

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Out of Africa: Local Solutions for Global Challenges **Water: Upstream Downstream Cooperation**

Upstream from the Limpopo water basin lies, amongst others, at a height of 1750m, Witbank in South Africa. Recently, some of the older coal mines in that area using shallow underground mining techniques were closed. However, roof collapses have been reported, allowing air to enter the old workings and promoting spontaneous combustion in the residual coal. Some of the abandoned workings in the Witbank area have continued to burn for many years and have resulted in unplanned surface collapse as well as ground and surface water contamination through acidification and salinisation of local aquifers and streams.

Downstream in Mozambique people need to buy water filters they cannot afford to filter out the cancer inducing residuals. Sound management of transboundary water is therefore crucial for countries such as Mozambique where most of the water flowing through the country originates in catchments outside of the national boundaries. Mozambican rivers are not only contaminated due to mining, but also as they pass through agricultural and urban developments resulting in high coliform counts, silt from erosion, excess phosphates and nitrates from fertilisers.

Cooperation on the major rivers and dams has gained increasing importance. On 28 July 2005 officials from local governments that share the Limpopo river basin – Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa – met at the river mouth near the City of Xai-xai to share information on the use of the river by the different countries and to forge further cooperation between the different local governments. The officials hailed the opportunity to have first hand interaction with their counter parts from across the border and pledge their support to ICLEI's LoGo Water initiative that brought them together and aims at furthering international cooperation in the South African Development Community region.

The Limpopo River basin covers a land area of roughly the size of Italy and is a typical example area of inherent water problems that could be solved through Integrated Water Resource Management - a model to increase cooperation between local governments and to strengthen their role in national and international water management. The river basin is the life line of 14 million people, yet it is unreliable. The river flow is highly variable, due to frequent droughts in the catchment area and a short, intense rainy season. On major stretches of the Limpopo and many of its tributaries, the flow of water in the river in dry years may be for 40 days or less. When the rivers do flow, the water may contain up to 30% sand and silt.

Apart from these natural events, other challenges such as the difficulty in obtaining development capital, insufficient training and support services for small-scale farmers, political and land use problems in certain areas, and land mines in parts of the catchment are seriously hindering sustainable use of the river basin. On the other hand, some catchments mainly situated in the south are highly developed. Over-utilisation of water resources and pollution arising from high-density urban settlements, mining and other industrial developments have been identified to have an impact on the social, economic, political and natural environments downstream.

The meeting near Xai-xai was successful in making the participating officials realise that immediate cooperation is the key to increase the quality of life in the Limpopo.



Sustainable water resources management will also be one of the broad themes at ICLEI's triennial **World Congress: Out of Africa: Local Solutions for Global Challenges** that will be held from 27 February to 3 March 2006. At the city level, ICLEI's Water Campaign directly targets municipal pollution and helps to build up to an integrated understanding of water resources management. The ICLEI World Congress will be an opportunity to learn from a wide spectrum of Local Governments, from the driest continent in the world, Australia, from resource poor nations and wealthy nations such as Japan and from regions in economic transition, such as Eastern Europe.

More specifically, discussions at the river basin level will encompass the role of local governments in developing basin wide plans and the potential initiatives that local governments have been engaged in to facilitate active participation. The Limpopo river basin project will be featured as an example. At the city level several projects will be showcased such as the systems that various cities have put in place to coordinate water supply, sanitation, hydro power, environmental management and even urban agriculture.

At the ICLEI World Congress 2006, participants will be given a unique opportunity to not only learn from the experiences of other cities but to also get an initial introduction to some of the tools that ICLEI has used to support local efforts for sustainable water management.

Local governments, organisations and representatives of the media interested in participating in this event are encouraged to contact ICLEI. Registration for the Congress is open.

www.iclei.org/worldcongress2006

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For more information

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Background information for journalists

Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

It is important for local governments of the affected areas to play a leading role in water management because local governments, if delegated the power and the means and if supported to build their capacities, can provide for increased responsiveness and transparency in water management, and increase the participation of women and men, farmers and fishers, young and old as well as town and country dwellers. ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability actively supports local governments in their bid for sustainable water management.

Photos available to journalists

Please visit the world congress website to find photos on the water topic

www.iclei.org/worldcongress2006/media