



Commentary on key messages of “The Grand Challenge of Water Security in Africa”

By Prof. Christopher Akinbile

1.) Why water is important

The report under this is excellently presented but there is one FUNDAMENTAL issue that was left out! The issue is 'the need to treat water BOTH as a COMMODITY and as a RESOURCE! This should be stressed and thoroughly emphasized. Commodity in the sense that placing economic value on water in order to allow Africans to 'treasure' it, and then it will be properly handled and not mismanaged as it is being treated presently.

Water should be treated as a resource, in a way that ALL must have unrestricted access to it; water must be available to all and for all without deprivation!

Whenever the need for something is unknown, abuse is inevitable! We must be able to adequately treat and classify water in these two categories. If this is the case, a considerable part of the challenges confronting it would be reduced.

2.) The water-food-energy nexus

The write-up in this section is also good BUT in addition, the need to build efficiency into food production is also inevitable. Creation of value chains for value addition is required for this synergy to be optimally effective. Developing irrigation technologies in Africa is also key, while increase in the use of treated wastewater for food production is also a very effective way of making the nexus work. Development of energy potentials from sun (solar), wind, water (hydro) are non-renewable energy sources which will complement the existing sources, play major roles in climate change mitigation and be 'good enough' to meet the burgeoning uncontrolled African population needing food and fibre.

3.) Education, knowledge and capacity development

I cannot agree less with this point and the intelligent presentation. There is no doubt a shortage of human resources in key areas of water development, hence training and re-training of personnel will be required for building capacity and ensuring development for sustainability of water security in Africa.

The establishment of five Pan African Universities in the five regions of Africa by the Africa Union is a step in the right direction and most especially the one in Algeria, which is strictly on climate change and water development at postgraduate level is the best

thing that has happened to Africa. More of such should be established as offshoot from the main Algeria campus in all the regions (west, east and south, since Algeria is in the north).

4.) Access to safe water and sanitation

Access in ALL ramifications to all and sundry is the key in this key message. Access should include 'sufficient quantities' and 'sustainable development'. This should be holistically addressed.

Political stability is also key in improving access to water supply and sanitation.

5.) Water resources and infrastructure for economic growth

In addition to what has been presented, the need to stress the economic importance of water is hereby encouraged. This way, wastage, losses, abuse and all forms of discriminatory handling will be minimised.

Increased investment in water infrastructure in order to increase water storage, capacity, conservation and management...is taking us back to message 3, education and capacity development is essential.

Finally, other resources should be developed like efficient wastewater treatment for recycling and re-use.

6.) Managing transboundary systems

The points here are also very valid. The need for intergovernmental cooperation to managing transboundary aquifers and waters is key and in this regard, political will is required.

AU should strengthen regional cooperation and integration to allow equitable distribution of water resources and this will reduce if not eliminate water conflict that may arise from the transboundary waters.

7.) Global change and risk management

In addition to the incorporation of climate change adaptation strategies in respective countries, development plan and programmes, localisation of the adaptive capacity to justify the principle of resilience building is key to handling global change and risk management. It must be location-specific, achievable and easily understood by the locals and the most vulnerable groups (women and children) to respond promptly with minimal collateral damage to them and their water resources. Also, a full proof risk alert

system for advance warning should also be provided for boreal African governments.

8.) Water governance and management

The points here are excellent! No addition.

9.) Financing

PPP- public private partnership arrangement which involves risk and responsibility sharing between the state and investor is the most workable in this regard.

Sourcing financing for developing key messages 1-8 from the government, private sectors and other initiatives should be encouraged.

Increased investment in the water sector should be done based on the real value of water. The real value of water should be determined using the real value analysis (RVA) of water.

Efficient water resources allocation and distribution to achieve economic efficiency and environmental sustainability are key in maintaining water security in Africa.

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The opinions are purely that of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any academy.

Thank you!