

STIMULATING STAKEHOLDERS' SUPPORT FOR MANAGING SHARED WATERS – EXPERIENCES FROM THE VOLTA BASIN

by

Kwame ODAME-ABABIO

Project Coordinator, IUCN-PACO, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

e-mail: kwame.odame-ababio@iucn.org

INTRODUCTION

The Volta Basin in West Africa is a complex ecosystem with varied water resources management challenges, including the absence of framework for managing information and data sharing; risks of conflicts resulting from increasing competition among various water users and uses; soil and land degradation leading to silting of river channels and reservoirs, increase in the growth of aquatic weeds, especially in the lower reaches of the basin. The basin is the ninth largest basin in Africa and until recently remained one of the few transboundary river basins without formal legal and institutional arrangements for the management of its water and other natural resources.

In 2004, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) initiated the “Volta Water Governance Project”, commonly known by its French acronym PAGEV (*Projet d’Amélioration de la Gouvernance de l’Eau dans le Bassin de la Volta*), in response to the need for transboundary coordination and cooperation regarding the management of the Volta Basin waters, and to demonstrate how to apply the ecosystem approach into river basin management. The project is being implemented in the Volta River Basin which is shared by six countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo). Burkina Faso and Ghana were selected as experimental states because they are the two among the six riparian countries which share the largest proportion of Volta Basin’s area (nearly 85%). It is developed and implemented by IUCN Regional Programme for Central and West Africa (IUCN-PACO) in partnership with the West African Water Partnership (GWP-WA), Ghana’s Water Resources Commission (WRC) and Burkina Faso’s Directorate General for Water Resources (DGRE), and it is receiving financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and The Netherlands Directorate General for International Development Cooperation (DGIS).

The PAGEV approach is based on three key components:- water resources information base improvement component, pilot IWRM component and institutional and legislative improvement component. This article outlines some innovative approaches adapted by PAGEV to mobilize multi-stakeholder support for the joint management of the White Volta sub-basin of the Volta Basin.

KEY OUTPUTS FROM PROJECT

After three years of project implementation (mid-2004 to September 2007), some key outputs recorded include the following:-

- The establishment of river bank protection committees in communities on both sides of the Ghana-Burkina Faso border. These committees have undertaken re-vegetation of nearly 16 km of river banks to reduce soil erosion and protect water quality. Fruit trees and fuel-wood trees have also been introduced to combine environmental management and provision of new livelihood options.
- The establishment of a set of multi-stakeholder forums for water resources management. The forums operate at local, national and transboundary levels, and are also designed to “mix” the different

levels, with the aim of increasing involvement by local communities in transboundary water management.

- Supporting communities to dig wells and rehabilitate an irrigation dam in Ghana. These initiatives have created benefits (i.e. dry season vegetable farming, rice cultivation, water supply) for the communities while at the same time working with them to build awareness and capacity in sustainable water management and conservation of natural resources
- The formulation of a Code of Conduct on the shared management of the Volta River system between Burkina Faso and Ghana. The process involved stakeholder consultation, national workshops and joint validation workshops.
- The compilation of knowledge and decision-support information to support planning, decision making and monitoring of interventions in the basin through a water audit of the basin, the production of maps and the collection of socio-economic data on the riparian communities in the pilot zone.

IMPACTS OF PAGEV INTERVENTIONS

Ecosystem conservation and livelihood needs linked

Conscious efforts have been made to integrate livelihood issues into the community-based actions. However, the long time lag to realize poverty reduction with respect to some of the interventions (reforestation, soil conservation, etc.), make quantification of impacts difficult at present. Some benefits of the interventions by PAGEV included the following:

- A small dam at Sakom in the Bawku West District of Ghana, which breached since 1998, has been rehabilitated to ensure that water is available in the floodplain for dry season vegetable farming and rice cultivation. The community now has access to water for farming and watering of cattle. This will ensure sustainable agricultural yield hence improvement in livelihoods of the community.
- PAGEV has provided some of the communities with hand-dug wells, which have brought much relief to those communities, particularly women who spend time looking for water for domestic chores during the dry seasons. Some of the wells have been fitted with pumps to make access easier when the water level reduces because of extreme dry conditions. These can bring about reduction in water borne diseases and improvement in the health status of the people, especially children.
- Most of people in the pilot communities are unskilled small-scale farmers who depend on seasonal crops like millet and maize. PAGEV is encouraging them to complement with high-value crops (mangoes and guava) to help boost incomes of households in the long term. Fast growing trees (acacias) have also been planted to provide protection to the river banks while at the same time providing fuel wood and increasing household income.
- .During the long dry season, there is the tendency for some farmers 'eat' into their food reserves and leaving nothing for planting in the following season. Some of those are being supported with vegetable seedlings to planting during the dry season. They are also being supported with water pumps to increase cropping areas during the dry season vegetable farming, while at the same time planting the buffer strips with improved varieties of fruit trees.

Gender perspectives integrated in community interventions

Under traditional cultures of some of the communities in the PAGEV zone, the role of women in household decision making is low; their participation in public affairs at the community level is also weak. Most village committees may consist of men who make decisions affecting the future of communities, while the voices of women are often not heard. PAGEV thus made conscious efforts to encourage the villages committees for river banks protection to overcome gender stereotypes by including at least one woman in the five-member executive for each village.

During the project conception, it was the women who decided on including fast growing trees (acacias) on the river banks to provide for their future fuel wood needs while protecting to the river banks at the same time.

The hand-dug wells provided to some of the communities have reduced the walking distance and time for women to fetch water, thus providing more time to undertake other economic activities.

Enhancement of local participation in transboundary water management

PAGEV is promoting effective participation of local communities in the water governance structures established for the operations of the stakeholders' forums. The river banks protection committee of each community has nominated 3 representatives each as the official spokespersons at the respective national forums. The national forums are providing platforms for the local communities to share their concerns with the heads of local authorities. A joint local transboundary committee has also evolved from the two national forums to coordinate joint cross-border activities, solve any local level water use problems and disputes, and strengthen cooperation between the two countries. The local transboundary forum has developed and adopted statutes and conventions to guide their operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Communities are willing to participate in water and other natural resources conservation interventions when the outcomes of participation are clearly and directly linked to the improvement of livelihoods of participating communities. Conscious efforts must be made to integrate livelihood needs of communities into IWRM by including income generation, safe water supply and hygiene education in the water resources management interventions. The support of local NGOs are crucial in these tasks, particularly in helping the marginalized community groups, such as women and the migrant farmers who have less capacity to articulate their demands.

References

IUCN-PAGEV (2007) "*Project Completion Report (July 2004 to September 2007)*" Volta Water Governance Project, (October 2007).

Kwame Odame-Ababio (2006) "*Laying the basis for a future transboundary management of the Volta Basin in West Africa – the Case of the Volta Water Governance Project*". Stockholm World Water Week 2006 Abstract Volume pp 41. (Poster exhibition August 20-26, 2006).

Kwame Odame-Ababio (2004) "*Water and Politics in the Volta Basin – defusing conflict, risks and promoting bi-national cooperation through informed dialogue and negotiations*". Proceedings of Workshop on Water and Politics organised by the World Water Council in Marseilles-France, (February 2004).