

# Event Organizer Substantive Report

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## 1. How did your event contribute to building peace? (e.g. knowledge, relationships, initiatives, etc.)

The potential of art, a universal language, to promote peace, was highlighted, with the presentation of artistic interventions to communicate BluePeace. The variety of topics with three thematic sessions (one on Local and inclusive water management practices for conflict prevention; one on Water in contemporary warfare from a civilians' perspective; and one on Fostering transboundary water cooperation) allowed to bring together speakers and participants with different interests topic-wise but sharing a common interest in the water sector. The nexus between water and peace was explored across disciplines (from law to development and engineering) and across categories of actors. The numerous co-organizers, with universities NGOs and youth organisations, from Swiss-based to international ones, allowed to have a diversity of speakers as well as a diversity of participants in the public. Actors that do not usually have the opportunity to discuss among them could interact. In addition to this, the numerous moments left for interactions with the public resulted in rich discussions and transfer of knowledge between actors. Finally, the Intergenerational Dialogue on Water and Peace developed a relationship across generations by matching young and senior experts in pairs. In order to build a lasting peace, it is important to include younger generations in the process, and the aim of this event was not only to have a youth presence among participants but to have them as speakers to give young people a platform allowing their voices to be heard and recognition of their expertise.

## 2. What new understandings emerged during your session on the needs for future peace-building practice?

Water management should be **more inclusive with women and youth**. There is a need to recognize their expertise and to involve them in water management. Key pre-conditions for inclusion process are to allow their voices to be heard, to understand their needs, to train them, so *in fine* they can take equal roles. For a meaningful water management, three elements are required: technical innovation, social innovation and institutions.

**The importance of communication** was raised. Water management being too technical, there is a challenge for universities in transferring knowledge to decision-makers. In the same vein, the fragmentation of water management with several institutions acting at different levels and in competition was mentioned. Ways to facilitate the exchange of technical data and information among countries were discussed, and the role of institutional mechanisms in it was mentioned. Among countries, the role of river basin organizations for peacebuilding was emphasised, using the Senegal and Niger basin organizations as example of cooperation despite the speaking of different languages and distinct national laws.

The role of **civilians as target and not collaterals in contemporary warfare** was denounced using the Syrian example. Water access was described as an interesting weapon allowing to reach territories outside of territorial control, and especially effective at pressuring and displacing populations. The short-term perspective of humanitarian aid organizations with the reparation of water infrastructures was contrasted with civilians' mid-term needs in long lasting conflicts. Keeping the water system functional is key, and as water can only be managed at the local level, the sustainability of answers and enhancement of local capacities is important to reconstruct society and build a lasting peace.

A recurrent observation among presentations was that **designing is not enough!** The importance of the implementation of laws by states was highlighted. The need for new laws was questioned considering the lack of implementation of current ones by states.

### **3. What policy recommendations on peacebuilding emerged during your event?**

- Designing laws/inclusive mechanisms/institutions etc. is not enough; implementation is key!
- Mobilize and empower a new generation of water leaders to contribute to a sustainable and peaceful development.
- Encourage inclusive water management practices, specifically those including young people and women.
- Improve communication and knowledge sharing between categories of actors, sectors and generations.
- Acknowledge the role of civilians as target in contemporary warfare in order to provide adequate protective mechanisms and answers.
- Put an emphasis on the sustainability of the humanitarian approach and complement short-term answers with an enhancement of civilians' capacities e.g. providing them with information on how to protect, repair, and manage the infrastructures; establishment of water-users associations.
- Share best practices from river basin organizations, such as information exchange, to favour the creation of new ones and the effective contribution of current and new organisations to peace.