



CASE STUDY

Transboundary: Transboundary Organisation in the Niger River Basin

Summary

The Niger River basin is of importance to the region. The Niger Basin Authority was established to foster, promote and co-ordinate studies and programs relating to the Niger River basin. Today the authority is required to promote co-operation among the member countries and to ensure integrated development of its resources. This case illustrates and provides key insights into transboundary river basin management.

Background

Many of the rivers in the West African regions are shared, four of them have RBOs. The case offers examples of pitfalls to avoid in order to assure success of their efforts at cooperation to share their water resources to maximise their socio-economic benefits while at the same time ensuring the survival of their terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem.

The Niger River basin is 1.5 million km² and is shared by nine countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad). The population of the basin is about 100 million people, of which around 80% live in Nigeria. Annual population growth rate is about 3%. The GNP per capita in 1998 was less than \$500 in most countries. Access to potable water is ranged from 26% to 84%. The environment is degraded from low flows and severe low water levels, silting of river beds; industrial & household pollution entailing water borne, water infestation like water hyacinth, and loss of arable and pasture lands. The basins faces many environmental problems (erosion, siltation, pollution, water borne diseases and others) yet the Niger river has potential for a spectrum of development uses including domestic and industrial water supply, flood control, hydropower generation, irrigation, fisheries, navigation and tourism.

Actions taken

The Niger Basin Authority (1980), successor of the Niger River Commission (1964), was established to foster, promote and co-ordinate studies and programs relating to the Niger River basin. The institutional and legal framework to carry out its mandate went through four phases between 1980 and 2001:

- Phase I (1980-1986) the Executive Secretariat was established with the assistance of Donors, but not carry out the assignment given because of institutional weaknesses and inadequate finance.

- Phase II (1987-1993), the authority was reformed in order to focus on development and to strengthen it institutionally, and financially, but again it was unable to perform as the problems during the first phase persisted.
- Phase III (1994-1997) the problems even got worse, and the authority was left without political and policy direction.
- Phase IV (1998-2001) the fortunes of the Authority began to turn round, when Member States began to see the danger they faced by not working together and the benefits they could get if they did. The authority has regained the confidence of the Member States and development partners. Action plans have been put in place which when complete will put the Authority on the road to achieve its objectives.

In spite of the problems mentioned it is on record that the Authority made progress with many basic studies (financed by donors and executed by international governmental and non-governmental agencies) like the Hydroniger project. A number of projects have been carried out including a study on institutional set up, the establishment of a documentation centre, sedimentation modelling, and desertification control.

Today the Authority is required to promote co-operation among the member countries and to ensure integrated development of its resources, notably in the fields of energy, water resources, agriculture, forestry, exploitation, transport and communication, industry. The institutional infrastructure presently consists of:

- The Summit of Heads and Government for policy making;
- The Council of Ministers;
- The Technical Committee of Experts;
- The Executive Secretariat responsible for implementing decisions of higher bodies.

Outcomes

This case study describes the processes, issues and difficulties in establishing an effective transboundary organisation for the Niger basin over a 20 year period.

In spite of the investments made over the years, the benefits have not been felt and individual countries have developed the river for various uses in their countries without references to their NBA. Performance was weak despite the large amount of assistance it received to strengthen the Secretariat, to recruit and build capacity of staff, and also to strengthen the capacity of the various organs within it, and the reforms of the NBA Convention.

The Convention has been partly blamed for not achieving the goal of the Authority. It has been said that the Aim and Objectives were not clear enough. The focus was on studies to assess the water resources of the basin. The practical benefits which its Member States expected were not forth coming. The Revised Convention of 1987 clarified the Aims and Objectives to make the Authority more development oriented. But by 2000, the Authority had still not been able to prepare an integrated socio-economic development and environmental conservation and protection plan for the basin, on which to base the integrated management of the water resources.

Unfortunately, the Revised Convention did not define the legal status of projects nor the mode of financing of Common Works. The request by the Heads of State and Government to do so was not complied with. Again the ECA draft is yet to be adopted. The Member's

unwillingness to pay their annual contributions was due to the fact that most of them did not see what benefits they could derive from the projects being undertaken compared with the share they were to contribute. The Authority suffered between 1987 and 1997 because there was no political/policy direction and supervision from the Summit of Heads of State and Government and the Council of Ministers as provided by the Convention.

It is clear that between 1980 and 1997, the NBA was unable to carry out the programme assigned to it in 1980 towards the fulfillment of its mandate. It must however be stated that NBA made progress with, basic studies and development of operational tools which were carried over from the NBC days.

Lessons Learned

The Convention providing the enabling environment for the establishment of an international river basin organisation should address the development objectives of the Member States and make provision for cooperation in the protection of water resources, the environment, and conflict resolution.

Provisions must also cover the status of projects (common ones) and how the financing is to be shared on an equitable basis among the Member States. Financial matters need to be governed by clear regulations to eliminate or reduce mismanagement.

The various organs of river basin authority should not cease to perform their roles and functions. The Summit Heads of State and Council of Ministers should be convened regularly to direct and make sure that policies and decisions are implemented.

Projects that benefit two or three Member States should be encouraged, especially those that benefit all of them at the same time. This is particularly necessary in a large river basin like the Niger with nine riparian countries.

Institutional infrastructure must recognise management of water resources at different levels (basin, sub-basin, national, local). The framework should cover all levels. Provision needs to be made to harmonise the rules and regulations for management at the various levels.

Corresponding Author

Boi Ayibotele, Nii

Corresponding Author Contact

ayibotele@niiconsult.com.gh

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Related IWRM Tools

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