



OKACOM

The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission
Comissão Permanente das Águas da Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Okavango



An Overview: The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission



The Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB)

The transboundary Cubango-Okavango River Basin comprise of a network of river systems traversing through the three countries; Angola, Botswana and Namibia. The approximately 700,000 km² CORB derives its principal flow from the Angolan highlands. It stretches for approximately 1,100km, and is drained by the Cubango, which becomes the Kavango in Namibia and the Okavango River in Botswana. The Okavango River forms the boundary of Namibia and Angola, and on this stretch is joined by the main tributary, the Cuito, before flowing through the panhandle as it enters Botswana and spilling into the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

The CORB is internationally renowned for its significantly high biological productivity and iconic biodiversity. With its high diversity variety of habitat types, characterized by high spatial heterogeneity, it remains one of the most important biodiversity conservation areas in the world. The Okavango Delta is epitomised by its status as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) and was declared the 1000th World Heritage site under the UNESCO convention in 2014.

THE PEOPLE OF THE CORB

The Basin supports predominantly rural communities most often located either adjacent to the river or along roads with a high level of ethnic diversity. The CORB is home to approximately 1,218,703 people (Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, 2011). By 2025, this is projected to increase to more than 1.28 million people.

“The riparian countries recognize that economic and social development within the Basin is essential for improvement of socio-economic status and livelihoods of communities within the Basin”.



62%

OF PEOPLE
IN ANGOLA



16%

OF PEOPLE
IN BOTSWANA



22%

OF PEOPLE
IN NAMIBIA



The most commonly practised livelihood activity is subsistence crop production and subsistence livestock rearing. Traditional forms of flood recession crop production referred to as molapo farming in Botswana and the olonaka system in Angola contribute significantly to food security among rural communities within the CORB. This type of farming occurs close to rivers and streams and is more productive than dryland agriculture because of good soil fertility and moisture maintained by seasonal flooding.

In addition to subsistence agriculture, harvesting natural resources, notably fish and vegetation resources such as wild fruits, wild vegetables, also contribute significantly to livelihoods and rural economy within the CORB.



OKACOM Mandate

The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) was established by the governments of Angola, Botswana and Namibia under the 1994 Agreement, with the mandate to advise the three Member States on conservation, development and sustainable utilisation of water resources in the CORB. OKACOM exists to promote and support the opening of pathways to improved livelihoods while conserving the natural resources in the CORB through revealing opportunities offered by joint transboundary management and development. This work also offers potential to contribute to economic development of the three riparian states and through its Secretariat, OKACOM promotes integrated transboundary management of the CORB.

According to Article 4 of the 1994 Founding Agreement, OKACOM was established by the contracting parties to advise the Member States on:

- The long term safe yield of water available from the Basin;
- Reasonable demand scenarios from all consumers in the Basin;
- Conservation, equitable allocation and sustainable utilisation of water resources of the Basin;

- Planning, separately and jointly, for development of water resources, including the construction, operation and maintenance of water infrastructure in the Basin;
- Prevention of pollution, prevention and control of aquatic weeds in the Basin and;
- Measures for the alleviation of short-term difficulties, such as droughts and floods.

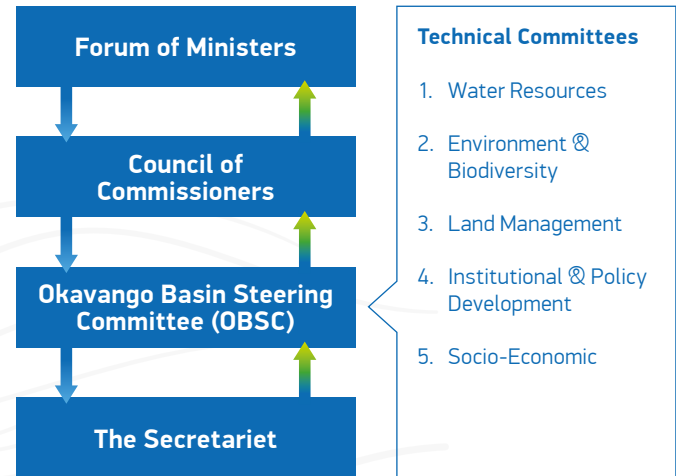
A photograph of a person in a small boat on a river at sunset. The text is overlaid on the image.

The OKACOM shared vision is to achieve an “economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally healthy development of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin”.

Structure

Building from the revised organisational structure of OKACOM approved on 29th May 2015 in Luanda, Angola the principal organs of OKACOM are:

- **OKACOM Ministers Forum** - The highest executive organ of OKACOM tasked with the approval of policy and political issues associated with the implementation of the OKACOM mandate.
- **Council Of Commissioners** - The principal organ of OKACOM, responsible for defining and guiding the development policy and general supervision of the activities of OKACOM.
- **Okavango Basin Steering Committee (OBSC)** - The technical advisory body to the Commission which provides technical leadership to permanent or temporary subsidiary committees or task forces that are established according to the nature and specificity of the matter.
- **Technical Committees** - These committees provide support to the OKACOM Secretariat in all matters that require technical input and specific expertise in the various subject matter areas that OKASEC has to manage.



Based in Gaborone, Botswana the OKACOM Secretariat (OKASEC) provides effective coordination, programme management and monitoring of all OKACOM activities and the SAP implementation. The Secretariat also carries out secretarial and administrative services including efficient organisation and arrangements of OKACOM meetings.

OKACOM Timeline of Development

1994

OKACOM Agreement signed on 15 September by the governments of Angola, Botswana and Namibia

1995

1st OKACOM Meeting
Establishment of the OBSC
Signing of the Revised SADC Protocol in Shared Water Courses

2000

WERRD Project (EU Funded) – Hydrology and Socio-economic Assessment and the signing of the Revised SADC Protocol in Shared Water Courses

1997

Okavango Delta listed as a Ramsar site

2004–2006

Environmental Protection and Sustainable Management of the Cubango–Okavango River Basin (EPSMO), UNDP funded – preliminary Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and SAP

2001

Adoption of Okavango Delta Management Plan

2003

Institutional Development study adopted – OKASEC establishment recommended

2005

Formal establishment of the Secretariat (internal phase and operational in 2007)

2002

End of Civil War in Angola

2006

1st SADC RBOs Workshop

2006

Hydromet stations rehabilitation in Angola
& Transfer of ERH project website to OKACOM

2010-2015

SAREP Project USAID
funded – Biodiversity,
Livelihoods and Water &
Sanitation

2010 - 2012

CORBWA Project – Data to
Decision Making and Policy
Development

2008 – 2010

Development of
SAP and NAPs

2004 – 2007

ERHP Every River Has
Its People Project (SIDA
funded) – focused on
awareness raising

2011

SAP
Approved

2014

Okavango Delta
declared the
1000th World
Heritage site
under UNESCO
Convention

2015

Establishment of the
Forum of Ministers

2017 - date

OKACOM Secretariat
Office moved to
Gaborone
SAP Implementation
(UNDP-GEF, EU,
USAID, DFID and
other ICP's)

2008

Secretariat Office
established in Maun

2007

First
Executive
Secretary
appointed

2005 – 2007

Interim Secretariat

2004 – 2009

Integrated Management of
the CORB Project (USAID
funded) – Internal Secretariat
from 2005 – 2007

Strategy and Approach

The OKACOM Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Sustainable Development and Management of the CORB is a basin-wide policy framework document that lays down the principles for the development of the Basin and improvements of the livelihoods of its people through the cooperative management of its shared natural resources. The overarching objective of the SAP is:

To promote and strengthen the integrated, sustainable management, use and development of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin at national and transboundary levels according to internationally recognised best practices in order to protect biodiversity, improve the livelihoods of basin communities, and the development of basin states.

This objective balances the shared commitments of the basin states towards environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, and improvement of the welfare and living conditions of the population through increased economic growth, using the mechanism of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM).

The SAP has established a long-term planning framework, titled the Basin Development and Management Framework (BDMF), which includes the development of a long-term vision and agreement on the accepted development space for the CORB. The BDMF provides flexible management approaches informed by scientific and economic analysis and will respond to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions in the basin over time. It is complemented by four Thematic Areas that have been identified through national and basin-wide consultation processes namely:

Thematic Areas

Thematic Area 1: Livelihoods and Socio-Economic Development



The Transboundary Diagnostic Assessment (TDA) identified Poverty and Population Growth as two key drivers of socio-economic and environmental changes in the CORB. At the core of livelihoods and socioeconomic development within the CORB, is the desire by OKACOM and its stakeholders to sustain key livelihood activities together and the member states common objective of improving the living conditions and livelihoods of communities within the CORB. Activities within this thematic area are expected to ensure productivity improvements while reducing or mitigating the negative environmental impacts of such activities.

Thematic Area 2: Water Resources Management



To manage allocation and detect the impact of water based socio economic developments on the water quantity and quality in the Basin, there is need for a basin wide comprehensive water resources monitoring programme. The development of surface water, groundwater, and water quality monitoring systems will enable collection of data necessary for effective water resources management. Improvement of the various tools for overcoming challenges faced in water resources management is a key issue in the CORB. This thematic area is focused on the development of specific planning and monitoring instruments for water resources assessment and management ultimately leading to the development of a basin-wide Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) plan.

Thematic Area 3: Land Management



The goals of Land Management activities are to address the drivers of land use degradation in the CORB, mitigating these drivers and threats with the implementation of viable, effective and sustainable interventions that are implemented through collaboration with national stakeholders and local communities. Effective land management in the CORB depends on the development of harmonised land use guidelines throughout the basin to promote equitable and sustainable resource use, as well as implementing practical land rehabilitation among local communities in the Basin.

Thematic Area 4: Environment and Biodiversity



This thematic area focuses on developing a better understanding of the basin ecosystems and the interrelation between different ecosystem functions and ecosystem services. The development of biodiversity, ecological, water quality, wetland and sediment monitoring systems is currently underway ongoing projects. A particular emphasis is placed on developing sustainable wetland management systems given the critical importance of wetlands for the Okavango ecology and livelihoods, and to identify transboundary ecological monitoring locations and provide associated training to Member States.

Partnerships and Cooperation

In order to advance the sustainable management of the CORB, OKACOM engages in a number of broad and diverse relationships with the relevant cooperating partners. The interest and scope of activities on the Basin continues to increase and OKACOM expects an increase in demand for partnerships, including partnerships for implementation of activities. For more than 25 years, OKACOM has worked with partners that fall into these key categories:

1. Strategic partner (government institutions, private sector, development projects)
2. Research partner
3. Funding partner

International, regional and national organizations are working towards a shared vision for the Basin to ensure it is sustainably managed. OKACOM, through support from various International Cooperating Partners, is implementing the SAP. OKACOM works to advise Member states and key stakeholders in the spirit of agreed national, regional and international conventions based on current scientific data and evidence based policy formulation and decision making approaches. The existence of OKACOM as a platform for cooperation has been key to realise past and current benefits.

“Cooperation in the CORB has already generated a range of economic, social and environmental benefits. It has also generated peace and security benefits for all countries, and more than expected. But there are opportunities to deliver more and better distributed benefits...”

OKACOM ICPs



Department
for International
Development



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION AGENCY



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

RESILIENT WATERS PROGRAM

CRIDF 



german
cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



UNECE



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP



WORLD BANK GROUP



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📍 Plot 25019, Old Lobatse Road, Gaborone, Botswana
✉ info@okacom.org
☎ +267 3161593
🌐 www.okacom.org
f @OKACOMSecretariat
🐦 @OKACOM

Photos: Kostadin Luchansky, National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project