



**REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON LARGE HYDRAULIC INFRASTRUCTURES IN  
WEST AFRICA**

**REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUMS FOR THE NIGER AND SENEGAL RIVER  
BASINS**

Nouakchott, MAURITANIA – May 24-26, 2010

Sélingué, MALI – June 7- 9, 2010

**SUMMARY REPORT**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The issues regarding large hydraulic infrastructures in West Africa

In order to meet people's growing needs for food security, energy security and water supply, several West African countries have built or are planning to build large hydraulic infrastructures in the watersheds of the sub-region's main rivers (Niger River, Senegal River, Gambia River, Volta Rivers, etc.).

Despite the benefits deriving from these constructions in terms of mobilisation of water resources for diverse uses (agricultural uses, water supply, electricity generation, etc.), some have had adverse impacts tending to overshadow the benefits and leading to feelings of frustration and rejection, particularly among the local communities. This poses risks to the sub-regional cohesion and stability which are fundamental for social and economic development.

For the past decade, governments, organisations in charge of watershed management, sub-regional integration organisations, as well as development partners have been actively looking for the best way to minimize conflict risks, optimize the positive impacts and minimize the adverse impacts of large hydraulic infrastructures.

It is for this reason that at the end of 2008 the Water Resources Coordination Centre (WRCC) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) launched a regional consultation process on large dam projects in West Africa. The consultation process aims at contributing to the harmonious development of West Africa and regional integration through the implementation of a dialogue on infrastructures in the water sector. This initiative aims to promote Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and is in line with the recommendations formulated in 2000 by the World Commission on Dams.

## 1.2 Involvement of civil society

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), WRCC's partner for this consultation process, was mandated to foster the involvement of civil society stakeholders in the dialogue through a series of activities: an electronic forum on four topics related to large hydraulic infrastructures, case studies and two regional forums, one on the Niger River basin and one on the Senegal River basin.

The objectives of the two regional forums held in Nouakchott in Mauritania on May 24-26, 2010 for Senegal River Basin stakeholders and in Sélingué in Mali on June 7-9, 2010 for those of the Niger River Basin, were to discuss large dam-related issues, and to obtain the opinions of civil society representatives on both the impacts of large dams, and particularly the whole construction process and any existing frameworks for consultation among stakeholders in each country and within basin organisations. These forums were intended to help civil society actors establish a joint strategy for participating in the regional consultation process and to make recommendations targeting political decision-makers from governments, basin organisations and ECOWAS.

Eau Vive, an NGO working for economic and social development with a wide experience of mobilising and supporting civil society stakeholders in the basins of large rivers in West and Central Africa, provided

its technical support in mobilising participants, designing the forum format and in facilitating the proceedings of the forums of Nouakchott and Sélingué.

Approximately one hundred civil society representatives from the two watersheds took part in these forums as well as representatives from government institutions and the respective basin organisations, the *Senegal River Development* organisation (Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du fleuve Sénégal), and the *Niger River Basin Authority* (*Autorité du Bassin du Niger*). 40 participants took part in the forum in Nouakchott and 50 participants in the forum in Sélingué.

This summary report sets out the preparation and the proceedings of the forums as well as the main emerging results and guidelines.

## 2 PROCEEDINGS OF THE FORUMS

### 2.1 Preparation of the forums

The forums were prepared in April and May 2010 by a team from the IUCN regional bureau for West and Central Africa, with the technical support of Eau Vive General Management's Africa Office, as well as various partners mobilised in the host countries. Several work sessions helped draw up preparatory papers and agree on the overall format for each forum (participants' profile, strategy for the mobilisation of participants, selection of communications).

### 2.2 Work proceedings

Each forum took place over three days including:

- An opening ceremony ;
- Plenary sessions where "Initiatives and Knowledge" sessions presented the scientific/technical, ecological, socio-economic and political issues related to existing or planned large hydraulic infrastructures in the watersheds of the Niger and Senegal river basins. These sessions also helped share with the participants the other components of the regional dialogue process launched by ECOWAS (results of the proceedings of the panel of experts which analysed the decision-making processes of three facilities of the region, results of the electronic forum) ;
- Group work around the main issues on which recommendations were to be formulated by the participants of each forum;
- A field visit of existing hydroelectric facilities (specific case of the forum of Sélingué in Mali);
- A closing ceremony.

The forums provided the opportunity for free and open debates on the various issues addressed as well

as direct exchanges among participants including user representatives, experts from basin organisations and governments. This helped to compare the different opinions on the positive and/or negative impacts of existing or planned large dams.

## **2.3 Results of the forums**

### **2.3.1 Achievements**

The forums in Nouakchott and Sélingué resulted in several key achievements including the following:

- Providing the opportunity to debate issues relating to large dams with civil society stakeholders from the entire river basin. Indeed, to date, the overall large dam construction process has been the sole responsibility of governments and basin organisations, with a considerable lack of transparency in any communication or consultation actions. Civil society stakeholders are generally involved only when there is an open or latent conflict with communities living near the sites. The setting up of a consultation process and exchanges as part of an overall dialogue is thus a major achievement;
- The participation in both forums of a member of the ECOWAS expert panel, to share the first conclusions of this panel with participants, as well as to ascertain the other participants' reactions, helping to further enrich recommendations which will be forwarded to decision-makers.
- These forums provided civil society stakeholders from the Niger and Senegal River basins with the opportunity to get to know each other, share their analyses and findings on cross-border issues and to strengthen their position with regard to other stakeholders in the dialogue ;
- The opportunity to directly exchange and debate among civil society representatives and experts from the basin organisations as there is no formal framework of permanent consultation in the governance of these organisations;
- The opportunity to share experiences on various research initiatives and actions in the field. This also helped civil society stakeholders to have a better understanding of the issues relating to the negative and positive impacts of large hydraulic infrastructures;
- The growing awareness of the civil society actors as concerns their role and responsibilities in the overall large dam construction process.

### **2.3.2 Shortcomings**

The shortcomings noted in the preparation and proceedings of the regional forums of Nouakchott and Sélingué included the following:

- Relatively short preparation time did not enable a better consultation at the local level for the selection of participants, the late sending of some presentations to the organisation committee and the poor involvement of some important organisations and networks in the respective

watersheds;

- Relatively short amount of time dedicated to discussions and exchanges during the three-day forum and which deserved to be extended with regard to the rich debates started by the participants;
- A lack of financial resources to meet the costs relating to the attendance of more participants in each forum;
- Logistical difficulties relating to the organisation of such events, as was the case for the forum in Sélingué in Mali, which has limited accommodation and capacities;
- Lack of a long-term agenda for the regional dialogue as a whole not allowing the design of an overall strategy for the future.

### 3 MAIN RESULTS

#### 3.1 Shared Findings and Concerns

Generally, participants who took part in the two regional forums made the following findings:

FORUM OF NOUAKCHOTT	FORUM OF SELINGUE
<p><b>1.</b> Large hydraulic infrastructures built in the last few years in the Senegal River Basin undeniably meet the recognized functions such as: mobilisation and storage of water resources, flow regulation, prevention of water salinisation, reinforcement of solidarity among nations sharing the basin and regional integration (cases of the common facilities of Diama and Manantali), etc.</p> <p><b>2.</b> Large hydraulic infrastructures modify the natural environment and create new situations of environmental degradation and constraints to economic and social development, especially in the site areas, in a context of climate change.</p> <p><b>3.</b> Potentialities offered through the realisation of large hydraulic infrastructures are not sufficiently developed by investments, notably post-dam investments, especially in the agricultural, pastoral and fishing sectors employing about 90% of riverside communities.</p> <p><b>4.</b> As concerns the benefits in favour of the riverside local and site area communities, large hydraulic infrastructures may lead to feelings of frustration harmful to a harmonious and fair development.</p> <p><b>5.</b> In most of the cases, the alternatives and other additional options are not sufficiently or not at all investigated during the design and</p>	<p><b>1.</b> Large hydraulic facilities built in the last few years in the Niger River Basin are profitable at the <b>economic</b> level (energy generation, development of agricultural, production, fisheries, livestock, industry, navigation, tourism and trade), <b>environmental</b> level (floodwater forecasting and management, ground water recharge, attenuation of drought effects by the creation of a microclimate) and <b>socio-sanitary</b> level (socio-sanitary and cultural development, cultural melting pot, job creation, ...).</p> <p><b>2.</b> These same hydraulic infrastructures also have adverse impacts on the three levels; <b>economic</b> (loss of natural heritage, giving up of economic activities), <b>environmental</b> (lost of houses and biodiversity, increased sedimentation, development of invasive plants) and <b>socio-sanitary</b> (immigration, exodus, destruction of sites archaeological sites and rituals, conflicts, development of diseases, involuntary movement of people, juvenile delinquency, insecurity, decline in morals, anarchic urbanisation).</p> <p><b>3.</b> A few existing dams in the Niger River basin were built without any prior environmental and social impact study. In</p>

<p>the implementation of large dam projects.</p> <p><b>6.</b> The social aspects (including health ones) are not sufficiently mainstreamed at the start of the projects leading to more difficult management of their negative impacts.</p> <p><b>7.</b> The overall construction process of these large infrastructures (initiative, research, construction, management, etc.) does not take into account the "involvement and participation" of the community concerned, and the latter is unable to exert any influence;</p> <p><b>8.</b> The stakeholders do not relate to the debates and exchanges and do not have much opportunity to discuss the challenges relating to large dam construction.</p> <p><b>9.</b> Civil society stakeholders are not organised enough or not organised at all in the watersheds, receive little or no information about the outstanding issues and implemented projects, are seldom or never consulted and involved, are not very or not conversant at all with the analysis of challenges related to large dam projects.</p> <p><b>10.</b> The lack or the vulnerability of the participatory mechanisms for civil society in the basin organisations is an impediment to organised and high-quality participation.</p>	<p>some cases, actions were carried out later to attenuate the adverse impacts on communities (as irrigated areas) but remain insufficient.</p> <p>4. The cost-effectiveness analysis of these projects is generally based on energy generation and agricultural production. It was generally noticed that the objectives of large dams which were initially set are still not met. Sometimes significant delays are noticed in the development of the agricultural potential of the area impacted by the dam.</p> <p>5. Damage caused to communities affected by the construction of hydraulic infrastructures is not well assessed and compensatory measures are low or not paid.</p> <p>6. At all dam project implementation phases (design, realisation, management), there is a lack of information sharing, awareness-raising and involvement in decision-making.</p> <p>7. In some countries, additional measures are implemented to minimize adverse impacts (creation of heritage conservation sites and conservation parks of animal and plant species) and optimize positive impacts (creation of fishery industries, development of agricultural production, etc.).</p> <p>8. The governments do not comply with their commitments (local development plan, re-housing plan, etc.) towards the communities affected and remedial mechanisms do not exist at the local, national, regional levels.</p>
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### 3.2 Major Recommendations

At the end of the exchanges and debates, each forum made the following recommendations:

Forum of Nouakchott	Forum of Sélingué
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°1</u></b> To make additional investments for the existing facilities for a better development of post-dam water resources and set a policy favouring land access by riverside communities (support to small family farms, ...);</p> <p><b><u>Recommendation N°2</u></b> The design and implementation of projects meeting basic social needs of affected people (drinking water, health, education, fish, livestock, energy, local economy,...) to make people feel they are participating in the improvement of living conditions;</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation N°1</u></b> The setting up at the ECOWAS level of mediation, arbitration and remedial mechanisms for stakeholders in large dam projects (Government, basin organisations, local communities, CSO, development partners, etc.) in order to ensure that the commitments made by each party are upheld.</p> <p><b><u>Recommendation N°2</u></b> The reinforcement of technical, political, financial capacities of civil society stakeholders and the setting up of an appropriate participatory mechanism to make them efficiently play their role in</p>

<p><b><u>Recommendation N°3</u></b> To set up a "continuous dialogue" mechanism among stakeholders in large dam projects (initiative, research, analysis and selection of options, construction, management, etc.) in order to share responsibility at all levels as regards future positive or negative impacts. This supposes a rigorous identification of all categories of actors concerned (central governments, local governments, CSO, opinion leaders, private sector, PTF, research, etc.) ;</p>	<p>collaboration with the Government, local communities, and development partners in the implementation of large dam projects in order to ensure transparency and good governance.</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°4</u></b> The reinforcement of technical, political and financial capacities of civil society stakeholders and setting up of an appropriate participatory mechanism to help them efficiently play their role in the implementation of large dam projects. Specific programmes must be developed for community-based organisations, all sectors taken into account, as well as social components with high potential for mobilisation (women, young people, religious and traditional leaders, etc.) in order to raise awareness on environmental issues and remedial measures to take at all levels. Special attention must be given to the issue of transhumance and its collateral effects ;</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation N°3</u></b> The development and the optimisation of existing or planned facilities in order to increase their positive economic impacts focusing on :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. development of uses (energy, water supply, agriculture, livestock, fishery) ;</li> <li>2. Ecosystem restoration ;</li> <li>3. Mainstreaming recurrent costs (maintenance, etc) of facilities ;</li> <li>4. Better sharing of costs and benefits among the Governments and among affected communities.</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°5</u></b> The carrying out of a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessment on post-dam impacts in order to learn from the past and consider remedial measures to be implemented in order to maximize positive impacts and minimize adverse impacts of existing dams in favour of a sustainable and fair local development ;</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation N°4</u></b> The carrying out of a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessment of post-dam impacts in order to learn from the past for the future projects and in order to consider remedial measures to be set up to maximize adverse impacts of the existing dams in favour of a sustainable and fair local development.</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°6</u></b> The adoption of the strategic environmental assessment as a requirement for dam projects in order to better understand and mainstream environmental, socio-economic and sanitary impacts on humans, animals and plants in the areas directly or indirectly impacted including the cost areas as regards challenges related to climate change</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation N°5</u></b> The adoption of the strategic environment assessment for dam projects in order to better understand and take into account environmental, socio-economic and sanitary impacts at all levels impacted directly or indirectly including lakes, as regards climate change related challenges.</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°7</u></b> The development of tools for assessing and sharing costs and benefits between the national and the local levels in a given country ;</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation N°6</u></b> Appropriate and timely information must be provided to civil society in order to reinforce its participation in decision-making and minimize dam-related risks.</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°8</u></b> To set up at the West African community level an arbitration and mediation mechanism among stakeholders in large dam projects as well as remedial measures (Governments, Basin Organisations, Local Communities, OSC, development partners, etc.) ;</p>	
<p><b><u>Recommendation N°9</u></b> The setting up of a mechanism for monitoring recommendations made during civil society forums as part of the regional dialogue on dams including the regular organisation of local and regional forums ;</p>	



**Recommendation N°10**

Support the organisation of civil society participation (identification of representatives, positions of representatives, etc.);

**Recommendation N°11**

To set up a mechanism for monitoring environmental issues, especially developments in water quality, with attention to aquatic plants issues.

**4 POST-FORUM AVENUES FOR ACTION AND GUIDELINES**

In regard to the aforementioned results, several avenues for action should be followed and/or undertaken so as to ensure better involvement of civil society stakeholders in the dialogue on dams process as well as to implement the recommendations on all levels, be it local, national, watershed, sub-regional or even international.

**4.1 Civil society structuring**

The involvement and participation of the civil society stakeholders in the sustainable development process is recognised as being key to good governance, but its implementation frequently puts governments and the stakeholders themselves to the test, given their diversity and their inadequate capacities for organisation, analysis, proposal making and influence.

In the Niger River basin, the level of organisation within the basin and the interface with Niger River Basin Authority (NBA), is fairly developed with the existence of a participatory mechanism recognised by all stakeholders and officially set in place by NBA ministerial resolutions. This mechanism even played an important role in the identification and mobilisation of participants and the organisation of the forum of Sélingué. Further support would enable them to better master the relevant information and understand the challenges relating to large hydraulic infrastructures. It would also help to reinforce capacities and positioning in the dialogue with the other stakeholders, particularly negotiations concerning compensation to be paid to communities and post-construction management.

In the Senegal River basin, the level of organisation of civil society stakeholders in the basin and in terms of interface with the OMVS, the basin organisation, remains low. Despite the existence of an organisation with high potential for mobilisation and action as well as several initiatives and projects using a participatory approach (example of the project supporting water user associations and project to communicate on the *Master Plan for the refurbishment and management of water resources* (Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et de Gestion des Eaux), it is essential to support better civil society organisation and the development of a functional participatory mechanism beyond the existing consultation frameworks.

Focus should be given to the coordination of consultation processes at the local level, particularly between users and the local authorities on the one hand and among users, basin organisations and

government experts on the other hand. Attention should also be given to the mobilisation and involvement of opinion leaders such as traditional and religious leaders, and people with high potential for mobilization (women and youth).

#### **4.2 Information dissemination and sharing**

Access to information (channels, content) will be decisive in ensuring civil society stakeholders better understand the challenges. It is thus necessary to set up a system or network for collecting and disseminating information on large hydraulic infrastructures from the regional level to the local level and vice versa. This supposes the creation and/or reinforcement in each watershed of an expertise in collecting, managing and disseminating accessible and comprehensible information in any form. This information concerns the ongoing products of the regional dialogue but also all the texts and existing guidelines of the governments and organisations (Water charters, development plans, action plans).

The short-term action will consist in the dissemination of the proceedings of the forums to the stakeholders in each basin and more widely within in the West African region and beyond. The main results may be published in a specific document in order to facilitate dissemination at the sub-regional level and in international forums (for example the world water week in Stockholm).

Local and national forums may be considered to report information and debates on the challenges to communities. The proceedings of the forums as well as conclusions from the expert panels will serve as tools for advocacy actions.

#### **4.3 Monitoring and participation in the dialogue process at the regional level**

In order to maintain the interest and commitments arising from the forums with civil society stakeholders, it is important to facilitate civil society participation in the subsequent phases of the dialogue at the regional level. This participation includes the participation in future meetings and workshops with the basin organisations, but also the monitoring of the expert panel's work to ensure the opinions and conclusions sent to ECOWAS are taken into account.

Credible representatives for each watershed need urgently to be identified and it is also essential to organise and define a strategy for civil society participation in future phases of the dialogue. It is also important to ensure mainstreaming of civil society recommendations in any future ECOWAS community directives which may emerge from the process.

#### **4.4 Country-based dialogue process**

While one major concern which motivated the dialogue initiative at the ECOWAS level remains the cross-border nature of large dams and their impacts, it is important to note that the issues and challenges are applicable to national infrastructures whatever their size. In this regard, the relevant findings and concerns are identical and must be considered by national level stakeholders as regards the numerous existing or planned facilities in each country. A dialogue process initiative at the national level is

meaningful and will be the occasion to test in each country the consultation, consensus building, arbitration and remedial mechanisms, cost and benefit sharing principles, stakeholder involvement principles, etc.

#### **4.5 Extension to other watersheds**

As regards the existence of other less important watersheds in the ECOWAS area (Gambia River, Volta basin), it is desirable to consider widening the involvement of civil society in the regional dialogue to the stakeholders of these watersheds. This would require the organisation of similar forums in these watersheds and building of links among civil society stakeholders at the West African sub regional level.

#### **4.6 Development of an open partnership**

Sharing the results of the process with other stakeholders of the sub-region and at the international level will contribute to develop products and reinforce advocacy actions targeting decision-makers who undertake actions. Partnerships should be built with regional and international organisations and networks (GWP-AO, RAOB, INBO, ANEW, AMCOW, etc.) working on similar issues as well as research, training and business stakeholders (engineering firms and public work contractors, etc.) involved to varying degrees in the building of large hydraulic infrastructures.

Contacts should be established with these groups and organisations in order to discuss the content of this partnership.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

The results achieved by the regional civil society forums, as part of the regional dialogue on large dams initiated by the ECOWAS Water Resources Coordination Centre (WRCC) clearly show that the action collaborative undertaken by IUCN and Eau Vive with civil society was indeed necessary.

Following the recommendations made by participants from the Senegal and Niger River Basins, it is desirable to continue to reinforce participation of the civil society organisations in the decision-making processes on sustainable development of basins in the region by providing real and adapted support.

Perspectives for the follow-up of the regional consultation in the ECOWAS area and a solid support strategy to nongovernmental stakeholders should be sought rapidly so as to ensure a productive and ongoing process.