



Learning from our activities

Improving water research coordination and communication with development actors in the Niger River Basin

Introduction

The River Niger is the third longest river in Africa. The Niger Basin is home to 120 people and is shared by nine countries. The Niger Basin Authority (NBA) was established in 1980, and aims to promote cooperation between member countries, and ensure the integrated development of the basin across all economically productive sectors. Whilst a number of water related research and development programmes are active within the basin, few opportunities exist for data exchange and knowledge sharing between these. As a result, synergies are not realized and therefore duplication of effort is likely.

To help remedy this situation, the NBA requested SPLASH to support and jointly organize a two day workshop in Niamey during 2010. It was agreed that the SPLASH partner IRD would jointly take forwards this initiative with the NBA.



Rationale

Key SPLASH objectives include: increasing coordination between ongoing water for development research programmes in order to promote synergies and reduce duplication; and speeding up the processes by which research results are used by practitioners and policy makers. SPLASH findings related to good research management practice show that research rarely reflects the articulated demands of policy makers and practitioners in the absence of appropriate dialogue platforms, that dissemination of research results is frequently inadequate, and that stakeholder engagement during the research process is often weak. Supporting the NBA to convene a workshop between a wide range of stakeholders at the river basin level was considered to be a good 'fit' with SPLASH activities, whilst also corresponding to the aims and objectives of working partners.

Resources

A two day workshop took place on 31st May and 1st June 2010, attended by more than 80 stakeholders active in the Niger Basin, including policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and those working in the private sector and civil society. The meeting included more than 20 presentations and facilitated group discussions.

SPLASH resources totalling €34,000 and involving three person months were used to support this activity.



What have we learnt?

The river basin is an appropriate and useful level at which to conduct this kind of workshop. However, time must be taken to plan and effectively execute the activity to ensure that intended target groups attend.

There is a strong demand for and commitment to such activities, as demonstrated by the high attendance, the number and quality of the presentations, and the active and constructive engagement in discussion groups. Post-workshop feedback confirmed that researchers and practitioners were not aware of each other's work, and there was duplication of effort.

The NBA recognises that it can play an important role in facilitating dialogue between stakeholders. The workshop has contributed to the overall management and development of the Niger Basin. Researchers have a greater understanding of the priorities for research within the basin, and the NBA has a greater appreciation of the contribution to be made by research to the overall management and development objectives, and of the importance of linking to and collaborating with research institutions in the long term.

Working in a collaborative partnership with established and appropriate institutions has leveraged the respective strengths of each partner and helped to ensure longer term sustainability through institutional commitment to and ownership of results.

Results

The workshop has increased understanding of the respective roles and activities between a wide range of stakeholders within the Niger Basin. This was valued by participants because it helped them to put their own work into context, to establish links with relevant activities and institutions, and in so doing to prevent duplication of effort and realize synergies.

Face to face networking over a two day period has initiated dialogue and the development of longer term collaborative relationships between stakeholders who were not previously known to each other.

Recommendations for the future

It is recommended that SPLASH should respond to future demand for similar activities at the river basin level.

SPLASH should also advocate for such knowledge sharing and coordination to be within the mandate of river basin organizations to ensure longer term sustainability and more effective conduct of both research and development programmes.



Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH learning notes available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net

If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH' please go to www.splash-era.net/enquiries

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