



**OKACOM**

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



Policy Brief Summary



## Realising the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin

### The Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB)

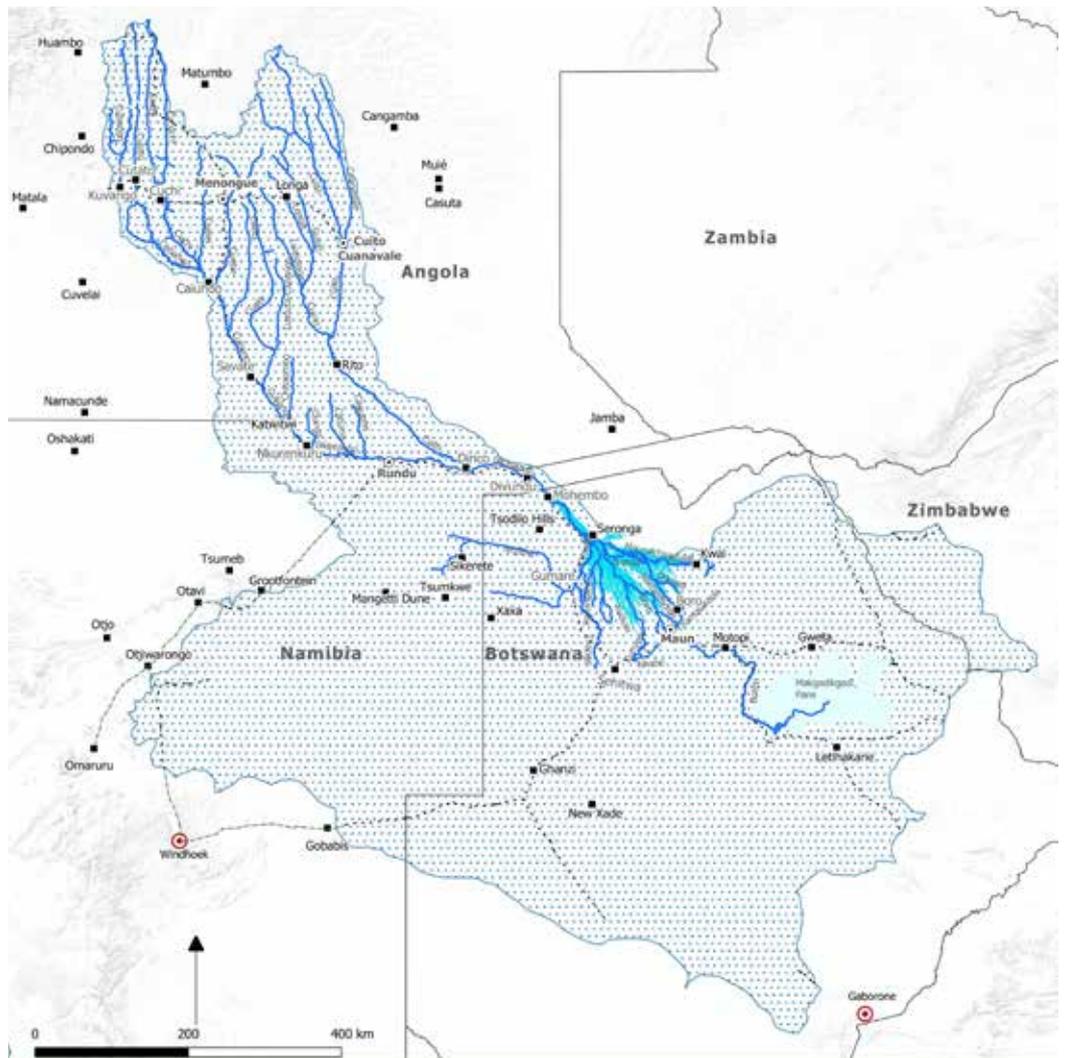
**Cooperation in the CORB has generated a range of economic, social and environmental benefits. It has also generated peace and security benefits for all countries, and more than expected. And there are opportunities to deliver more and better distributed benefits, mostly related to regional economic integration.**

The CORB has a high environmental value, while it suffers high levels of poverty and faces large uncertainties regarding the possible impact of climate change. The CORB is still relatively environmentally pristine, but this will not last, due to the pressures of poverty-induced catchment degradation, particularly in the north-west part of the upper basin. Possible threats to the CORB's health are becoming very real with the need for development of riparian countries.

Realising the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin



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

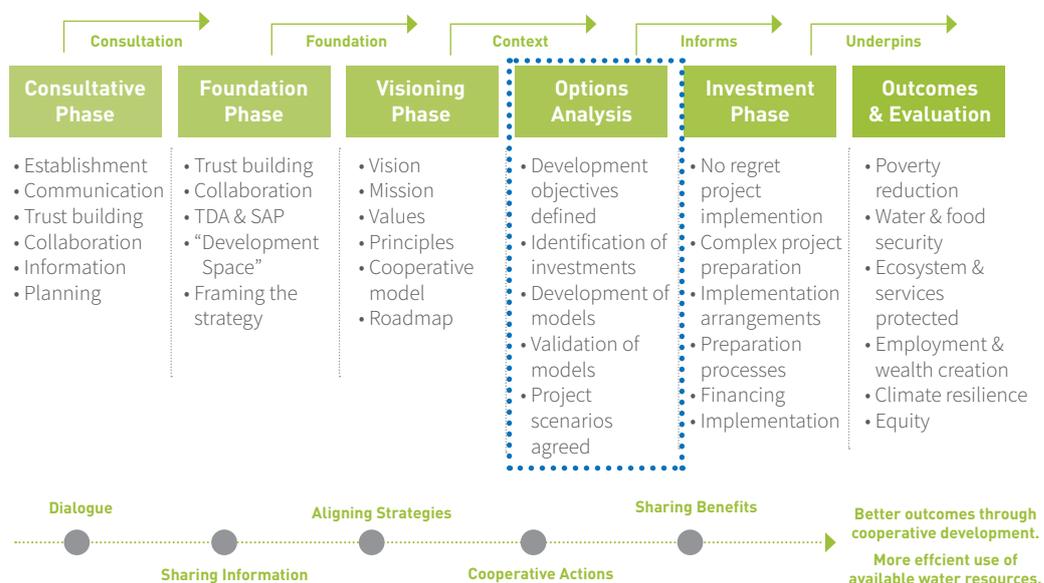


The Cubango-Okavango River Basin with Sub-Basins [Source: OKACOM]

Successful cooperative management of the world’s transboundary basins is key for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Angola, Botswana and Namibia have been cooperating in the knowledge and management of the CORB in the framework of the Permanent Okavango Basin River Commission (OKACOM) for over 20 years. The CORB has an agreed policy framework document,

the Strategic Action Programme, that lays down the principles for the development of the basin and improvements of the livelihoods of its people through the cooperative management of the basin and its shared natural resources. The OKACOM shared vision is to achieve an “economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally healthy development of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin”.

Institutional “phased” development in the CORB



## The Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the CORB

The CORB is at the forefront of identifying and assessing the benefits of transboundary water cooperation. The benefits assessment study in the CORB was an initiative led by OKACOM, implemented in partnership with the World Bank, DfID and the Water Convention Secretariat. It followed a participatory methodology. Participants in the benefit assessment identified a large number of realised and potential benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the CORB. The qualitative benefit assessment carried in the CORB represented a first step towards characterising the relative importance of the different benefits and their distribution. The process of carrying out the benefits assessment represented a major communication and stakeholder engagement action. The process and results of the CORB benefit assessment have been communicated to the global water community.

### Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation (Realized and Potential) Identified through Participatory Processes in the CORB

Economic benefits	Social and Environmental Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong expansion of tourism sector</li> <li>• Modest expansion of agricultural activities, particularly fishing</li> <li>• Land use improvement</li> <li>• Foreign exchange from tourism sector</li> <li>• Projects in the fields of energy, irrigation and water</li> <li>• Reduced costs of natural disasters due to early warning</li> <li>• Increased value of plots along the river</li> <li>• Decrease in water price</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment creation in tourism and related sectors</li> <li>• Improved livelihoods and poverty reduction</li> <li>• Food security</li> <li>• Water transport and recreation benefits</li> <li>• Improvement of drinking water supply</li> <li>• Community cohesion</li> <li>• Exposure to and appreciation of other cultures</li> <li>• Ecosystem integrity conservation by communities</li> <li>• Conservation of biodiversity and delta ecosystem</li> <li>• Maintenance of good water quality in the delta</li> <li>• More collaboration natural resource management</li> <li>• Protection of upstream environment and river flow</li> <li>• Improved control of invasive species</li> </ul>
Regional Economic Integration	Peace and Security Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investments in research</li> <li>• Investment in road infrastructure</li> <li>• Increased transboundary tourism</li> <li>• Enhancement of bilateral relationships</li> <li>• Increased trans border commercial trade</li> <li>• Sharing of expertise on water management, sustainable tourism and agri-business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicts avoidance</li> <li>• Increased collaboration in anti-poaching, border controls</li> <li>• Support from the three countries for World Heritage Site declaration of Okavango Delta</li> <li>• Cultural exchange visits</li> <li>• Agreement about a shared vision based on a shared identity</li> <li>• Increased security thanks to rapid alert systems</li> </ul>



Source: Chongica E, R Martin-Hurtado, and R Saraiva. 2017. "CORB Benefit Analysis", presentation delivered at the Basin Workshop "Assessing the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the CORB", 10 May 2017.

## The Multi-Sectors Investment Opportunities Analysis (MSIOA)

The MSIOA is part of a systematic strategy by OKACOM to assist the Member States to achieve socially just, economically prosperous and environmentally healthy development of the CORB. The MSIOA framework facilitates the process to agree on the balance between development and ensuring the long-term safety and functioning of the natural assets which exist in the CORB. The MSIOA builds and compares different "scenarios" that combine a range of investment projects. In addition to economic return and environmental impact, the scenarios are evaluated taking account the social impact of the programme of investments, as well as climate resilience. The MSIOA does not provide a preferred scenario; rather, it provides information and a framework to facilitate decisions.

The MSIOA recommends the adoption of three basin-wide strategic development programmes: (i) a *Livelihood Enhancement Program*, that would support low regret measures needed to address underlying drivers of poverty through programmatic approaches to ensure continuous improvements; (ii) a *Tourism Investment Framework*, that would facilitate extending private sector investment from the Delta into the whole



“Realising the potential regional economic integration benefits demands deeper cooperation and a stronger OKACOM platform to facilitate and sustain it.”

Basin and would include mechanisms to distribute benefits to address local needs, and (iii) a *Cooperative Infrastructure Development* that would include three types of large projects (urban water supply, irrigation and hydropower) and would promote joint regional infrastructure developments to enhance the individual national benefits.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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, mostly related to regional economic integration. The “no development” option is not an option for the CORB, while there is Development Space to meet development and conservation objectives, if great care is taken in the implementation, sequencing and operation of infrastructures. Realising the potential regional economic integration benefits demands deeper cooperation and a stronger OKACOM platform to facilitate and sustain it.

- 1. Analysis.** Devote more efforts to communicate the benefits of cooperation at different scales; continue and refine the discussion on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the CORB; and expand the discussion on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation to the benefits of transboundary cooperation in the basin more generally, beyond water.
- 2. Planning.** Evaluate how transboundary water cooperation objectives are currently reflected in national plans, programmes and projects; integrate the findings of the benefit assessment into national and sectoral planning processes; and move towards integrated basin planning.
- 3. Institutional development.** Expand the mandate and capacity of OKACOM to ensure that the tangible benefits of transboundary basin cooperation are realized. This will require actions on three fronts:
  - Consider including other government ministries and agencies, in particular finance, planning and economic development, in OKACOM in order to embrace the change of focus from narrower transboundary water cooperation to wider transboundary basin cooperation;
  - Reflect on the extent to which current institutional arrangements are conducive to benefit sharing, and implement reforms as needed; and
  - Identify basin-level mechanisms (such as a water allocation mechanism or a universal project notification procedure) that need to be developed to achieve the agreed transboundary cooperation objectives, in complementarity to existing national processes.
- 4. Investments.** Develop and implement livelihood improvement programmes as soon as possible and ensure that cooperative responses from the Member States will perform satisfactorily across a wide range of possible climate scenarios.

## Acknowledgements

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