The Global Water Initiative: Water for agriculture programme in West Africa (2012–2017)

Global Water Initiative
A Partnership Funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation
Supporting water resources for sustainable agriculture

Bagré dam and irrigation scheme, Burkina Faso

Large scale irrigation for rice production is a key strategy for food security in West Africa. Over 90 dams have already been built to support irrigation and 40 more are on the drawing board. However, the productivity of existing irrigation systems is far below the intended performance for many reasons: they suffer from serious capacity underutilization; crop yields are low; risk and uncertainty high; and water conveyance and water use efficiencies are among the lowest in the world. In consequence, rice is the most important agro-food import, representing around 20% of agricultural imports within the sub-region over the last thirty years. Countries of the Niger basin envisage a quadrupling of large scale irrigation investment to over 2,000,000 ha by 2025.

Between 2012 and 2017, GWI will lead a regional process to better inform the debate on irrigation options and efficient and equitable water use through advocating for policy change in three main areas:

Firstly, current evidence suggests that large scale irrigation schemes, designed to produce food (rice), are often expensive and may not do so at competitive prices and good economic rates of return, nor may they systematically be meeting household livelihood security needs. Yet such infrastructure remains a priority component of national, donor and regional policies. GWI will gather evidence on the effectiveness of intensive irrigation schemes in meeting livelihood and national food security needs and engage policymakers in an informed debate around investment choices.

Secondly, advocating for empowerment of smallholder farmers in existing large scale schemes to sustainably improve agricultural practice and productivity, sharing and adopting innovations. Poor system performance is often caused by insufficient farmers' agency and poorly developed linkages between the different actors in the agricultural innovation system. Improved agronomic and market knowledge needs to get to those who need it, in a form that can be used for social learning. GWI will identify and empower farmers with a long term commitment to improved crop cultivation and work with them to identify and address policy barriers.

Vision

Water is used efficiently and equitably, enabling farmers to improve food security and become more resilient to change through sustainable agricultural production for themselves, their communities and the world.

Principles

- Maintain or improve water quality while conserving the resource
- Develop and promote sustainable agricultural systems, improved knowledge and social learning
- Empower men and women, improve human well-being and foster sustainable livelihoods

Approach

We develop robust national, regional and global strategies to leverage the various assets of the HGBF and partners to create meaningful change through integrated action-research and advocacy initiatives focused on:

- Enabling more effective governance and policy;
- Enhancing the quality of information and improving practices;
- Improving the targeting of investment in solutions.

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IUCN

Kandadji Village, Niger

Thirdly, improving the governance systems around current and future dams so that all local beneficiaries of water use share water and land equitably, exploiting opportunities for investment in diverse activities, avoiding conflicts between users and fostering secure and sustainable livelihoods for pastoralists, farmers and fishermen.

GWI will deliver this program through:

i. Synthesizing or gathering strong and credible field evidence to analyse the local situation and support advocacy positions;
ii. Understanding the current drivers and identifying appropriate pressure points for policy change; and
iii. Convening platforms of like-minded partners through alliances for policy change, building from local experience to national and regional levels.

GWI works at the planned and existing dams listed below, as well as with regional organisations such as river basin agencies and the ECOWAS Water Resources Coordination Centre.

Country	River basin	Dam	Contact
Senegal	Kayanga-Géba (OMVG)	Niandouba/ Confluent	Modou Diouf, IUCN Senegal Modou.diouf@iucn.org
Mali	Niger (NBA)	Sélingué Taoussa	Bamadou Cessouma, IUCN Mali Bamadou.cessouma@iucn.org
Burkina Faso	Volta (VBA)	Bagré	Moumini Savadogo, IUCN Burkina Moumini.savadogo@iucn.org
Guinea	Niger (NBA)	Fomi	Jérôme Koundouno, IUCN regional office (PACO) jerome.koundouno@iucn.org
Niger	Niger (NBA)	Kandadji	Kiari Zeibada, IUCN Niger kiari.zeibada@iucn.org

Resources on dams in West Africa available on the web:

www.gwiwestafrica.org: GWI West Africa website
www.dialoguebarrages.net: Regional dialogue on large water infrastructure in West Africa (ECOWAS)
www.wrcu.ecowas.int: Water Resources Coordination Centre (ECOWAS)
www.iucn.org/gwidams: IUCN regional sub-site on GWI West Africa work on dams 2009-2013
www.omvs.org: Senegal River Development Organization
www.abn.ne: Niger Basin Authority
www.abv-volta.org: Volta Basin Authority

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www.iied.org
Contact: Mr. Jamie Skinner, jamie.skinner@iied.org

IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature
www.iucn.org
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