

Nov 04, 2016 by [Naomi Leight-Give'on](#)


On World Water Day, Focus on the Publics ^[1]

In recognition of World Water Day 2012, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy would like to acknowledge not just the organizations, governments and international coalitions that provide aid and solutions to water problems, but more importantly the publics that are experiencing water crises around the world. Our Water Diplomacy Initiative is designed to focus on these publics, and last month we held a conference, “Water Diplomacy: A Foreign Policy Imperative” at the University of Southern California. It was my privilege and pleasure (as well as my job) to facilitate the preliminary research for the conference and to now direct and manage the CPD research project on Water Vulnerability, which I wrote about in my last CPD Blog [post](#). During the conference, CPD brought together practitioners and scholars who discussed listening as a tool for water diplomacy, the challenges of practicing water diplomacy and the future of water diplomacy policy and technology. During the Conference, participants offered valuable points for tackling water issues, which support CPD’s approach to water diplomacy and focus on the people in need.

Focus on the Publics?

- Address human rights as a key water issue
- Build strategic partnerships
- Connect with the young people
- Facilitate learning by bringing developing countries together
- Mutuality in water relationships must exist
- Offer technical training and assistance
- Talk and work with local, indigenous and traditional communities
- Understand cultural dimensions in order to better serve the local populations

In addition, we discussed CPD’s role in developing water diplomacy as an element of public diplomacy. We are committed to the idea that public diplomacy in the twenty-first century must comprise not just listening, exchanges, broadcasting, culture and advocacy, but also service. Service can include development projects. Although traditional development actors do not consider what they do to be public diplomacy, CPD proposes that development work – whether conducted by nongovernmental actors, citizens or governments – done well and making a real difference in the lives of a population constitutes public diplomacy.

Over the coming months, as part of CPD’s Water Diplomacy Initiative, we will embark on at least two project strands. The first will be a collection of case studies and best practices recommendations for water diplomacy. To submit a contribution to this publication, please review our [Call for Papers](#) . The second, long-term project will be original research on areas of water vulnerability. I will provide updates on our research as it develops. For World Water Day, I would offer these three tools for conducting effective water diplomacy:

- 1) Listen to the people you are trying to help;
- 2) Provide technical training to people in communities receiving aid from groups like Engineers without Borders and

Water for People;

3) Use public diplomacy to raise global awareness of water issues through advocacy programs and international institutions

As we continue to develop our project on Water Vulnerability, we hope you will be in contact with us, post your comments below and visit our [Water Diplomacy Research Page](#) for more information.
