

**Theme: INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION: New Ideas for Collaboration in River Basin
Management Policies and Practices**

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Tekeze-Atbara Basin Transboundary Civil Society Engagement Workshop

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Abstract:

There are historical relations between the Nile Basin communities that transcend the political boundaries. These relations provided mutual benefits for all the Nile communities. Based on this, a workshop was convened by the Sudan National Discourse Forum (SNDF) and the Micro Grants Programme (NTEAP) in collaboration with the Ethiopian NDF and the Eritrean NDF to get representatives of the communities (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan) living in the Tekeze-Atbara Basin to discuss their common problems and formulate guidelines for a management plan for the Basin. The workshop was co-financed by the Challenge Fund (NBD) and the Micro Grants Programme of the Nile Transboundary Environment Action Project (NTEAP/NBI). The overall purpose of the workshop was to reduce poverty and improve resource governance to attain sustainable socio-economic development in the Tekeze-Atbara Basin and to ensure the development of the resources of the basin in a sustainable and equitable way to ensure prosperity, security and peace for its entire people.

The activity was based on participatory planning by the communities who were assisted by scientific inputs from relevant experts. The main thrust of the activity was the collaborative management programme that entailed community action plans aiming at poverty reduction and conflict transformation.

The elements of water and vegetation conservation were included in the management plan in addition to disaster early warning systems and land use planning.

There were 43 representatives of the local communities from the three countries (mainly farmers and pastoralists).

Salient points that emerged from the workshop

- It was for the first time that the communities from three countries from the Nile Basin got together to discuss the joint problems and look for sustainable development plans.
- The Government of the state of Kassala was present in the activity and fully endorsed the outcomes. The representative of the Government pledged to collaborate with the other two countries to develop a joint management plan of the Basin.
- Such activity can and should be replicated all over the Nile Basin countries.

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1. Introduction:

After a meticulous process of preparations that extended for months the organizers successfully brought the stakeholders to the workshop venue at Kassala during the period 18th to 21st March 2007. There were 43 representatives of the local communities from the three countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan). At that time and in the after mass of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, there were a lot of apprehensions that the communities from either countries might not be able to participate.

However, these apprehensions were relieved when the participants arrived and engaged actively in the proceedings of the workshop.

2. Workshop Objective:

To initiate a community dialogue between the communities of the Tekeze-Atbara River Basin as a step towards a Basin wide management plan.

3. Methodology:

The workshop adopted a participatory technique. An experienced facilitator was recruited for this workshop. The facilitator and the organizing committee held several meetings in Khartoum to discuss the workshop objectives, methodology and the papers that were be presented. A Lot of consultations were also undertaken with Eritrean and Ethiopian NDFs The facilitator provided guidance and resource persons provided the baseline information, mostly in power point presentations, and the participants exchanged views putting their expertise, experience and vision for the future in the group work that was country specific.

4. Workshop Participants:

There were 43 participants from the Tekeze-Atbara Basin. The participants included representatives of the farmers and pastoralists in addition to the Commissioner of Western Tesseney sub region of Eritrea and the Commissioners of Atbara River and Kassala Localities of the Sudan. The Egyptian NDF and the Micro grants Coordinator in Egypt were among the participants in addition to the SNDF President, members of the SNDF Executive Committee and representatives of the Sudanese Environment Conservation Society and the Sudan Poverty Alleviation Network. Other participants included the representatives from the relevant Governmental Institutions, the Farmers and pastoralists Unions, the universities and research institutions and the media.

5. Workshop Proceedings:

4.1 The Opening Session:

This session witnessed the commitment from the Deputy Governor (*Wali*) of Kassala state towards the joint development of the Tekeze-Atbara Basin.

4.2 The Scientific Sessions:

The scientific program that covered the three days consisted of 7 sessions. The first session was an ice breaking one and helped the participants to focus on the topical issues, knowing each other and exchanging experiences. The participants, mostly community leaders, expressed their hopes and expectations.

The second working session was allotted to baseline information about the Nile water, in general, and Atbara-Tekeze Basin in particular. Two presentations were given by the Sudanese Ministry of Irrigation. The session closed by introducing the use of GIS for natural resource mapping, monitoring and development.

In the third working session, the facilitator provided a note on land use patterns; this was followed by country specific groups who used mapping techniques to give concise summary of problems of land use patterns along the Basin in each of the three countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan).

The second day was divided between baseline information on early warning systems and the use of this concept in disaster management, namely floods, steps of mitigation and the coping mechanisms (already applied by the communities). The scope of the flood problems and the urgent need to develop the early warning system was the issue discussed and reported on by the three country-specific group work. It was clear from the group work that the communities have suffered from the fluctuating rates of the River flood, as it sometimes inundate their agricultural lands and threaten their houses and in some years the flood would be far below average. The communities have developed their own coping mechanisms. They have their community based early warning systems that transcends the political boundaries. They have also diversified their livelihoods between crop cultivation and animal husbandry to cope with the fluctuations in the floods. It was clear that the Basin communities were not consulted about the proposed dams on the Tekeze in Ethiopia and the Atbara and Setit Rives dam. This was followed by a session on the impacts of refugees on the forestry sector in the Eastern Sudan.

The 6th working session was allotted for conflict resolution and peace building. The second tier conflicts and natural resource based conflicts mechanism were discussed. The root causes of conflicts were identified as the over utilization of these resources as a result of the fast growing population. This has resulted in environmental and natural resources degradation which was aggravated by the change in climate. The ensuing competition over the scarce natural resources has led to conflicts in many parts of the Basin. The integrated and holistic development of these resources was seen as the only way for achieving sustainable development. The Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement was taken as an example for a process of peace building. The workshop facilitator pointed to the importance of considering the gender dimension in conflict analysis. By this presentation the map of the problems, the *status quo* and the tools for understanding and analyzing the situation were already in place. The last working session dealt with planning the way forward and the three country-specific groups arrived at country-specific actions frames that included recommendations at the policy level.

6. Recommendations:

- Mapping and ranking of the problems of the Tekeze-Atbara Basin in each country.
- To develop an action frame to empower the CSOs in the Basin.
- The NBD must establish a sub basin network for the Atbara-Tekeze Basin. This awaits the formation of the Eritrean branch.
- The Basin integrated management plan should contain the following:
 - Range and forest land rehabilitation.
 - Encouraging the use of alternative energy, e.g. natural gas and solar energy sources to immediately reduce the deterioration in the vegetative cover.
 - Improving the range land by regulating the pastoral treks across the borders and by introducing water harvesting techniques.
 - Improving the traditional rain fed agriculture.
 - Gender mainstreaming specially at the planning phase.
 - Poverty eradication actions.

7. Lessons Learnt:

- The relations between the Nile communities are deeply rooted and are not affected by incidental political differences between the countries.
- The local communities have their own local knowledge, this should be documented and used.
- The NBD, being the voice of the voiceless, has a great role to play in bringing the Nile communities together to plan jointly.
- The NBD is highly recommended to build on this initiative to assist the communities of the Tekeze-Atbara Basin to prepare an integrated action plan for the whole basin and its communities.

8. Emerging Issues:

- The issue of the dams was and still is an area of contention for the Nile communities. In most cases, especially in the Sudan, dams are planned and established without the consent of the communities and in many cases they were subject to forced deportation from their homelands.