

## Civil society engagement

Water security in Africa requires that existing policy frameworks be matched with effective implementation. Key to success is multi-stakeholder collaboration wherein an empowered local civil society is able to voice the needs of communities and advocate to policy makers for sustainable water resource management.



THRIVING ECONOMIES



IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS



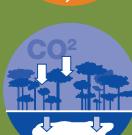
FOOD SECURITY



WATER SECURITY



HEALTHY BIODIVERSITY



CLIMATE RESILIENCE



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# Communities at the heart of river basin management

## Context and challenge

Africa is a continent of large rivers and lakes, vast wetlands as well as ground water resources. Extensive river basins are home to three quarters of the continent's population. Yet two thirds of Africa is classified as 'arid' or 'semiarid', meaning that water is frequently scarce. Water resources are often overexploited and are being depleted faster than the recharge rate. A range of factors from population growth, pollution, rapid urbanisation and poor planning to desertification and climate variability play a role in undermining the hydrological cycle and ensuring that millions of people suffer from lack of access to clean, affordable supplies of this essential resource.

The good news is that the policy foundations are solid. The Africa Water Vision for 2025<sup>1</sup> describes a future where the use and management of water resources for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, regional cooperation, and the environment are both equitable and sustainable. In 2007 the African Network of Basin Organizations was designated as a sub-committee of the African Ministers' Council on Water to promote Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) (see box). As river basins are often shared by several countries, special attention was given to addressing the need for enhanced transboundary management.

What is often lacking, however, is effective implementation. Despite the 90+ agreements aimed at cooperatively managing transboundary water resources and many more plans at the national level, in practice there are few effective institutional arrangements for cooperation between users. Procedures to avoid or resolve disputes over water are largely absent. Another critical ingredient often missing is active community engagement through stakeholder collaboration. This is essential to creating an enabling environment for the co-management of the water resources upon which livelihoods depend.



## Taking an ecosystem approach

The ecosystem approach promotes the integrated management of land, water and living resources in a way that achieves mutually compatible conservation and sustainable use, and delivers equitable benefits for people and nature.<sup>2</sup> The Ecosystem Alliance has worked closely with civil society partners in Africa to ensure that ecosystems are at the heart of a participatory and inclusive dialogue on achieving water security and integrated management by translating policy into practice. The Alliance's strategy focuses on building trust, shared knowledge and a common vision.

Key to realizing these goals is the Afriwater Community of Practice (CoP). This platform for learning and exchange was initiated in 2011 when Alliance partner Both ENDS convened a group of African civil society practitioners to share experiences around IWRM in an effort to upscale the encouraging results of collaborative action. Through the CoP, twelve civil society organisations from 6 countries support enhanced community participation in IWRM processes through:

- Supporting and promoting the development of river basin management processes with the strong and sustained participation of local communities, in cooperation with relevant officials, water experts and private sector stakeholders;
- Engaging actively with river basin organisations in their respective countries;
- Promoting the conservation of mangroves, floodplains and riparian forest as a foundation for sound river basin management;
- Increasing the capacity of local actors to engage and influence water management policies and water-related investments;
- Supporting a strengthened African civil society network for river basin planning according to the principles of the Negotiated Approach<sup>3</sup>.

Since 2014, the CoP secretariat has been hosted by Alliance partner JVE International in Togo.

Exciting work is also under way at the field level:

- Alliance partners the Benin Environmental Educational Society (BEES), Nature Tropicale, and Le Centre Régional de Recherche et d'Education pour un Développement Intégré (CREDI) have established a number of community based protected areas in Benin's Ouémé Delta. The aim is to conserve and restore biodiversity rich areas which play an important role in water regulation and climate adaptation.
- In the Volta Basin in Ghana, the Development Institute helped set up a local committee for the management of the Dayi sub-basin and successfully introduced small scale irrigation as an adaptive response to climate change.



JOSEA S. DOSSOU-BODJENOU, NATURE TROPICALE



Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is defined as “a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.”<sup>1</sup>

The rationale is to ensure efficient and sustainable development and management of the world’s limited water resources and to cope with conflicting demands.

*‘...an Africa where there is an equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, regional cooperation, and the environment’.*  
The Africa Water Vision for 2025: Equitable and Sustainable Use of Water for Socioeconomic Development<sup>2</sup>

- In the Mono Basin, JVE Togo and JVE Benin have put sustained participation into practice through extensive consultations with basin communities and the creation of a Citizens’ Forum as a platform for continuous dialogue and the development of bottom-up policy proposals.
- Senegal’s Forum Civile assists communities in defending their access and user rights to water resources in the lower delta of the Senegal river, currently under threat from large scale investments for food and biofuel production.
- BEES is closely involved in a project supporting the development of a new water institute to better enable Benin in managing future water challenges. The Society represents the voice of local communities in the set-up of the institute.

### Impacts on communities, nature and policy

- Thanks to the protection and rehabilitation work in the Mono River in Benin, over 100 hectares of mangrove have been replanted and 12,000 hectares of natural infrastructure benefit from improved local governance.
- Local Alliance partners from Benin have been central to transboundary biosphere reserve in the lower delta of the Mono River. This multi-year project is financed by the GIZ (German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation) and supported by IUCN NL. The creation of the reserve is a consolidation and scaling up of initiatives started by Alliance partners, notably on community based conservation areas around flagship species such marine turtles, hippopotamus and the Sitatunga swamp antelope.
- As part of the Dayi basin management plan in the Volta Basin in Ghana, over 25,000 hectares of Community Managed Conservation Area is being realised for the conservation and restoration of the upstream forest areas.
- In 2014, the governments of Togo and Benin set up the Mono Basin River Authority, including all stakeholders in the decision-making processes. The JVE teams in both Togo and Benin were thus enabled to speak on behalf of civil society more broadly to protect and fulfill their rights, and to propose and negotiate viable long term strategies toward integrated resource use. JVE and partner civil society organisations will monitor the developments closely to ensure that community voices

are heard and local participation becomes a reality in the Mono River Basin.

- In 2014, the African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO) invited AfriWater CoP representation to the validation meeting of ANBO’s ten year Strategic Plan and five year Action Plan. This was evidence of ANBO’s new commitment to include all relevant stakeholders in all stages of planning and implementation. Together they made a joint commitment toward (i) developing bottom-up and participatory water resource management plans in African basins, conducting analysis of stakeholders and the needs of local water users (including communities, private sector, and ecosystem); and (ii) strengthening civil society practitioners.

### The way forward

With a number of participatory fora and processes now officially established, a key challenge for government authorities and other leaders within these institutions will be to ensure the proactive inclusion of all stakeholders, including an empowered civil society. Local empowerment takes time. Therefore the process toward inclusive local participation in water management in Africa will require long term financial and human investment in building local capacities and management structures. Governments, donors and private sector partners must move focus on a broader water security agenda. A participatory, bottom-up approach to planning and implementation should replace the predominant top-down processes which have been common thus far.

Success will be the realisation of integrated water resources management on the ground, resulting in improved water security and health of Africa’s wetland resources for the long term.

### For more information, please contact:

- Both ENDS: Thirza Bronner, tbronner@bothends.org  
Wetlands International: Chris Baker,  
chris.baker@wetlands.org  
IUCN NL: Jan Kamstra, jan.kamstra@iucn.nl  
JVE International: Sena Alouka, afriwater.cop@gmail.com

### Further reading/viewing

1. AfricWater COP <https://www.facebook.com/AfriWaterCoP>, Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020
2. <http://www.amcow-online.org/images/docs/2012%20africa%20status%20report%20on%20iwrm.pdf>
3. <http://www.jve-international.org>
4. <https://www.facebook.com/rbtdm Reserve Biosphere Transfrontalier du Mono>
5. <http://www.bees-ong.org/>
6. <http://www.thedevin.org/>

### REFERENCES

1. [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/African\\_Water\\_Vision\\_2025.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/African_Water_Vision_2025.pdf)
2. <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/>
3. The Negotiated Approach shifts the initiative for the development and implementation of river basin plans from the state to actors in civil society. For more information, see <http://www.bothends.org/nl/Publicaties/document/49/Involving-Communities-A-Guide-to-the-Negotiated-Approach>

### MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ECOSYSTEM ALLIANCE



National Committee  
of The Netherlands



Wetlands  
INTERNATIONAL

Both ENDS  
Connecting people for change