

***Africa Water Resources Policy Conference  
Nairobi, Kenya, May 26-28, 1999***

**Summary Statement**

1. ***Introduction.*** The African Water Resources Policy Conference was held in Nairobi from May 26-28, 1999, within the framework of the Global Water Partnership. The conference, which included senior water resources officials and specialists from 24 African countries, was hosted by the Government of Kenya. It was held at UNEP Headquarters and organized and supported by the World Bank, with funding from the Governments of Germany, Sweden, UK, USA, the Netherlands, UNEP, and by Switzerland (through the World Bank Institute).

The Conference objectives were to:

- *Provide a forum for senior policy- and decision-makers from various African countries to share – and draw lessons from – their experiences in water resources management policy and institutional reforms*
- *Promote the development of a community of African water resources professionals and define a program of short-term actions for the management and exchange of water resources knowledge*
- *Contribute to the definition of a long-term African Vision for Water*

National experience was reviewed to distill lessons and best practice from the process of water policy and regulatory reform: e.g. substantive components, stakeholder consultation, political commitment, timescales and implementation. In addition, strengths, weaknesses, actions needed and long-term vision were analyzed within four thematic areas of water resources management: economics and financing; legislation and regulation, institutions, and environmental aspects:

2. ***Key strengths and key lessons learned.*** Water resources policy reform and implementation is gaining momentum across Africa, reflecting increasing awareness of the need for water resources management (WRM). There is widespread recognition of the importance of civil society engagement in WRM, with stakeholder consultation a key element of the policy reform process (e.g. in the development water legislation) in many countries. A basin-wide approach is increasingly being adopted, both at the national level, and, importantly, in the many international basins that characterize Africa. There is much open debate on difficult questions of water pricing and cost recovery, on environmental management and tradeoffs, as well as on particularly African issues such as the importance of customary law and practice.

journey has well and truly begun.

3. ***Key weaknesses and challenges.*** Although integrated WRM is taking hold in many countries, sound ones –are sometimes unimplemented and unenforced. The most important challenge of WRM is to provide the enabling environment for universal access to safe water supply and requiring determined efforts in cooperation and co-management –shared waters should provide a major incentive for economic cooperation. An underlying weakness in WRM is the develop the inter-disciplinary capacity (technical, economic, legal, social, environmental) necessary for WRM. A further underlying weakness is the lack of information and data.

Contributing to this capacity and information gap is the absence of mechanisms for the sharing of experience, information, and research findings.

***Key constraints and threats.***

Impacts of climate change, though uncertain, could be very serious, and more needs to be done to understand and to manage these impacts. Without intensive efforts in co-management,

instability and dispute is a major constraint. Weak economies and widespread poverty limit access to capital, making effective WRM a particular challenge. The retention of skilled staff

threats that require effective WRM.

5. ***Immediate follow-up actions.*** An overriding conclusion of the Conference was the need to establishment of an African Water Resources Forum (AWRF) for the exchange of knowledge (including experience, research findings and information) among African WRM professionals professional associations and to other mechanisms, such as those set up by the Global Water Partnership. The Forum will need a volunteer Task Force to guide its activities and a small four thematic areas for immediate action, and proposed that the follow-up be considered by the AWRF Task Force.
6. ***Contributing to Africa's 2025 Vision for Water.*** This vision comprises where Africa wants to be in 2025 and how it can get there, as a contribution to the World Water Vision to be presented in The Hague in March 2000. The Conference generated many ideas to contribute to such a vision, including full and sustainable water and sanitation coverage, regionally harmonized environmental management (particularly of watersheds and invasive weeds), and efficient river basin organizations (including international organizations), with full civil society and private sector participation in water management. The Conference proposed that the AWRF Task Force support the appropriate institutions on the development of Africa's Vision.
7. ***Next Steps.*** The conference constituted a small, interim Task Force to develop a mechanism for sustaining dialogue and exchange of experience through an African Water Resources Forum. The World Bank agreed to identify support for a 6-month contract for an African Water Resources consultant to serve as a temporary secretariat to the Task Force.