

Overview of Experiences in the Limpopo River Basin

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Abstract

The paper presents a summary of the findings of a German mission to four countries of Southern Africa, in which many people at different levels were asked to give their views about water issues in two trans-national river basins, the Limpopo and the Orange-Senqu. The principal common factors in people's responses are identified. Various sources and types of inequity are described. In conclusion, it is found that external assistance could be especially useful in areas of information and communication, and in organisational development for river-basin management.

1. Context

A mission by a project appraisal team of the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) was carried out in September 2000, for the support of regional water management in the SADC (Southern African Development Community) region. The team talked to stakeholders of the Limpopo and the Orange-Senqu river basins.

The mission had the following major tasks;

- Map the scene;
- Capture the expectations and issues of concern of the stakeholders with regard to the establishment of river basin commissions;
- Identify possible areas for technical co-operation;
- Make preparations for the planning workshop.

2. Procedures

Between 14 and 29 September 2000, the group visited Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa and held discussions with relevant government institutions, parastatals and donor organisations involved in water resources management of the Limpopo and, where applicable, of the Orange/Senqu. Other resource persons, such as representatives of water users' organisations, researchers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and consultants were met. Similar talks will be held in Namibia in October 2000.

3. Purpose of the presentation

The purpose of this presentation is to address the first two major tasks. Emphasis is laid on the presentation of voices captured from stakeholders in the Limpopo basin. The audience is asked to respond.

4. General observations

The mission recorded the following general observations:

- A broad consensus exists about the principles of common management of shared watercourses.
- There is a high degree of solidarity among the riparian states.
- The authorities acknowledge that in future regional prerogatives will be given higher priorities than national interests.
- It is expected that the creation of river basin commissions will enhance further co-operation and contribute to avoiding conflicts.
- There is a felt need to build up trust and confidence amongst the institutions involved in the water sector of the riparian countries.
- In spite of their different historic backgrounds, and socio-economic and political conditions, the riparian states share a common vision with regard to the development of their national water sectors.

5. Mapping the scene

5.1 Problems in the catchment areas

In all the riparian countries visited by the mission, the contacted institutions and resource persons mentioned problems that reflected their specific interest in sharing the water resources. Nevertheless, there was a great similarity among the issues raised.

The natural conditions found in the shared river basin and the capacity imbalances with regard to technical and managerial issues lead to stresses, which cause particular impacts. The main items in each of these categories are shown in Table 1.

5.2 Stresses in the catchment areas

The following stresses were mentioned:

- low flow or dry rivers during long drought seasons
- unexpected high floods in the lower parts of the basins
- increasing water pollution

Table 1: Capacity imbalances in the riparian countries

Natural conditions	Technical problems	Managerial problems
High temporal and spatial variation of rainfall	Uneven standards of infrastructure	Unequal economic standards
Areas affected by saline groundwater	Different degrees of exploitation (development) of the water resource potential	Unequal negotiation skills
Variation of climate from humid to arid	Unequal potential for water use	Lack of early warning system (quantity and quality)
Unequal physical potential for water use (hydrological, morphological)	Water use without considering trans-boundary impacts (dams, intakes, outlets)	Deficiency of exchange of data and information between member states, e.g. gauges, water resources development
		Unequal water resources management capacity access to data monitoring capacity (quantity, quality)
		No common management of dams (flood protection, drought prevention)

5.3 Impacts

Informants mentioned the following impacts of water, on the people and on their environment:

- negative impacts on the environment, especially in those parts of the rivers, which become dry during some time of the year and on the ecosystems of the estuaries (affecting clam and prawn cultures) through salt-water intrusion
- further degradation of biodiversity
- flood damages with high destructive power causing high costs to the economy
- reduced potential for economic development
- unequal access to water resources for
 - human consumption
 - irrigation

- animal production
- industrial development

6. Voices from stakeholders

This section presents some quotations from the people who provided information to the mission. These individual statements seem to capture some more general views.

6.1 Statements recorded

“On the South African side, 64 commercial farmers are drawing water from the river. On our side there are only 6 commercial farmers left, all not paying to the council anymore, and thousands of people who hope for water for income generation projects.

“We don't really know what to do. We want to talk to the other water users in South Africa and Mozambique and raise our concern.”

Chairperson, Lower Mzingwani Catchment Council, Beitbridge, Zimbabwe

“If no mechanism exists, you are thrown into the conflict, and guess who wins? The one who flexes the muscles best.”

CEO, Water Utilities Corporation, Gaborone, Botswana

“We seriously fear for our ecosystem downstream. Our coastal resources, our clams and prawns, are threatened, if the river does not flow.”

Executive Director, Environmental Working Group, Maputo, Mozambique

“In spite of our different historic, socio-economic and technical background, we all share a common vision with regard to the management of shared watercourses.”

Chief Engineer, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Pretoria, South Africa

6.2 Main issues addressed

The voices quoted above address the following main issues:

- Obvious imbalances of water use
- Need for communication and conflict management
- Threats
- Goodwill declarations

6.3 National voices

A not too serious attempt is made to frame the voices heard in the four riparian countries into national categories.

Botswana seems to be relaxed about the issue and interested to participate.

Zimbabwe is rather concerned and poses questions.

Mozambique seems to be a bit alarmed and does not want to lose out.

South Africa is self-confident and hopeful that things turn out well.

7. Areas of Intervention

In the discussions held the following activities were identified, which could be carried out by GTZ:

- To act as an honest broker between member states
- To facilitate access to international experience
- To provide specific expertise on selected subjects
- To support the assessment of existing reports, studies and data
- To help to identify gaps and deficiencies in the existing reports, studies and data and define areas for further activities
- To assist in capturing of data, processing of data and their dissemination
- To provide equipment for improvement of the database
- To help to improve negotiation skills
- To assist in the establishment of dispute settlement mechanisms
- To act as a catalyst for the organisational development of the commission

- To give managerial support to the secretariats of the commissions
- To assist in co-ordinating and streamlining technical and administrative processes

We, at GTZ, feel that external assistance could focus on the following points, among others:

- Support for the organisational development of the river-basin organisation
- Strengthening communication routes
- Facilitating access to information