

Water Resources Accounting as a Catalyst for Improved Information Sharing for Adaptive Water Resources Management in the Orange River Basin

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Abstract

Most of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries are faced with challenges in water supply to meet the ever increasing demand for water by various economic sectors. The riparian states of the Orange River Basin are no exception to this state of affairs. To this effect, information exchange on the shared water needs, supply and demand in relation to available river basin stocks and flows is crucial for effective management of shared waters. Information management is one of the important regimes in adaptive water resources management. It is currently common knowledge that, there are no integrated data and information systems which could be used to adequately address the use of basin water resources. This paper explores ways in which water accounting can be used to enhance the availability of information pertinent to adaptive water resources management. Water accounts provide information on available stocks of the resource at a particular point in time, where they are sourced from and what they are used for. A water accounting framework for the Orange River Basin has been developed and furthermore, the individual riparian states have national water accounts save for Lesotho. The study undertook a content analysis of relevant documentation on water resource accounting and adaptive water resource accounting with emphasis on information management. The findings show that some gaps still exist in the availability of information with regards to shared waters. For example, there is data collection inconsistency and the data lacking in spatial coverage, quality, dissemination and accessibility. Furthermore, information is still haphazard and scarce rendering decision making on a basin wide level rather difficult. The paper concludes that Water Accounting can thus assist in providing data required on past and future development of water availability, water demand as well as water quality. There is need for proper identification, measuring, recording and reporting information about water resources. Water resource accounting provides a framework for these to be realized. This would in the end help identify opportunities for saving water and provide a basis for the development of effective strategies for water allocation among different users.