



ECOWAS water ministers agree to strengthen coordination, and approve water management infrastructure policy

Dakar, Senegal, 27.11.2015 – On Friday 27 November 2015 the 4th session of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee of the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) initiative in West Africa was held in Dakar. It was chaired by the Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal.

According to **M. Ousseini Salifou, representing the ECOWAS Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources**: *“this session covered key issues for the regional coordination of integrated water resources management in West Africa, to which all the governments of the region are whole-heartedly committed”*.

The Ministerial Monitoring Committee reviewed progress in implementing IWRM in the region, discussed the initiatives carried out by the Water Resources Coordination Unit (WRCU) of ECOWAS and its partners, defined the orientations for future activities and took steps to strengthen the opportunities for synergies. This was the first statutory meeting of the Permanent Framework for IWRM Coordination and Monitoring (CPCS) in West Africa since 2008.

Strengthening IWRM coordination in West Africa to improve protection of water resources

“Water is the natural resource on which all other natural resources depend, because without it there can be no life and no biodiversity. It is a resource subject to competition by actors with very diverse and sometimes contradictory cultures and aims. A scarce resource in arid and semi-arid zones, water is a truly vital issue everywhere”. **Pr. Aimé J. Nianogo, Regional Director of the Central and West Africa Programme of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.

Water is a key factor in socio-economic development in West African countries. Water management issues play a central role in combating poverty through meeting the basic needs of a growing population, in conserving and developing water resources, and in strengthening cross-regional integration to deal with climatic and political crises related to water.

“In the face of the multiple challenges of ensuring sustainable management of water resources in West Africa, ECOWAS has to develop its human, technical and financial capacity to keep improving the coordination of IWRM activities across the region”. **M. Diène Faye, Secretary of State for Water Infrastructure, representing the Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal**.

For these reasons, the Ministers recommended strongly that ECOWAS invest in strengthening the human resource and budgetary capacities of the Water Resources Coordination Unit (WRCU), to enable it to fulfil its leadership role in implementing IWRM in West Africa.

The Committee also emphasised the importance of investing in the natural resource base in order to protect water resources. To this end the committee encouraged ECOWAS and IUCN to continue to promote the integrated ecosystem management approach in West Africa, with a view to the eventual adoption by ECOWAS member states of a Regional Coordination Mechanism for Integrated Ecosystem Management.

Approval of ECOWAS Directive on Water Infrastructure Development in West Africa

Some 150 dams have been built in West Africa, and another 40 are planned or under construction. The main reasons for these complex and costly development projects are the energy and irrigation requirements of ensuring food security, in a context of climatic variability. However, experience across the region shows that these kinds of water management infrastructure projects must be, and can be, improved if they are to contribute to the goal of inclusive and harmonious development among the member states and to regional integration in the water sector in West Africa.

“Development of water management infrastructure must be based firmly on the concept of sustainable development, in order to guarantee equitable sharing of benefits for the population as a whole, with the least possible negative environmental impact, optimal economic performance, and strengthening of regional integration in cross-border water catchments”. **Jamie Skinner, Director of the Global Water Initiative at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)**

Against this background, the Water Resources Coordination Unit of ECOWAS carried out a regional dialogue on the development of large water infrastructure projects in the ECOWAS area. This took place between July 2009 and July 2011 and was commonly referred to as the “Dialogue on Dams”. A key outcome of this process was a set of policy guidelines in the form of a proposed Directive on Water Infrastructure Development in West Africa. On 27 November 2015, the Ministerial Monitoring Committee of IWRM approved this proposal, which can now be adopted by the relevant ECOWAS authorities and become current policy.

Before this 4th session of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee, the 10th Session of the Technical Experts Committee (CTE) was held on 24 and 25 November to prepare recommendations to be submitted to Ministers in the form of resolutions. This was organised by the Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources Department of ECOWAS through the WRCU, and was supported by IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), as part of the Global Water Initiative (GWI) and the Partnership for Environmental Governance in West Africa (PAGE). It was co-financed by the ECOWAS Commission, the UK and Swedish Governments and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

For further information

- [The Final communiqué 4th session of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee of the Integrated Water Resources Management \(IWRM\)](#)
- [Guidelines for the Development of Water Infrastructure in West Africa](#)

Photos



Contacts

For more information or an interview please contact : :

Mahamane Dédéou TOURÉ

Chargé de Programmes Régionaux, CCRE/CEDEAO

mdtoure@yahoo.fr

Jérôme KOUNDOUNO

Coordinateur régional, Global Water Initiative (GWI) en Afrique de l'Ouest, UICN

jerome.koundouno@iucn.org

Marcello ROCCA

Expert en communication et gestion des connaissances, UICN

Marcello.rocca@iucn.org

WRCU/ECOWAS – The Water Resources Coordination Unit of ECOWAS (WRCU) is the executive branch of the Cadre Permanent de Coordination et de Suivi (Permanent Coordination and Monitoring Framework) for IWRM. Its role is to monitor and supervise ECOWAS activities in water management through the implementation of the Policy on Water Resources in West Africa (Politique des Ressources en Eau de l'Afrique de l'Ouest – PREAO) and the Regional Action Plan (Plan d'Action Régional – PARGIRE). The objective of the WRCU is to promote integrated management of water resources, and coordination and monitoring of regional activities so as to realise IWRM in West Africa in conformity with ECOWAS policies and programmes. www.wrcu.ecowas.int/

IIED –The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development by linking local priorities with global challenges. We work to support some of the most vulnerable populations in the world to make their voices heard in decision making.

<http://www.iied.org/>

IUCN – The International Union for the Conservation of Nature helps to find practical solutions to current problems of environment and development. Valuing and conserving nature, effective and equitable governance of nature's use, and developing nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development are the key areas of IUCN's work.

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