



Deal imminent for East Africa's model transboundary water basin

Uganda and Kenya have been working on the planning of the management and development options for the transboundary Sio-Malaba-Malakisi sub basin of the Nile for a while now and are close to signing a revised Memorandum of Understanding that will guide the management and development of the sub basin, a transboundary resource between the two countries, whose successful implementation will result in a model to be replicated by other regions to address water crises.

With a dozen identified and prioritized investment projects that are expected to cost an estimated \$252.8 million, the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi, commonly referred to as the SMM basin, will transform livelihoods of four million people who call this place home when these projects are implemented within the coordination framework of the MoU, water resources experts say. The identification and prioritization process was undertaken through SMM basin stakeholders' participation taking into account and balancing between both built and natural infrastructure through the IUCN's Benefit Opportunity Assessment Dialogue process.

IUCN's Benefit Opportunity Assessment Dialogue process helps to facilitate cooperation through deliberate steps engaging different stakeholders at multiple levels in jointly identifying and prioritizing benefits. It is an approach of moving beyond the traditional volumetric water sharing to sharing benefit in terms of jointly prioritized investment opportunities for management and development, says John P. Owino, Programme Officer, IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office.

Experts add that the basin is also significant as it is part of a larger ecosystem of water bodies, hence its management directly impacts a much bigger population and environment.

"These basins are important in the sense that, all put together, they form the sum

total of the water resources of large transboundary water bodies like Lake Victoria and the River Nile. Therefore, their value in contributing to the water security in large shared basins cannot be over emphasized," says Sowed Sewagudde, Assistant Commissioner in Uganda's Ministry of Water and Environment.

In addition, basins like SMM drain areas further away from major shared water bodies, and hence make it easier to harness, and demonstrate benefits of transboundary cooperation to adjacent communities, adds Mr Sewagudde, who is an international and transboundary water affairs expert.

Other authorities familiar with the basin's planning and development echo this point.

"Transboundary water cooperation is not an option but a must, since water doesn't recognize political boundaries and this MoU will lead to added benefits such as regional collaboration, trade, peace and security and development," says water expert Dr. Callist Tindimugaya.

Dr Tindimugaya, who is the Commissioner for Water Resources Planning and Regulation in Uganda's Ministry of Water and Environment is the Uganda's focal person for the SMM basin, under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) BRIDGE (Building River Dialogue and Governance) Initiative, which has been building on the previous NBI NELSAP (Nile Basin Initiative Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Programme) work in the SMM basin.

The projects identified and prioritized for investment in the SMM basin, through stakeholders' participation included: Malaba irrigation; Eastern SMM water security and development (which combines six sub catchment management plans); Sio Sango multipurpose water resources development project; Toloso sub catchment management plan; Lwakhakha hotspots; Sio-Siteko community-based wetlands management; Angololo multipurpose water resources development project as well as Solid waste management in both countries on the sites of Lwakhakha and Bungoma in Kenya and Lwakhakha in Uganda.

Mr Sewagudde explains that the MoU is a major development as it makes reality ventures like Angololo Multipurpose water project, which is envisaged to establish irrigation schemes estimated at 3,300 hectares gross area both in Uganda and Kenya.

The deal will also see equitable



Sio Siteko Transport and River (Photo Credit: NELSAP)

utilization of the shared Sio-Malaba-Malakisi water and shared resources.

The basin's development also prioritizes a project for food security, and others like Nyabanja irrigation development and watershed management project, Storm-water drainage masterplans and Bulusambu multipurpose water resources development project.

“The importance of the SMM investment planning process and institutional framework is a mechanism to enable stakeholders' realize concrete and tangible results from transboundary water cooperation,” says Ms Gladys Wekesa, Director, Water Resources, Sanitation and Irrigation, Kenya.

Ahead of World Water Day this year, water resources experts said the progress that Kenya and Uganda have achieved in recent years and the planned development of the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi basin is a blueprint to replicate by other countries with shared water bodies.

The SMM basin is a transboundary watershed spanning 3,240 square kilometres, comprising an ecosystem of lakes, rivers, forests, game reserves and national parks, boasting of a rich variety of flora and fauna.

Once the basin's prioritized investment projects are implemented, its over four million inhabitants who depend on the water system which traverses one of Africa's driest regions, will realize more value from the water body – in line with this year's World Water Day theme “Valuing Water”.

According to the experts, the value of water is about much more than its price: water has enormous and complex value for our households, food, culture, health, education, economics and the integrity of our natural environment.

However, they warn that if users overlook any of these values, they risk mismanaging this finite, irreplaceable resource, hence jeopardizing the realization of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, which is to ensure water and sanitation for all.

Experts warn that without a comprehensive understanding of water's true, multidimensional value, the world will be unable to safeguard this critical resource for the benefit of everyone.

Despite its potential for development and investment, the SMM basin remains underdeveloped, hence limiting its economic growth, and continues to face constraints primarily from deteriorating water quality and scarcity in parts of the catchments.

Agriculture is the major socio-economic activity in the SMM basin, employing 85 percent of people, but experts cite poor agricultural practices, intensive land cultivation and sand harvesting which over the years have resulted in extensive landscape degradation and loss of water quality in the basin.

Because of this, the governments of Kenya and Uganda selected SMM basin in 2015 as a demonstration basin, as part of the IGAD's “Strengthening transboundary water governance and cooperation” project.

The Sio-Malaba-Malakisi project is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the US Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, with technical assistance from IUCN, IGAD Secretariat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Secretariat – the Helsinki Water Convention.



Malaba – Tororo (Photo Credit: NELSAP)

BRIDGE website: www.waterandnature.org/initiatives/bridge
Water Law and Governance website: www.waterlawandgovernance.org
<https://preview.shorthand.com/nmACk7bk6aj2BV3Atimes>
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