

Under Cover? Transboundary Aquifers - the Hidden Asset for Riparian Cooperation in Africa

Message from the 2006 World Water Week in Stockholm to Decision Makers & Relevant Stakeholders

Considering the relevance of groundwater for poverty alleviation and sustainable development and convinced that cooperation is key for creating benefits from transboundary groundwater resources, we invite **governments, financing agencies and relevant stakeholders to support initiatives that will ensure the sustainability and sustainable utilisation of transboundary groundwater resources.**

Stockholm Message on Transboundary Groundwater for Africa

With this message, the convenors and participants of this seminar aim at drawing the public attention to the issue of transboundary groundwater management and cooperation. We feel the need to call on decision makers and committed stakeholders to intensify their:

Support to improved cooperation on transboundary aquifers enhancing sustainable regional development and poverty alleviation by generating economic, social and ecological benefits for the people in African states.

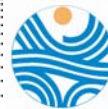
Why is Transboundary Groundwater important?

Increasingly it has been recognized that groundwater resources play a **central role in sustainable development and poverty alleviation**, since groundwater is the most reliable and affordable source of potable water and often the most efficient source for irrigated agriculture. In addition it is indispensable for the existence of many unique ecosystems in Africa.

Studies have indicated that an estimated **2 billion people worldwide rely on aquifers** for their drinking water supply, irrigation needs and drawing livelihoods from ecosystems. Allowing for the incomplete data situation, it is assumed that the vast majority of communities in Africa are served by groundwater.

The current state of an ongoing inventory of transboundary aquifers in Africa has indicated that **at least 60 aquifers are shared among riparian states** many of them being located in arid and water short regions. Improved transboundary cooperation on these aquifers has the potential and needs to be more focussed to generate direct benefits for the people in riparian states.

Although there has been an unprecedented development of groundwater resources in many regions during the last years, which has contributed to significant poverty reductions, there is room for improvement at the institutional level. For about 24 transboundary river basins in Africa some institutional mechanisms are in place. The mere existence of these organisations is a success which should be consolidated. It remains a future task making groundwater management an integral part of the work of these basin organisations.



From message to realisation

To put this message into practice, significant inputs are required to several major aspects of water and in particularly groundwater resources management¹.

- ***Integrating groundwater into water management***

Basin organisations should **include groundwater resources into their scope of work** acknowledging that the extent of the relevant aquifers may differ from the extent of the surface water catchment area and hence require incorporating additional riparian states. In regions without existing river basin organisation, aquifer organisation should be formed on the three-dimensional extent of the aquifer in question.

- ***Raising awareness***

Key stakeholders at all levels should **be aware of the relevance of groundwater** for people's well-being, its developmental role, its hydrological and ecosystem function, its vulnerability to human impacts and approaches to its sustainable utilization.

- ***Developing capacity***

Countries should **develop appropriate capacity** within their national institutions and on regional level, including policy and legislation, appropriate institutions and human resources to plan and implement sustainable groundwater utilization and protection at all levels within the transboundary setting.

- ***Building knowledge***

Transboundary groundwater management should **build its decisions on a knowledge base** which requires the existence of shared monitoring networks, resource assessments and information systems as well as the analysis of best practices for joint management.

- ***Promoting and institutionalising cooperation***

Adequate forms of (informal) **transboundary cooperation should be fostered** and supported by binding institutional mechanisms, like agreements or joint commissions helping the riparian states to jointly manage and to develop and share the benefits from the utilisation of their water. This includes especially adaptive approaches for cooperation on local and shallow or minor aquifers as well as governance aspects in terms of people's participation in decision making within the riparian states.

This Message was developed by:

AMCOW – African Minister's Council on Water

BGR – Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, Germany

IAH – International Association of Hydrogeologists

SIWI – Stockholm International Water Institute

UNEP DGEF – UNEP Division of Global Environment Facility

UNESCO-IHP – UNESCO-International Hydrological Programme

¹ The issues raised in this message are based on the UNESCO-UNEP "International Workshop on Groundwater Protection in Africa 28-30 November 2005, Cape Town". During this workshop a vision of "An Africa where groundwater resources are valued and utilized sustainably by empowered stakeholders" was addressed to AMCOW. <http://www.amcow.org/EXCO/DecisionMakers.doc>.