

**Final Communiqué of the
Conference of the Heads of State of the Niger Basin Authority and Partners**
INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR THE RIVER NIGER BASIN
Shared Vision : From the Strategy to an Action Plan
Paris - April 26-27, 2004

The Conference of the Heads of State of the Niger Basin Authority took place on April 26 and 27, 2004 at the International Conferences Center of Paris under the chairmanship of Mamadou TANDJA, President of the Summit of the Heads of State of the Niger Basin Authority and with the active support of Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic.

Were in attendance the Heads of State of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, the Prime Minister of Guinea and the Representative of the President of Côte d'Ivoire.

Regarding development partners, the major international institutions were represented at the highest level, as well as the banks and development agencies, NBA technical partners and several bilateral partners.

Opening Ceremony

The importance of the conference was underlined right from the opening ceremony.

In his welcome address, President Jacques CHIRAC highlighted the commitment of France for access of populations to potable water and sanitation as well as the equitable management of water resources. The commitment of France to support NBA countries is a testimony of her commitment to the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD).

In his opening address, President TANDJA recalled the dangers facing the River Niger and his tributaries. By its length, this River is the third hydrographic basin in Africa. Today, ten million persons live on its banks and make their livelihoods out of agriculture, animal rearing, fishing and navigation ;these populations will increase to 200 million in 2020. The basin is facing a decrease in the rainfall pattern and a severe environmental pressure. There is a significant reduction of the flows which is likely to increase poverty and tensions in an already very fragile region.

To face these challenges, President TANDJA pointed out that :

« The urgent issue we have to face today is to have adequate resources for the projects and actions targeted under silting control, environmental protection and ecosystems regeneration.

The emergency is also capacity building for the NBA Executive Secretariat and its specialised agencies. That is an orientation in which we must quickly put effort so as to succeed in the conduct of the Shared Vision for the Niger basin. »

For the European Commission, President Romano PRODI reaffirmed his personal support to the initiative of the NBA member countries and the support of the Commission following the Johannesburg commitments, through a water facility of 500 million Euros. This partnership on the river Niger basin is a concrete illustration likely to benefit from this new water facility.

For the United Nations Environmental Program, Mr. Klaus Töpfer particularly stressed on the UNEP capacity building special program, likely to support the development of the Niger basin. A message from the United Nations Secretary General was read by Mr. Ould Abdallah, his personal representative for Africa.

The World Bank, team Leader of the NBA development partners, reaffirmed his commitment to support the Shared Vision and conduct his action under the partner's co-operation framework following three imperatives : mutual confidence, sharing of benefits and mobilization for an action plan.

The Paris Declaration

This commitment was signed by the Heads of State and Government before the participants and the international media. It relates to a strong political commitment. It aims at setting in place an equitable and shared management of the water resources which is increasingly threatened : climate change, silting, various pollutions... The nine States should henceforth consult themselves systematically for any infrastructural work which significantly affects the flow pattern of the waters of the basin, and consolidate their regional institution i-e the Niger Basin Authority, in order to have NBA fully play its coordination role.

During the press conference which followed the signing ceremony, Presidents CHIRAC and TANDJA, in line with the New Partnership for Africa Development, particularly insisted on the necessity to henceforth replace the notion of assistance by that of partnership.

Interventions of the Heads of State of the NBA member countries on « the Shared Vision for the Sustainable Development of the Niger basin »

All the Heads of State and delegation expressed their satisfaction as regards the signing the Paris Declaration. They commended the Republic of Niger for the efficacy and dynamism of her NBA chairmanship since 2002. They expressed appreciation to President Jacques CHIRAC for the interest shown in Africa in general and most particularly in the river Niger basin. They also reaffirmed the prime responsibility of Africans as regards the development of their countries, as the external support will come in only after the strategies are well formulated and the international supports are mobilized.

In their respective declarations on the Shared Vision, the Heads of State or their representatives highlighted the necessity for their countries to conduct successfully the Shared Vision process in peace, unity and solidarity. According to them, this vision should be an adequate strategy for the rational management of natural resources of the basin and poverty alleviation, pledge for a better future.

For all the member States, this Shared Vision stands for the ideal way, if not the only one to be followed so as to preserve the environment and the natural resources of the Niger basin.

However, signing a declaration is not enough. The most important issue is to implement the decisions taken. This precision made by President Olusegun OBASANJO of Nigeria was largely approved by all the delegations.

For Presidents Idriss DEBY of Chad and Mamadou TANDJA of Niger, the efficient implementation of the Shared Vision requires a restructured, strong and very competent Executive Secretariat so as to manage the financial resources made available to the NBA for its projects and programs.

President Paul BIYA stressed on the water scarcity and the demographic pressure, factor of fragility. He insisted on the importance of consultation mechanisms for the preparation of the action plan as well as on the necessity of co-operation among the technical and financial partners.

As for President Amadou Toumani TOURE of Mali, he stressed on the urgent necessity to control the silting of the River Niger. To illustrate his statement, the malian President mentioned regretfully the situation facing some sites of the inner Delta which were, in the past, deep zones and have now become a pray of the sand. Obviously, the challenge is to urgently reverse this trend.

The Guinea Prime Minister Mr. Lounseny FALL underlined the importance of the River Niger for his country, as the Fouta Djalon Mountains constitutes its source.

Presidents Mathieu KERÉKOU of Benin and Blaise COMPAORE of Burkina Faso have underlined the importance of the present conference for the international partnership for the river Niger basin.

The NBA Action Plan

Having provided justifications on the Shared Vision which will consolidate co-operation among the States, the NBA Executive Secretary underlined the importance to overcome the challenges associated with the sustainable development of the Niger basin. The objectives and the Action plan development process of this Shared Vision were clearly presented. The Executive Secretary highlighted the necessity participatory nature of this exercise. For the successful conduct of this process, he reaffirmed the importance for the NBA as regards the signing of the Paris Declaration by the Heads of State and the Co-operation Framework by the Niger Basin Authority's Partners.

To illustrate a successful experience of shared management of transboundary basins in West Africa, the High Commissioner of OMVS presented the long maturation process of his institution. He stressed on the three foundations regulating OMVS operation: solidarity, consultation and building of the future for forthcoming generations. He emphasizes the importance of some operation principles, notably the principles of prior authorization and primacy of commitments taken at the level of OMVS as regards international law.

International Partnership

NBA development partners signed the Niger Basin Authority's Co-operation Framework, which affirms the willing of signers to reinforce the coordination of their interventions and to participate actively in the Advisor Comitee of the Niger Basin Authority Partners.

Future projects can henceforth be envisaged. Several infrastructural works are planned throughout the basin for irrigation, energy generation, navigation, fishing ... and for securing the hydraulicity of the river i-e his flowing throughout the year. In order to provide the population of the basin with a livelihood, there is a need to develop the basin, through the conduct of silting control small works at the local level up to the construction of dams whose socio-economic and environmental impacts shall be assessed at the regional level.

After the Paris Conference, perfect illustration of the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD), it is henceforth possible to design these works in a common, complementarity and integration prospects, based on the respect of the interests of the countries and populations upstream and downstream.

Special appreciation

The chairmanship of the Niger Basin Authority expressed special appreciation to the Secretary General of the Conference, Pierre Jacquemot for the remarkable organization of the Paris Conference.

Done in Paris, on April 27, 2004