

OKACOM

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November 2005

OKAFLOW

the OKACOM Newsletter

Introducing OKAFLOW

Let us introduce you to OKAFLOW, the first newsletter of the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM).

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Like the River for which it was created, each edition will offer you a fresh angle for insight. It will strive to be both practical and interesting and stand as evidence of our commitment to be transparent, participatory and informative. OKAFLOW will become your most up-to-date and reliable point of important news and issues exclusively concerning the Okavango River Basin

This inaugural edition introduces you to the people and origins behind OKACOM. It will link you to the names and faces of those whose crucial decisions will affect both the river and you.

Each issue will open a new forum, an interactive medium for back-and-forth dialogue in which we all communicate and share the best ideas on how to use and conserve the Okavango, Kavango, Kubango, Kuito Rivers and tributaries in ways that endure.

Is there a point you should like us to investigate or clarify? What themes relevant to the basin should we explore in future editions? Let us know.

This newsletter is your most direct point of access to convey your ideas to the Commissioners, and vice-versa. Our success depends on all of us being involved in achieving the objectives of OKACOM. You are the best and primary source for OKAFLOW. The current lies in your hands.

Sincerely,

Eng. Armindo Gomes Da Silva , Dr. Akolang Tombale, Mr. Kahijoro Kahuure

“We need to start seeing the river basin as a whole, not as three parts in three countries”

*Dr. Tombale Current
OKACOM Chair*

What is OKACOM?

Under the guiding principle of ‘three countries, one river’ Angola, Botswana and Namibia established OKACOM as a unique entity in 1994 when the three basin states signed an agreement in Windhoek, Namibia.

They sought to promote coordinated and environmentally sustainable regional water resources development, while addressing the legitimate social and economic needs of each of the riparian states.

The Commission consists of representatives from each of the three member states: high-ranking officials from government ministries related to water and natural resources management.

What does OKACOM do?

The three countries established OKACOM to promote coordinated and environmentally acceptable regional water resources development objectives, while addressing the legitimate social and economic needs of the riparian states. Because the Okavango River and its tributaries cross the borders of more than one country, any changes upstream – dams, diversions, pesticides, irrigation, pollution – can

often have serious consequences downstream.

The role of OKACOM is to anticipate and reduce those unintended, unacceptable and often unnecessary impacts.

OKACOM's charter gives it legal responsibility to:

- Determine the long-term safe yield of water available from the river
- Estimate reasonable demand from consumers
- Prepare criteria for conservation, equitable allocation and sustainable utilization of water
- Conduct investigations related to water infrastructure
- Recommend pollution prevention measures
- Develop measures for the alleviation of short term difficulties, such as temporary droughts, and
- Address other matters determined by the commission

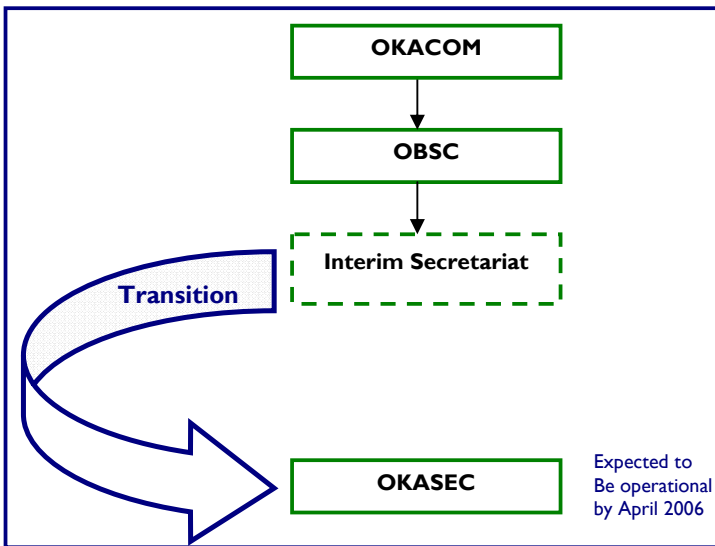
To do so it has developed a coherent approach to managing the whole of the river basin. That approach is based on equitable allocation, sustainable utilization, sound environmental management and sharing of benefits.

Or, as Dr. Tombale, the Co-Chair Commissioner from Botswana emphasized, looking back, "we need to start seeing the river basin as a whole, not as three parts in three countries."

How does OKACOM work?

OKACOM provides a forum for the commissioners to communicate, network and share concerns and prepare advice and recommendations to address problems.

Acknowledging the breath of issues and increased need for coordination, the Commissioners set up the Okavango Basin Steering Committee (OBSC). Technical specialists from related government departments and agencies sit on the OBSC.



These experts brief and advise OKACOM on technical matters and review topics proposed for discussion at scheduled meetings.

The specialists have also proven instrumental in implementing OKACOM decisions at the national level.

CURRENT OKACOM COMMISSIONERS

- Angola:**
Eng. Armindo Gomes da Silva
Mr. Isidro Pinheiro
- Botswana:**
Dr. Akolang Tombale
Mr. Stevie Monna
- Namibia:**
Mr. Kahijoro Kahuure
Mr. Piet Heyns
Amb. Ndeutapo Amagulu

Some Interesting Facts About the Basin

- ✓ It is the only perennial river in Africa that flows eastward without reaching the ocean.
- ✓ It is one of the few large rivers in the world without any dams.
- ✓ The Angola portion provides more than 95 percent of the total water runoff in the catchment.
- ✓ The length of the Okavango from continental divide source in Angola highlands to mouth at the outer margin of the Delta in Botswana is 1,100 kilometers.
- ✓ The number of earth's river basins shared between two or more countries is 261, and of these only 55 include treaty mechanisms to guide joint management.
- ✓ The population in southern Africa, 190 million is projected to double by 2025



OKACOM establishes a Permanent Secretariat

Exactly three years after Angola emerged from war, the Okavango tributaries that witnessed intense military battles have now become the political landscape of efforts to secure a lasting peace.

To cope with the resulting increase in activity, in April 2005 OKACOM Commissioners formally established a Permanent Secretariat referred to as OKASEC.

The Secretariat, set to be operational by early 2006, will bring greater consistency, coordination and administrative support to meetings of the River Basin Organization.

Commissioners have convened productively over the last decade on their own accord with limited administrative support. Each Commissioner worked out of his own home office, with no shared space or support staff.

OKASEC will help focus decision-making, bring clarity to deliberations, and eventually assume a more active role in helping Commissioners implement their resolutions. That role involves: sharing information, enhancing communications and coordinating initiatives in the Okavango River Basin.

The move toward permanence came through widespread recognition of the crucial window of opportunity brought by the Angola 'peace dividend.'

Now it can help ensure those vital, flowing waters are shared for peace and security throughout the region.



Above: Aerial view of the Okavango Delta, a Ramsar Wetland of international importance

Okavango Unites Donors from Sweden, US and United Nations

Angola, Botswana and Namibia are not the only ones working hand in hand to forge a Permanent Secretariat for OKACOM.

Development aid agencies are integrating their efforts as well.

Several international donors are coordinating to help implement OKACOM's plans for a Secretariat. They are joining forces in complementary ways that plan ahead while avoiding duplication.

First, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) is supporting the design and staffing for the first phase of the Permanent Secretariat and supporting the development of the OKACOM website through the Every River Has its People Project.

Next, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing Interim Secretariat Services for OKACOM and facilitating start-up support for OKASEC.

Finally, a United Nations Development Programme – Global Environment Facility (UNDP-GEF) project aims to strengthen the mechanisms for joint implementation, develop a transboundary diagnostic analysis and formulate a Strategic Action Plan for the Okavango Basin.



Above: Tribal administration office for the chief of Barragem at Kambumbe River.

Right: Kuebe River near Lago de 1 Maio 15 km from Menongue



What would you like to say?

In keeping with our promise to make this newsletter a two-way current, we are seeking submissions from throughout the basin linked to themes related to the Okavango.

How does the River shape your life? What has the River taught you or your ancestors? Why would upstream changes be good or bad for your family? What must leaders know about the River?

Send OKAFLOW stories that feel interesting, motivational, or informative. Share what is happening in your community or project.

Top stories will be prominently featured in future editions. We will highlight all news, upcoming events, successful activities, milestones, significant issues or problems.

*Please write to us at;
OKAFLOW newsletter
P/Bag 351
Gaborone*

*Or email us at:
okaflow@irbm.co.bw*

If you received a hard copy of this newsletter and would prefer to receive it electronically, send us an email with your request.

NEWSFLASH

11th OKACOM Meeting
Held In Namibia

The 11th meeting of OKACOM was held on the 4th of November 2005 in Windhoek, Namibia.

OKACOM Commissioners, Basin Steering Committee members and representatives from the many diverse projects on the Okavango River basin convened in Windhoek for the week of 31st of October to the 4th of November.

One highlights of the week was an interactive, facilitated event on resolving disputes over finite natural resources, especially water.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Office of International Affairs sponsored the workshop led by globally recognized facilitators of multiparty disputes related to water and natural resources management.

The two experts orchestrated the event, designed to smooth the path to integrated Okavango River management across international boundaries.

The Global Environment Facility's Environmental Protection and Sustainable Management of the Okavango River Basin Project (EPSMO) also held its Project Steering Committee (PSC) during this week of events.



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