



# LIMPOPO River Awareness Kit

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## Transboundary Water Management: Benefit Sharing

"In the context of transboundary watercourses, benefit sharing may be defined as the process where riparians cooperate in optimising and equitably dividing the goods, products and service connected directly to the watercourse, or arising from the use of its waters" (Phillips and Woodhouse, in press).

The starting point in discussing benefit sharing is that cooperation within an international river basin is seen as desirable and it is understood that a number of benefits will result from cooperation (Sadoff & Grey 2002; Waterbury 2002). These benefits are described as **benefits to the river** (e.g. improved water quality, environmental protection, etc.), **benefits from the river** (e.g. hydropower, irrigation, etc.), **benefits because of the river** (e.g. reduced risk of conflict, increased food and security, etc.), and **benefits beyond the river** (e.g. integration of markets, benefits of regional trade, etc.) (Sadoff & Grey 2002).

Benefit sharing presents an alternative to traditional water management approaches of quantifying absolute amounts of water in a system and focuses instead of the values derived from water uses. Rather than viewing water as a stock in a zero sum equation, benefit sharing views water as "a flux that moves through space and time with variability being the norm (Gleick 2000)". Through this approach, water can travel through a river system multiple times depending on the level of interventions and technical options available. The constraint within benefit sharing is the availability of technical options, rather than the limitations of the quantity of water within a system (Van Royeen 2008).

### Putting Benefit Sharing Into Practice

One of the key components of applying the benefit sharing concept in practices is identifying the potential costs and benefits of cooperation. Potential costs include financial, institutional, political and the loss of unilateral opportunities, while examples of benefits could include environmental protection, and flood and drought mitigation (Qaddumi 2008). Benefit sharing presents the opportunity for issue linking to expand potential benefits, such as linking a water agreement to favorable trade agreements in other sectors.

Once the range of potential costs and benefits of cooperation have been articulated, mechanisms for redistributing these costs and benefits can be identified. Mechanisms can include payment for water, payments for power-purchasing agreements and financing and ownership arrangements (Qaddumi 2008).

Cooperation in a transboundary river can take many forms, ranging from sharing data to joint management. Preliminary technical cooperation can help to create a conducive environment that could lead to broader cooperation. Achieving cooperation requires an effective national policy and regulatory framework, as well as supportive regional initiatives. Within the Limpopo River basin, achieving benefit sharing will be supported by regional initiatives, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which places transboundary water management central in its agenda.

### Benefit Sharing in SADC

SADC is in the process of developing a SADC Guideline on Benefit Sharing. An interim document was produced, entitled '[SADC Concept Paper on Benefit Sharing and Transboundary Water Management and Development](#)'.

[Next: Examples of River Basin Organisations](#) 