



Consultation on large water infrastructure projects within ECOWAS

Workshops to share the recommendations of the expert panel with the basin authorities (NBA, VBA, OMVS/OMVG) Niger Basin Authority and civil society/basin users. 20-27 January 2011

Final report

1. Background

A consultation on large water infrastructure is underway within ECOWAS. It is being implemented by the Water Resources Coordination Unit (WRCU) of ECOWAS. The objective is to contribute to the harmonious development of ECOWAS member States and to regional integration through a dialogue on large infrastructure in the water sector.

An expert panel (July 2009-April 2010) analysed good practices and made recommendations concerning consultation processes. A sample of projects, proposed by the steering committee, was analysed including existing dams, those in construction or planned, as well as shared infrastructure developed by national or transboundary basin authorities. The dams studied included Manantali, Senegal basin, Kandadji, Niger basin and Bui, Volta basin.

The final draft of the recommendations is available and is entitled « Best practices for the development of sustainable water infrastructure in West Africa ».

2. Objective of the workshops

The WRCU organised the workshops in partnership with the basin authorities, countries and West African civil society in order to present the details of the recommendations of the panel and to gather and address relevant comments from participants. This will result in a set of consensus recommendations to be adopted by ECOWAS in the form of a regional Directive.

The workshops were organised in three steps as shown below :

- 20 January 2011 for the Volta Basin Authority (VBA) in Ouagadougou
- 24 January 2011 for the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) in Niamey
- 27 January 2011 for the Senegal, Mano and Gambia basin authorities (OMVS/OMVG) in Dakar

The participants at these workshops were as follows :

- For Ouagadougou : VBA + Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo + civil society (Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo).
- For Niamey : NBA + Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroun et Chad + civil society (Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria).
- For Dakar : OMVS + OMVG + MRU; Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone + civil society (Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia).

Where a country is a member of several basins, it only participated once in the consultation. IUCN participated in all the meetings.

3. Workshop organisation

Each workshop was chaired by the relevant basin authority with technical support from WRCU. The chairmen managed the debates very effectively and respected the one-day agenda adopted by the participants at the outset.

Each workshop was an opportunity for the WRCU Director to present the regional dialogue on large infrastructure in the water sector and to stress the importance of the consultations with the basin authorities as a key step, prior to submitting revised recommendations to a regional workshop for approval. He reminded participants that the workshops were not expected to endorse or adopt the panel's recommendations however they provide an opportunity for the panel to reply to comments made by the basin authorities, countries or civil society and to incorporate these contributions prior to the regional workshop.

Civil society from the basin contributed actively to the workshops, responding vigorously to the recommendations made by the panel. Civil society was supported in the regional infrastructure dialogue by IUCN which was also represented at high level during the workshops. The representatives of the panel, supported by the basin authorities, provided the secretariat for the meetings.

The presentation of the panel's recommendations was spread over seven sessions. Each session dealt with one strategic area proposed by the panel, followed by a presentation of the written proposals from civil society and then the organisation of a discussion.

The seven Strategic Areas proposed by the panel in its recommendations are as follows :

- Assert the critical role of basin organizations (BOs) in developing and implementing transboundary projects;
- Involve the affected people as project beneficiaries;
- Identify and accept uncertainties for more effective risk management;
- Ensure that all actors involved in project development play their respective roles;
- Optimize the profitability of large water facilities in West Africa;
- Capitalize and share existing experiences within ECOWAS; and
- Adopt a regional framework for carrying out environmental and social assessments of transboundary projects.

4. Principal results from the workshops

The discussions did not reveal any fundamental objections to the content of the document presented by the panel, however significant contributions to refine or correct the content or formulation of the recommendations will allow them to be made more readable and more practical.

The principal themes discussed included :

1. Capacity building and the role of organisations

Discussions focussed on the consensus to create BOs where they do not exist, however participants stressed the need to ensure the smooth running of existing BOs that require general institutional, financial and technical support. One area requiring further work is the funding of BOs through regional organisations such as ECOWAS.

2. The structuring and reinforcement of civil society contributions

Civil society has played an important role in the dialogue and it is essential to provide it with structural support to promote local development, however its representativity remains a challenge.

3. Sustainable development

The project risks linked to the environment were raised in the discussions and these concerns require the panel to be more exhaustive on this issue.

4. The promotion of local development

The workshops underlined the need to ensure that the interests of local people are met, however while local people should be prominent during the building of large dams, they cannot expect to be “primary beneficiaries” due to the broader national objectives of such projects.

5. The promotion of regional integration

Participants stressed the need for clear and readable provisions for the sharing of costs and benefits between states and other stakeholders to guarantee investments, to ensure the participation of stakeholders, and to promote regional integration.

During the discussions, the panel members responded to the observations made by the participants and will submit the comments received to a meeting of the whole panel, who will be charged with incorporating appropriate changes to reflect the aspirations of the different participants. In order to do so, the secretariat of the different workshops has made a complete account of the comments made in each workshop (NBA, VBA, OMVS/OMVG) for each Strategic Area that is presented in the attached Annex.