IWRM Action Hub

CASE STUDY

Transboundary: Water management through multi-level participatory governance and community projects in Volta River Basin

Summary

The Volta River basin remained one of the few unregulated transboundary watercourses in Africa. Action was taken to improve water governance and water management practices. Although this is still in progress, it has resulted in multi-scale participatory governance frameworks for joint management. From this process, it is evident that building a local knowledge base with good data and information systems is important in deciding the most efficient allocation of resources.

Background

The Volta River Basin in West Africa has a surface area of approximately 400,000 km^2 across six countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Togo. The basin is divided into four major sub-basins: the Black Volta, the White Volta, the Oti and the Lower Volta. It is home to nearly 19 million people and an important asset for the livelihoods of the people and development of the riparian countries.

The Volta River Basin faces enormous development challenges. Poverty and increasing population pressure have led to the extensive exploitation of natural resources contributing to water scarcity, land degradation and the siltation of river channels.

Despite the fact that most of these challenges call for basin-wide responses, the Volta River remained one of the few transboundary watercourses in Africa without an international treaty and without a basin-wide coordination mechanism. Limited consultation and coordination between Burkina Faso and

Ghana combined with uncoordinated policies and development initiatives were serious threats to the sustainable management of Volta Basin. The basin had no formal legal and institutional arrangements to manage disputes over resources. Tensions between Burkina Faso and Ghana stemmed from misconceptions about the causes of climate variability and changes in flow patterns of water resources.

Actions taken

Demonstration approach: As a response to these challenges, WANI and partners established a demonstration site in the Volta Basin and launched the pilot project 'Improving Water Governance in the Volta River Basin' (or PAGEV – Projet d'Amélioration de la Gouvernance de l'Eau dans le bassin de la Volta). PAGEV was based on three key areas of WANI's vision: knowledge, capacity building (at all scales) and good governance. In partnership with national partners, including the Directorate of Water Resources in Burkina Faso, the Water Resources Commission in Ghana and community municipal

assemblies, the project aimed to improve water governance through consensus on key water management principles and to institutionalise coordination mechanisms.

Improving Water Governance: The PAGEV project supported the setting up of local, national, transboundary and regional governance frameworks to improve the management of water resources in the Volta Basin focused on Burkina Faso and Ghana as they share most of the waters. The framework of the decision-making process is multi-scale and participatory, involving local grassroots committees, national level committees, the Local Transboundary Committee at the cross-national level and finally, regional level planning is coordinated through the Volta Basin Authority. These multi-level connections facilitate communication between all stakeholders and help to build trust and capacity across the basin.

Ecosystems and livelihoods: WANI supported the implementation of livelihood projects which aimed to demonstrate integrated water resources management at the local level and build trust and capacity through establishing the linkages between livelihood benefits and water governance. PAGEV provided the knowledge, technical advice and funding to help communities combat environmental degradation and provide income opportunities.

Knowledge and information:

- Creating baseline data: Surveys and assessments: Without crucial information about the nature of the water resources in the basin, key decisions could not be taken on how to manage these resources. Therefore, to improve water governance in the basin, essential baseline data was gathered to inform decision-making processes at all levels.
- Knowledge tools: Water management planning for climate change: The Water Evaluation and Planning system, or WEAP aims to incorporate freshwater management challenges into a practical, robust tool for integrated water resources planning. In 2008, PAGEV and partners set up a single application of the WEAP model for the Volta Basin (WEAP-Volta). Around 40 experts from Burkina Faso, Ghana and Benin received training on the use of the WEAP as a water resources management planning tool in 2009 and 2010. The training is supporting the establishment of a network of expertise which then can be drawn upon for water management in the basin. In addition, the scenarios formulated with the WEAP also contribute to managing risks from climate change and promote dialogue.

Outcomes

While water laws and institutions for managing water resources were in place in both Ghana and Burkina Faso, the implementation of IWRM principles were not fully demonstrated and there was a lack of regulatory processes or mechanisms to manage basin water resources. While the willingness to discuss transboundary issues was present, the lack of baseline knowledge of the basin and the absence of major water users in decision-making processes and governance frameworks limited the riparian countries' ability to manage the water resources sustainably. This situation was compounded by environmental degradation, adversely affecting livelihoods of communities in the basin.

The PAGEV project and partners efforts contributed to turning this situation around through strengthening communication between Ghana and Burkina Faso, creating multi-scale participatory governance frameworks for joint management of water resources and improving livelihoods through riverbank protection schemes.

Sub-basin knowledge collection and consolidation through the water audit and other studies has helped to build capacity and supported decision-making processes. Legal tools, including the Code of

Conduct, the Local Transboundary Committee and the Volta Basin Authority have now been established to tackle basin-wide issues, resolve conflicts and to provide the framework to manage share water resources sustainably.

Lessons Learned

Although water laws and institutions for managing water resources were in place in both Ghana and Burkina Faso, the implementation of IWRM principles were not fully demonstrated. There is still a lack of regulatory mechanisms to manage basin water resources.

While the willingness to discuss transboundary issues was present, lack of baseline knowledge of the basin and the absence of major water users in decision-making processes and governance frameworks limited the riparian countries' ability to manage the water resources sustainably.

Alignment of activities with national priorities and linkages with government policy processes are needed for larger-scale impacts. When national interests are positioned with regional initiatives (basin authorities with the political hardware and infrastructure), water resources governance can become a reality.

Stakeholders and partners are more willing to participate when they see tangible results and improvements in their everyday lives (income generation schemes, water supply facilitation, conflict reduction). Addressing some of the issues helps considerably in gaining trust and commitment.

Building a local knowledge base with good data and information systems is important for efficient allocation of resources. It is key for thorough understanding of relationships and scenarios within the basin and can then lead to better management decision making.

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Related IWRM Tools

Basin Management Plans, Transboundary Organisations, Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, Information Gathering and Sharing Networks, Communities of Practice

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