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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

A city-basin approach to water security in Africa

24 March, 14:00-15:15, Conference Room 4
Organized by UCLG Africa, OECD and CSU



Background on the event (one paragraph)

This session gathered Ministers, presidents of local government associations and high-level representatives of international organisations, non-governmental organisations and multi-lateral banks to contribute to the [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#) adopted by the [OECD/UCLG-Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#), which proposes 12 concrete actions for local and regional governments to drive water security at all levels. It provided a platform for African leaders to voice their commitment towards the implementation of the Action Plan based on the [OECD Principles on Water Governance](#) towards better water security.

Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#)) N/A

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- As recognised by the [OECD Principles on Water Governance](#), water crises are often primarily water governance crises, revealing gaps in terms of who does what, at which scale and how.
- As a result of decentralisation processes, the role of African cities in water management has evolved in recent years, from ensuring access to water and sanitation services towards building resilience to the risks of ‘too much’, ‘too little’ and ‘too polluted’ water exacerbated by climate change, urbanisation and population and economic growth [[OECD](#)]. In many African countries, water policy flows from the top, with a line ministry overseeing standard setting, consumer protection, tariff setting and other responsibilities. The past few years have seen a growing role for local authorities, but the regulatory and fiscal powers of subnational governments vary widely across African countries [Forum of Regions of Africa]. However, national-local coordination challenges at the basin scale remain.
- A city-basin approach is vital to sustainably manage water resources across municipalities, foster dialogue and avoid conflicts [OECD, UCLG-Africa, Association of the Mayors of Congo]. However, according to the OECD report on Water Governance in African Cities, in partnership with UCLG-Africa, just 42% of 36 African cities surveyed are part of a river basin organisation. In the absence of integrated basin governance systems, the mismatch between hydrological and administrative boundaries can lead to competition between water uses and hinder the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Place-based responses are needed to address territorial differences. For example, Morocco is combining infrastructure (e.g. desalination, groundwater extraction and improving the performance of the water supply network from 67% to 80%) with governance measures (e.g. stakeholder engagement and planning through the country’s ten river basin agencies). Senegal emphasises the differences between urban and rural areas, insisting on the importance of the institutional landscape for rural areas and the need to renew outdated urban infrastructure in cities. Place-based and stakeholder-based solutions (e.g. community-led water management) can help reduce costs, increase access and avoid conflicts [Association of Mayors of Senegal].

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

As set out in the OECD / UCLG-Africa [Action Plan of Mayors, Local and Regional Governments for Water Security](#) signed by 80+ local authorities, and reiterated by side event speakers, governments should strive to:

1. **Implement effective multi-level governance** to manage water at the appropriate functional and territorial scale(s) and develop place-based solutions that reflect local conditions. Local

governments will ‘make or break’ the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on ‘Clean water and sanitation for all’ in Africa, but they cannot do it without national governments. Wherever possible, local authorities should be placed in the “driving seat” for the effective implementation of national water policies [UCLG-Africa, Association of Local Governments of Nigeria]. The World Bank is preparing National and City level Water Security Assessments with several African countries in order to understand the socio-economic implications of a city not being water secure and the sequence of interventions to be prioritised.

2. **Promote a city-basin approach to integrated water resources management and implement upstream-downstream solidarity mechanisms.** Within river basins that irrigate large cities (e.g. the Congo River Basin), dialogue, solidarity and equitable water management can help prevent conflicts between users [Association of the Mayors of Congo]. The African Development Bank (AfDB) supports mechanisms whereby downstream users financially compensate upstream users for water conservation or pollution reduction, also known as payments for ecosystem services. The INBO-IWA Handbook for Basin-Connected Cities provides guidance and examples from Johannesburg, Kinshasa-Brazzaville and Nairobi on leveraging city-basin dialogues for sustainable water resources management.
3. **Increase transparency to strengthen trust and political will for ambitious water policies.** For instance, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) engages with parliamentarians – who are particularly relevant for the local level – through the Parliamentarians Handbook. SWA also builds momentum for water and sanitation policies among Ministers and Heads of State through a Presidential Compact and a Mutual Accountability Mechanism.
4. **Ensure financing goes hand in hand with the capacity to develop and implement projects in adequate regulatory environments.** A holistic, whole-of-government approach is needed to ensure sustainable financing, for instance through tariff reforms and efficiency improvements to recover investments and costs. [Forum of Regions of Africa]. The World Bank leverages WASH financing in countries by mobilising domestic resources (e.g. tariffs, taxes and transfers) and private financing via credit enhancement mechanisms, and other explores carbon and green funding opportunities. Through Policies, Institutions and Regulation (PIR), the World Bank supports capacity development and regulatory frameworks that incentivise efficiency improvements and greater water and sanitation coverage. AfDB supports water sector reforms that improve cost efficiency and water operator performance: for instance, in Nigeria, the AfDB is supporting in-house capacity building alongside green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. The Resilient Cities Network (RCN) is setting up a financing instrument to fund the smaller-scale water innovations that cities are implementing.
5. **Foster city-to-city learning and cooperation within basins to tackle the risks of “too much”, “too little” and “too polluted” water.** The [OECD / UCLG-Africa Roundtable of African Mayors for Water Security](#) brings together 50+ Mayors from cities of different sizes across the five sub-regions of Africa to raise the voice and boost the capacity of city leaders through city-to-city partnerships to share knowledge, experience and best practices on local policies for water security. In a similar vein, the Consortium for Sustainable Urbanization promotes a better understanding of the role of resilience design in city planning through peer-to-peer learning and sharing of best practice. As a global city network that builds capacity and drives action, RCN leverages city to city partnerships, for instance with its recent Cities Solve, Cities Deliver campaign that highlights exemplary actions cities have taken on water resilience.
6. **Engage with stakeholders to manage water resources in a sustainable and inclusive way.** Engaging across levels of governments, with the public, private and non-profit sectors along with local communities, should be part of a whole-of-society effort to protect the water cycle

[UCLG]. UN1FY, the youth movement of the Water and Climate Coalition, has published a Water and Climate Youth Development Plan and Agenda (YDPA) outlining how member states, the private sector and stakeholders can effectively engage and work with youth.