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Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture

African Union Commission

**Proposal for the Federation of Transboundary River and Lake Basin
Organizations and Authorities to Promote Regional Cooperation in the
Development and Equitable Utilization of the Water Resources in Africa.**

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Introduction

Water is a vital resource for economic and environmental development as well for the development of human welfare. Because of their extensive dependence on agriculture, which requires reliable supply of water, the political and economic policies of African countries needs to ensure that adequate attention is paid to the development and the sustainable and equitable harnessing of the continent's waters for sustainable development. Unfortunately however, Africa's water potential, estimated at 5000m³/Capita/year, is highly unevenly distributed in the continent, with the majority of the food grain production areas having limited exploitable reserves and thus facing frequent shortages. Given the current population projections, over 400 million people are expected to be living in at least 17 water-scarce African countries by the year 2010. This lack of water threatens to severely constrain food production, ecosystem protection and economic development. The situation further heavily penalizes the rural poor who constitute the majority of the agricultural population of the continent. Today over 300 million people in Africa still do not have reasonable access to safe water for drinking and sanitation, a situation that needs urgent correction if the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for the water sector in Africa, which calls for reducing by half the number of people without access to safe water for drinking and sanitation by 2015, would be met.

Although Africa's per capita water endowment lies below the world average of about 7000m³/Capita/year, it still has significant potential to meet the development needs of the continent. This potential can however only be usefully exploited if African governments demonstrate sufficient political, financial and other resource will to cooperate in joint and integrated management, development and harnessing of the transboundary rivers and lakes. Indeed a strong political and financial commitment to such joint management and use will significantly contribute to poverty alleviation at the local level thus contributing to the achievement of the MDG on poverty reduction by 2015.

As most countries of the region are riparian to one or more river basins, and since 40 % of the area in Africa falls within transboundary basins, social and economic problems emanating from inefficient and ineffective management of and harnessing of these water basins pervades a large portion of the continent and continue to pose serious impediments for successful integrated water resources management (IWRM). In view of the increasing scarcity of freshwater and the threat of desertification, against a backdrop of extreme and temporal variability of climate and rainfall, and in consideration of the trans-boundary nature of most water bodies, African Governments have appreciated the urgent need to pay special attention to cooperation amongst them to protect and manage the continent's freshwater resources.

Africa's commitments to the development of the water sectors are contained in: the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community; the Lagos Plan of Action for

the Economic Development of Africa; the Final Act of Lagos; the Priority Programme for Economic Recovery etc. These commitments have been further crystallized in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative. Furthermore the "Sirte Declaration on the Challenges of implementing Integrated and Sustainable Development in Agriculture and Water in Africa" strongly underlines the commitments of the Heads of State to urgently address the challenges of the Water Sector in the continent.

Challenges.

In the context of this proposal the principal challenges facing development efforts in the water sector and the Commission are political and financial. They include:

- First and foremost, the need for Africa to 'dismantle' the political bottlenecks to equitable access to shared resources and other governance issues at the regional and national levels;
- The need to ensure that sufficient financial, technical and human resources are directed to protection, development and sustainable harnessing and channelling of water from water-rich to water-poor areas for the purpose of agricultural, industrial and domestic use;
- Making (transboundary) water resources management a priority for regional integration and development, therefore requiring agreements to review and to harmonize/coordinate policies, which require radical political and resources commitments on the side of Member States and Regional Economic Communities;
- Convincing the poor countries to cooperate in financing joint management of transboundary waters in the face of competing demands on their already stretched national resources and increasingly diminishing overseas development assistance.

Justification

Many of Africa's surface water resources, principally rivers and lakes, are trans-boundary in nature providing water for livestock and crops production as well as for human settlements in more than one country. Although the use of these shared waters has not so far been at the center of serious intra and inter-state conflicts, the possibility for such conflicts flaring become more and more real as the demands for water increases due to heightened pressure from the burgeoning human and animal populations and the need for increased water drawing for irrigation and for industrial processes. Joint management of the Transboundary waters and cooperation between Basin Organizations/Authorities will minimize this risk.

In other to increase agricultural production and provide sufficient supply of safe water for drinking and sanitation in the ever-growing settlements for the purpose of reducing human suffering and poverty, African Governments, through their Regional Economic Communities, are challenged to look for innovative partnership arrangements that would allow sharing of experiences on integrated transboundary

water management, promote inter-basin and inter regional water transfer, and coordinate donor actions in the sector, in addition to bringing more of the continents transboundary fresh water resources under sustainable management and equitable use. Furthermore arrangements need to be made to relieve water stress in those countries that have very limited supplies or that may not belong to a water/basin in the interest of and for the enhancement of political and economic integration of the continent.

Africa has more than 60 transboundary lake/river basins. However ,fewer than twenty are being jointly managed by the basin countries, through Basin Organizations/Authorities. [Most of these basin institutions are constrained by major difficulties](#) that render [them](#) incapable of [functioning](#) in a way that would permit the exploitation of the full potential of the shared water regime. Despite the commitment demonstrated by the countries in the joint management of these river and lake basins many of the water bodies continue to deteriorate. While climate change and variability are in many cases responsible for this (e.g. Lake Chad Basin), insufficient financial, administrative and managerial capacities, pressure from ever increasing human and livestock populations, insufficient political will as well as limited or the lack of application of integrated management approaches are largely to blame for this situation.

Some Existing Basin Organizations/Authorities

The Niger Basin Authority
The Senegal River Development Organization (OMVS)
The Gambia River Basin Organization (OMVG)
The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)
The Kagera Basin Organization
The Okavango River Basin Commission
The Mano River Union
The Zambezi River Authority
The Nile Basin Initiative
The Lake Victoria Initiative.

A successful integrated Joint management and equitable sharing of the transboundary water resources calls for harmonized and or coordinated policies amongst the basin countries. The current basin agreements were negotiated separately and were not extensively informed by failed or successful experiences that preceded them. The existence of many 'fragmented' transboundary management arrangements and the emergence of new political, economic paradigms, such as the evolution of the African Union, the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and the outcomes of the Pan-African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), calls for concerted and well coordinated efforts for the sustainable management of Africa's water resources. The partnerships arrangements that are advocated by these regional and global developments can better be enhanced at the regional level if the existing Basin organizations/authorities could cooperate in such a way as to allow sharing of their experiences for mutual benefits and for informing new and emerging authorities. The cooperation between authorities will promote donor coordination, away from competition, thus facilitating efficient use of the already stretched donor resources. Furthermore, best practices,

as regard national policies of basin countries, could be shared for the overall effective protection, management and use of the basin resources.

In recognition of the need for cooperation as indicated above, the AU Extra-ordinary Summit on agriculture and Water held in Sirte, Libya, in February 2004 adopted the “*Sirte Declaration on the Challenges of Implementing Integrated and Sustainable Development in Agriculture and Water in Africa*”. This Declaration committed Member States to:

- i. “**Encourage** bilateral agreements on shared water resources and **enjoin** the Regional Economic Communities to develop appropriate regional protocols to guide integrated water resources managements.
- ii. **Strengthen** existing river and lake basins organizations where they exist and establishing new ones wherever appropriate to *inter alia*:
 - Develop and promote water resources through support to infrastructure projects, including the construction of dams and canals, sinking of wells and providing irrigation equipment;
 - Exploit water falls to provide electric power and link it to the Continent’s general network.
 - Carry out studies on untapped water in areas where it is available in large quantities to benefit the continent in accordance with the principles of international law, including the protocols concluded among all the riparian States.”

The Sirte Declaration further calls upon the African Union Commission to develop details plans of action to implement the Declaration

It is in line with requirements of the Sirte Declaration and the objectives of the NEPAD, the Implementation Plan of WSSD and the MDGs for the water sector in Africa that this proposal is made for the consideration of the African Development Bank.

Proposal for the Establishment of the Federation of African River Basin Organization.

Goal and Objective.

The **Goal** of the programme is to contribute to the achievement of the broader developmental goals of NEPAD, The Africa Water Vision 2025, the MDG and the outcome of the WSSD in the Water Sector in Africa.

For the above purpose therefore the **Objective** of the programme is to promote and facilitate cooperation between existing transboundary river and lake basin organizations/authorities by bringing them together into a ***Federation of African Basin Organizations***, that would share experiences and lessons learnt in order to

improve on the existing management arrangements and approaches, provide advise for emerging ones and to specifically facilitate:

- i. Donor coordination and efficient use of limited resources in the area of transboundary water management through donor participation in its meetings;
- ii. Cooperation for capacity building at individual basin levels;
- iii. Agreements on inter-basin and inter regional water transfer;
- iv. National policy review/formulation, and harmonization, in support of cooperation at transboundary levels;
- v. Creation of new basin authorities as may be proposed by RECs or basin countries by sharing experiences and providing guidance;
- vi. Sharing experience and lessons learnt on application of integrated management approaches and encouraging its wider application.
- vii. Investments in the development of the water sector at national level within each basin.
- viii. Regional integration through dialogue and consultations between host (of Basins) Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
- ix. Priority setting
- x. Coordination of social, economic, environmental and technical studies.

Process Strategy.

The Federation of African Basin Organizations will be a permanent feature of the regional arrangements for transboundary water management. It will therefore be incorporated/instituted within the general framework of the operational modalities of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), which is an organ of the African Union. Consequently its activities will be linked to those of AMCOW in order that it could benefit from a harmonized political, policy, technical and financial support of relevant African Union Organs and programmes, such as NEPAD, as well as AMCOW's development partners, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), African Development Bank (ADB), the European Union (EU), UN Water/Africa, and other multilateral and bilateral partners.

Specific Strategies:

The ***establishment*** of the Federation of African Basin Organizations will be approached in a phased manner over the next three years. It will involve:

- Developing terms of reference/Statutes or a framework agreement;
- Organizing an initial meeting, under the aegis of AU/AMCOW, to form and launch the Federation;
- Incorporating the resulting federation into the AMCOW structure through:
 - Membership of the Basin Organizations in the African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO)
 - The Establishment of ANBO as institution/organ of AMCOW
 - The Chairperson of the Federation participating in the Executive Committee (EXCO) meetings of AMCOW.
- Develop a communication strategy for the Federation.

- Organize meetings of the Federation once in two years to share experiences and lessons learnt on technical and policy matters and to assess the status of implementation of AMCOW programmes at basin level.

Institutional Arrangements.

A bureau of the federation will be established on a regional representational basis as necessary. The meetings of ANBO would be linked to AMCOW activities.

Expected Outcome.

1. Short Term

The expected outcome for the short-term is the creation of a forum for dialogue and exchange of experiences and lessons learn between river and lake basin Organizations in Africa.

2. Long-term

The long-term outcome is expected to be:

- Wider application of integrated transboundary water management;
- Well coordinated donor intervention in transboundary management;
- Harmonized policies with regard to country involvement in transboundary management;
- Agreement to and implementation of inter-basin and inter-regional water transfer.
- Increased management capacity at the basin level.
- Harmonized economic and technical studies to save resources.
- Facilitated negotiations for and creation of new shared basin organizations;
- Minimized potential for conflict over the use of shared surface waters;
- Enhanced availability of water for agricultural development in all regions of Africa;
- Meeting the MDGs related to water supply and sanitation in rural and urban settlements in Africa; and
- Overall enhancement of regional integration