, who runs the SDC's Global Programme Water. Such a cooperative approach is more relevant than ever at a time when population growth and industrial expansion are putting more and more pressure on water supplies, whereas water is often very poorly recycled, and ecosystems are being disrupted by the impact of climate

change. Today, nearly 3.5 billion people lack sufficient drinking water. In 2017, as in previous years, water-related crises have been identified among the top five long-term threats to our planet, according to the Global Risks Report published by the World Economic Forum.

Switzerland has emerged as a leader in this area, drawing on its extensive hands-on experience (see pages 2, 3 and 4). In less than a decade, it has turned Blue Peace into a unifying movement. "In the many shared water management projects that it develops and funds around the world, Switzerland seeks to ensure everyone's voice is heard, from villagers to ministers, women, young people, researchers and companies looking for investment opportunities," says Nadia Benani, programme officer at the SDC. While problems vary from one situation to the next, dialogue is always the solution. "How the water from a river or lake is used can sow discord, yet steps can be taken to forestall this. Simply bringing people with competing water interests together can prevent conflict in other areas."

## International visibility

Switzerland's expertise in water management, and its long-standing policy of joining forces with other countries such as Germany, Italy and France, are a major factor in the success of the Blue Peace movement. In 2015, the same year that the call for "integrated water resources management" was included in the 2030 Agenda, Switzerland helped set up a panel of high-level policy makers from 15 countries whose task was to discuss what "international water cooperation" meant and ways it could be achieved. Panel Chairman Danilo Türk had the honour of presenting the aforementioned report in Geneva, New York and Brasilia (where the latest World Water Forum was held).

Countries around the world embraced the idea that water resources could be peacefully managed. The link between water and peace was also taken over in the recommendations issued by the United Nations' and the World Bank's High-Level Panel on Water.

According to Benani, Switzerland "supports all of the observations and goals set forth in the report." In reality, the SDC's projects already feature some of the panel's recommendations, such as encouraging private sector investments in cross-border facilities, strengthening water diplomacy, providing open access to reliable water data and systematically protecting water-related infrastructure in times of conflict.

> For more information read:  
[«A Matter of Survival»](#)

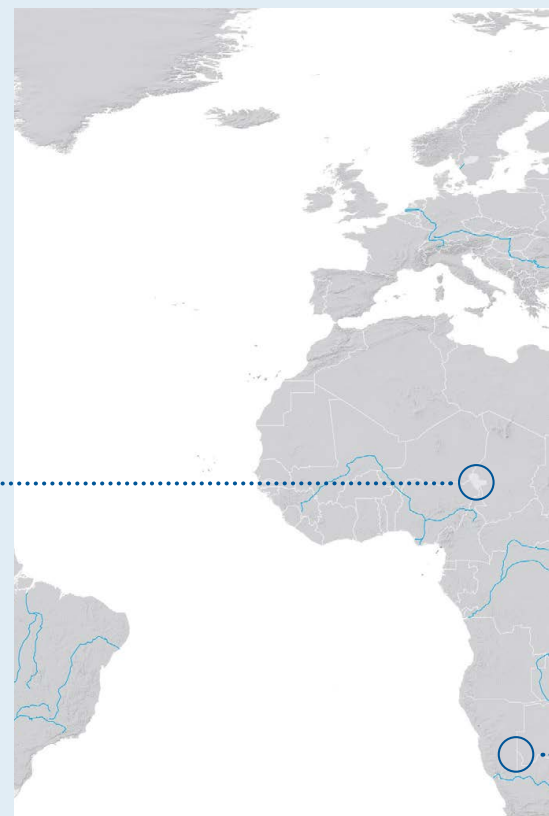
# THE BLUE PEACE IDEAL IN ACTION

## Appealing for cross-border cooperation

The SDC, through its active support for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (the "Water Convention"), has helped forge new paradigms of cross-border cooperation. Its strong advocacy for joint water management results from a detailed analysis of benefits of the countries that lie along the Drina River (Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro), the Cubango-Okavango River Basin (Angola, Botswana and Namibia) and the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi River Basin (Kenya and Uganda). Their willingness to work together was an economic, social and environmental boon for these countries as well as a factor of peace and security. The Water Convention was originally negotiated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and serves nowadays as international guidelines.

## Negotiated water sharing

Four countries – Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger – have direct access to Lake Chad. Millions of farmers and breeders depend on its water, yet the lake's surface area has shrunk by 80 per cent since 1960. The Central African Republic and Libya may be farther away, but they too have an interest in the resources provided by this lake. The BRIDGE project, run by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and funded by Switzerland, has developed, with the member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission detailed hydrological maps. They are carefully analysed to identify the effects of climate change. Further down the line, local communities can use them to plan their activities in accordance with the volume of water available to them.



# Three questions for... Joyce Mendes

**JOYCE MENDES**, 24 years old, is a local activist and member of the World Youth Parliament for Water, which is supported by the SDC.



## Joyce, how did you become active in cross-border cooperation between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina?

I lived in various countries with my parents before they decided to move to Foz de Iguazu, a Brazilian city that sits across the Paraná and Iguazu Rivers from Paraguay and Argentina. Five years ago, when I started university, I had several ideas

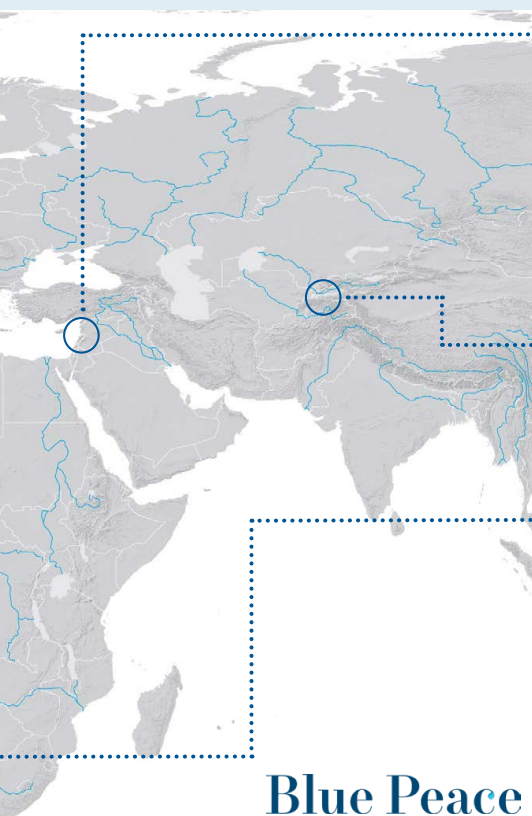
for water-related projects. It hit me like a bombshell! I helped to set up a variety of youth groups in the region, thinking: 'Young people like me need to do something to protect our shared ecosystems.'

## Has the World Youth Parliament for Water been beneficial for your projects?

Definitely, it helps us to find out what's going on elsewhere. It's a real source of inspiration. After one particular session of Parliament, I contacted local communities to suggest they try producing biogas. That project is part of a regional initiative aimed at 'zero waste'. River pollution is a cross-border issue by definition, so we try to influence relevant public regulations by organising open workshops where we look at water and soil samples.

## Do you think that young people around the world view water and water-related priorities the same way?

On one hand, yes. We all want to achieve peace, and this means thinking about how we treat each other. That said, every country and every region has its own history. In the Paraná Basin, for example, the awful War of the Triple Alliance 150 years ago still haunts people. More recently, these countries have signed several co-operation agreements. Brazil and Paraguay jointly operate a hydroelectric power plant. But it's up to us, young people, to pay attention to these arrangements and attempt to build on them.



## Sustainably managing a scarce resource

The Middle East is an arid region where available water resources must be managed in a long-term perspective. In Jordan, the situation has deteriorated following the influx of millions of refugees in the northern part of the country. The rights to the waters of the Yarmouk River, which separates Syria and Jordan, are a long-standing source of contention. Over the past two years, the SDC overcame difficult circumstances to prepare a rigorous hydrological and political study that now serves as a useful model when it comes to sharing transboundary water resources.

## Water diplomacy

As part of the Swiss-led Blue Peace Central Asia initiative, five countries from this region – which is of strategic interest for Switzerland in several respects – are teaming up on this cross-border effort (see article on page 4).

## Preserving aquifers

In the border area between Namibia, South Africa and Botswana, water represents an underground challenge. A large number of people depend on the Stampriet Aquifer for their existence. For now, this aquifer is not in a situation of overuse or pollution. But given local population growth, that could change quickly. Switzerland is funding a UNESCO-run project to generate and collect hydrogeological data in an effort to bolster each country's responsibility when it comes to planning its water needs and playing its part in sustainably managing the water table.

# Blue Peace Central Asia: the impact of water diplomacy

Central Asia is second only to the Middle East in terms of where Switzerland actively promotes water diplomacy in support of cross-border water cooperation under the Blue Peace initiative. The challenge is formidable: to provide sustainable and safe water access to the 60 million people living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

This region more closely resembles Switzerland in its geology – with glaciers, fertile plains, long rivers and lakes that sometimes straddle national borders – than in its institutions. “Until recently, interstate cooperation was limited to water-sharing formulas inherited from the Soviet era,” says Michel Mordasini, Switzerland’s Special Envoy for Water in Central Asia. “The idea of exploring what could be done with this water through a joint effort never made it to the agenda.” That gave Switzerland an opening, since it could draw on a long history of cooperating with neighbouring countries on sustainably managing water sources and preventing disasters.

As such, Switzerland was able to bring together representatives of the five Central Asian countries in Basel in 2014, for an initial meeting to discuss integrated water resources management. In offering its water diplomacy services, Switzerland is also able to bring to the table its extensive experience in the region gained over the course of 25 years

of technical cooperation in the water sector.

## Applying best practices from West Africa

Since then, high-level “technical dialogues” and study trips have taken place regularly. The last trip brought a delegation of ten officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to Dakar, to look at how Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Guinea work together at managing the shared Senegal River. The visitors took a special interest in the fair and equitable distribution of the costs and revenues associated with river water use, and how each water infrastructure is managed by individual private companies.

In reality, “Central Asian countries are not starting from square one,” points out Mordasini, who mentions the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, a long-standing cooperation framework. Several other projects supported by the SDC or by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) are also making a difference. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have set up a system of automatic water-flow measurements for the Chu and Talas Rivers, which means that they can base their discussions on reliable and transparent data. In Osh, Kyrgyzstan’s second-largest city, high-tech wastewater treatment is a boon for the Uzbek community living on the other side of the border. In another example,

the SDC supported a partnership between glaciologists from the University of Fribourg and Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik researchers to develop models for the efficient use of mountain water. Glaciers in Central Asia – like elsewhere in the world – are melting as a result of climate change and pose real dangers. Transnational alert systems were thus created in order to warn people of flooding and landslides, which are oblivious to borders.

What does the future hold? According to Mordasini, one key challenge will be to convince banks active at the regional and international levels to provide funding for major transboundary projects at a regional level rather than by country. Here again, Switzerland “is a thought leader”. But new ways of thinking will require a new generation of public officials and activists. Switzerland is working on that too. By the end of this year, it will create a regional network of young professionals keen on experiencing life in a neighbouring country. It is all about planting the seeds of cross-border solidarity.



A good example of South-South cooperation: ten high-level officials from Central Asia saw first-hand how Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Guinea work together to manage the Senegal River Basin. © SDC



## Imprint

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