

Transboundary water resources management, integrated water resources management and conflict prevention have been identified by the European Parliament as issues that the European Commission should address in the water sector in Africa as enablers to socio-economic development. In particular, one of the key limitations to a harmonious development and management of water resources in Africa is the lack of human and institutional capacity to assimilate the modern advances in science and technology necessary deal with the complex interactions between the hydrological cycle and the societal needs, while conserving the environment¹.

Through the Commission Decision No C(2009)2374 of 26 March 2009, the DG EuropeAid of the European Commission has launched the pilot project “Support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)² water centres of excellence”. This pilot project aims at fostering the capacity development and the ownership of south to south networking and cooperation in water science in the African high education, training, research, advocacy and consultancy communities, in line with the principles of the multi-stakeholder participatory approach fostered by the European Water Initiative (EUWI).

At present, research and development in the water resource sector in Africa is highly dependent on developed countries expertise both in terms of knowledge and human resources. African countries can, however, innovate for sustainable development if and when they mobilize and direct their different capacities towards common research and development challenges.

The NEPAD identified through a call for interest already existing organisations sustainably working in higher education, scientific research, consultancy and advocacy in the water sector and recognised their importance for regional cooperation and development with the label of Water Centres of Excellence. The NEPAD already identified the Centres of Excellence (CoE) of two regions-networks (Southern Africa and Western Africa). In each region-network, the NEPAD also nominated a hub institution as official representative of its respective network. Therefore, the NEPAD Southern African Centres of Excellence network will be represented by the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa); and, the NEPAD Western African Centres of Excellence network will be represented by the University of Cheick Anta Diop (Senegal).

The European Commission, through its support, aims also at recognising these Centres of Excellence, currently organized in two networks being represented by two African institutions, as reference for regional development fostering south to south cooperation and hence sustainability of technical support actions. These actions are in line with the overall political framework of the EU Water Initiative and develop the successful approach undertaken by the EC with the Joint Learning Programme of the Train4Dev Network also managed by the EC.

The MONDE Action of the GEM Unit is implementing this project “Support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) water centres of excellence” on the European Commission's behalf through the Administrative arrangement No 2009-09-31487 NFP CSP with EuropeAid.

The JRC Institute for Environment and Sustainability (IES) – Global Environmental Monitoring (GEM) Unit aims at improving the understanding of the interactions between the terrestrial, marine and climate components of the Earth's system, assess the impact of changes on the long-term sustainability of ecosystem services and highlight the consequences for EU environment and development policies. The Unit delivers products and services to directly support European policies in the fields of Space, Environment and Sustainability, Climate Change and Development Aid.