

## ***Session: Any role for RBOs in managing conflicts? World Water Week, 27 August 2019***

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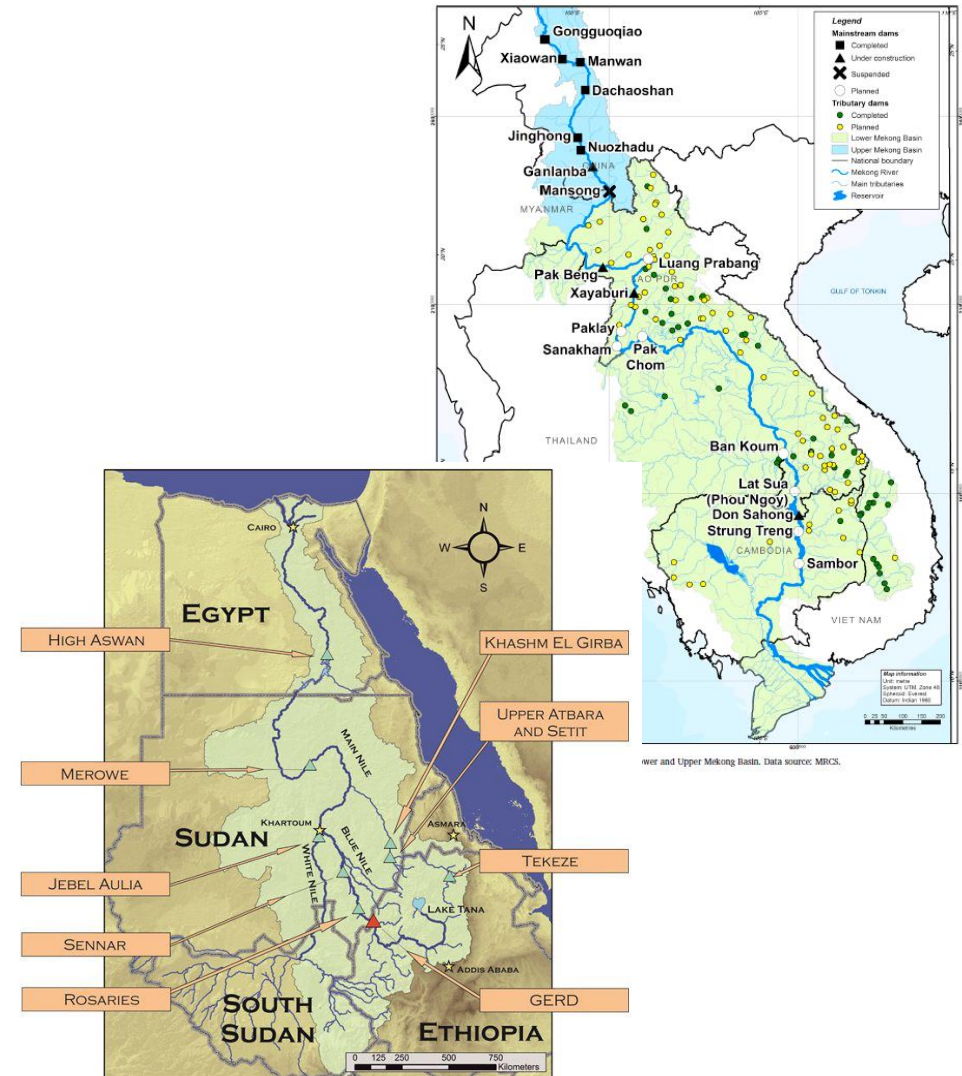
# **River Basin Organizations in Water Diplomacy**

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# Water conflicts or water diplomacy?

- Policy leaders, academics, international organizations, NGOs and media have warned that **tensions between states sharing watercourses** would be the new conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- **Population growth and climate change to infrastructure development** – put water resources and their riparians at risk and are therefore regarded as threat multipliers for water conflicts
- Significant due to the **geopolitical locations of some of the large rivers** and the strategic core interests of great and regional powers
- Examples – **Mekong** in Asia, **Nile** in Africa, Aral Sea in Central Asia, **Jordan** in the Middle East, even **Colorado** in the North America, and **Rhine** in Europe...
- Yet no historical evidence of states actually going to war over shared water resources – **states are more cooperative**
- **Key factor** is the role of institutional frameworks, especially River Basin Organizations (**RBOs**)



# Why RBOs in water diplomacy?

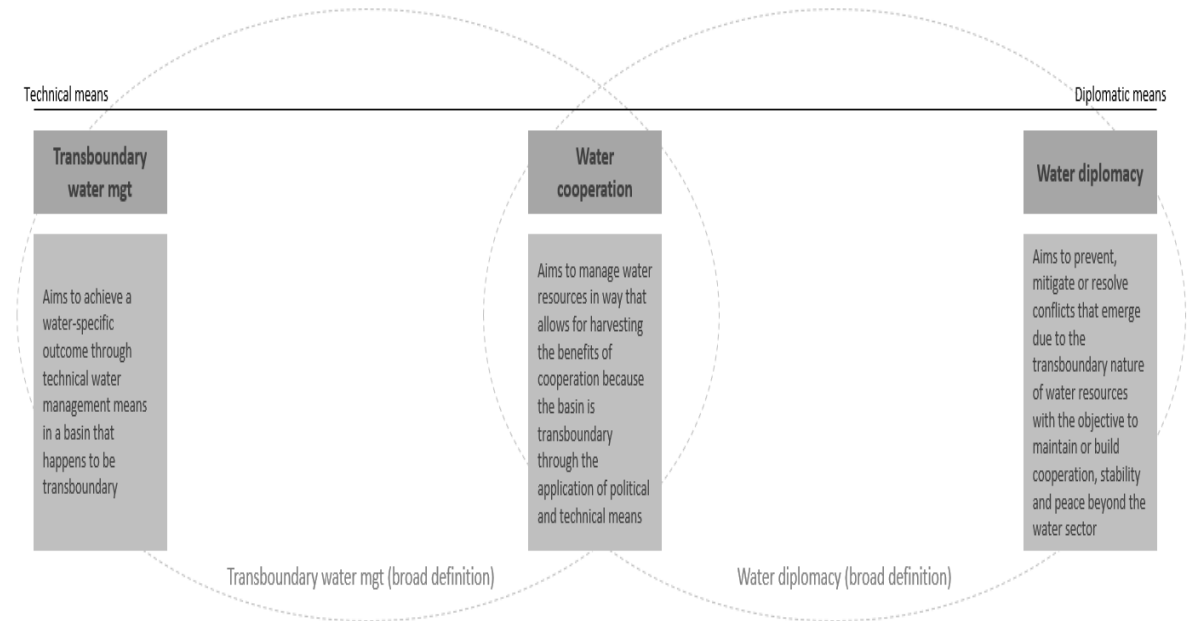
Water diplomacy in the broader context of water resources management and water cooperation.

**Water resources management** aims to achieve water-specific outcomes (e.g. managing floods, conserving fishery resources, etc.) through mostly technical means

**Water cooperation** aims to manage and develop water resources in a cooperative manner that allows for harvesting the benefits of cooperation (e.g. jointly investing in energy projects and trading, etc.)

**Water diplomacy** – focus on the use of diplomatic means in order to addressing existing or emerging disagreements and disputes over shared water with cooperation, peace and stability as aimed outcomes

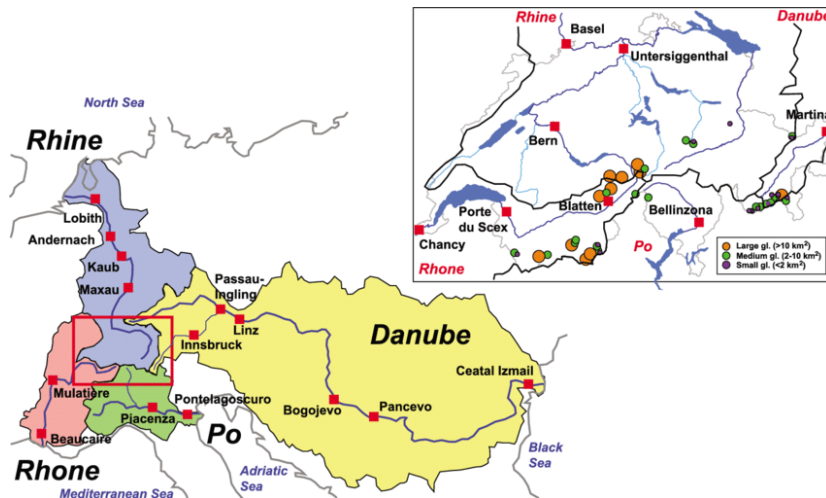
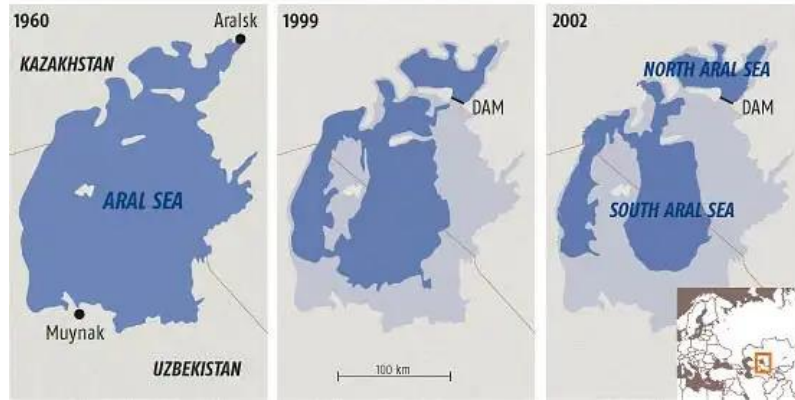
**RBOs**, as international organizations tasked to manage a designated basin on the basis of agreed upon principles, norms, rules and governance mechanisms, have the mandate and tools to engage in water diplomacy



# Context matters

## THE SHRINKING SEA

The changed shape of the Aral Sea since 1960



Context varies considerably across different regions and basins and affect the ways RBOs operate

- **Physical and hydrological conditions** (from arid basins such as the Nile and Aral Sea to basins characterized by relatively abundant water such as the Mekong, Danube and the Rhine)
- **Socioeconomic development** (from poor regions such as central and west Africa to rapidly industrializing Southeast Asia and developed Europe and North America)
- Number and **size/power/influence of riparian states** and external interests, such as the Danube with 19 riparian states (including Germany) or the Nile with 11 riparian states (including Egypt), or the Niger with 9 riparians (including Nigeria), or the Mekong with 6 riparians (including China), as well as basins shared by only two riparian states, such as between the US and Canada.



# How can RBOs play water diplomacy role?

Two sets of four interrelated factors are key: the level of development of the RBO's **legal** mandates and established **institutional** structures together with their **technical** and **strategic** resources and capacities.

When these correlate to sufficiently high degrees, RBOs have and can play effective roles in managing and resolving water and related differences, tensions and disputes.

Those basins with other combinations of these two sets of factors have various troubles and tribulations.



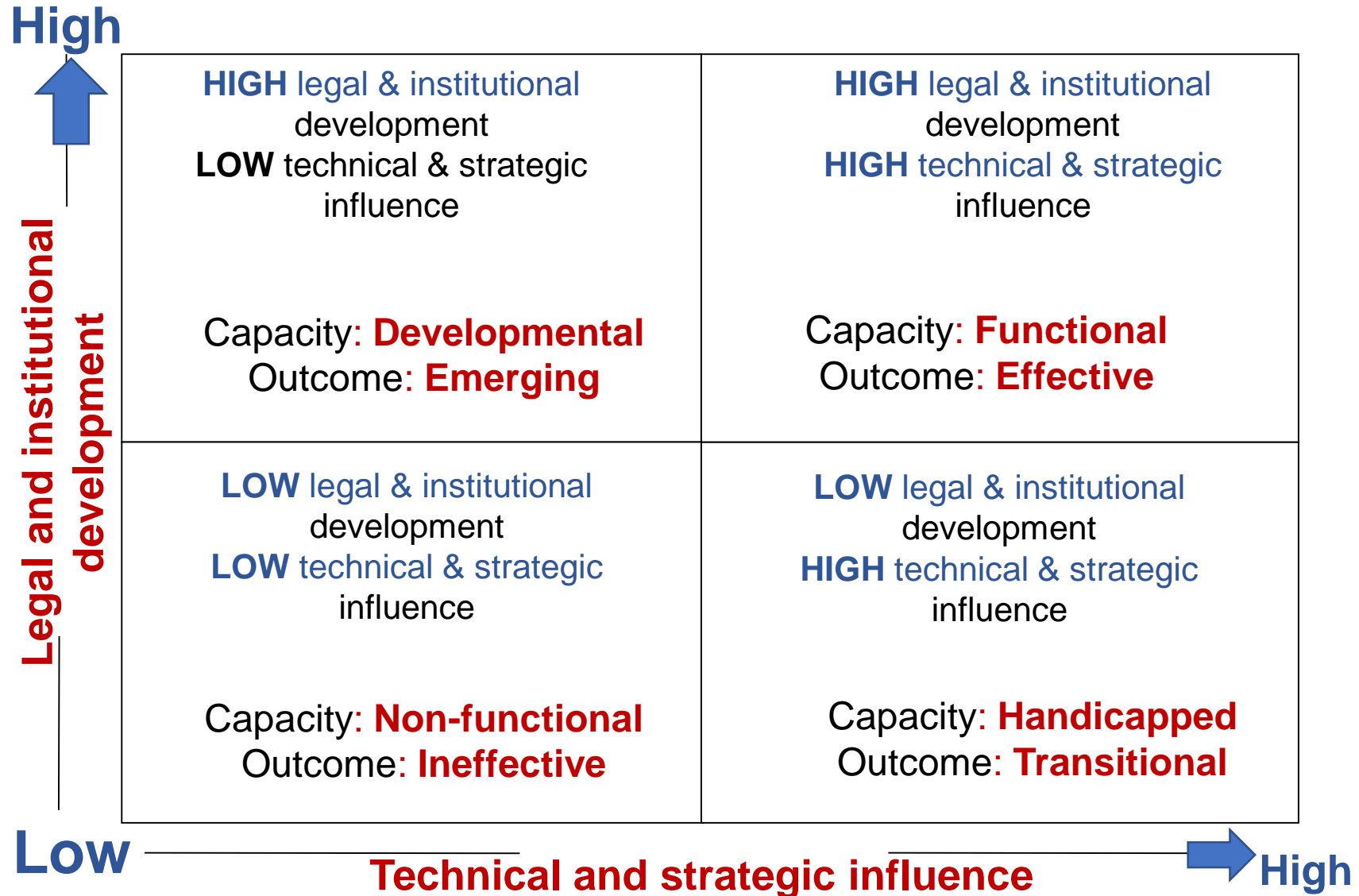
# Why legal and institutional development matter?

Characteristic	What	Why (contribution to water diplomacy)
<b>Legal mandate</b>	<b>Legally binding agreements or legal arrangements</b> through which states consent to be bound to water cooperation and mandate the RBO to fulfil cooperation functions, including managing differences and subsequent legal and policy documents (rules of procedures, regulations, binding minutes of formal meetings, etc.)	Manifest <b>member states' commitment to cooperation</b> over shared water resources and <b>to resolve any differences</b> , tensions and conflicts in a pre-determined manner (and specific <b>principles, norms and rules</b> for doing so); determine the <b>legitimacy of RBOs</b>
<b>Institutional set-up</b>	Institutional set-up/organizational bodies of an RBO ( <b>high-level policy meetings, technical working or expert groups, secretariats, etc.</b> ) and their roles and responsibilities; mechanisms for communication and coordinating between different states and agencies within and across states; mechanisms for engaging stakeholders	Provides mechanisms and <b>fora for legitimate engagement, discussion of contested issues, joint decision-making</b> ; determines who within an RBO (which body) can engage at which level/through which activity and how these engagements interact and are coordinated; relates to efficiency as well as effectiveness

# Why technical and strategic resources matter?

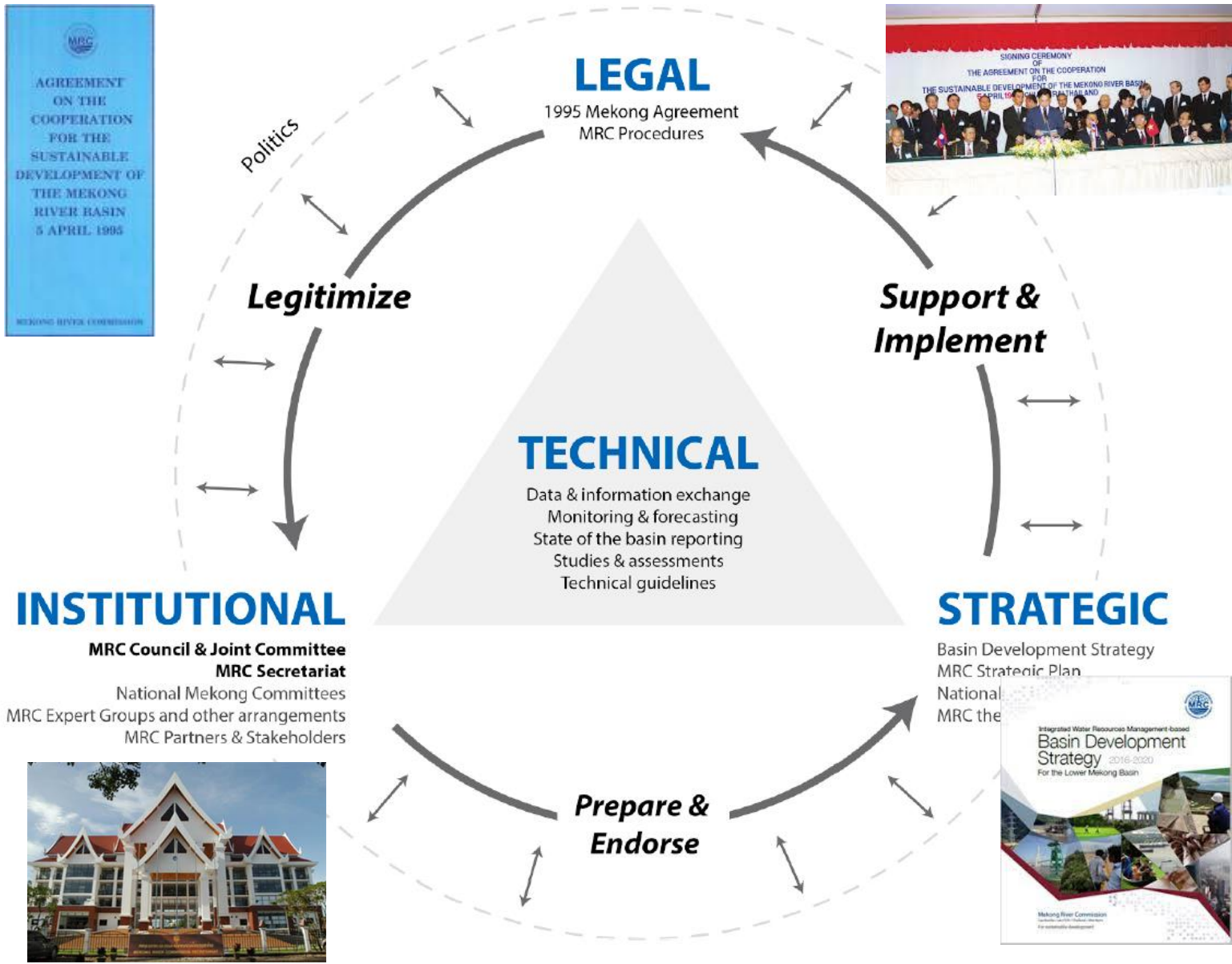
Mechanisms	What	Why (contribution to water diplomacy)
<b>Technical</b>	Scientific and technical activities (e.g. <b>data and information collection and sharing, monitoring and assessment</b> , modelling, forecasting, state of basin reporting, etc.)	Provides the <b>technical basis for managing shared water resources</b> in an effective and efficient manner, thus indirectly contributing to preventing, mitigating or resolving disputes over these resources; or provides <b>objective and jointly agreed upon information and recommendations that directly support negotiation</b> and facilitation of solutions
<b>Strategic</b>	Strategic activities relating to <b>basin wide plans, strategies or programs</b> , with a particular focus on the transboundary nature of water resources (e.g. basin development and/or management plans, strategic water resources analyses, investment plans, etc.)	Directly contribute to addressing challenges related to diverging interests or competition over (potentially scarce or contested) resources through developing a <b>joint vision and joint plans</b> of basin-wide projects and programs, <b>highlighting the benefits of cooperation</b> , thus preventing, mitigating or resolving conflicts

# RBO capacity and outcome in water diplomacy





# Mekong River Commission – example case



Capacity & outcome in water diplomacy: **functional and effective**

Address tensions and disputes over mainstream hydropower developments through:

- **Legal framework** of the 1995 Agreement, obligations for info sharing and consultations via Procedures
- Facilitation of debate and agreements via the **MRC Secretariat, Joint Committee and stakeholder mechanisms**
- Based on **basin-wide strategy** of opportunities and risks, more specific **technical assessments** and recommendations

# Thank you

