IWRM Action Hub

CASE STUDY

Uganda: Progress towards IWRM

Summary

Uganda is faced with deteriorating water quality, scarcity, floods, and droughts, which are all negatively impacting Uganda's quest for economic and social development. The situation has, however, been improving with the launch of a Water Action Plan which promotes IWRM as an integral part of its strategy. Examining this case clearly illustrates that long-term sustainability aspects such are often overlooked and instead, the focus is on short-term domestic provision.

Background

The provision of safe and adequate drinking water is considered a fundamental human right in Uganda which is enshrined in the Constitution of 1995. In spite of water being a human right by the Ugandan constitution, only 61% and 68% of the population of Uganda has access to safe drinking water in the rural and urban areas respectively.

Although Uganda is considered well-endowed with water resources, these resources exhibit both seasonal and spatial variability. Geographically, some parts of the country have too little water during certain periods of the year while others have too much water. Both situations often result in disasters in form of droughts and floods in different areas of the country. This situation is aggravated by rapid population growth, deforestation, increased agricultural production, urbanization and industrialization which are leading to rapid depletion and degradation of available water resources.

The inadequate water infrastructure and the necessity to deal with the effects of climatic changes exacerbate this situation even further. Water shortages, water quality deterioration, flood and drought impacts are some of the problems, which require urgent attention and action.

Uganda's quest for economic and social development is increasingly related to water. The water

supply sector is under expansion and small-scale irrigation is being promoted and may in the future be of increased importance. The power supply of Uganda is almost totally dependent on hydropower. Sewerage and sanitation service requirements increase in step with improvements in water supplies and have important health implications. Fishing in lakes and rivers is a major component of the country's economy, and fishponds along water courses are fast increasing in importance and numbers. Development of tourism is a high priority area and dependent on the natural beauty and quality of the environment. Improved water supply and sanitation services have major social, economic and health impacts on life in general. Some of the benefits from water supply and sanitation also have a positive effect on investments in other sectors, such as education and industry.

Potential conflicts are developing between upstream and downstream users. Uganda fully lies in the River Nile basin and all Uganda's surface water resources are part and parcel of the transboundary watershed. Water resources management at the beginning of the 1980s faced a number of challenges. The existing surface water monitoring network had been destroyed due to the civil strife in the country and capacity for water resources assessment was almost non-existent.

Actions taken

In 1994 Uganda took an initiative to prepare a Water Action Plan (WAP) and since then, the situation of water resource management has improved significantly.

The WAP was a comprehensive set of documents that detailed the activities associated with water resources development and management and further defined priority action areas to revitalize the water resources management sub-sector. It provided the government with guidelines and strategies for the protection of and development of water resources and a structure for their management at national, district and local levels. The WAP provided recommendations and laid a proper foundation for other important document.

As a follow up to the recommendations of the WAP, the Government enacted a Water Statute (1995) and gazetted a National Water Policy (1999), thus putting in place a comprehensive enabling legal and institutional framework for water resources management in the country. In the same year (1995) the National Environment Statute was also enacted to provide a framework for co-ordination and sound management of the environment including environmental impact assessment of water

resource related projects.

Since the preparation of WAP in 1994, Uganda has been promoting IWRM as an integral part of its strategy. An enabling legal and institutional framework has paved a way for establishment of water resources data and information for use in planning of water resources projects has been improved.

Other arrangements such as a regulatory framework to control water abstraction and the pollution of water bodies played a crucial role in this regard. In 2003 the Directorate of Water Development initiated the Water Sector Program Support, WSPS 2 (2003-2007), which aimed to develop a cadre of highly trained and motivated staff to handle issues of water management in the country.

Outcomes

Despite these achievements, a number of key aspects of IWRM have not been implemented. Management and development of water resources continue to be done by different sectors of

government located in different ministries without any coordination. For example, the Ministry of Energy and Environment is responsible for drinking water supplies and sanitation, for water production and water for the environment, Ministry of Tourism is responsible for water for recreation and tourism etc. Planning of water continues to be carried out on a sector basis and there is no holistic Approach to water resources development and use.

Furthermore, water resources planning and decision making continues to be done without the involvement of users and stakeholders; water resources management continues to be a central government function without the decentralisation of decision-making at the lowest appropriate level; institutional mechanisms for resolving water conflicts have not been fully utilised and hence water conflicts have continued unabated; and economic, social and environmental values of water have not been determined – thus affecting effective water allocation.

Lack of an operational IWRM framework due to the failure to expand water and poverty focus beyond drinking water and sanitation makes it difficult to reap the benefits of IWRM. For example, there is a lack of multi-purpose infrastructure in Uganda to handle the various water demands due to this problem.

Lessons Learned

Priorities for water management are mainly geared towards domestic service provision at the expense of economic aspects and more long-term sustainability aspects such as operation and maintenance and water resources management.

Uganda’s strategic development is focused on hydropower production, improvement of agricultural production (through the provision of water for production), domestic water supply, improvement of water transport on lakes and rivers.

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Organisation
United Nations Environment Programme Center for Water and Environment - UNEP-DHI

Year
2013

Country
Uganda

Region
Africa

Keywords
Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)

Thematic Tagging
Climate , Ecosystems/Nature-based solutions , Gender , Private Sector , Transboundary , Urban , Water services , Youth
Language English

Supporting Materials
GWP Eastern Africa

Related IWRM Tools
Preparation of a National Water Resources Policy, National IWRM Plans, Regulatory Bodies and Enforcement Agencies , Training Water Professionals , The Rights of Rivers

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Source URL: https://iwrmactionhub.org/case-study/uganda-progress-towards-iwrm