



## CASE STUDY

# Benin: Advocacy for Securing the Okpara Dam and access to Drinking Water in the Municipality of Parakou



## Summary

**In 2008, the Country Water Partnership of Benin (CWP-Benin) led an advocacy effort to federate the efforts of stakeholders to save the Okpara dam, then in a critical state of degradation. The initiative helped initiating a broader dialogue on access to drinking water in the municipality of Parakou. Since then, the government of Benin has been able to mobilize several dozens of millions of euros to rehabilitate the dam and secure access to drinking water for the inhabitants of Parakou.**

## Background

In Benin, the sustainable management of multipurpose dams is a national issue. In 2008, the dam on the Okpara River, a tributary of the Ouémé River, was in an advanced state of degradation, due to a lack of monitoring and a lack of investment over several years. The government attributed responsibility for financing to the Société Nationale des Eaux du Bénin (SONEB), which indicated that it did not have the required means. According to the experts, the lateral spillway of the dam could fail in the case of heavy rain with very important social, sanitary, economic, and environmental repercussions. There is no other way to supply drinking water to the city of Parakou, the third largest city in Benin, which had about 200,000 inhabitants in 2008 and is experiencing significant population growth.

Faced with the lack of reaction from the competent authorities at various levels, an advocacy action was first initiated in 2008 by CWP-Benin towards the government and all stakeholders in the water

sector. It helped mobilize stakeholders around the preservation of the work. The main objective sought through the mobilization of political decision-makers at the national level was achieved in 2009, with the inclusion in the 2009 national budget of a first amount of 259,163 euros for the conduct of basic studies and a second amount of 670,776 euros for the implementation of rehabilitation work and the establishment of an integrated management system for the water reservoir.

Although the facilitation of dialogue by CWP-Benin led to a reaction from the authorities, the establishment of a sustainable management dynamic for the reservoir in its hydrological space remained a major challenge. The action plan adopted by all stakeholders at the national seminar on the rehabilitation of the dam was a reference tool. However, it remained to determine the means to ensure the effective implementation of the commitments made by these actors for the rehabilitation of the structure and the support to IWRM in this territory as well as the scaling up of the experience at the national level. Although firmly committed to IWRM implementation, at the beginning of 2010 the Beninese State did not have a favorable legal, institutional, and technical environment. The law on water management recognizing IWRM as a priority approach was only adopted in November 2010.

CWP-Benin has therefore developed, starting in 2010, a series of pilot initiatives to facilitate the implementation of IWRM at the local level. These initiatives were partly carried out within the framework of the PAWD to support the establishment of an enabling environment for IWRM and Component (support to the IWRM process) of the Multi-year Support Programme to the Water and Sanitation Sector (PPEA), funded by the Netherlands.

## **Actions taken**

CWP-Benin started the Okpara pilot action by organising training sessions on IWRM for central and local government officials to raise awareness of the authorities on the need for appropriate and concrete responses to local water-related issues. The action also focused on the continued mobilisation of the Directorate General for Water (DGEau) and the municipalities to support the initiative. The intervention included, in June 2010, a participatory diagnosis of the management of the dam and its catchment area.

Following validation by the stakeholders the «Pilot Action to support the concerted and integrated management of the Okpara dam» project was officially launched. The stakeholders at that time had elaborated, under the facilitation of CWP-Benin, a strategic operational framework for the implementation of pilot actions for the application of IWRM at the local level, with a view to reinforcing the national process underway. It was a participatory strategic approach to inform the design and implementation processes of pilot actions at the communal and intercommunal levels, with the commune or an inter-communal structure as the sponsor.

Concerning the Okpara dam, the project management of the rehabilitation works was ensured from 2011 to 2012 by the Territoire de Développement de l'Ouémé Supérieur (TDOS46 - Upper Ouémé Development Territory), with the financial support of the PPEA. A partnership agreement between TDOS and CWP-Benin allowed for the provision of technical assistance. The Local Water Partnership (PLE) of Borgou acted as delegated project manager. In particular, the action enabled the successful implementation of resource protection measures and the operationalisation of a consultation framework on the integrated management of the dam and associated ecosystems. Capacity building for concerted management of stakeholders and the participatory development and management plan for the livestock transit corridor at the sub-basin level continued during the 2nd phase of the PPEA (2013-2015).

The roles of the key actors were aligned with the texts on decentralisation: the DGEau became responsible for the coordination of IWRM, the SONEB became the user and manager of the dam as well as of the Okpara farm, property of the Ministry of Agriculture where the dam is located. The management of the Okpara Farm was responsible for authorising all works and activities of its domain, notably the marking out and operation of the livestock transit corridor bypassing the dam basin. This corridor, 14 km long, benefited from a development plan that included works and accompanying measures for the benefit of the identified occupants, particularly women's groups. The areas adjacent to the dam have been reforested over approximately 29ha with species such as khaya, roan, and moringa, selected in consultation with the stakeholders.

Regarding the improvement of water resource governance, the action plan validated by the stakeholders included the operationalisation of a local water management and consultation body. The PLE-Borgou then carried out an identification of the actors involved in the initiative and the capacity building and equipment needs of the groups identified. The Council of Actors for the Concerted Management of Water Resources of the Okpara Dam (CAGC) was set up in May 2012. It brings together state actors (SONEB, decentralised state services), decentralised communities, civil society actors and different groups of users of the dam and sub-basin resources. The CAGC has the mission of monitoring and coordinating all the interventions at the level of the dam and to a lesser extent in the sub-basin it drains, monitoring the evolution of the state of the dam, informing the actors\stakeholders of the conditions of its operation and management, and working towards the protection of the dam, spillway, intake structure, etc. This marked the first creation of such a body in Benin.

## **Outcomes**

The process of setting up and operationalising the CAGC around the Okpara dam has helped to experiment with the installation and animation of an Local Water Bodies (OLE) by the national water administration in Benin. In terms of progress in strengthening the institutional management framework and water governance of the Okpara sub-basin, the following is noted:

- The realization of a summary study of the opportunity to create the Public Establishment of Intercommunity Cooperation (EPCI) of the sub-basin;
- The validation of the conclusions of the study by the mayors and the decision to create the EPCI;
- The regular holding of the governance sessions of the CAGC of the dam;
- The sharing and valorization of the CAGC's experience on the multi-stakeholder and concerted local management of the dam and its sub-basin during a study trip to Burkina Faso in 2014;
- The valorization of the CAGC's experience for the definition of the modalities of implementation and operationalization of the pilot OLEs/Local Water Committees (OLEs);

- Successful facilitation of the implementation of the Okpara IWRM pilot action by the CAGC as a consultation body for stakeholders (operationalization of the corridor, maintenance of reforested sites, dialogue between the DFO, TDOS, SONEB, and the Departmental Directorate in charge of water, transhumant herders and other users of the dam);
- Strengthening the commitment of stakeholders to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2008 seminar on Okpara, the conclusions of which were adopted by the Council of Ministers, with the holding of a workshop to review the implementation of these recommendations in 2014.

The smooth functioning of the CAGC and the processes it has facilitated demonstrate the need for this body to enable all stakeholders to dialogue on the issues at the heart of the pilot action. Thanks to the facilitation of the CAGC and the continuous dialogue involving all stakeholders, the IWRM pilot action has resulted in the strengthening and maintenance of the government's commitment to increase the means for improving and securing the drinking water supply in Parakou. The development of the city's Sanitation

Master Plan in 2014 and the mobilisation of funding for other projects have enabled the CAGC member authorities to better understand the water and sanitation problems.

Similarly, the workshop on the implementation of the recommendations of the Okpara seminar enabled decision-makers at different levels to support projects aimed at rehabilitating and sustainably managing the dam and securing access to drinking water for the people of Parakou. Members of Parliament and Ministers have shown great interest in these projects, as has the President of the Republic, who visited the Okpara site on several occasions between 2014 and 2016.

Continued targeted advocacy, especially towards the authorities of the Ministry of Water and the MPs, has contributed to the government's continued efforts to regularly allocate financial resources for studies and basic works. According to SONEB, during the 2010-2020 decade, nearly 44 million euros have been mobilised for the realisation of three structural drinking water supply projects in Parakou, including 20.6 million from the West African Development Bank (BOAD), 2.25 million from the national budget, 11.3 million from a private partner and 9.5 million from SONEB's own funds. These investments are divided mainly into two components: rehabilitation work on the Okpara dam and strengthening the drinking water supply system in Parakou and its surroundings.

## **Lessons Learned**

IWRM pilot actions that integrate advocacy activities with the promotion of a local water body help to establish a functional multi-stakeholder dialogue and facilitate both the understanding of IWRM and the mobilisation of financial resources to ensure water security.

The establishment of a mechanism for continuous monitoring of advocacy recommendations is essential to keep all stakeholders mobilised around the initial momentum and to achieve the expected results.

The definition and implementation of local water bodies at the level of a shared ecosystem must take into account the hydrographic territory concerned, the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder and the interests of users.

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