

Annex 4: Statement by Mr. Edache to Nile-COM 13

Statement
by
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On the occasion of the
13th Nile Council of Ministers Meeting
of the Nile Basin Initiative

17th – 18th March 2005, Kigali, Rwanda

*Mr. Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am greatly honoured and pleased to represent the FAO Director-General, Dr. Jacques Diouf, at this Ministerial meeting of the Nile Basin Initiative.

I wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for hosting this 13th Meeting of the Nile Council of Ministers, and for their warm hospitality. This gratitude is also extended to the Organisers for inviting and associating FAO with this important event.

*Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the outset I would like to congratulate the Nile Basin States for the historic Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and for the unfolding cooperation process between the ten riparians, which is aimed at jointly addressing the Nile issues. Among NBI's great accomplishments to date is the creation of an atmosphere of trust and confidence, in which the Nile partners jointly explore how to develop and share the benefits from the common Nile resource. As a result, we are right now witnessing the remarkable process to design, through intensive dialogue and consultations, a framework for joint implementation of development programmes.

*Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is well known among the Nile riparian countries that the two projects hidden under the common name “Nile Basin Water Resources” programme were implemented by FAO in the period 1996 – 2004, with a total budget of 11 million USD provided by the Government of Italy. The second phase 1999 – 2004 was endorsed by the Nile COM as part of the NBI Shared Vision Programme. The financial support from the Government of Italy and technical support from FAO now sits squarely within the NBI and I am very glad for this evolution.

It has been an extremely rewarding experience for FAO, and our cooperating partner, the Government of Italy, to work with the Nile Basin States for the last 10 years to achieve socio-economic development through the equitable and sustainable utilization of the shared Nile waters, for the benefit of the people living in the Nile basin. In the spirit of the Nile Basin Initiative, our involvement has been primarily focused on building capacity and know-how in each riparian country, and at providing the tools for establishing the state of land, water and agriculture needed to build a common knowledge base across the basin. While each riparian country faces unique pressure on its land resources, the pressures on the shared water resources are rather collective.

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers,

In spite of being one of the longest rivers in the world, the Nile is not a big river in terms of volume of water, when compared with other river basins such as the Congo or Niger. The contrast between the size of the basin and the comparatively small volume of runoff is an important feature of the river, and an important potential constraint to development. The current relative water scarcity could, within decades, become an absolute scarcity as populations continue to grow, and as water demand per capita continues to rise. If not addressed, this resource constraint threatens to become a serious obstacle for growth and

prosperity in the region, which is the case with the Lake Chad Basin where the surface of the active reservoir has shrunk from 25,000 km² to 2,500 km².

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In spite of the dominant role of agriculture in the economies of the riparian states, the shared vision program has allocated only very limited resources to agriculture. In fact, agriculture has the least allocation of resources. Given the pressing need to improve food security and livelihoods, and to create jobs, it would be appropriate for the shared vision to accord agriculture greater priority. Moreover, the Heads of States and Government of the African Union had committed themselves in their Maputo Declaration of 2002 to accord agricultural development priority, and to allocate not less than 10 percent of their budget to the agricultural sector.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its establishment in 1945, FAO has supported its member states in developing and managing transboundary water basins. Much of this support has been directed at the development of African river and lake basins, through existing basin organizations. Considering the potential contribution of such organizations to regional integration, peace and poverty alleviation, the joint Dakar Declaration of the International Network of Basin Organizations stressed, in November 2004 the need to strengthen intra-basin cooperation, which is essentially a win-win game designed to bring improved development to all collaborating countries. The Declaration called on the Governments and Development Partners to support Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at the basin level. Indeed, there is inherent mutual benefits of the basin approach to water resources management.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have seen that the emphasis has shifted from supply-side development to more adaptive, demand responsive approaches with a much stronger emphasis on environmental values and full natural resource accounting. This is particularly the case in our current operational GEF projects in the Kagera sub-basin and the Okavango basin.

I wish also to stress that at national level we should focus a lot of our technical cooperation resources on agriculture and water resources in order to obtain a much more strategic fit between rainfed and irrigated agriculture, and to relieve pressure on natural resources while improving overall productivity. Sustainable livelihoods are at the centre of all these efforts and I am keen to emphasize how tightly bound water, food security, and ecosystems will remain in the transboundary Nile basin no matter how fuzzy the interface between land and water rights may be at the national level. Population growth and the demand for food and fibre are essentially non-negotiable, whereas co-management of the common natural resources in the Nile Basin is negotiable. Let us help establish the basis for that negotiation with a realistic appreciation of the future of agriculture and water management towards the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals by the Nile Basin countries.

I would like to thank, once again, the Nile Basin States and the Government of Italy for entrusting FAO to be your technical partner in the implementation of a new interregional project, which is fully integrated in the NBI, and which is part of the family of Shared Vision Program projects. The new project aims to strengthen the governments of the Nile Riparian States to take informed decisions on water resources policy and natural resource management across the Basin. It will work closely with the other shared-vision projects.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Director-General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf, I would like to reiterate our commitment to further strengthen our long standing partnership with the Nile Basin States and the NBI. Like our partners, we are proud to be part of the historic Nile Basin Initiative process.

Thank you for your attention.