

Assessing the Adaptation Capacity of African Water Resources Governance in Light of Environmental Change – Mapping Determinants of Resilience across the Continent

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Environmental change causes a variety of effects in river and lake basins, not only significantly influencing ecosystems, but also challenging development opportunities for riparian states and communities, especially in Africa often heavily relying on the resources provided by a river or a lake. When watercourses transcend the boundaries of nation states, such developments can easily turn into severe collective action problems or even conflicts, further impeding development. Although water wars are extremely unlikely and states tend to cooperate instead of fight over water, effective cooperation on transboundary watercourses remains a challenge – especially in times of rapid change. It is therefore not the mere existence of institutionalized cooperation mechanisms that have been established in the last decades all over the African continent for jointly governing shared resources, but rather the capacity of such mechanisms to adapt to change that matters for effective and sustainable governance of shared watercourses and thus ultimately for the overall development of riparian states. This proposed paper therefore aims at providing a general analytical overview of factors determining the adaptation capacity of River Basin Organizations (RBOs). It thereby sets the framework for more case-specific studies that are presented in the context of the proposed panel “Responding to Environmental and Social Change - Assessing the Adaptation Capacity of African International River and Lake Basin Organizations”, aiming at analyzing the institutional mechanisms and management tools that have been implemented in African RBOs as well as organizations in other parts of the (developing) world to meet these challenges.