

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE ON NIGER RIVER BASIN — Feb. 3rd 2005

Introduction

- As part of the Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems, two meetings were organised on February 2nd and 3rd on the Niger River Basin by the Netherlands Development Cooperation, FAO and IUCN
- These meetings brought together delegates from Niger Basin countries (Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Chad and Benin), delegates from other African countries (Kenya, Guinea Bissau), representatives of the Netherlands government, FAO, IUCN, Wetlands International, IFDA.
- The purpose of the side event was to identify priority themes to promote the integrated management of the Niger Basin and to suggest practical interventions which could help better manage water for multiple uses, including the environment. These suggestions would be made taking into account the framing themes of the Conference: (1) know-how for action; (2) the new economy for water, food and the environment.
- The Key question discussed was: What can be done to assist the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) and Niger Basin countries to improve the management of the basin for food, ecosystems and other uses in a sustainable manner?

The discussions resulted in the following observations and recommendations (ideas that could be considered for action):

- Participants recognised the importance of addressing the challenge of managing water for food and ecosystem at the level of transboundary river basins like the Niger basin. West African countries share 25 transboundary rivers which together cover 70 to 80 percent of the region's land area; there are more than 60 transboundary rivers in Africa and about 260 globally.
- A process is currently underway of formulating a 'Shared Vision for the Sustainable Development of the Niger basin'. This process, conducted under the leadership and coordination of NBA, will result in the coming months in the development and adoption of an Action Plan for the sustainable development of the Niger Basin for the next 20 years.
- Donor agencies and donor countries, including The Netherlands should join and support the Shared Vision process.
- There is a need for a holistic approach in managing large river basin such as the Niger River basin, which should be viewed in its totality as a unique hydrological system
- Need for improved knowledge of the current situation and trends in water availability and water demand in the Niger Basin — this information will then be used to guide decision making in managing the river waters
- In view of the conjunctive use of all water resources, it is urgent to assist NBA and its member countries in the assessment and management of the basin groundwaters
- NBA's conflict prevention and resolution role should be strengthened by helping it better serve as a first level of prevention, arbitration and management of water conflicts between member states
- Need to invest in confidence building between member states. In that regard, lessons can be learned from the Nile Basin Initiative.
- Need for a communication system that would ensure more inclusive participation of all major stakeholders (instead of being only centered on government entities in charge of

water as is currently the case). Relevant stakeholders to be involved include :
government (all relevant sectors) ; bilateral institutions ; civil society

- Process of developing and implementation IWRM national plans should be encouraged in all basin countries. Some of the basin countries have currently either developed their IWRM plans (Burkina) or are in the process of doing so (Mali, Benin). The assumption made here is that effective implementation of a sound IWRM plan in each of the basin countries will have a positive role in the management of the basin water to respond in a sustainable manner to competing water needs, including ecosystem requirements
- In support national IWRM efforts, a special attention should be paid to having IWRM plans and policies effectively implemented
- Need to find innovative ways of sharing more fairly the costs and benefits of water development interventions in the basin. The polluter pays principle can be applied; and incentives should be created to encourage countries to investment in the protection and sustainable management of critical ecosystems such as the Futa Jallon Mountains in Guinea, the Inner Delta of the Niger River, and the Coastal mangrove forest in the delta in Nigeria.
- Development partners should assist in the effective implementation of the cooperation agreement signed between NBA and civil society organisation, in particular with international environmental organisation. Implementation of the latter agreement could help in «greening» the NBA process and make more inclusive
- In addition to NBA, support should also be considered to other institutions such as water user associations, civil society organizations at the national and also sub-regional level
- In the same vein, support could also target bilateral initiatives in the basin
- Finally, it is important to ensure that these suggestions are in coherence with the Shared Vision process underway and the Action Plan that will result from it.