

AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER

Summary Report

- 1) The Africa Leadership Forum (ALF) in collaboration with the Melody for Dialogue among Civilizations Association (MDACA) and with the financial support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), organised a two-day Africa Regional Conference on Water on November 30 and December 1, 2011 at the ALF International Conference Centre, Ota, Nigeria. The main thematic thrust of the conference was “Water: The Regional Challenge of Our Future. Participants were drawn from various parts of Africa and represented civil society, multilateral organisations, public policy makers, academics, youth leaders, students, and the media. In attendance at the Conference were participants from different walks of life. There were Professors and students, managers and other consumers of water.
- 2) The conference was convened as part of the on-going efforts aimed at increasing stakeholders’ collaboration on water sustainability in Africa; Contributing to efforts aimed at raising levels of public awareness on water utilization in Africa by 2015; contributing towards Improved advocacy for concrete actions on water management by decision makers in Africa
- 3) The conference reviewed the challenges of climate change and sustainable water management in Africa particularly identifying the critical problems related to sustainable water management, assessing trends, and developing recommendation for solutions while providing strategies to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change.
- 4) The conference also examined how enhancing Integrated Watershed Management can help in developing natural resources and converting them to productive assets to secure livelihoods. It further highlighted good practices that can be replicated across African communities with regard to natural resources, their management and livelihoods.
- 5) Participants also reviewed Water Infrastructure in Africa focusing on the critical challenge of providing water for the large number of un-served and under-served in Africa by addressing the Water infrastructure deficits.
- 6) Another highlight of the meeting was the use of music as a tool for advocacy on water issues. A music drama composed specially for the conference was performed by Nigerian musician, Ara. Ara’s performance, with the theme ‘The Breath of Water holds Life’, focused on the essence of preserving water and keeping it clean to save lives.
- 7) In line with its objective to provide a platform for the development, promotion and sharing of indigenous technologies and solutions to Africa’s water challenges, two poster presentations were made at the meeting. A presentation on the comparative study of grey water treatment using *Moringa oleifera* and Aluminium Hydroxide

Chloride was designed to help local communities treat water using technology that is cheap and readily available. It demonstrated how water sourced from hand basins, showers, baths, laundry tubes and kitchen sinks can be treated for drinking. A second presentation assessed the physico - chemical and biological characteristics of the Oke Afa Canal, Ejigbo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria, highlighting the health implications of water pollution caused by industrial activities in African urban areas. It concluded that there is high probability of infiltrations of pathogenic bacteria into underground water of residential homes built close to the canal.

- 8) The conference also received a presentation from The World Water Assessment Programme on the preliminary results of the African Water Report, which is one of the important regional reports that will be included in the 4th edition of the World Water Development Report (WWDR4).

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Participants identified a number of issues that require urgent intervention if Africa is to adequately deal with its current and future water challenges. Some of the issues included;

- I. Africa's failure or inability to harness its abundant water resources for the benefit of its people as an impediment to its growth. Participants agreed despite the many water sources in Africa, the continent is failing to utilize them for its development.
- II. The disturbing health implications of water scarcity and poor sanitation for Africans. Participants observed that fatalities resulting from water-borne diseases or water disasters are significantly rising. It was agreed that Africa can no longer watch as thousands of its children, especially those less than five years of age, die every day from diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, and dysentery.
- III. Participants endorsed music as an advocacy tool for water issues. Drawing inspiration from the music drama performance by Nigerian musician, Ara, participants agreed that African musicians can be engaged to help spread the message of sustainable water management.
- IV. School education was a major area of concern as student participants at the conference observed that while they were familiar with other global challenges such as the HIV/AIDS scourge, there was little awareness on the similarly serious issue of water scarcity. Participants observed that the curriculums of African schools should begin to emphasize water issues in order to prepare the successor generation for the current and future challenges of clean water availability.
- V. Internal response to the water challenge was also brought to the fore. Participants agreed that stakeholders in Africa are slow in holistically responding to the issues of clean water scarcity, climate change and its resultant water disasters. There was a consensus that indigenous technologies and initiatives need to be encouraged and developed to address the issues.
- VI. The lack of sustainable ways of developing water infrastructure in order for the continent to fully utilize its water resources. It was observed that despite the enormous

contribution of water infrastructure to the economic growth and general development of some African countries, the development of water infrastructure has been relegated to the background as evident in the poor budgetary allocations to water infrastructure development in most countries. Participants noted that there is need to urgently increase financing of water infrastructure across the continent.

- VII. The role of the private sector in financing water infrastructure development. It was observed that Africa has not fully taken advantage of its private sector in the development and management of water infrastructure. Experiences from other parts of the world such as Brazil in Latin America were used to argue the case for the involvement of the private sector.
- VIII. Climate change challenges and their consequences for sustainable water resources management in Africa. Key challenges identified include the problem of desertification, deforestation, emission, while lack of clean water for human consumption, flooding/erosion, and water stress were identified as some of the consequences of climate change on the sustainability of water resources in Africa;
- IX. The danger associated with climate change on local farmers and residents of flood prone areas. Participants noted the need for proper awareness creation and sensitization aimed at protecting local communities from climate change hazards, sensitizing them on newer approaches and technologies for effective water utilization and management and developing mutually beneficial interaction between water users and water management authorities.
- X. The need for an integrated approach and regional cooperation for effective water management, given the trans-border nature of water resources and the need for trans-border water transfer required to address extreme water shortage challenges.
- XI. Existing and potential conflicts over water were a concern to participants at the conference. It was agreed that there is a need for African countries to develop frameworks for preventive hydro-diplomacy.
- XII. Poor data collection and management of Africa's water resources was also addressed during the conference. It was agreed that there is too little data on the continent's water bodies, consumption needs and water supply.
- XIII. The meeting observed that there is a strong link between water and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Water has potential to help African countries meet the MDGS. For instance, it was observed that the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger requires agricultural and industrial activities. These activities in turn require water. Without water, food production and several economic activities would be crippled. In the MDGs bothering on health, it was observed that water-related or water-borne diseases cannot be tackled without a deliberate consideration of the impact of water on health.
- XIV. Media practitioners at the conference brought to the fore the issue of water reporting. It was observed that African media practitioners have failed to call adequate attention to the issues regarding the region's water challenge.

After extensive deliberations on the issues, participants made the following recommendations;

- A. Participants called on water policymakers across Africa to urgently develop frameworks for adequate management and utilization of the continent's water resources.
- B. It was resolved that there is a need for African countries to adopt an integrated water management approach and include this in their local and regional water policies. At the core of this approach is the need for cooperation and transparency among states.
- C. The meeting resolved to create an Africa Water Focus Group (AWFG) to serve as a conduit pipe for the integration of Africa's water management needs to the Global Water Agenda. This six-member group will specially focus on climate change, water contamination, Integrated Watershed Management, Water Conservation and re-use, enhancement of water infrastructure.
- D. Participants agreed to initiate a sensitization framework for water and climate change awareness. Other than the use of traditional and new forms of media for publicity, the framework is focused on using musical icons and other creative artistes as water ambassadors to create awareness on water issues across the continent. Already, Nigerian musician and "Queen of Drums" Ara has agreed to be one of such ambassadors.
- E. It was decided that youths, especially students, will be engaged in the promotion of the water agenda through competitions and other activities. It is also expected that the AWFG will support students and educators to drive the process of incorporating sustainable water management issues into school curriculums.
- F. Participants agreed to aggressively promote the development and application of new and local technologies in water conservation and management.
- G. The meeting agreed that stakeholders in the public and private sectors need to encourage more elaborate research on water management and utilization.
- H. The meeting called on stakeholders in the private sector to become involved in the financing of water infrastructure development as this will boost economic activities to their benefits.
- I. It was agreed that stakeholders at all levels should facilitate the involvement of women in the various stages of water planning and management since they contribute greatly in providing water used in the household.
- J. The meeting agreed that water experts should examine and report on the existing policies and approaches adopted in water management and sustainability in Africa.
- K. Participants agreed that the media across Africa must urgently begin to report issues relating to water with an objective of finding solutions rather than events of water disasters.