

KAZA Shines a lens on Kavango-Zambezi freshwater ecosystems challenges

RESILIENT WATERS PROGRAM

Resilient Waters is a five-year, \$32 million project implemented by Chemonics International. Its goal is to build more resilient and water secure Southern African communities and ecosystems through improved management of trans-boundary natural resources and increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation services.



Photo Credit: Dr Nyambe Nyambe. KAZA Banner



Mr. Felix Monggae, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation & Tourism, Botswana giving official opening remarks.

The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) is a protected area covering a remarkable 519,912 sq. km of rich landscapes, ecosystems and wildlife. The area lies in the Kavango and Zambezi river basins where Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe converge. Water scarcity, declining fresh water species, and pollution of fresh water systems characterize the current reality of freshwater in the KAZA TFCA, negatively impacting communities, wildlife and vegetation in the area. “We are dealing with massive disruptions of fresh water and the ecosystem environment,” said Dr. Nyambe Nyambe, KAZA Secretariat.

In January 2019, KAZA TFCA held the first workshop aimed at addressing the management of the KAZA freshwater network based upon a shared understanding of the development needs and opportunities of the countries represented in the KAZA TFCA. The workshop was convened in collaboration with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), COMON Foundation and USAID’s Resilient Waters Program. About 70 regional government representatives, development partners and NGOs attended the



Photo Credit: Dr. Nyambe Nyambe. Freshwater Workshop Participants

workshop with a commitment to contribute towards the sustainable use, conservation and the protection of KAZA freshwater resources.

This workshop is a significant step for the KAZA TFCA as it marks a shift from a predominantly wildlife focus to a more integrated approach from supporting partners, stakeholders and organisations through a lens involving people, water, biodiversity and ecosystems. Acknowledging how all these factors interact, affect and have an impact on one another is the key to strengthening the ability of people and systems to adapt, transform, and recover from multiple and diverse shocks and stresses in KAZA going forward. As part of its mandate to address transboundary water challenges, USAID's Resilient Waters Program sponsored the workshop, presented the Resilient Waters Program, and participated in plenary discussions during the four-day event. From a Resilient Waters perspective, the workshop was an opportunity to: bring the water and conservation sectors together, facilitate discussions between both sectors on common challenges faced (specifically on the water-conservation intersection in the KAZA geographic space) with a view to strengthening integrated management approaches for the KAZA.

The first two days of the workshop consisted of regional government meetings that provided a platform for all participants to engage and discuss regional, institutional and national perspectives for securing water and natural resources in KAZA, including current priorities, initiatives and plans. The regional and institutional perspectives were provided through presentations from the Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM), Zambezi Water Commission (ZAMCOM) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Secretariats. Similarly, national perspectives were provided by the country representatives of

the KAZA TFCA member states. During the second day of the workshop, development partners and NGOs presented their plans for the KAZA river basins to the governmental institutions. These presentations highlighted the conservation value of the Okavango-Zambezi water tower; water sustainability and tourism in KAZA; climate impacts on water resources and biodiversity; and sharing of practices or experiences in river basin planning and management. During the last two days of the workshop, NGO and development partners discussed challenges and opportunities in the KAZA region to develop a common understanding of the conservation and management of the area's freshwater resources. The aim was to address these challenges and opportunities in partnership with the KAZA countries in a strategic and cooperative manner.

As a result of bringing together KAZA TFCA's partners, member states, river basin organisations (RBOs) and stakeholders to discuss fresh water issues, awareness was raised on the unique attributes of the KAZA freshwater systems and the importance of maintaining free-flowing freshwater. The workshop helped to elaborate on a collective understanding of conservation development plans for KAZA's freshwater systems, and potential developmental options and priorities for sustainable water-use in KAZA were discussed and explored. For the Resilient Waters Program, one key benefit was that the workshop became a key forum for the RBOs and TFCAs to share and discuss their strategic management plans on the common spaces that they operate in. The workshop has put in place a suitable environment for the development of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between RBOs (OKACOM and ZAMCOM) and TFCAs (Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, KAZA, and Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area) operating in overlapping geographic spaces. Going forward, Resilient Waters will be facilitating the setting up and implementation of such MOUs.