

**Abstract of MA Dissertation -  
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**River Basin Management – The Incomati as a case study**

The paper focuses on issues relating to water (river basin) management concerning the Incomati River Basin in Southern Africa.

It looks at riparian issues between the 3 countries in the basin, South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique. Riparian relations are known from the Helsinki Principles (1966).

Furthermore the different view between North and South resulting in different approaches towards

the environment and economic growth is discussed. A related topic, Political Ecology, is discussed and also the destruction of nature and its relation to growth and more human welfare. The same issues were also laid down in the Copenhagen and Dublin principles.

Virtual water is mentioned as being an important tool to try to keep social stability in arid regions, to which Southern Africa belongs. The region has thus seen an increase in wheat imports and a lower wheat production, which points in the direction of virtual water, water import embedded in foods.

The main issue in river basin management in the Incomati River is the shared management between the countries. Cooperation has grown in recent years with the TPTC (Tri-Partite Technical Committee) being able to do more of its work, most lately reflected in the JIBS Phase 2 study.

The view of cooperation is somewhat being limited by the view of South African stakeholders who do not take the part of the Incomati River Basin in Mozambique into their view. This is reflected in the fact that the Water Act from 1998, which mentions the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies, is a South African national law not benefiting for instance Mozambique farmers.

Finally it is mentioned that many dams have been built in the Incomati River Basin, mostly in South Africa and mostly for irrigation. They have brought human welfare and development and more dams are needed in Swaziland and Mozambique for the same to happen there.

The paper concludes that the North has developed approaches towards water (and river) management which takes social, economic and environmental resources into account (like WISER, WISEER and the Copenhagen and Dublin principles). The South, however, still finds tough environmental and economic principles unrealistic and unfair.

South Africa has a partly northern approach, but the other two countries in the Incomati River Basin, Swaziland and Mozambique are countries with a typical Southern view and background.

South Africa is the upstream riparian in the Incomati River Basin and uses its rights, since water is

scarce, through efficient water management, mainly irrigation. The Incomati River Basin situation is well-reflected in the Helsinki Rules, but they are too good to be true.

In order for development to take place, nature has to be compromised. This is the case both in order to help South Africa's emerging farmers to more wealth and to develop the agricultural economies of Swaziland and Mozambique.

Virtual water can be an important stabilising factor when countries are faced with a water deficit. Southern Africa is arid or semi-arid and there has been an increase in wheat imports and a decrease in wheat production. The upstream reaches of the Incomati River Basin is in the arid zone.

Cooperation in the Incomati River Basin is starting to develop between the three countries now. Until recently Mozambique had chosen not to participate in the work of the TCTP, but with the JIBS Phase 2 study this has changed. However South African stakeholders and the establishing of Management Catchment Agencies do not take Mozambique or Swaziland into account since the Water Act from 1998 is a national South African law.

The Environmental focus within the Incomati Basin is strongest in South Africa, despite pollution in the lower Incomati from Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. The river basin has plenty of dams, mainly for the purpose of irrigation and mainly in South Africa. They have improved human welfare and Mozambique and Swaziland could both do with more dams to develop the agricultural sector and to prevent floods.

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