



# ORASECOM

THE ORANGE-SENQU RIVER COMMISSION

# NEWSLETTER

No. 3

July 2010 - February 2011







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## Foreword



These last 8 months have perhaps been some of the most eventful since ORASECOM's establishment and certainly the most exciting of my tenure serving the Commission at the Secretariat.

This period not only marked ORASECOM's 10th birthday but also the launching of the Secretariat's permanent offices in Centurion, South Africa.

The Commission participated in the 13th International River Symposium in Perth, Australia, as well as Africa Water Week in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These events provided the opportunity to demonstrate just how far ORASECOM has come in 10 short years! Demonstrating growing success at these events has encouraged others to visit to learn from our experiences. A high level group from Central Asia visited the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in November 2010 to study this Region's approach to cooperation on water. This delegation, which was facilitated by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) were particularly keen to learn about water transfers, approaches to compensation, and benefit sharing in the Orange Senqu River Basin, as well as cooperation in general among various basin States sharing trans boundary rivers in the SADC region. We also hosted the Volta Basin Authority in our new offices in January this year.

ORASECOM's thematic programme and the management of our wide range of projects towards our common goal are now often viewed as best practice with regard to coordination and programme management for African River Basin Organisations.

The Joint Basin Survey in October and November 2010 was the first such basin wide survey supported by all the ORASECOM Parties and their International Cooperating Parties. This was, to the best of our knowledge, the first such comprehensive survey of river health and water resources quality for such a large river system anywhere in Africa. We have, over this last 8 months, made significant progress towards developing the tools we need to formulate our Basin Wide Plan, and now have a better understanding of how this Plan could be used to support all of the Parties. With this in mind, Commissioners, as well as technical staff continue to receive training in the use of a basin wide water resources model. The Delphi process has elaborated institutional design and governance roles around this basin wide planning process.

These last 8 months show that ORASECOM is truly coming of age. We are, to make a relevant analogy, at a watershed moment. We are now ready to take our next steps, moving from building a common understanding of the basin, to making substantive recommendations on how the 4 Parties can work together in a single Basin Wide Plan. To quote from another recent event in the region;

**ORASECOM - KeNako!**  
**It is time!**

**Lenka Thamae**  
**Executive Secretary: Orange-Senqu River Commission**

## ORASECOM comes of age at 10!

SADC's recognition of the importance of transboundary river systems dates back to 1995, with the signing of the SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses. The Revised SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses, signed in 2000, brought SADC's approaches in line with other international developments. This Revised Protocol makes provision for the establishment of Shared Watercourse Institutions (SWCIs). The ORASECOM Agreement was signed on 3 November 2000 by the 4 Parties - Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South

**ORASECOM** celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday on 3 November 2010, making it one of the oldest Shared Watercourse Institutions to be established under SADC's Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses. However, what is perhaps more remarkable is just how far the organisation has come in these 10 short years.

Africa, establishing it as one of the first SWCIs -only 5 months after the signing of the Revised Protocol.

By the end of 2001 ORASECOM had already established its programme of action, identifying 30 priority projects in 6 Thematic Areas. This programme of action, albeit in a much revised and updated Programme Gantt Chart, still serves to guide ORASECOM's activities. The Commission then embarked on building a common understanding of the basin; highlighting the water resources, environmental, legal, and institutional challenges that would have to underpin the development of a Basin Wide Plan. This not only established a common technical basis for the Plan, but also built a solid foundation of trust between the 4 countries. Both are key steps towards developing the Basin Wide Plan.

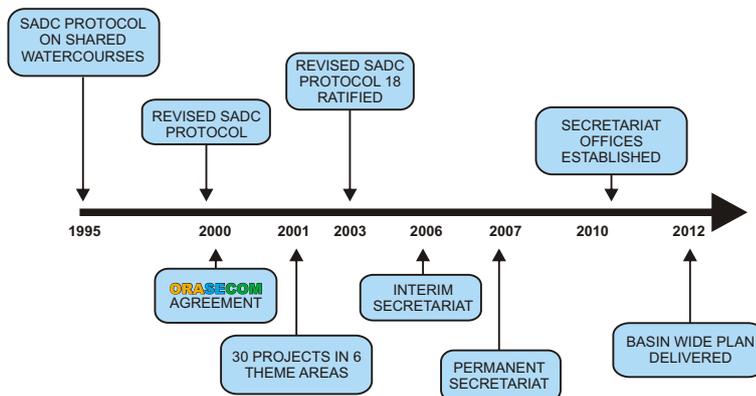
This process was supported by a range of International Cooperating Partners. The GTZ - German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (now GIZ), BMZ - the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, DFID - the British Department for International Development, AusAid - the Australian Agency for International Development, FGEF - the French Global Environment Facility, EU - the European Union, and UNDP-GEF - the United Nations Development Programme Global Environment Facility have all contributed to achieving components of the ORASECOM Programme.

In 2006, ORASECOM established its Interim Secretariat, housed by GIZ in Gaborone, Botswana. In 2007, after the signing of an Agreement between the Government of South Africa and ORASECOM, a permanent

Secretariat was established in temporary offices in South Africa's Department of Water Affairs. South Africa has since identified and secured permanent offices for the Secretariat in Centurion, South Africa. These offices were officially opened by the Acting Director-General of the Department of Water Affairs South Africa on Thursday 24th February 2011 - marking a key milestone in ORASECOM's ongoing development.

If the organisation can move so far in its first 10 years, there are certainly huge expectations for the next 10!

### THE ORASECOM TIMELINE



## Training Courses and workshops

*The greatest asset for any organisation is its human resources, and ORASECOM has made a significant commitment to building skills in the Secretariat and Member States. Efforts to build the skills related to transboundary water resources management in ORASECOM have continued over these last 8 months.*

### Training on Water Resources Yield Simulation Models

Two training courses on Water Resources Yield Simulation Models have been held. The first on 25 January 2011 was aimed at Senior Decision Makers in ORASECOM, and provided an introduction into the basin wide water availability simulation model being developed for the whole basin. This short course included modules on; the Orange-Senqu River System, Water Resource Management, Water Allocations, Management of Water Resource Systems and Intervention Planning.

This course provided a sound basis for the Commission to start developing a Basin Wide Plan on a level playing field. This will help ORASECOM Parties to jointly explore a variety of interventions which can reconcile the demands for water with its availability – ensuring that water can be supplied to water users across the whole basin at an appropriate assurance of supply and at acceptable risks.

This short 1day course was followed by a more detailed 4day training course aimed at training staff on how to use the water resources yield simulation model being developed for the Basin.



## What is the appropriate form and function for ORASECOM?

A series of 3 workshops have been held over the last 8 months;

The 1<sup>st</sup> workshop was held in June 2010, at Bakubung – South Africa and outlined in broad terms the kind of basin wide planning process that could be followed and the role that ORASECOM could play in implementing or monitoring that plan.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop in August 2010, held at Heja Lodge – Namibia, outlined the relationships between ORASECOM, the bilateral arrangements and the Parties. This workshop also outlined the objectives of the Basin Wide Plan, and the activities that should be included in the planning process.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop, held in Maseru – Lesotho in January 2011, summarised the results of the process thus far, and then proposed institutional structures and governance roles that would best respond to this emerging role.

ORASECOM has held a series of workshops aimed at building a better understanding of the basin wide Planning process, the role of the existing bilateral arrangements in this process, as well as the role ORASECOM could play in developing, implementing and monitoring this Plan. Together, these workshops proposed functions of the organisation, enabling the design of appropriate institutional forms and governance roles.



Key issues arising from these workshops were:

- ORASECOM is an evolving organisation, and its role would change as SADC gradually realises its goals for greater regional integration.
- The importance of the basin wide perspective would grow as water became increasingly limited.
- The bilateral arrangements are likely to be a permanent feature of water resources planning in the basin.
- At least in the medium term, the Basin Wide Plan should aim at aligning and coordinating planning being done by the bilateral arrangements and the Parties.
- The Basin Wide Plan should provide a framework for sustainable development, contributing to social upliftment, and meeting the current and future water needs in all the Member States.
- There are three planning horizons, an Annual Operating Plan, Medium Term Operational Planning and Long Term Strategic Planning.
- ORASECOM would focus on monitoring implementation of key aspects of the Basin Wide Plan by the Parties, and would have a limited implementation role.

Perhaps the most important outcome of these discussions has been the recognition that the complexity of the process, as well as the different perspectives on the problem would make it very difficult to derive a single narrowly defined form for ORASECOM. Importantly, none of the options emerging out of the process suggested a radically different institutional structure and governance. Nevertheless, the following general conclusions could be drawn:

- There should be annual meetings of senior officials, and biannual meetings of the Ministers for Water.
- A Conference of the Parties could be arranged on an ad hoc basis to agree on key components of any Basin Wide Plan.
- Council could gradually shift into a fiduciary oversight role akin to the role of the Board in the Corporate Sector - this would reduce duplication between the institutions.
- A single ORASECOM Steering Committee could evolve out of the existing Programme Strategy Committee, and this would reduce the demands on staff from the Parties.

## ORASECOM works with the Benguela Current Commission in engaging a "Ridge to Reef" approach to managing the Orange-Senqu River Mouth

The mouth of the Orange-Senqu River is a unique ecosystem on an otherwise wave exposed, hyper-arid coast with few freshwater inputs. It is recognised as an internationally important wetland for migratory birds and was accorded Ramsar Status in 1991. However, in 1995, the site was placed on the Montreaux Record following the rapid degradation of the salt marshes.

In order to deal with the legacy of depleted fisheries resources as well as the need to jointly manage the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) in a sustainable way, the three countries along this section of the Atlantic seaboard; Angola, Namibia and South Africa signed an interim agreement establishing the Benguela Current Commission (BCC) in 2006. This Commission is also benefiting from UNDP-GEF support through a TDA, SAP and NAP process. Recognising that, as the only large river estuary along this stretch of the Atlantic Ocean, the Orange-Senqu River influences the Benguela Current LME, it was decided that the two Commissions should hold a joint workshop.

A workshop with representatives from both Commissions and other key stakeholders was therefore held in Windhoek on 16 August 2010. This discussed the major interactions between the Orange-Senqu River Basin and the Benguela Current LME based on the UNDP-GEF Project's review of relevant scientific literature and data. This workshop highlighted that;

- The modification of inflows to the estuary - in particular increased winter flows and reduced inflows in summer means that the mouth now seldom, if ever, closes.
- This prevents water from building up behind the sand bar and flooding the adjacent salt marsh areas, affecting the breeding of migratory birds.
- Mouth closure, when it does occur, is now more likely to occur in summer than winter. Floods that would historically have reset the system in summer and inundated the salt marshes and floodplain, have also been greatly reduced.
- Localised impacts such as the construction of roads, dykes, slimes dams near the mouth, have further degraded the estuary and associated ecosystems.
- Changes in the volumes and seasonality of freshwater reaching the near shore coastal environment, along inputs of nutrients, sediment and detritus, have most likely influenced both abiotic and biotic processes.
- Further offshore, impacts are probably restricted to deposition of sediment on the continental shelf which may have affected abundance, distribution and recruitment success of some commercially important fish species.

Recognising these impacts, but also that anticipated developments in the estuarine area may further affect the system, the workshop recommended that a comprehensive, rehabilitation and management plan for the Orange-Senqu Mouth should be developed as a priority. Importantly, the workshop also established closer contacts between the two Commissions as a start to developing this plan with the participation of all the stakeholders.



## ORASECOM participates in the international arena!

ORASECOM has participated in a number of events over the last 8 months, and has hosted a number of other African River Basin Organisation (RBOs). This not only built our capacity to address new challenges that may have been tackled elsewhere, but is also establishing an international profile that the Parties and ORASECOM can be proud of!

Participation in international forums and interaction with other RBOs builds a better understanding of best practice and helps establish ORASECOM as a credible and progressive organisation. This is critical to proposing recommendations that the Contracting Parties can and want to implement.

## ORASECOM participates in the 13th International RiverSymposium



Six representatives of ORASECOM attended the 13th River Symposium in Perth, Australia from 11 to 14 October 2010. Our team included; Mr Othusitse Katai, Mr, Solly Mabuda, Mr Peter Nthathakane, Mr Luther Rukira, Mr Rapule Pule, and Mr Gavin Quibell, representing among them all of the Member States. This team presented 4 oral papers and one poster paper in both the Plenary and Side events.

ORASECOM consequently enjoyed a high profile in Perth, not only making itself known through the vuvuzela, but also by co-sponsoring one of the sessions and playing an important role in two others!! We were also able to renew our ties with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River - who cosponsored one of the parallel sessions.

Perhaps the key lessons emerging from the conference were drawn from a number of papers on the Murray-Darling River System - where the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is working on getting water users to accept a basin wide plan aimed at securing water for environmental purposes.

## ORASECOM is represented at the 3rd Africa Water Week in Addis Ababa

The Executive Secretary and the Water Resources Specialist represented ORASECOM at the 3rd Africa Water Week in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Once again this event not only provided an opportunity for ORASECOM to renew ties with its sister RBOs in Africa through the African Network of Basin Organisations (ANBO), but also to share our experiences. It is through these kind of events that ORASECOM is establishing itself as one of the foremost RBOs on the Continent.

The theme for the 3rd Africa Water Week was "Implementing the Africa Water Vision and meeting the MDG targets: Challenges and opportunities in water and sanitation". A number of recommendations were made and included the following:

- (i) More financial investment in water for growth and development are needed and the requirements for accessing funds from International Cooperating Partners need to be simplified;
- (ii) Joint planning and implementation of initiatives by all role players is important, especially in-order to deal with water challenges associated with, among others, urbanisation, climate change, and development;
- (iii) Enhancing the capacity of institutions and role players in the water sector needs to be given a high priority by Governments, Private Sector, and International Cooperating Partners; in-order for the 2025 Africa Water Vision and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved. Coordination at the regional or continental level e.g. through the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) needs to be strengthened in-order to track achievement of the MDGs and the Africa Water Vision. AMCOW is working on establishing an African Groundwater Commission (AGWC) as part of strengthening itself institutionally.

## Visits from other River Basin Organisations

### ORASECOM is visited by the Volta Basin Authority

A high-level team comprising of Commissioners and Secretariat staff of the Volta Basin Authority visited ORASECOM during the 1st week of February 2011 to share experiences. The Volta Basin is shared by 6 countries from West Africa; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo. The Volta Basin has also recently undergone a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, supported through the United Nations Environment Programme Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF) process. This included three demonstration projects, much like the work currently being supported by the UNDP-GEF programme in ORASECOM. We therefore have much to learn from the Volta Basin Authority.

The VBA, on their part, drew from ORASECOM's experiences with the Joint Basin Survey - taking with them video materials and ideas for possible similar exercises in their Basin.

### ORASECOM's Joint Basin Survey -1



ORASECOM undertook its first detailed Joint Basin Survey (JBS-1) of the water resources quality of the whole River System during October and November 2010.

Understanding the state of the water resource, the health of aquatic ecosystems, water quality and habitat degradation is the foundation of measuring the success of water resource management.

This survey will provide a broad understanding of the state of the aquatic ecosystem, the presence of Persistent Organic Pesticides, and the quality of the water at sites throughout the basin. This concept is based on similar surveys conducted by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.

The planning of the first Joint Basin Survey (JBS-1) was undertaken by a core team made up of staff from each of the Parties, the ORASECOM Secretariat, as well as the Programme Managers from all three International Cooperating Partners (ICPs) currently supporting ORASECOM. The process was therefore "Joint" not only through the participation by all the countries, but all through participation by all our cooperating partners. The work on the ground was eventually undertaken by 7 different sampling teams supported - a logistical nightmare.

The JBS-1 was made up of 5 elements;

- The Aquatic Ecosystem Health Survey;
- The Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) Survey;
- Chemical and microbial water quality Survey;
- Inter-laboratory calibration; and
- 5 Public Events.



The survey also provided the opportunity to for specialists from all the Member States to share experiences, to learn from new techniques and most importantly establish common methods for sampling and assessing aquatic systems. The inter-laboratory exercise will also allow us to provide targeted support to those laboratories struggling with resources. Seven laboratories - scattered in all the Member States analysed the same 10 samples, as well as samples of known concentration. By comparing the results of these analyses we can identify key challenges in the laboratories, and make recommendations for addressing these.

The preparation of detailed scientific reports presenting the results of each of the four technical components of the JBS-1 is already well



underway. A JBS-1 Process Report, outlining the approach to designing and coordinating the survey, as well as the costs of the survey has also been prepared - to serve as a basis for repeating the survey in 5 years time. The results of the survey will also be prepared as a summary - State of the Orange-Senqu River System report which will be available towards the middle of this year.

However, perhaps the most exciting part of the study is the legacy it has already left among learners, students and the public in all 4 Member States. Over 100 learners and students were shown how to use the mini South African Scoring System (miniSASS) to determine the health of aquatic ecosystems at 4 sites across the basin; Parys and Upington - in South Africa, Rosh Pinah in Namibia and Maseru in Lesotho. Schools in Tsabong in Botswana, where rivers or streams are dry most of the time, were also shown how to take samples of underground water, while public events at each of these sites were used to build awareness about ORASECOM, its mandate and activities.

We would like to thank the students from;

- Aha - Setjhaba Primary School in Parys
- Oranje Oewer Intermediate in Upington
- Hoeksteen Primary School and
- The Rosh Pinah Academy in Rosh Pinah,
- Schools in Tsabong in Botswana, and
- The Lerotholi Polytechnic in Maseru

for their enthusiastic participation in these events.



## ORASECOM opens the Secretariat offices

On the 24th of February 2011 ORASECOM officially opened the Secretariat offices in Centurion, South Africa

Over the last 10 years, ORASECOM has focussed its attention on building a common understanding of the shared river system, understanding the factors impacting on water quality and the environment, as well as on developing the tools that will help the Commission develop a joint Basin Wide Plan by the year 2012. ORASECOM will be monitoring the implementation of that plan, as well as the impacts the implementation of the plan has on the State of the River System, well into the future.

*"The most important work you or I will ever do is within the walls of our own homes"*  
*Harold B Lee*

In-order to deliver on this mandate the organisation needed to establish a Secretariat. Under the terms of an Agreement signed between the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and ORASECOM, the hosting of the Secretariat and the cost thereof were to be borne by South Africa. RSA provided temporary accommodation at the offices of its Department of Water Affairs (DWA) during the Secretariat's establishment phase from 2007-2010. In November 2010 the Secretariat relocated to permanent accommodation in Centurion, South Africa.

The launching of these offices took place on the 24th of February 2011. South Africa's Acting Director-General of Water Affairs (as the host nation), assisted by the High Commissioners of Lesotho and Namibia to RSA cut the ribbon, officially opening the offices. Participation by a number of other senior officials and dignitaries from all 4 Parties added to the significance of this event.



Establishing the Secretariat in its own offices is certainly one of the most important milestones in the history of the organisation, creating a professional and permanent home for the organisation. We hope that this will be the start of even greater things into the future.



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