



National Workshop

National workshop related to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes: Namibia's accession process

31 May (full day) & 1 June (half day) 2022
Windhoek, Namibia

1. Background

Namibia shares all her perennial rivers with neighboring countries and has already entered into bilateral and multilateral Agreements to establish river basin commissions, aimed at promoting joint management and sustainable development of the shared waters. Namibia has separately ratified other international instruments which provide for transboundary river basin management: the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention) and the SADC Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses (SADC Revised Protocol) of 2000. Both these instruments strive towards equitable utilization, joint planning, sustainable development and protection of the environment.

Namibia is one of only two states in Africa to have all its transboundary freshwater bodies covered by operational arrangements according to the national report submission for the 2nd monitoring exercise in 2020 of SDG Indicator 6.5.2, for which United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UNESCO are co-custodian agencies. Namibia has ratified basin agreements and is a member state of basin organisations including OKACOM, ORASECOM, ZAMCOM and CUVECOM. Furthermore, Namibia is a party to the 2000 SADC Revised Protocol at regional level and to the 1997 Watercourses Convention at global level.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) of 1992 is a global legal and inter-governmental framework which aims to strengthen cooperation in the field of transboundary waters and to promote protection and sustainable use of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters. Adopted in 1992 and initially limited to the UNECE region, the Convention has been open for accession by all United Nations Member States since 1 March 2016. Five African countries have already acceded to it and many others are in various stages of the process of accession. The Convention continually engages states, basin organizations and other stakeholders on practical activities, global meetings and projects on the ground, such as the Policy Brief on Realising the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation with OKACOM published in 2020.

The 1992 Water Convention, which has a crucial institutional platform and whose Secretariat is hosted by UNECE, and the 1997 Watercourses Convention are vital global legal frameworks to support cooperative development and prevent conflicts related to shared waters. The UN Secretary-General encourages states to accede to and implement both conventions as mutually complementary.

By acceding to the Water Convention, Namibia stands to gain new prospects for enhanced transboundary cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa, conflict prevention and regional stability, currently enjoyed by other African countries such as Ghana, Senegal and Chad that have acceded to the Water Convention. The Convention does not replace specific bilateral and multilateral agreements on transboundary basins and aquifers. Instead, it fosters the establishment and implementation of such agreements, as well as their further development. The Convention establishes principles and rules that form the basis for countries working together to protect and sustainably use their shared freshwater resources.

With a view to possible accession of Namibia to the Water Convention, a virtual inter-ministerial preparatory meeting was conducted on 28 February 2022 organized by the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform and the Water Convention secretariat to increase awareness and understanding of the Convention with officials, including those from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. A national workshop is now being convened to raise broader awareness of the Convention and develop a road map for accession.

2. Workshop objectives

The general objective of the workshop is to inform stakeholders about the Water Convention, to share about the processes initiated by Government of Namibia to become party to the Water Convention and to discuss the next steps in the accession process.

Specifically, the workshop will allow to:

- Inform stakeholders about the Water Convention;
- Identify the benefits, possible advantages and strategic objectives of a possible accession to the Convention for Namibia;
- Inform about the accession process, benefits and implementation by new African Parties;
- Discuss the practical implementation of the Water Convention to meet the challenges of water resource management in Namibia, based on the experience of existing Parties;
- Present the initiatives started by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform as part of Namibia's accession process to the Water Convention;
- Hold a Question and Answer session to respond to questions from stakeholders about the Water Convention;
- Discuss the next steps and road map in the accession process and the contribution of this process to Namibia's transboundary and national water management.

3. Expected results

The expected results pursued through this workshop are:

- Stakeholders are informed about the cooperation framework of the Water Convention at the global level and discuss the future engagement of Namibia with the Convention's Programme of Work 2022-24;
- The advantages for States to become party to the Water Convention are presented;
- Update on the efforts initiated for Namibia's accession to the Convention is presented;
- The actors are informed on the next steps of the accession process and the contribution of this process to Namibia's national water management and transboundary water cooperation are discussed;
- Actors define a roadmap, with key milestones agreed, for accession to the Water Convention.

4. Participation

The workshop will bring together representatives from:

- Relevant ministries in Namibia regarding transboundary water resources, including Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, parliamentarians;
- Relevant basin organizations pertaining to Namibia's shared waters, including OKACOM, ORASECOM, ZAMCOM, CUVECOM;
- Relevant diplomatic missions, including the European Union;
- Relevant international and regional organizations, including AMCOW, GIZ, World Bank, African Union, SADC, UNECA, IWMI, GWPSA;
- Relevant academia, civil society and independent national and international experts.