



KNOWLEDGE SHEET 1

Strengthening Regional Collaboration and Integration

West Africa's coastal area is critical to the region, home to a third of its people and the source of about half of its GDP. Because most of it is composed of mangroves and sand formations, the area's coastline is also highly vulnerable to erosion caused by coastal currents and storm surges. Erosion is evident from Mauritania to Gabon—and the rates of erosion are increasing. Around the port of Lomé, for example, Togo's coastline is estimated to have receded by as much as 12–15 meters a year (UEMOA 2010).

The importance of the area and its vulnerability to climate change make it an area of increasing concern for governments in the region. Projected population growth along the coast, migration from inland and rural areas, and climate change put added pressure on governments to act.

Over the past two decades, donors and regional and international organizations—including the African Development Bank, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Global Environment Fund, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)—have collaborated with countries in the region, supporting sustainable coastal zone management, filling knowledge gaps, and facilitating implementation of priority interventions. WAEMU's regional shoreline monitoring study and management scheme (2010) gathered

and updated information on the coast's characteristics, identified challenges, and made recommendations for priority actions and a regional plan. The analysis covers 11 countries, from Mauritania to Benin. In 2011, in Dakar, the 11 countries' ministries of environment officially adopted the study's recommendations.

Several other diagnostics and strategic directions have also been prepared. One of them is the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) transboundary diagnostic analysis and strategic action program, which seeks, among other things, to improve the sustainability of fisheries and reduce land and sea-based pollution in 16 countries. Other examples of regional cooperation include the Abidjan Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region, which covers 14,000 kilometer of coastline from Mauritania to South Africa, and the West Africa Coast Observation Mission (WACOM), a regional cooperation mechanism for monitoring and reducing risks to the coastline.

Challenges

The commitment at Dakar and the actions that followed are encouraging. But not enough has happened to address the challenges of coastal erosion and flooding.

Interventions are still being implemented piecemeal, with too little coordination among countries.

There is, however, a growing sense among the region's countries that the time for action is now and that results can be achieved only by collaborating regionally, based on decisions informed by up-to-date information. Regional collaboration and coordinated action are needed because many of the challenges affecting the coastal region are transboundary in nature. Examples include the following:

- Erosion and accumulation of coastal sediments caused by coastal infrastructure build up in neighboring countries.
- Sediment deficiency caused by regulation of rivers has downstream effects, including in neighboring countries.
- Flooding caused by marine pollution drifts along the coast, affecting river deltas and drainage canals.
- Loss of natural habitat caused by poor planning and marine pollution adversely affects the regional fish population and the livelihoods of communities that depend on them.

Solutions

Regional approaches have proved successful in other sectors, such as in the context of power pools and river basin management. They provide a long-term framework for country actions and allow resources to be deployed strategically and in a way that benefits from economies of scale. They complement integrated national coastal management processes.

Regional integration would improve the sustainability of shared coastal waters, the protection of environmental services, and the livelihoods that depend on coastal ecosystems. Cooperation would also contribute to the development of regional principles or guidelines for coastal infrastructure investments.

One major benefit of regional approaches is the economies of scale they provide. The costs of effective action are too high for a single country to mobilize. West African countries should be encouraged to engage collectively in the management of shared environmental coastal resources to achieve global environmental benefits and to capture a larger share of the market for global environmental services.

Countries can promote regional approaches in two ways. First, they can support greater regional dialogue and experience sharing. Understanding the costs, benefits,

and responsibilities associated with sustainable coastal management equips countries to collaborate in the design, implementation, and financing of regional and country projects, enhance the regional and national governance of sustainable coastal management, and improve the knowledge base about coastal erosion, flooding, and other climate change hazards along the West Africa coastline.

Second, countries can support a regional observatory and data repository. Building on the West Africa Coast Observatory Mission, national-level monitoring of coastlines would provide a big picture view of trends in erosion, monitoring, and forecasting. The data collected would trickle up to the regional observatory, which in turn would provide countries and regional agencies with the real-time data and information required to manage the risk of coastal erosion and flooding.

REFERENCE

UEMOA (Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine). 2010. *Etude de suivi du trait de côte et schéma directeur littoral de l'Afrique de l'Ouest: Etude du cas au Togo. Caractérisation des états de plage dans deux cellules de dérive littorale: Côtes à l'ouest et à l'est du port de Lome.*

The West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) is a convening platform that aims to assist West African countries to sustainably manage their coastal areas and enhance socio-economic resilience to the effects of climate change. The program also seeks to facilitate access to technical expertise and financial resources for participating countries.



West Africa Coastal Areas
Management Program

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