IWRM Action Hub

CASE STUDY

Benin: Getting started - experiences of IWRM planning process

Summary

In Benin, water use has not been regulated. water management has been sector-based, fragmented, and compartmentalised. To change this, action was taken to initiate IWRM in Benin. A baseline study was done followed by drafting of an IWRM action plan. The lesson learnt is that advocacy for strengthening political will for supporting the process must be seen as a transversal and on-going action throughout the whole IWRM process.

Background

Benin belongs to the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC) with a low per capita GDP. Its economy is predominantly dependant on subsistence farming (extensive cotton production) and regional trade. Benin is drained by a dense hydrographical network made up of seasonal flow rivers. The water resources of the country are estimated at about 15 bill. m^3/year, including approximately 2 bill. and 13 bill. m^3 of groundwater and surface water respectively, unequally distributed in space and time.

Benin has been at a stage where the catchments and water uses are not controlled and do not fall under any enforced regulation. The country currently uses less than 3% of its renewable water resources.

Forecasts done in 2000 show that Benin only needs about 40% of its renewable water resources to meet its development needs by 2025 without the needs of industrial sector. These forecasts however have not taken into account the impacts of climate change on water resources and the increasingly pressing needs for the populations to adapt. From an institutional perspective, the water sector in

Benin is characterized by a multiple decision-making centers, a sector-based management framework and a lack of collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders.

Management is thus sector-based, fragmented and compartmentalized, with no cross-sectoral coordination, therefore resulting in high economic, social and ecological costs.

The February 1998 Kouhounou declaration was a starting point of the IWRM planning process in Benin. Since then, the government has reaffirmed its willingness to operate a transition towards IWRM approach through various reforms and programmes established.

Actions taken

Under the leadership of Benin government, the Benin Water Partnership mobilised stakeholders from government and non-government organisations and civil society to define a road map and vision of the planning process towards better water resources management.

A baseline studies (water situation analysis and complementary thematic studies) were done followed by the drafting of the national IWRM action plan. The Ministry in charge of water set up a Drafting Committee made up of national experts coming from relevant ministries, civil society, universities, private sector and NGOs all constituted important part in the process.

Following various information and sensitization workshops, and different studies, and the setting up of the Drafting Committee, thematic workshops were organized to refine the results of water situation analysis studies. The water resources challenges were prioritised using Water Resources Issues Assessment Methodology (WRIAM) and priority was given to the main technical problems in terms of assessing, managing and using water resources at basin and national level. Weaknesses of the water resources management framework were also assessed and analysed.

The GWP re-affirmed its support to the IWRM planning process in the country under a Partnership for Africa's Water Development programme (PAWDII). Active and constant advocacy actions were conducted by CWP Benin targeting the main sectoral ministries involved in water management and its uses (water, environment, agriculture, transport, decentralization, tourism, etc.) and other governmental institutions. The GWP Toolbox assisted in formulating key areas for water policy reform.

Outcomes

The content of the national IWRM action plan was developed. 54 Actions were defined for immediate and long term implementation. A draft IWRM action plan was validated by stakeholders during 6 regional workshops. The IWRM action plan was being finalised in March 2010, and once completed, will be presented for adoption to the Council of Ministers. The main outcomes of Benin's planning process include:

1. Enhancement of political will for IWRM planning process;
2. Establishment of national water law validated by all stakeholders and adopted in July 2009 by the Government;
3. Development of a new water law and its transmission to parliament, for review and adoption;
4. Development of a draft national IWRM action plan;
5. Beginning of the process of IWRM principles integration in various levels of Benin's education system. Establishment and strengthening of CWP-Benin, and its positioning as a key facilitating platform for promoting, understanding and implementing of IWRM in Benin;
6. Building capacity of various stakeholders for implementation of national IWRM action plan.

The recommendations resulting from the process are:

1. Maintain commitment from the Government and Technical and Financial Partners to the IWRM process by on-going advocacy action;
2. Integrate IWRM experiences and its principles in various levels of education system;
3. Invest more in capacity building, training courses and specialisation of qualified staff, on IWRM and its related sub-sectors;
4. Establish and operationalise the new IWRM institutional framework, including monitoring and evaluation structures with sufficient means for regular assessment of the IWRM action plan's implementation.

Lessons Learned

Advocacy for strengthening political will for supporting the process must be seen as a transversal and on-going action throughout the whole IWRM process.

Involving stakeholders with proven experience and competence is capital to guarantee quality and credibility of results. Defining roles is essential for smooth implementation. Multi-field experts add value to the quality of data analysis and bring various dimensions to the draft.

Involvement of key players allows easy implementation of the plan and its timely adoption by the Government. Involving different ministries helped to create linkages between the national IWRM action plan and the Strategic Document for Growth and Poverty Alleviation.

It is necessary to reorganize the institutional framework following the IWRM principles. Relative abundance of water resources should not overlook the need for planning and rational management of these resources, for supporting national development needs.

Capacity building activities allowed stakeholders to better understand water-related problems and IWRM principles and to sensitize and convince each new official of the relevance of the process. CWP Benin developed a capacity building and communication strategy, involving the media.

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