



## CASE STUDY

# Transboundary: Cooperation for investment planning for green growth and poverty reduction in the Mekrou sub-basin

The Global Water Partnership West Africa (GWP-WA) and the JRC/EU58 jointly with the Mekrou River basin riparians (Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger) implemented a concerted strategic planning process to support sustainable development in the basin (2014-2017). Sustainable resource management on a basin level becomes a challenge especially when it is transboundary and includes a natural park shared by several states. The project has enabled collection of scientific data on water and associated natural resources, and establishment of a framework cooperation agreement between riparians, and a Master Plan for Water Development and Management (SDAGE) with an investment plan at the sub-basin level.

## **Background**

The Mekrou River sub-basin, located in the Niger River basin and shared by Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger, covers an area of 10,500 km<sup>2</sup>. This area is confronted with the unsustainable management of its natural resources and in particular its water resources, which are subject to competing uses, in a context of worsening poverty and exacerbating the impacts of climate change. Drought is a major risk to the livelihoods of farmers in the sub-basin. High levels of poverty and poor infrastructure make people highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and change. The sub-basin is home to the W Park Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is also under severe threat.

Prior to the implementation of the project, there was a lack of knowledge about the state of the water resources in the sub-basin. There was no strategic planning framework for development that would assist in its rational use and attract investment to ensure sustainable development. This is compounded by the transboundary nature of the sub-basin which is governed by various administrative, organisational, institutional and legislative arrangements. The States concerned are at different levels of developing and implementing their national IWRM plans and thus the institutional framework and instruments for water resources management. A number of conventions and cooperation instruments already existed within the Niger Basin Authority (NBA), such as the Shared Vision, the Niger Basin Water Charter and the Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP). However, sustainable development planning was still necessary to allow the harmonious implementation of concerted actions with positive impacts for the populations of the sub-basin.

In response to these challenges, GWP-WA and JRC/EU, in collaboration with the three

States, set up the «Water for Growth and Poverty Reduction in the Mekrou Transboundary Sub-basin» project to enable all stakeholders in the basin, including political authorities at different levels, to make better-informed decisions for the sustainable development of the area, based on agreed principles and scientific findings.

Two intervention components were distinguished:

an institutional component, implemented by GWP-WA, to mobilise the stakeholders and ensure that their concerns are better taken into account, and  
a scientific component carried out by the JRC/EU to strengthen collaboration between international, regional and national scientific structures, to improve knowledge and to develop tools to support decision making.

The coordination of the implementation of these two components was carried out by GWP-WA. Project financing amounted to 5 million EUR, was provided by the European Commission and the JRC/EU. It was implemented from 2014 to 2017.

### **Actions taken**

For the institutional component, active lobbying was undertaken by the GWP-WA branches with the relevant officials in each State. The aim was to identify and involve technical staff in the ministerial departments, researchers in the scientific structures, appropriate local structures, community leaders and local elected representatives in taking into account the various concerns.

The signature by the three Water Ministers of the framework agreement for cooperation and promotion of political dialogue for sustainable development in the Mekrou sub-basin was a major axis of commitment by the political actors. NBA has had an important role in coordinating the action: it has ensured its coherence with the general planning in the basin and communication with the other Member States through its bodies. Taking into account the priorities related to the W Park, including its specific environmental priorities, has informed the implementation of the project at all stages, in particular for the EU pilot actions.

In a framework of collaboration with research and training institutions, the scientific component has made it possible to produce decision-making tools to guide decision-makers and other actors in the planning process, based on existing and/or newly collected data. The participatory nature of the action, in accordance with the second principle of IWRM, resulted in the mobilisation of the Secretaries General of the Ministries of Water, Directors General in charge of water resources, heads of deconcentrated technical services involved in the management of water resources, the environment, agriculture, mayors, councillors and local elected officials, heads of NGOs, user associations, research institutions, etc. All were able to appropriate the project to their own needs. All were able to take ownership of the project.

For the research component, renowned institutions participated in the action, with, at the regional level, the AGRHYMET Regional Centre (CILSS) and university structures including the National Water Institute (INE) in Benin, the Institute of Environment and Agricultural Research (INERA) in Burkina Faso and the Hydrogeology, Hydrochemistry and Isotopic Geochemistry Laboratory of the Geology Department of the Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey in Niger.

Through a comprehensive coordination mechanism led by NBA and the three States, the Mekrou project has put in place basic tools and elements to support sustainable development in the sub-basin. The major concern of the users, which was strongly expressed during the project's launching workshop, was the implementation of pilot actions capable of impacting their living conditions. This was taken into account through the identification, design and implementation of a pilot project in each of the three countries.

Benin's pilot project focused on protection actions through reforestation of the riverbanks, capacity building for women to build improved stoves, the delimitation of the protection area of the spring head, the adoption of a protection decree by the commune of Kouandé in 2017, as well as awareness-raising activities. The pilot project implemented in Burkina Faso, in the Eastern region, allowed for the development of a 125 km pastoral track with the installation of beacons every 200 m. The pilot project in Niger focused on the development of a watering hole in the W Niger Park for wildlife, in accordance with the studies carried out under the W ECOPAS Park programme.

Each pilot project addresses a cross-border problem. It contributes to ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and to securing the transit of local communities on both sides of the borders by preventing or mitigating conflicts

## **Outcomes**

The project has ensured, through the involvement of the NBA bodies and the taking into account of their orientations throughout its implementation, that the approach used and the results obtained are consistent with the commitments made by the States, the Shared Vision, the Action Programme for Sustainable Development (APSD) and the Niger Basin Water Charter, in a logic of subsidiarity. The project was based on three pillars: a political commitment at the highest level through the framework agreement for cooperation, which made it possible to mobilise the countries' stakeholders and resources; improved knowledge of the socioeconomic, hydrological, environmental and climatic context through scientific and technical research and the E-Water module; and participatory planning which, on the basis of the development priorities defined by the stakeholders, made it possible to draw up a SDAGE together with the Programme of Measures and Investment Plan (PMPI) for the sub-basin.

The Mekrou project has strategically helped:

- to strengthen transboundary cooperation within the framework of the commitments made within NBA by leading a consultative process on the sub-basin;
- obtain from the Ministers of Water a renewal of the commitments made through the international conventions and regional agreements ratified by the States within the framework of ECOWAS and NBA, in particular the Niger Basin Water Charter;
- to improve scientific and technical knowledge on natural resources as well as on the problem of climate variability and change in the sub-basin;
- to carry out a joint planning of the sustainable management of the resources to ensure the socio-economic development in a participative way, by taking into account the collected scientific data and information;
- to ensure the effective participation of key national and regional actors operating in the intervention area as well as beneficiaries and development actors in the implementation of the action, while taking into account the transboundary nature of the sub-basin and the importance of the W park.

Most important tangible outcomes included:

- establishment of the baseline situation of the sub-basin in the first year of the project in 2014;
- signature of the framework agreement for cooperation and promotion of policy dialogue for sustainable development in the sub-basin by the three Water Ministers in 2015;
- joint development by the scientific institutions and technical services of the E-Water module, an innovative information and decision-making tool at transboundary level, with a user's manual. With 8 thematic components, it includes all the routines and simulation tools available for optimising food and water security (agro-hydrological modelling, analyses of climatic variables, socio-economic analyses).

Finally, the results of the Mekrou project have enabled the development of the Mekrou Phase 2/Niger project in 2019. At the request of the Nigerian government, GWP-WA provided technical and financial support for the preparation of this project, in line with the CaSSE, the PMPI and the SDAGE of the sub-basin. A funding of one million euros has been granted by the European Commission for its implementation as a contribution to the PANGIRE-Niger for the period from January 2020 to the end of June 2023.

In addition, the scientific component of phase 2 of the Mekrou project has been set up for the period 2020- 2022 under the coordination of the JRC/EU with a budget of 600,000 euros financed by the European Commission through its Directorate General for International Cooperation.

## **Lessons Learned**

Projects focusing on governance, institutional organisation or research, even if they aim to build or strengthen an enabling environment for efficient natural resource planning and management, need to include pilot physical investment actions in their design. This approach offers the opportunity to learn from these actions in preparation for large-scale investments.

Linking the institutional and scientific/technical components carried out by independent entities, with specific mandates and capacities and separate agreements, is a possible but challenging option. This option requires a significant effort in joint planning, coordination and a real-time consultation mechanism. Formalisation of coordination processes facilitates this interaction

The scale of intervention of the transboundary basin implies taking into account the levels of progress of decentralisation and implementation of IWRM in the different States.

An IWRM project, especially in a transboundary basin, requires intense dialogue at all scales. Building and facilitating a consultative mechanism to reach consensus requires a lot of time and resources.

Taking into account the concerns of the populations in the implementation of a project is a means of generating interest and a strong commitment to sustainability, an indicator of

ownership by its beneficiaries.

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**Organisation**

Global Water Partnership West Africa - GWP WAF Country Water Partnership Niger - CWP Niger

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**Supporting Materials**

Partnership action for water security and climate resilience of populations and ecosystems in West Africa

**Related IWRM Tools**

International Water Law  
Transboundary Organisations  
Information Gathering and Sharing Networks  
Transboundary financing

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