

# CASE STUDY

## BUILDING RIVER BASIN INSTITUTIONS IN SWAZILAND

Jan van der Molen and Sindy Mthimkhulu\*

■ This case study provides a description of a cooperative partnership between Swaziland and the Dutch Water Authorities aimed at the further development of the river basin institutions in Swaziland.

Swaziland is a sovereign state in Southern Africa. It is neighbored by Mozambique to its east and by South Africa to its north, west and south. At no more than 200 kilometres north to south and 130 kilometres east to west, Swaziland is one of the smallest countries in Africa. Despite its size, Swaziland holds a significant position as far as water management in the southern part of Africa is concerned. This position is due to the fact that two major rivers, the Incomati river and the Usuthu (Maputo) river, originate in South Africa and flow through Swaziland to Mozambique. The Incomati river in fact first flows in South Africa, then into Swaziland and again through South Africa, before it enters Mozambique.



Figure 1: **Swaziland, bordered by South Africa and Mozambique**

■ Because of Swaziland's significant position within water management in Southern Africa it is important that its development in water management keeps track with the developments in South Africa and Mozambique. When the developments in water management in the three countries are compared, the conclusion however is that as far as the establishment and functioning of river basin institutions is concerned, South-Africa and Mozambique are ahead of Swaziland. Both the main South-African regional counterpart and the Mozambican counterpart are already operational and are further developing themselves with the support of Dutch Water Authorities. In Swaziland, five River Basin Authorities have been established but so far no structured approach to get them operational has been established.

\* **Jan van der Molen** is policy strategist at Vechtstromen Regional Water Authority in the Netherlands and is also part-time professor at the Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Germany.

**Sindy Mthimkhulu** is Senior Engineer at the Department of Water Affairs of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy in Swaziland and is head of the Water Control Section of the Department.

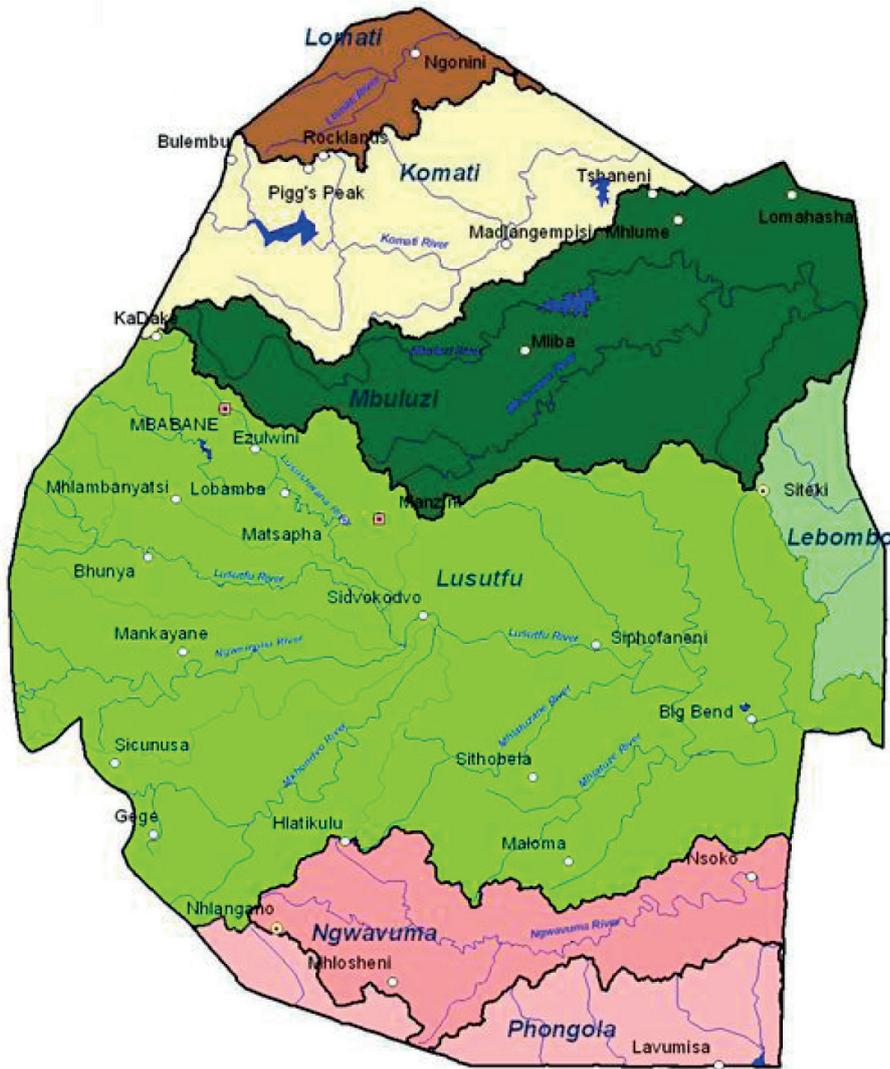


Fig. 2: River basins of Swaziland

Swaziland works closely together with South-Africa and Mozambique both on the bi-national and tripartite level and the regional level and therefore has a clear view of the gap between its own institutional operations and those of South-Africa and Mozambique. In an effort to catch up, Swaziland has got the support of the EU to kick start the decentralization of its water management. In addition Swaziland has asked one of the Dutch Water Authorities, Vechtstromen Regional Water Authority, to enter into a cooperative partnership with the River Basin Authority for the Incomati river, Komati RBA. It was agreed upon that as far as useful and possible, the two neighboring River Basin Authorities will be offered to participate in the project activities.

**Introduction of the project**

The cooperative project between Komati RBA and Vechtstromen RWA has started in 2015 and is named ‘Code BEST’, this name stands for “**C**ontributing to **d**ecentralised water management & **B**ecoming **S**trong(er) basin institutions.

In order to build strong and sustainable water management organizations, the three layer model<sup>1</sup> for good water governance will be used in the project as a reference framework.



Fig 3: The three layer model for good water governance

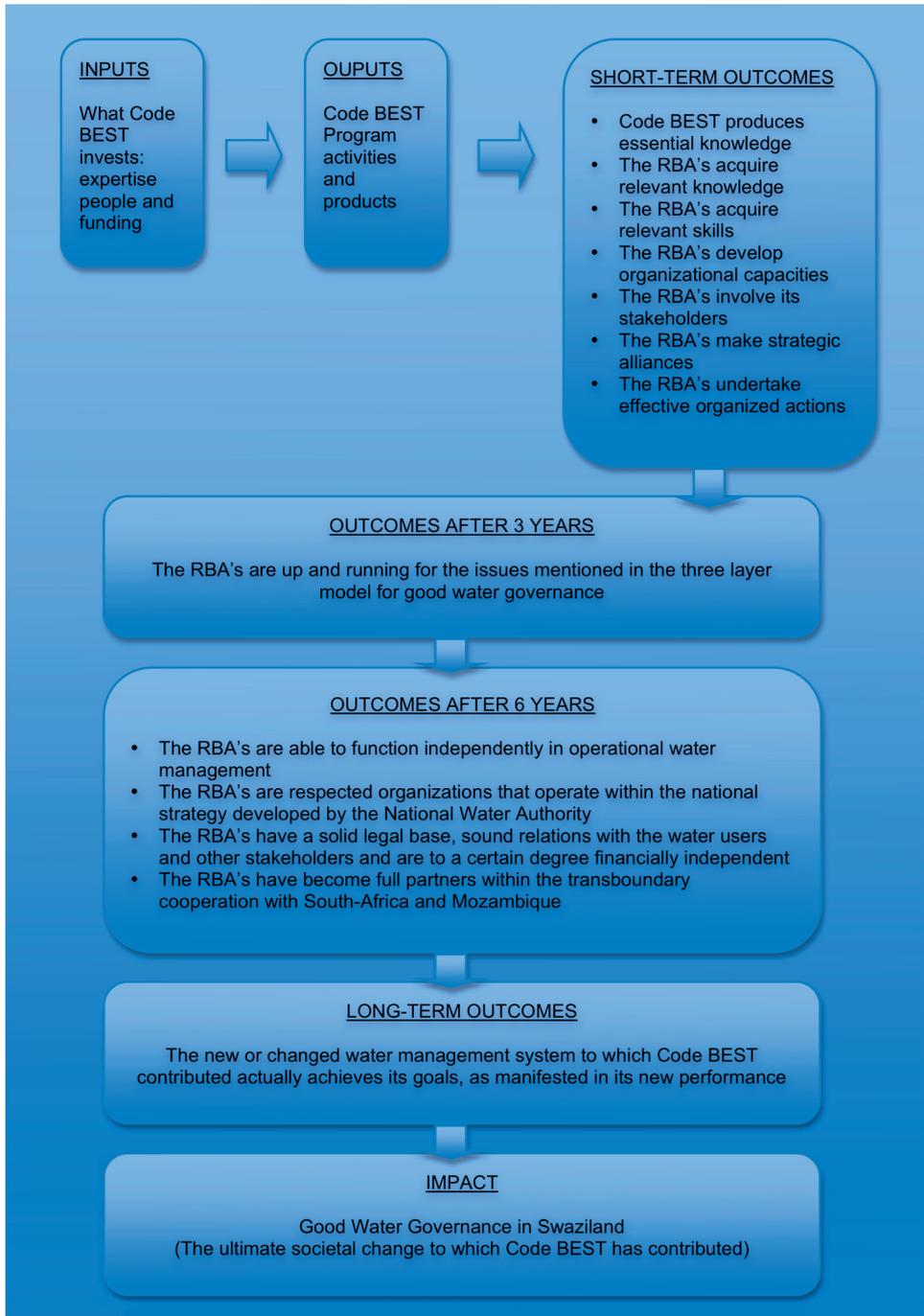


Fig. 4: **The Theory of Change of the Code Best project**

The core element of this approach is that water management comprises three layers: a content layer, an institutional layer and a relational layer.

In the content layer in addition to the knowledge of the water systems and the nature of the problems prevailing, a good information position and the experience and skills required to solve the problems are also essential.

However, in most cases this is not enough to achieve a good water status. An adequate organizational framework together with the necessary legal

instruments and a good financing structure are fundamental requirements for successful integrated water resource management (the institutional layer).

In addition, in order to successfully solve persistent water problems, attention to what is called the relational layer is required. Important elements of this layer are communication and cooperation between different actors and with the public, stakeholder participation, transparency and trust.

The Theory of Change to reach this is shown in Figure 4.

**Project objectives**

The aim of the Code BEST project for the first 3 years is that the three RBAs should be up and running, taking cognizance of the key issues that support good water governance (see figure 3).

This implies that by the end of 2017, the three RBAs should have improved capacity in the following issues.

**AT THE CONTENT LEVEL:**

- Policy
- Knowledge
- Experience and skills

**AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL:**

- Organization
- Legislation
- Financing

**AT THE RELATIONAL LEVEL:**

- Culture
- Ethics
- Cooperation
- Communication
- Participation

It should however be clear that in order to obtain a feasible set of objectives for the year 2017 prioritization with respect to the 11 issues that support good water governance is required. In order to focus the RBA development in the coming years the following lines of thought were chosen as a guideline for the development:

	High priority	Average priority	Low priority
<b>At the content level</b>			
<b>1. Policy</b>	X		
<b>2. Knowledge</b>		X	
<b>3. Experience and skills</b>		X	
<b>At the institutional level</b>			
<b>4. Organization</b>	X		
<b>5. Legislation</b>		X	
<b>6. Financing</b>	X		
<b>At the relational level</b>			
<b>7. Culture</b>			X
<b>8. Ethics</b>			X
<b>9. Cooperation</b>		X	
<b>10. Communication</b>	X		
<b>11. Participation</b>	X		

**Table 5: The priorities of the different issues that support good water governance**

- The RBAs can only function well when they have the support of their stakeholders
- Sustainable basin management can only be reached when there is adequate financing
- The basis for adequate financing is permitting and charging
- Permitting and charging can function as a driving force for more efficient water use
- Permitting and charging only makes sense when permitted water withdrawals are registered adequately
- Permitting and charging only makes sense when actual withdrawals are monitored adequately
- Permitting and charging only makes sense when there is an adequate enforcement system

As the twinning project is there to support the development of the RBAs, the lines of thought mentioned above were also used during the mission as a guideline to prioritize with respect to the 11 issues that support good water governance. The result of this prioritization is presented in table 5.

So within the twinning project 5 high priority issues are distinguished (colored red), 4 average priority issues (colored orange) and 2 low priority issues (colored yellow).

## Results and indicators

The following 11 results should have been reached by the end of 2017.

### At the content level:

<b>Result 1</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as its policy development is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 a regulation for permitting and charging should be available (high priority). In addition the Basin Management Plan should be ready by then. The key function of this plan is to execute the National Water Plan.
<b>Result 2</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as acquiring essential knowledge is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 essential knowledge has been acquired from Swaziland, from Mozambique, from South Africa and from The Netherlands. In addition the RBA has a clear picture on how it wants to acquire essential knowledge in the period 2018, 2019 and 2020.
<b>Result 3</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as acquiring relevant experience and skills are concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 relevant experience and skills have been acquired from Swaziland, from Mozambique, from South Africa and from The Netherlands. In addition the RBA has a clear picture on how it wants to acquire relevant experience and skills in the period 2018, 2019 and 2020.

### At the institutional level:

<b>Result 4</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as the organizational framework is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 there is an adequate organizational framework in terms of legal structure, operational guidelines (statutes, bylaws), mandates, templates for staffing and estimates of required budgets and capacity building for the future (especially for the period 2018, 2019 and 2020).
<b>Result 5</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as its legal instruments are concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA is using the regulations as a guideline for its operations.
<b>Result 6</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as its financing is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has a financial strategy on how its financing will be arranged in the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. In addition it has calculated to which degree it may be financially independent in 2020.

### At the relational level:

<b>Result 7</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as developing its culture is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has immersed itself in the organizational culture that it would like to have.
<b>Result 8</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as looking after its ethics is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has immersed itself in the way it wants to deal with ethical issues.
<b>Result 9</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as cooperation with other actors is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has developed cooperative relationships with other actors in Swaziland, Mozambique, South Africa and The Netherlands.
<b>Result 10</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as its communication with the public and with other actors is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has an external communication strategy on how it wants to communicate with the public and with other stakeholders and it has started to act according to this.
<b>Result 11</b>	The RBA should be up and running as far as stakeholder participation is concerned
<b>Indicators</b>	By the end of 2017 the RBA has acquired knowledge on the varying degrees of stakeholder involvement and it has started applying this knowledge.

## **Tangibility of the results**

Looking at the results the tangibility of the results appears to be in line with the set priorities in a sense that the results of the high priority issues are most tangible and the results of the low priority issues are least tangible.

In case of the high priority issues the results are either a tangible product (issues 1, 4 and 6) or a perceptible change in behavior (issue 11) or both (issue 10).

In case of the average priority issues the results are a perceptible change in the behavior (issue 5) or a perceptible change of the situation (issues 2, 3 and 9) but some of the fields of attention are not fully fixed at the moment (issues 2 and 3). The present plans for acquiring essential knowledge (issue 2) and acquiring relevant experience and skills (issue 3) still have to be fine-tuned based on the type of staff and the experience of the staff that is going to be appointed.

In case of the low priority issues (issues 7 and 8) the results are least tangible. This is because these issues will be dealt with as part of more general activities. Both the development of the organizational culture (issue 7) and the organizational ethics (issue 8) will be part of a training course for RBA board members.

In order to reach the results listed above eleven project activities have been planned for the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. These activities include the project definition mission, a training course for board members, participation of young talents in an international training program, joint working weeks in both Swaziland and The Netherlands and joint working conferences with the South African and Mozambican counterparts on the development of transboundary regional water management. ■

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: H. Havekes e.a., Building blocks for good water governance, The Hague, Water Governance Center, 2013