

## Recommendations of civil society stakeholders in the ECOWAS area

Ouagadougou, 20 January, Niamey, 24 January, Dakar, 27 January 2011

### General findings by civil society on large dams

**Large hydraulic infrastructures constructed in the past decades in the five river basins of West Africa (Niger, Senegal, Gambia, Volta, Mano) have generated the following benefits:**

- Economic benefits (power generation, development of agricultural production, fisheries, livestock farming, industry, navigation, tourism and trade),
- Environmental benefits (flood management, groundwater resupply, mitigation of the effects of drought, creation of an upstream microclimate, mobilisation and storage of water resources, revitalisation of certain ecosystems, combating water salination) ;
- Social benefits (development of social, health and cultural infrastructure, stable job creation).

Large dams have also helped to build solidarity among the nations that share the basin and to promote regional integration.

**In these same basins during these past decades, the large hydraulic infrastructure constructed has also brought about negative impacts.** They have modified the natural environment and have hindered economic and social development, particularly around the sites and in the context of climate change:

- Economic impacts (loss of natural assets, loss of farmland, orchards and fields, loss of economic activities),
- Environmental impacts (loss of habitats and biodiversity, increase in sedimentation, proliferation of weeds, modification of natural hydraulic cycles, clogging of waterways with harmful vegetation such as typha, erosion of river banks, increased risk water contamination) ;
- Environmental impacts (displacement of the populations, immigration, destruction of archaeological sites and sites of ritual and worship, generation of conflict, proliferation of disease –malaria, bilharzia, etc.-, juvenile delinquency, insecurity, moral degradation, unplanned urbanisation).

### Values and recommendations of civil society that should guide policy on large dams

For civil society, the building of large hydraulic infrastructure in the five river basins of West Africa should first and foremost meet the socio-economic needs of the local communities. They must be considered as full partners in the project, and should be the first to benefit from it in terms of improved livelihoods.

As mentioned by the World Commission on Dams in its 2000 report, "*Dams and Development: a new framework for decision-making*", core values must guide the location of these large dams: *equity, efficiency, participatory decision-making, sustainability and accountability*. These values form *the foundation of a rights-based approach to equitable decision-making about water and energy resources management*.

**The approach taken with regard to large hydraulic infrastructure projects should be reviewed on the basis of these values. Civil society presents ECOWAS with recommendations that can be grouped into seven main themes, as a contribution to the development of a directive on large dams in West Africa.**

- 1) **Develop large hydraulic infrastructure to meet basic social needs**
- 2) **Minimise negative impact and optimise positive impact on the environment**
- 3) **Promote economic development in the surrounding areas**
- 4) **Carry out high-quality environmental and social impact studies and monitor implementation of their recommendations and those of strategic environmental assessments**
- 5) **Support the structuring of civil society and officialise its participation in all decision-making on river basin development projects**
- 6) **Set in place mechanisms for compensation and means for recourse for the populations**
- 7) **Consider and promote all the alternative and complementary options for large dams that render the same services (water resource management, power generation etc.)**

## 1. Develop large hydraulic infrastructure to meet basic social needs

### Findings

- Large hydraulic infrastructure constructed in the river basins in the past decades has been of little benefit to the local populations, a situation that can create frustrations that are harmful to a harmonious and equitable development.
- Social aspects (including health-related issues) have been given little consideration at the beginning of project design, thus making it more difficult to manage the negative impacts.

### Recommendations

- **Plan complementary investments to existing dams** to improve water resource use. Implement policies that encourage access to land for local populations (support for small family farms, etc.).
- **Design and implement projects that meet the affected populations' basic social needs** (drinking water, human and animal health, education, etc.) with a view to further improving their living conditions.
- **Set up instruments for measuring and sharing costs and benefits** among regional national and local levels : among states and between the state and the affected population.

## 2. Minimise negative impact and optimise positive impact on the environment

### Findings

- Disappearance of certain ecosystems now underwater, risk of water pollution, loss of biodiversity downstream due to failure to comply with rules and regulations.

### Recommendations

- **Set up a mechanism for monitoring environmental issues**, in particular changes in water quality, with a particular focus on the problems of aquatic vegetation.

## 3. Promote economic development in the surrounding areas

### Findings

- The economic potential of large hydraulic infrastructure is not promoted by post-construction investment, particularly in terms of agriculture, livestock farming and fisheries, which provide livelihoods for 90% of the local populations.
- The economic and profitability assessment of dam projects is generally based on power generation and agricultural productions. Is this sufficient to say that a dam has achieved its objectives if the negative impacts are not also taken into consideration?  
The objectives initially specified for large dams are frequently achieved. Sometimes there are considerable delays in developing the farming potential of the affected zone.

### Recommendations

- **Design and implement projects that meet the affected populations' economic needs**, with a view to further improving their living conditions and local development: development of irrigated plots, livestock farming, fisheries etc.

#### 4. Carry out high-quality environmental and social impact studies and monitor implementation of their recommendations and those of strategic environmental assessments

##### Findings

- Some existing dams in the West African river basins were built without any prior environmental and social impact studies. In some cases, certain actions were carried out later to attenuate the adverse impacts on communities (such as irrigated areas).
- The cost-benefit studies conducted for large dams are often of poor quality and are sometimes carried out by large companies responsible for construction of the dam.
  - The cost analysis in impact studies is not usually very detailed. Profitability should not be the only criterion to take into account.
  - The zone that the project will affect is often poorly evaluated. It is considered to be limited to the vicinity of the project, and yet the impact will be felt all along the river.
  - Even when social and environmental studies are carried out prior to construction, the recommendations made are too often ignored.

##### Recommendations

- **Carry out an exhaustive qualitative and quantitative assessment of existing dams, constructed without any impact studies**, in order to envisage corrective measures to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts of existing dams for fair and sustainable development as well as to learn lessons for future projects.
- **Optimise the benefits of existing dams**, as is recommended by the World Commission on Dams, rather than systematically thinking of developing new dams.
- **Make the application of social and environmental assessments compulsory in dam projects** in order to better assess and take into account the environmental, socio-economic and health impacts on local communities, animals and the environment within all the zones directly or indirectly affected, including coastal zones, and in the context of climate change.
- **Develop a regional ECOWAS framework for sharing benefits, advantages and interests of large hydraulic infrastructure projects.** It will be applied to basin organisations, responsible for fairly sharing out benefits. This framework must be based on high-quality independent impact studies carried out before and after dam construction. They will also make it possible to monitor the dam's impact.
- **Set up a participatory and inclusive monitoring and evaluation mechanism** (for all stakeholders) **for socio-economic and environmental matters** (in particular changes in water quality, and the problem of aquatic vegetation). The monitoring-evaluation mechanism must be able to work as closely as possible to local realities and involve the most affected communities. It must be common to the ECOWAS community which must also assure an overall framework, as for the environmental and social impact studies.

## 5. Support the structuring of civil society and officialise its participation in all decision-making on river basin development projects

### Findings

- Insufficient consultation and involvement of civil society in the process of identification, design, implementation, management and monitoring-evaluation of large dams.
- At all hydraulic infrastructure project stages (design, implementation, management), there is a lack of information sharing, awareness raising and involvement of local communities and civil society in decision-making. The affected populations do not have sufficient knowledge of the risks to enable them to fully play their role as stakeholder and to demand their rights and assume their responsibilities.
- Lack of awareness of impact studies which, when they exist are not always made public.
- Lack of capacities and support of civil society stakeholders, to accompany the communities and ensure they fully participate in the different stages of decision-making.
- Lack of structuring and statutory recognition of civil society stakeholders in some basins at regional level (ECOWAS area).

### Recommendations

- **Recognise the role and the legitimacy of civil society organisations to defend the interests of the affected populations** and ensure they participate as full stakeholders in decision-making and monitoring of project implementation.
- **Set up specific mechanism for civil society participation and continuous dialogue**, among civil society and the other stakeholders in large infrastructure projects throughout the whole process (identification, design, implementation, management and monitoring and evaluation) in order to share responsibilities among all levels as regards the future positive and negative impacts.
- **Support the structuring of civil society organisations. Recognise via legal statutes their participation in all decision-making bodies**, relating to the development of West African river basins (at national, basin and ECOWAS level).
- **Disseminate appropriate and timely information to civil society**, to strengthen the community's participation in decision-making (identification, design, implementation, management and monitoring and evaluation) so that civil society can make informed decisions.
- **Support capacity building (technical, financial and political) of civil society stakeholders and develop specific programmes for community-based organisations** in all sectors, including highly mobilised community members (women, youth, religious and traditional leaders, etc.).

## 6. Set in place mechanisms for compensation and means for recourse for the populations

### Findings

- In West African countries, land is usually government property, and the inhabitants just use it. The Governments exploit this situation to build dams and displace communities without fairly compensating them. Furthermore, they are often unable to adapt to the new situation following construction, and are totally unprepared.
- Lack of and failure to fulfil government commitments to compensate affected populations.

### Recommendations

- **Set up within ECOWAS, a mechanism for mediation, recourse and arbitration** for stakeholders in large hydraulic infrastructure projects to ensure all parties respect their commitments.
- **Set up and monitor thorough compensation systems based on** exhaustive, objective and up-to-date assessments of the affected people's assets and traditional practices, taking into account the risks associated with large dams.

- There is no law establishing housing standards, that obliges the populations to be re-housed appropriately after displacement. This creates open conflicts among users, over land and water resources (farmers, herders etc.).
- Lack of mediation, recourse and arbitration mechanisms for the affected populations at ECOWAS level and lack of mechanisms at Government level.

- **Compensate in a fair and equitable manner the communities that have been displaced and recognise their right to access to land**, overcoming the complexities of land ownership issues. This will prevent the risk of conflicts among communities, associated with the different uses of land (farming, herding, seasonal migration etc.) and of natural resources.

## 7. Consider and promote all the alternative and complementary options for large dams that render the same services (water resource management, power generation etc.)

### Findings

- Increased investment in agricultural and irrigation sectors have not led to a significant increase in local production and productivity.
- Increased construction of hydro-electric stations has not increased the number of nearby communities connected to the national grid – this has even diminished in some cases.
- Large dams benefit from many investment credits, to the detriment of other alternatives. There is also corruption around large dam projects, reducing the benefits for the communities.
- The various alternatives to large dams are not studied with the same degree of attention and consideration by researchers and governments.
- Recommendations relating to large dams, put forward in the social and environmental impact assessments are not implemented or followed up, and certain national policies do not foster the consideration of alternatives.
- There is no specific long term assessment of green-house gas emissions from hydro-electric projects.

### Recommendations

- **Accord importance to alternative options for large dams and give priority to small structures which can fulfil multiple functions and spread risk.** These other options are also viable and are often less costly. In the choice of options, it is necessary to accord as much importance to social and environmental factors as to technical, economic and financial factors:
  - **Envisage all alternative renewable energies** (solar, wind, ocean) and promote energy saving. Increase the effectiveness and sustainability of existing irrigation and electricity production systems.
  - **Promote national policies in the water, energy and environment sectors that affect consumption patterns and encourage savings** which reduce demand and affect the viability of the different options.
  - **Improve the effectiveness of existing water supply systems** for instance to avoid water loss in channels (shorter channels, linen channels). Develop rainwater harvesting techniques, protect groundwater, recycle water. Also improve urban planning.
  - **Promote the construction of well-managed micro dams** and develop integrated flood management systems (reforestation, early warning systems, risk mapping, regulation of construction in flood-risk zones).