

# INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS IN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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## Abstract

Although water is essential to human survival it is estimated that more than a billion people worldwide have insufficient access to clean water supplies. Twenty seven nations were classified as “water scarce” and a further 16 as “water stressed” ( UNESCO-WWAP, 2003; Jansky and Uitto, 2005).

In an effort to promote the institutionalization of stakeholder participation, international water laws & agreements have, over the past decade, started incorporating provisions committing governments to involve stakeholders in water management decisions. Governments and river basin organizations (RBOs) have increasingly paid attention to the involvement of stakeholders. Civil society represents a resource which can assist governments in the formulation and implementation of projects, policies, regulations and laws around managing water resources (Bruch, 2000).

General Challenges in Southern Africa:

Among the challenges limiting the progress towards sustainable management of fresh water resources in the region are: poor technical and financial capacity institutions; lack of adequate political and financial support from member countries, thereby affecting the performance of a number of regional and basin level institutions; low investments in water resources management, including pollution control and inadequate legislative reforms and enforcement. Among other limitations is the decline of the quality of data collected in some parts of Africa. This has made it difficult to provide adequate and accurate data and information needed for water resources assessment and development activities at national and basin levels.

Requirements to Ensure Effective Stakeholders Participation:

Effective stakeholder participation depends on strong and transparent institutions, as well as legal frameworks at the national level. Some of the requirements to ensure effective Participation can be summarized as follow:

- The role of each stakeholder must be clear, both at community and technical level and be in line with their normal functions.
- Building of common views, the desire to resolve a resource dilemma must be shared by the stakeholders. Stakeholders must agree on a common understanding of shared basin management and see advantages in a joint approach.
- Early dissemination of information, available information on the basin should be made available to all stakeholders when the project is initiated, to give a base-line for the development of a common understanding, which provides for effective stakeholders participation.
- Enhancing mutual understanding among stakeholders which can be created through interaction around local situations. New knowledge arises through action.

- Trust in each other, and in the institutions that support action, emerges as participants become familiar with the stakes of others and their perspectives when expressed in conversations around action.
- Skills such as effective communication and conflict management need to be developed within teams.
- African women have a much less influential role in the management and decision-making processes related to water resources than men, in spite of the important role they play. Effective gender balance should therefore be pursued at all levels in decision-making and implementation.
- There is a need to adopt or strengthen relevant legislation relating to stakeholder participation, and enhancing capacity at the national level to accommodate stakeholders within the decision-making process.
- In addition, new funding strategies will be required to ensure that infrastructure for stakeholder participation is in place.
- Involving the stakeholders in the water management plan must be present in all stages of the compilation of the water management plan.
- At the national level, States are encouraged to guarantee legal rights for the public on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, so that the public may enjoy these rights during decision-making processes relating to water management.
- When taking decisions regarding water management, States should ensure that the outcomes of stakeholders participation are properly taken into account by public authorities and joint bodies.

#### Benefits of Involving Stakeholders:

The decision to involve the stakeholders in water management should be understood in the sense that it presents real benefits to governments. Some of these benefits include:

- Improved quality of decision-making - allowing stakeholders to express their views regarding social & environmental conditions in their communities and taking those views into consideration in the governmental decision-making process expands the knowledge base for decisions, resulting in better implementation of environmental & development goals.
- Improved credibility and public support – when offering the stakeholders access to information and access to justice improve the credibility, effectiveness, and accountability of governmental decision-making processes.
- Improved implementation and monitoring - Public input supplements government resources for developing laws, as well as for monitoring, inspection, and enforcement, by identifying environmental threats or violations of applicable laws.
- Early warning of potential challenges - Public participation can identify and address problems at an early stage, saving time, energy, and scarce financial resources in the long run.

Enhancing the interest among the local people of the basin:

The incentive to participate should be based on mutual realization that ‘going it alone’ no longer delivers desired outcomes. In different studies it emerges that public participation can be introduced or enhanced through the implementation of different projects in the basin. These projects may be those initiated by government agencies or by NGOs and development organizations. In some cases they are initiated by the communities themselves.

Public participation can be encouraged by introducing a common linking issue of concern, such as:

- poverty alleviation,
- public health,
- water quality,
- concerns about infrastructure,
- environmental changes.

Stakeholder participation in the Okavango River Basin:

The Okavango River Basin extends across three countries: Angola, Namibia and Botswana, covering an area of some 700 000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Okavango river is unusual in that it does not drain into the sea, but ends instead in a large inland desert oasis covering an area of 15,844 km<sup>2</sup>, where the water is seemingly “lost” to evaporation and the sands of the Kalahari Desert through a wetland system that is the Okavango delta in Botswana, a Ramsar site (Ashton & Neal, 2003; Turton *et al.*, 2003a).

The Okavango River Basin is home to some 600,000 people. About 350 000 (58%) live in Angola, 163 000 (27%) in Namibia and 88 000 (15%) in Botswana. (Mendlesohn and el Obied 2004).

In recent years several national developments have been proposed but vetoed due to the sensitivity of the Okavango Delta to any alternations in the upstream flow. Currently Namibia uses less than 0.2% of the river water, to supply Rundu and a few irrigation schemes alongside the river.

The main use of the water in Botswana is to maintain the world-famous Okavango Delta, a major source of foreign revenue through tourism. Intergovernmental co-operation within the Okavango River Basin started long before the formal signing of the SADC Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses in 2000. The result was the establishment of the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) in September 1994.

The OKACOM:

The OKACOM is recognized as the highest-level, regional institutional body for the Okavango River Basin. Its main objective is to advise the respective Governments on the conservation, development and utilization of the water resources of the Okavango River Basin ( Bethune, 2006). It is mandated to give advice on:

- o Measures to determine the long term safe yield of the available water resources,
- o Reasonable water demands of stakeholders in the basin,
- o Suitable criteria for conservation, equitable allocation and sustainable water use,
  - o Pollution prevention and the control of aquatic weeds,

Stakeholder participation and interaction with Okacom:

At its annual meeting held in Maun in 1999, OKACOM approved and endorsed the “Every River has its People” project, requesting regional partners to assist OKACOM by developing the capacity of local communities within the basin to enable them to participate more fully in future decision making. Initially the project worked only with communities in Namibia and Botswana, but expanded into Angola as soon as peace was restored there (Namibia Nature Foundation 2003). The “Every River Has Its People” Project, has succeeded in developing an excellent basis of knowledge and information sharing between water resource managers in OKACOM, government departments, local communities and traditional leaders. One of the important achievements of the project is the establishment of the Basin-wide Forum (BWF). The BWF is a regional committee of local authority and mere community members, each country have elected 30 members

who have been capacitated, trained to make decisions, and they have a seat at OKACOM. There is also a participation protocol whereby communities and commissioners attend each others meetings.

One of the important activities is that stakeholders in the three countries have been able to exchange visits, using these opportunities to see different parts of the basin, gain a better understanding of how the system functions and to share ideas. OKACOM members, i.e. Government officials from Luanda, Windhoek and Gaborone have been able to speak to local community members living alongside the river. Therefore, a common vision has been developed by the communities and relevant stakeholders on how they can contribute towards the long term sustainable management of the Okavango River basin, agreed on the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder.

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