

The road to regional climate resilience: SADC’s transboundary ‘River Basin Organisations’ emerge as an exciting new platform

Lessons learned from CRIDF’s integrated approach to support the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) in the transition from ‘planning and information exchange’ to ‘equitable climate resilient infrastructure planning and delivery’.

Background

Improved climate resilience for poor and vulnerable SADC citizens is an urgent priority of SADC, the River Basin Organisations (RBOs) and SADC Member States. Climate change does not respect national boundaries; tackling vulnerability and improving climate resilience is most effective when approached at a regional scale. The current and future spatial and temporal distribution of water resources across SADC is the key to planning for a rational response to climate variability and change.



SADC RBO’s are mandated to advise on transboundary water issues, and have the full political and legal backing of their Member States. These bodies have ownership, buy-in and legitimacy as ‘platforms’ for an emerging transboundary discourse on a number of key (climate and equity-related) issues. Some of the more established RBOs are already moving to include more aspects of regional integration into their deliberations. The transition of RBOs from ‘hydro-centric’ (focussed on water issues alone) to ‘hydro-supportive’ (focussed on the requirements of key water-dependent sectors in the regional and national economies) is beginning to gain momentum.

Key Activities

CRIDF is in a position to link the dynamics of the RBO - as an evolving transboundary visioning platform - to its own mandate to promote pro-poor, climate resilient, transboundary water infrastructure for improved regional co-operation and integration. The CRIDF ‘toolbox’ has allowed a number of instruments to be applied to enter into, participate in, contribute to and enrich the SADC/RBO/Member State discourse on present and future climate resilient development pathways.

We have undertaken linked and sequenced activities, under all the main CRIDF output areas, to deliver comprehensive support to OKACOM. The table below offers a brief summary of the tools and timing:

Using the SADC-approved Infrastructure Development Masterplan to initiate contact and start the dialogue with OKACOM	early 2014
Based on the initial dialogue OKACOM requested support for the development of a Basin Vision for the Member States. CRIDF used its Rapid Advisory Service’ to quickly and effectively respond to this request	late 2014
Using targeted professional support to complete the Visioning process, develop the OKACOM Strategic Corporate Plan and develop and deliver the OKACOM	2015

Communication Strategy and Plan	
Help conceptualise and develop the 'OKACOM equitable and sustainable climate-resilient development programme' from CRIDF+ funding. Under this approved OKACOM programme, assist with the investment options analysis (Multi-sector Investment Options Analysis, MSIOA), assess the distribution of co-operation benefits amongst stakeholders and Member States, and adapt and apply CRIDFs climate vulnerability tools to help develop a 'climate index' to guide future development scenarios for the Basin	2015-16 ongoing
Help OKACOM develop a regional funding proposal, for sustainable livelihoods support to Basin residents, under the Green Climate Fund	2016 ongoing

Strategic Significance

CRIDFs comprehensive programme of support to OKACOM on infrastructure identification, stakeholder engagement and support on strategy and planning has helped CRIDF to mainstream its mandate of climate resilient and peaceful management of transboundary water resources for the benefit of the poor into the development planning for the Okavango basin.

CRIDF has learned a number of important lessons in their three-year journey with OKACOM. These include:

- Providing quick, targeted, professional support to respond to OKACOM needs is an important, ongoing need. The Rapid Advisory Service (RAS) has been, and will continue to be, a key CRIDF tool to provide quick and flexible professional advice and support.
- Being 'client-centred' and focussing on infrastructure is key to i) building relationships and trust, ii) gaining a 'seat at the table' to discuss longer term sustainable programmes and iii) turning CRIDF 'outputs' into 'outcomes'.
- Being 'client-centred' and 'demand driven' requires flexibility - multiple entry points and access to a 'suite' of support mechanisms – in order to ensure that the pathways from output to outcome have the best chance of germinating and flourishing.
- The above approach works, but it takes patience and staying power. CRIDF started with an outline 'big picture', worked on activities to enter, learn, earn trust and start to influence the discourse. CRIDF has now 're-assembled' the various support activities into an integrated 'OKACOM Support Programme' which is owned and valued by OKACOM and the Member States. This is a very stable platform for the delivery of future CRIDF support in this and the next phase.