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WEBINAR

# Source-to-Sea Cooperation Practical Guidance for Implementation in Transboundary Basins



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WATER  
CONVENTION



CURRENTS  
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# Source-to-Sea Cooperation: Practical Guidance for Implementation in Transboundary River Basins

UNECE-IW:LEARN Online Webinar

Ruth Mathews 21 May 2026



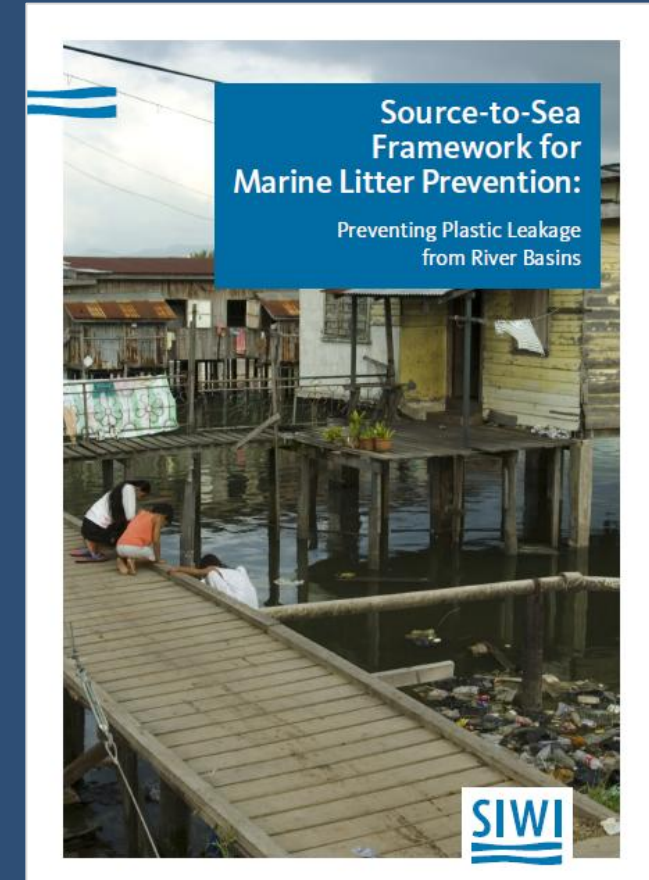
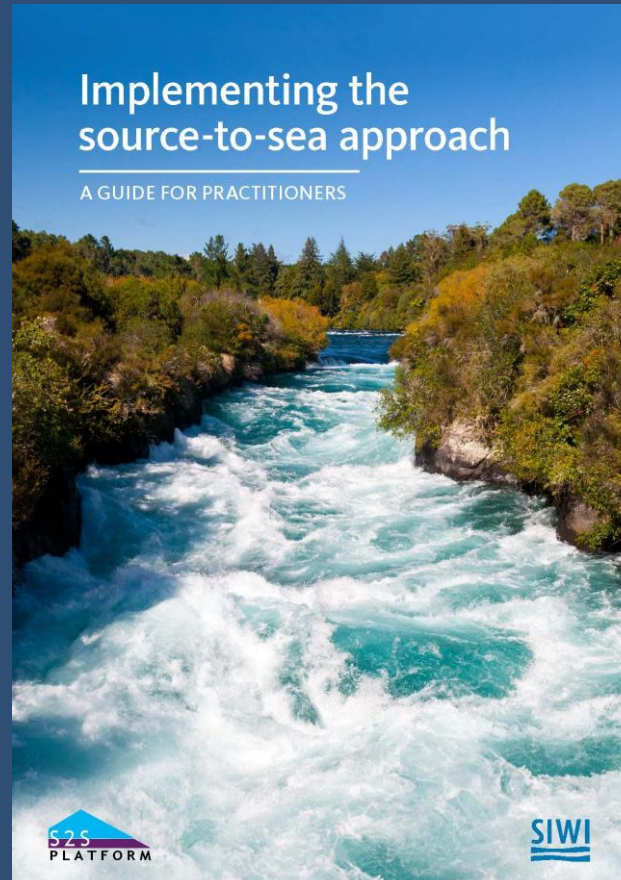
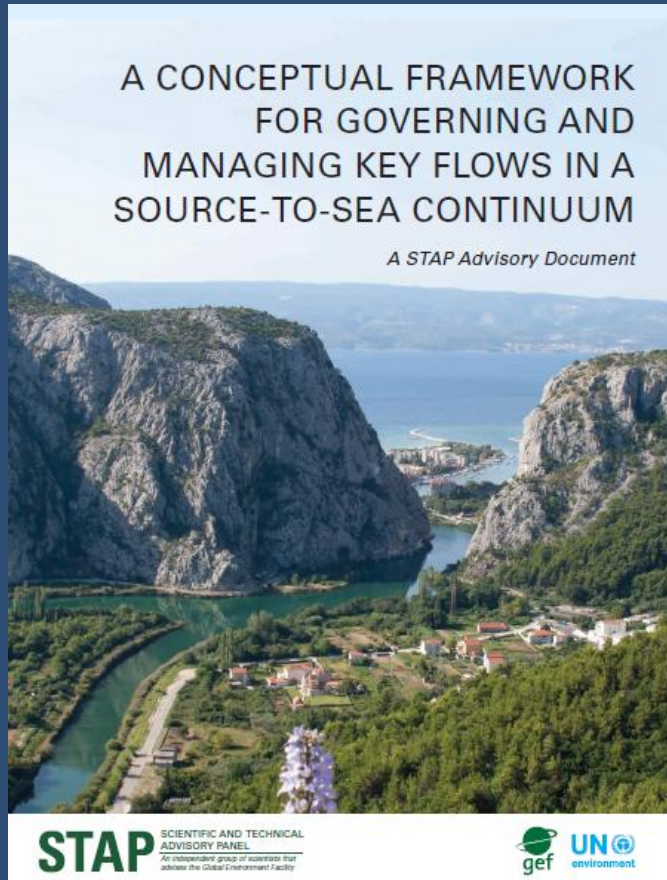
# Source-to-Sea Management

- A **holistic approach to management** of land, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems.
- Source-to-sea systems are connected by **six key flows**: water, biota, sediment, pollutants, materials and ecosystem services.
- Governance of source-to-sea systems is often **fragmented** with management responsibilities **operating in siloes**.
- This can lead to actions taken in one part of the source-to-sea system **having negative consequences** elsewhere.
- Many source-to-sea systems are **transnational**.

Source-to-sea management facilitates integrated decisions that protect ecosystems, improve living conditions and meet the global goals of sustainable development.



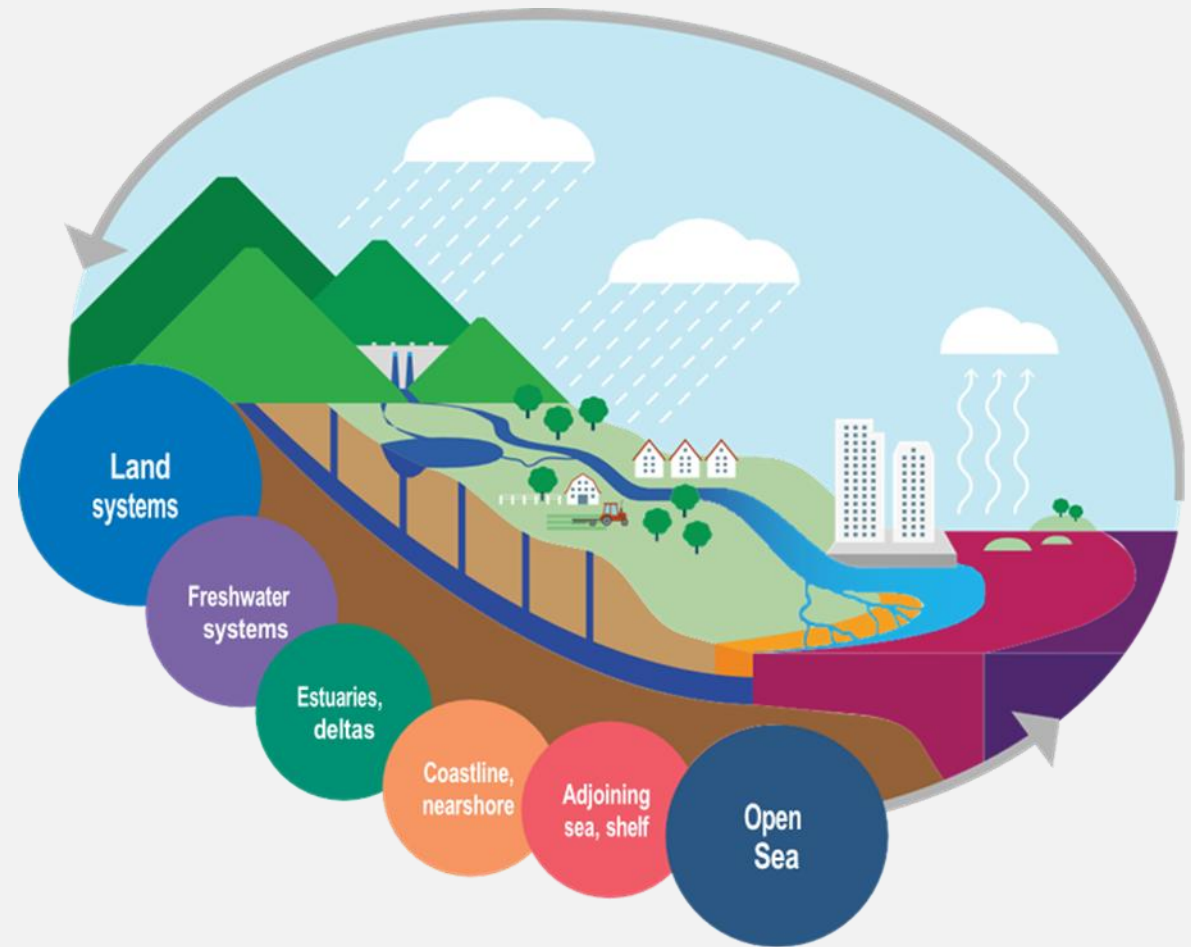
# Foundations of Source-to-Sea Management



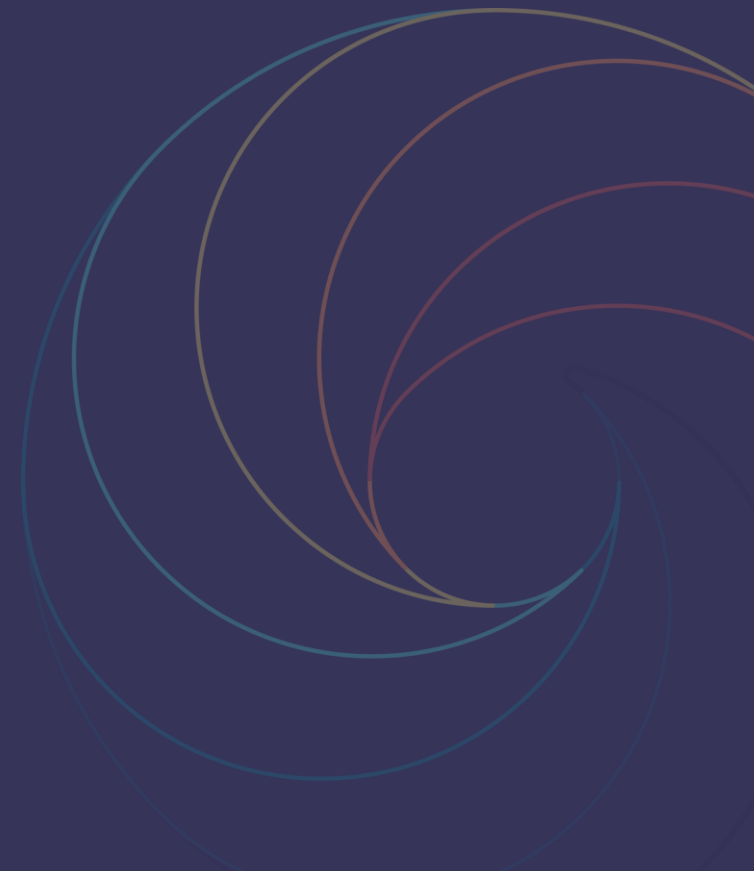
# Rising on the global agenda

Declaration from the 3<sup>rd</sup> UN Ocean Conference reaffirms the need to **adopt a source-to-sea approach** “to enhance the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems and communities”

2026 UN Water Conference: Water for planet: climate, biodiversity, desertification, environment, **source to sea**, resilience and disaster risk reduction.



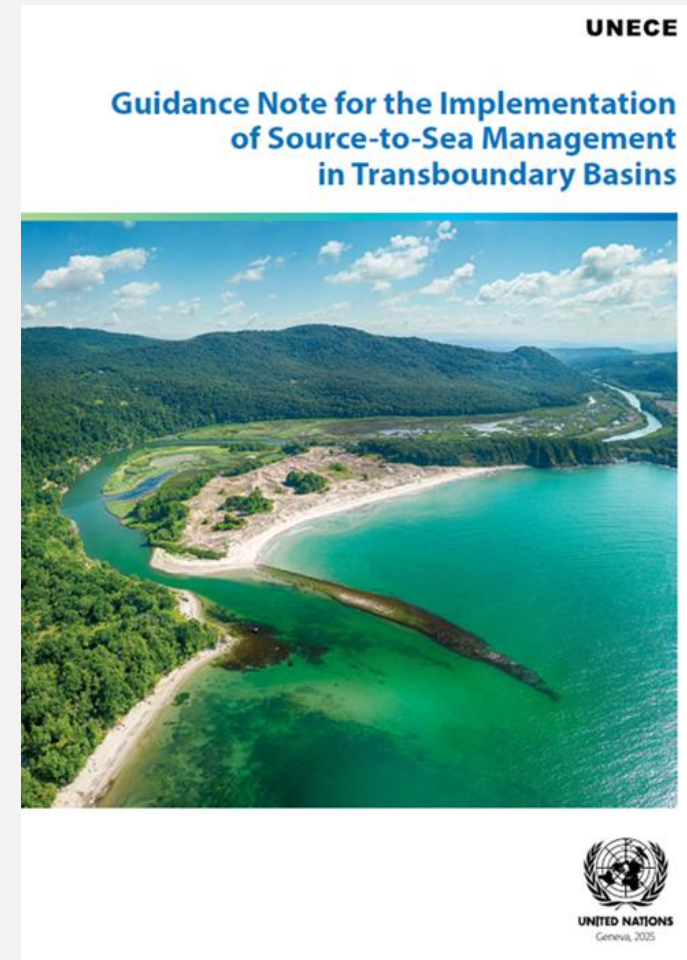
Two new guidance publications.  
One connected approach.



# Implementing source-to-sea management in transboundary basins

This Guidance Note:

- Aims to expand transboundary **source-to-sea cooperation**.
- Positions source-to-sea management within **existing global and regional legal frameworks**.
- Provides examples for **operationalizing source-to-sea cooperation**.
- Suggests **key actions** that can be taken by a range of actors to accelerate its adoption.



# 26 Case Study Examples

At a glance: examples of source-to-sea management from around the world



# Global Conventions support Source-to-Sea Cooperation

- 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- 1979 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- 1989 Basel Convention
- **1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)**
- 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
- 1994 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
- 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention)
- 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

# The Water Convention

**Preamble:** “...prevent, control and reduce the release of hazardous substances into the aquatic environment and to abate eutrophication and acidification, as well as pollution of **the marine environment, in particular coastal areas, from land-based sources.**”

- **Art. 2.6:** “The Riparian Parties shall cooperate on the basis of equality and reciprocity... aimed at the prevention, control and reduction of transboundary impact and aimed at the **protection of the environment of transboundary waters or the environment influenced by such waters, including the marine environment.**”
- **Art. 9.3:** In cases **where a coastal State is affected by transboundary impact**, the Riparian Parties can, if they all so agree, **invite that coastal State** to be involved in an appropriate manner in the activities of multilateral joint bodies established by Parties riparian to such transboundary waters.
- **Art. 9.4:** Joint bodies according to this Convention **shall invite joint bodies, established by coastal States for the protection of the marine environment** directly affected by transboundary impact, to cooperate in order to harmonize their work and to prevent, control and reduce the transboundary impact.
- **Art. 13.1:** It is recommended that **non-coastal States located within the catchment areas of transboundary rivers flowing into a regional sea** become a Party to such agreements.

# Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs)

- 1990 Kuwait Protocol addresses pollution from **land-based sources**.
- Nairobi Convention: 1996 Protocol on **land-based sources and activities**.
- 2019 **Regional Plan on Marine Litter**, Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia.
- Helsinki Convention: **Working Group on Source to Sea Management of Nutrients and Hazardous Substances and Sustainable Agricultural Practices**.
- Barcelona Convention: 1980 Land-Based Sources and Activities Protocol, Regional Plans on **Marine Litter**, on **Urban Wastewater Treatment**, and on **Agriculture**.

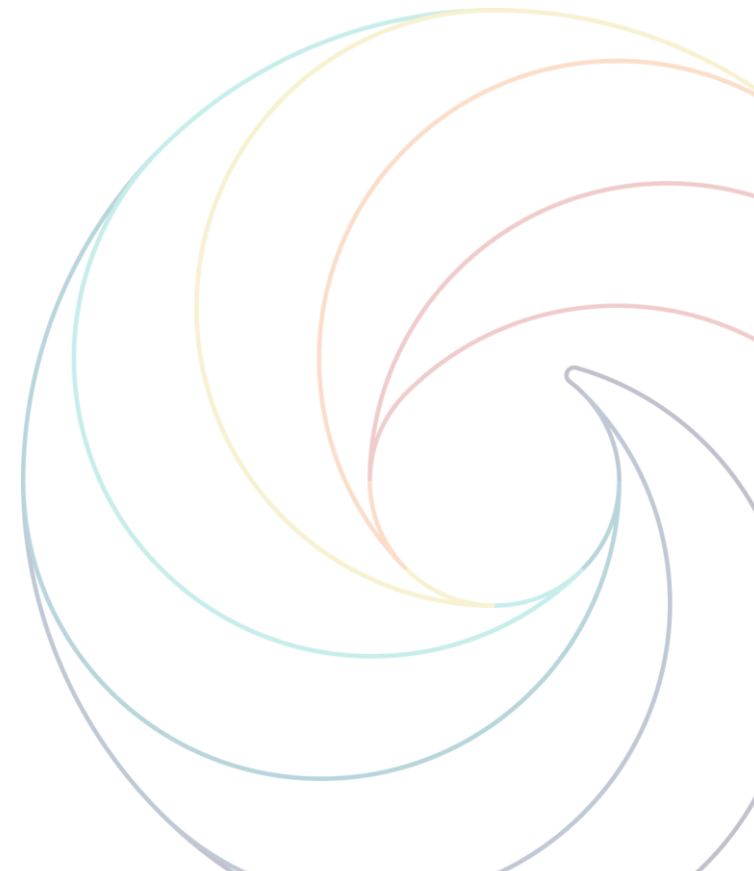
# Modalities for Source-to-Sea Cooperation

Cooperation can be facilitated through legal arrangements such as:

- Memoranda of Understanding
- Letters of Agreement
- Protocols

And through establishment of:

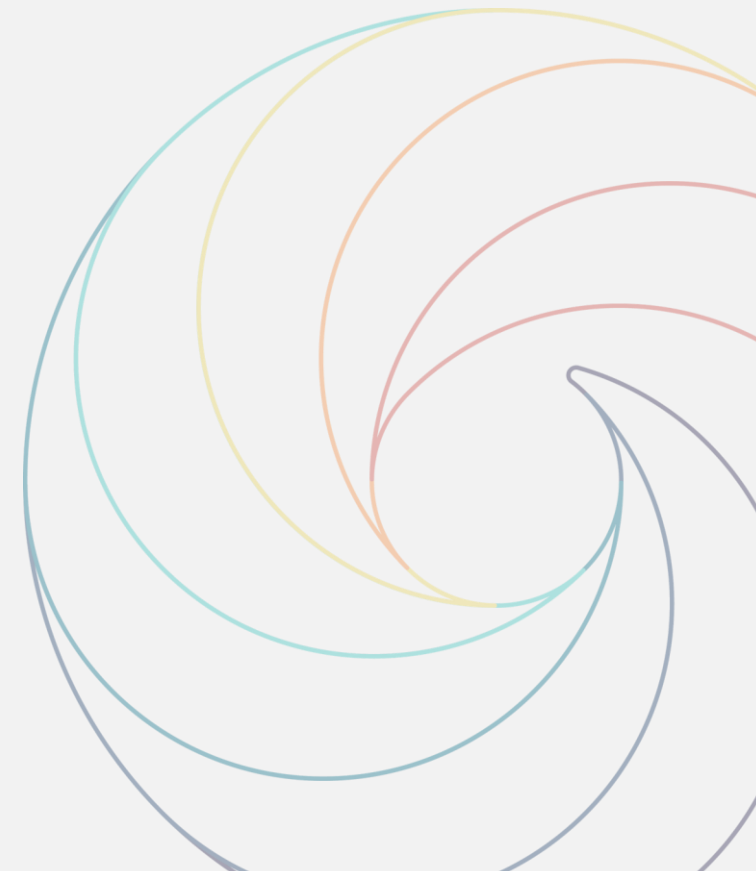
- Joint Task Forces
- Expert Groups
- Working Groups



# Activities in Source-to-Sea Cooperation

Advances towards source-to-sea management can be achieved through cooperation between States on the development and implementation of:

- Joint Action Plans
- Target setting on pollution prevention
- Joint monitoring programmes
- Stakeholder engagement
- Joint planning instruments



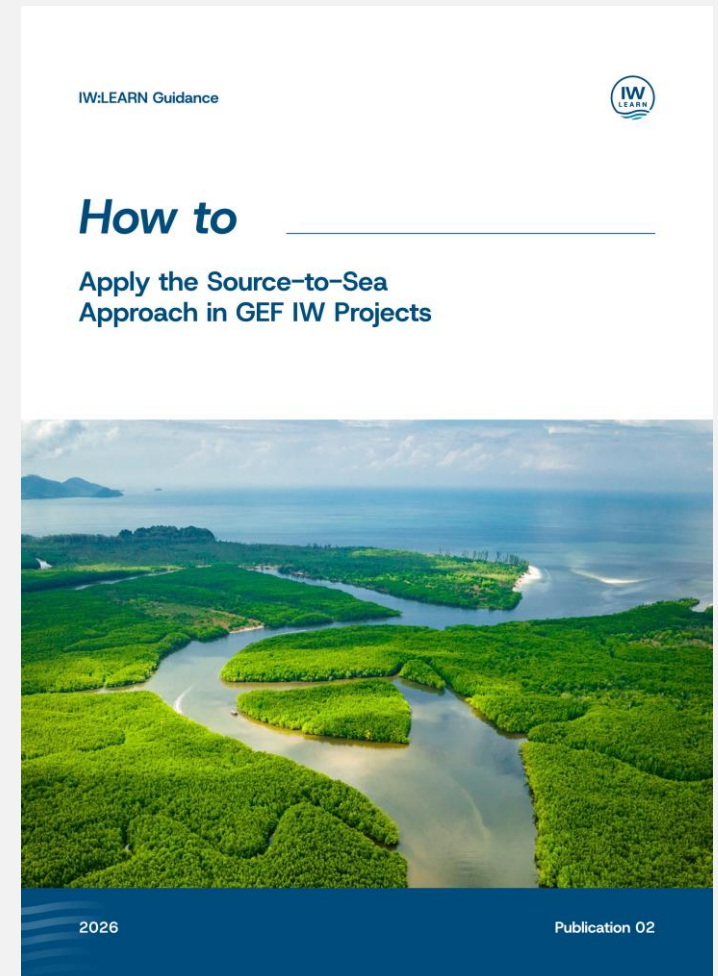
# Actionable Recommendations

- Governments
  - International Organizations
  - Non-Governmental Organizations
  - Financial Institutions
  - Private Sector
  - Academia and Research Institutions
  - Regional and Basin Organizations
  - Governance and policy coordination
  - Financing and investment
  - Stakeholder engagement
  - Capacity development
  - Advocacy and monitoring
  - Innovation and technology
  - Knowledge and evidence building
- 

# Applying the Source-to-Sea Approach

This How to Guide:

- Provides guidance on **incorporating source-to-sea considerations** into GEF IW projects and programmes.
- Supports governments in **adopting source-to-sea management**.
- **Engages private sector actors** as solutions providers and beneficiaries of ecosystem resilience.



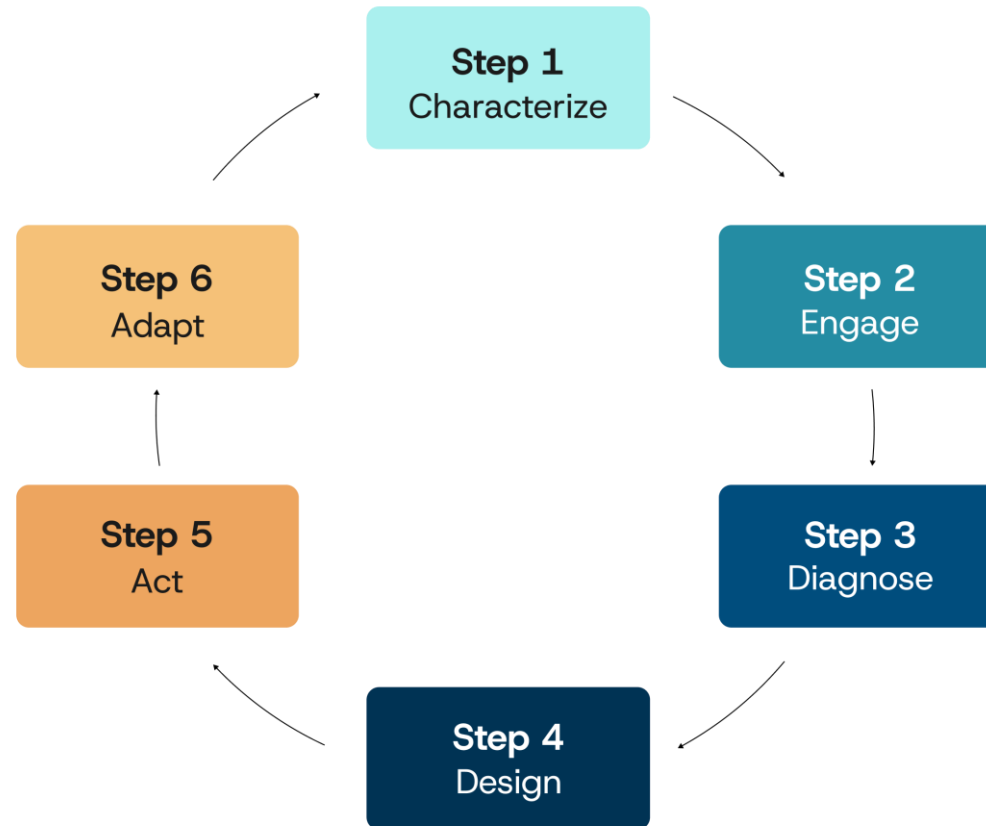
# Inside the Guide

- Introduces **core concepts** and the **six steps** of the Source-to-Sea Approach.
- Applies the Source-to-Sea Approach to **four phases of the project cycle**: concept development, project development, project implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Provides **Field Experiences** from GEF IW projects.
- Includes Tip Boxes, How to Boxes, Key Considerations and Checklists.
- Gives **detailed step-by-step guidance** with worksheets and examples.
- Shares key insights and takeaways.

- **Orange–Senqu River Basin:** Support to the Orange-Senqu River Strategic Action Programme Implementation (GEF ID: 9054).
- **East Asian integrated river basin management (IRBM):** Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in the East Asian Seas through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management in ASEAN Countries (GEF ID: 9654).
- **The Black Sea:** Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) (GEF ID: 10563).
- **Drin River Basin:** Implementing the Strategic Action Programme of the Drin Basin to Strengthen Transboundary Cooperation and Enable Integrated Natural Resources Management (GEF ID: 10881).
- **uP-Cycle:** Towards Sustainable Phosphorus Cycles in Lake Catchments (uP-Cycle) (GEF ID:10892).



# Six steps of the Source-to-Sea Approach



# Progressive application of the six steps of the Source-to-Sea Approach across the project cycle

		Concept development	Project development	Project implementation	MEL
01	Step 1	Incorporate S2S considerations in initial technical assessment	Deepen understanding of S2S system linkages in comprehensive technical assessment	Fill knowledge gaps, research and data needs on S2S system linkages	Identify status indicators to monitor changes in S2S system health (third-order outcomes)
02	Step 2	Identify project partners and consult stakeholders from across the S2S continuum in concept development	Develop an inclusive engagement plan and consult diverse stakeholders in project development	Engage stakeholders from across the S2S continuum in project activities	Identify S2S stress reduction indicators to monitor changes in behaviours and practices (second-order outcomes)
03	Step 3	Identify gaps, conflicts, overlaps, barriers for S2S management in initial governance baseline analysis	Conduct thorough governance baseline analysis to identify challenges and opportunities for S2S management	Deepen understanding of governance system, address challenges and pursue opportunities	Identify process indicators to monitor changes in enabling conditions for S2S management (first-order outcomes)
04	Step 4	Incorporate S2S considerations in concise ToC using four orders of outcome	Incorporate S2S considerations in full development of ToC using four orders of outcome	Review and update ToC to reflect current conditions and knowledge	Identify impact indicators to monitor progress toward desired long-term S2S impacts (fourth-order outcome)
05	Step 5	Identify initial intervention strategies to address S2S impacts	Fully develop project interventions to achieve four orders of outcome	Implement project interventions to strengthen S2S management and improve S2S system health	Track progress on S2S indicators and targets and validate ToC assumptions on S2S system linkages
06	Step 6	Identify global environmental benefits achieved through S2S management and select preliminary project and system-level indicators	Develop S2S indicators and targets for system-level M&E plan	Implement a system-level M&E plan	Analyse, document and disseminate S2S outcomes and learning; adapt as necessary

# Key insights

- Source-to-sea systems are complex: fragmented governance, leadership instability, weak science and knowledge base and disconnected stakeholders.
- Source-to-sea management increases collaboration, knowledge-sharing and sustainable practices that enhance ecosystem resilience.
- It is important to incorporate source-to-sea considerations early, build structured partnerships and frameworks, strengthen the science-policy interface and scale coordination.

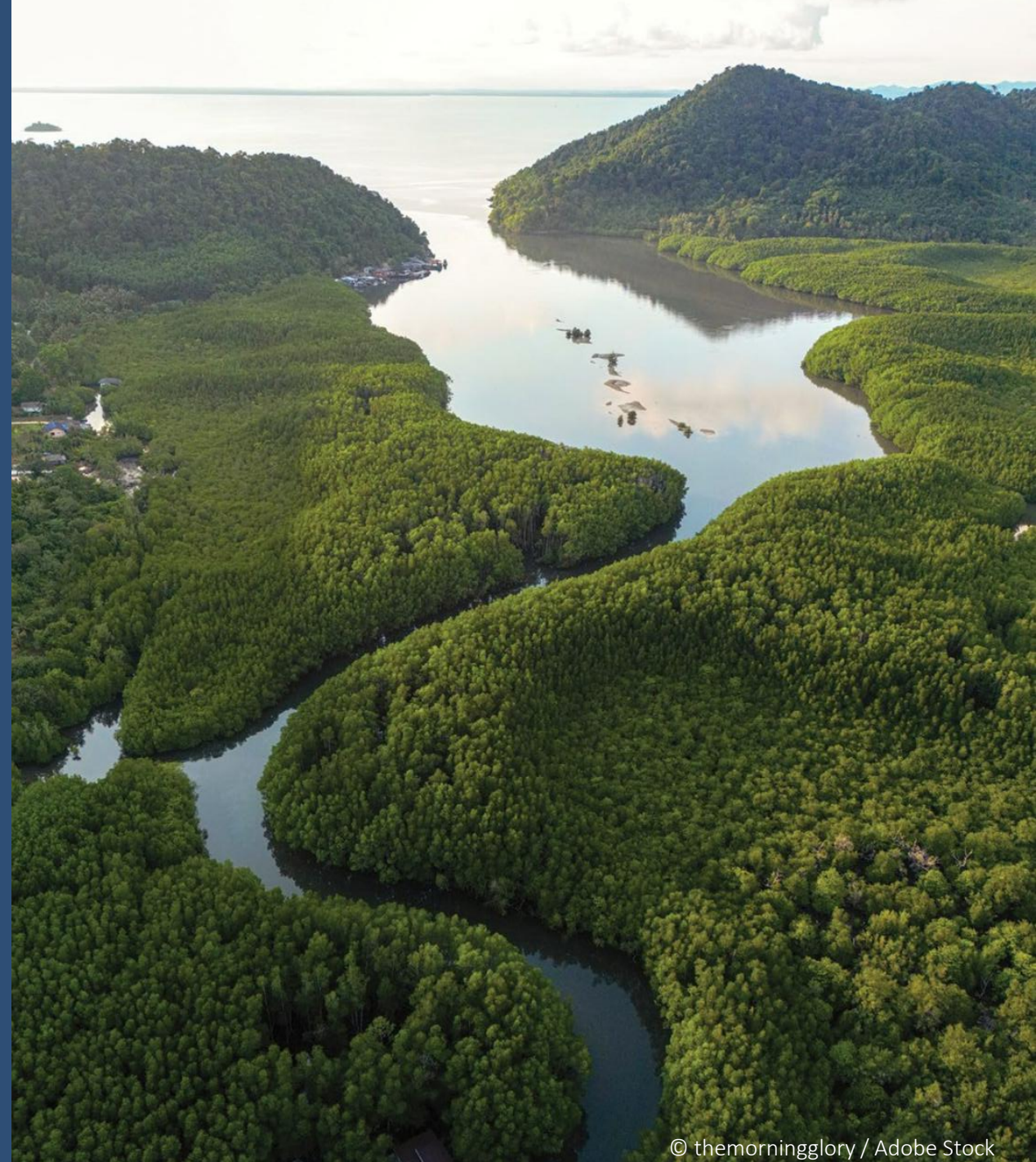
# Incorporating Source-to-Sea Management

- Transboundary basin organizations, RSCAPs and agreements.
- National policy and regulatory development.
- Area-based planning frameworks.
- Multisectoral stakeholder platforms.
- Pilot projects and demonstration sites.
- Capacity development and knowledge exchange.
- Monitoring, reporting and data systems.



When governments, international organizations, NGOs, financial institutions, businesses, academia and regional bodies come together, they become the **driving force behind effective source-to-sea management in transboundary cooperation.**

Such collective action does not just safeguard ecosystems, it paves the way for **a future where nature and people flourish in harmony**, protecting the source-to-sea continuum for generations to come.



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