

The Water-Energy-Food-Environment Nexus in the Niger Basin

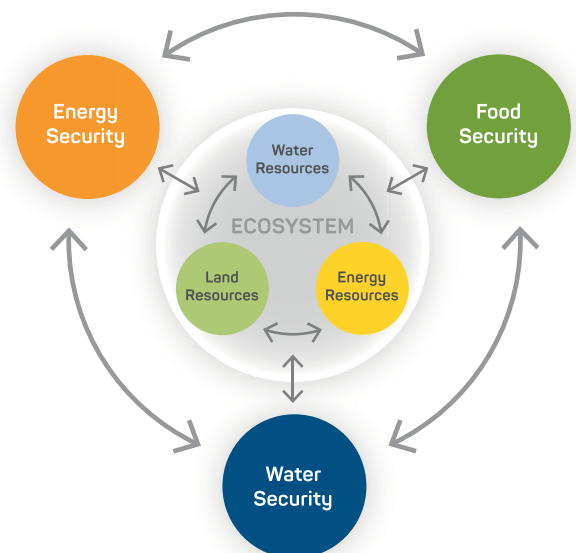
Supporting the Niger Basin Authority in the Institutionalisation of the Water-Energy-Environment-Food Nexus

LOCAL CONTEXT

The Niger River Basin covers an area of 2.13 million km² and is home to about 160 million people in nine countries among the poorest in the world. The urgent challenge of infrastructure development to meet growing water, food and energy demands in the basin may lead to non-synergetic investments compromising the existing and/or expected socio-economic and environmental benefits. The Niger Basin Authority (NBA) is an intergovernmental agency tasked with promoting coordinated development in the water, energy, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, mining, transport and communication sectors. At the basin level, the NBA is responsible both for horizontal (i.e. across countries) and vertical linkages (i.e. between different levels of stakeholders). It is increasingly tasked to link these concerns to regional and global agendas. There is hence a need for an approach that facilitates the design of contextual and cross-sectoral solutions based on horizontally and vertically integrated interventions.

OBJECTIVE

The project aimed to assist stakeholders in developing concrete policy recommendations and action plans for future investments, particularly for multi-sectoral infrastructure. The ambition was to develop Nexus policies and action plans at national ministerial and regional policy levels and to support partners in mobilising new investments for larger-scale Nexus projects.





LONG TERM IMPACT

The project led to the adoption of the first-ever Nexus guidelines by a river basin organisation. This is a laudable milestone globally as well as regionally and can lead to dramatic beneficial impacts in the sustainability of the water and related resources for the 160 million people sharing the Niger River Basin.

Using the developed guidelines can reduce the threat of adverse impacts on the basin's shared water and land resources for instance between hydropower and agricultural projects and reduce investment needs while jointly meeting various vision objectives. As the NBA and its 9 member states prepares its next 9-year operational plan, the application of the Nexus Guidelines will increase the efficiency of the use of natural resources and support the implementation and monitoring of (multipurpose) investments. It ensures that the Niger Basin will continue to enhance water, food and energy security and environmental sustainability for generations to come.

BENEFICIARIES:

- Member countries of the Niger Basin Authority
- Political stakeholders in the basin: government agencies, dam agencies, municipal authorities.
- Water users in the basin: fishermen, farmers and herders.



KEY ACTIVITIES

A first draft of the Nexus Guideline was developed by the Nexus Regional Dialogues Programme in coordination with the NBA's technical secretariat and legal counsel, complementary to the NBA's Water Charter. To validate the draft Nexus Guideline, a total of nine national stakeholder workshops took place between May 2022 and August 2022 in the basin's member states. These workshops brought together representatives of government services in charge of the water, energy, food security and environment sectors, the private sector, national and international NGOs. The workshops included formal training coupled with a serious Nexus simulation game on the approach and its key principles, a quantitative Nexus analysis of a project selected by the country, and the review of the draft Nexus Guidelines. The amended Nexus Guidelines were reviewed by the NBA Technical Experts Committee, and adopted on December 8, 2022, during the 41st session of the NBA Council of Ministers in N'Djamena, Chad. A

digital Nexus application was developed to help countries assess relevant synergies and trade-offs of new projects prior to their integration in the NBA operational plan.



KEY RESULTS

- National stakeholders are sensitised and have grasped the WEFE Nexus security concepts and tools;
- A jointly agreed guideline document was developed on both cross-sectoral and transboundary level among Water, Energy, Environment and Agricultural sectors of 9 countries;
- Strengthened capacity of national stakeholders in planning, policy development and implementation of the Nexus approach in combination with relevant financing mechanisms from public and private sources;
- Importance of the 1992 International Water Convention and its role and implications for applying Nexus principles is stressed to decision makers.



LESSONS LEARNED

- The NBA has already institutionalised many principles on transboundary cooperation coming from Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). Building on existing governance structures from NBA, such as the National Focal Structures, and policy documents like the NBA Water Charter, was crucial to present the Nexus-approach as an addition to IWRM and not as a replacement.
- Two key barriers to the operationalisation of the WEFE-Nexus are data availability and technical expertise in Member States. Hence, the development of the guideline is supported by technical capacity development and a call for sustained data collection and capacity building within the developed guidelines.
- There is a high fluctuation among key stakeholders and decision makers. It is important to involve various members per delegation to maintain knowledge transfer and perform regular recaps on former decisions.
- Formal and ambitious policy goals via laws and agreements require time and run the risk of being blocked/vetoed. Soft law, such as guidelines, allow for quicker collective agreement on common understandings and principles and thus better suited to introduce completely new topics.