

## **PRESS RELEASE WATERSHED MALI**

***“For healthy ecosystems and human wellbeing, water quality matters”***

We acknowledge that clean water is life, and hence that our lives depend on how we protect the quality of our water.

Good water quality helps to sustain healthy ecosystems supporting human well-being.

In Mali today, the issue of access to quality and universal WASH services is a pertinent issue due to the growing needs of the Malian population. To illustrate that, in 2015, only 16% of rural households and 38% of urban households had improved sanitation, while the country is committed to universal access to WASH services by 2030. With regard to waste, regardless of their source, there is a shortage of adequate infrastructure to treat and evacuate them. For example, in Bamako, almost 50% of the waste are not picked up or treated. This exposes the population to serious public health risks. Residuals wastewater from industrial and artisanal sources are generally discharged into gutters and watercourses without prior treatment? Sewerage is only found in the capital city, serving less than 1% of Bamako’s habitants, and this percentage is decreasing since the population is constantly increasing as the network becomes more and more dilapidated. The Niger River is then the outlet for waste. But how long will this last?

Many water pollutants have long-term adverse effects on water quality, posing a risk to human health. As a result, fresh water is greatly reduced. In addition, the capacity of ecosystems to provide services is greatly reduced, sometimes with irreversible effects. The environment is degraded by a decline in biomass productivity, loss of biodiversity and vulnerability to other constraints.

It is far cheaper to protect water resources than to clean up after pollution. Water quality protection and maintenance of aquatic environments ensure the sustainability of their ecosystem services i.e. benefits such as potable water, fisheries, recreation and tourism. For instance fully-functioning natural wetlands filter off nutrients and toxic substances from water.

Hence the importance of restoring and protecting wetlands to ensure water quality.

*Water quality is key to human and ecosystem health. There are numerous add-on benefits to improving water quality: improved ecosystems and ecosystem services, resulting in improved health livelihoods and well-being.*

### ***Sustaining Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services through Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) approach***

Integrated Water Resource Management in Mali, covered by a national strategy and action plan (PAGIRE) has been the focus of several national and West-African regional programmes. Many water resource studies have been carried out and numerous hydrological and piezo-metric data collected and many initiatives have been implemented to develop water sources, protect river banks, protect against floods and droughts etc. A hydrological newsletter is published weekly, a database called Hydraccess is active and a national water information system (SINEAU) is currently being developed, as software to achieve optimal water resource allocation.

However, WASH stakeholders decry the lack of impact of all these activities on the level of water and sanitation services. Indeed, in Mali, no link or connection was noted between resource management

and service provision. Data produced for IWRM are not shared with WASH stakeholders and are not used to guide WASH projects. Issues around over-exploitation or pollution are not adequately addressed. Water quality analyses are carried out when infrastructure is built, but are not regularly repeated. It would thus appear essential to review the overall IWRM intervention framework to situate resource management within the context of service provision and priority economic sectors.

While recognizing the efforts already made by the Government, we share the following observations:

- IWRM can both bring more sustainable WASH service and more healthy ecosystems;
- Healthy ecosystems (especially healthy wetlands) help to provide sustainable WASH services as wetlands can store water and can purify contaminated water;
- Non-sustainable WASH (especially water quality degradation due to unsustainable faecal sludge management) on the other hand can deteriorate ecosystem health;
- Besides supporting WASH services healthy ecosystems (like healthy wetlands) provide all kinds of other ecosystem services which help make people healthy, resilient and support livelihood development. Hence investing in healthy landscapes should go hand in hand with investing in WASH;
- Such an holistic approach needs especially good arrangements in the governance and financing of WASH, IWRM and environmental management;
- The provision of IWRM data to WASH stakeholders will greatly contribute to the integration of the two sectors;

### ***A shared responsibility: Water Security***

Protecting water sources from pollution is everyone's responsibility. It cannot be left to public authorities alone. All sectors, public and private, must take appropriate and adequate action to prevent pollution. It demands the open engagement of all stakeholders, from individuals and local communities to international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. Action should be differentiated according to the type of water use and the actors i.e. whether as an individual person or as a corporate body. There is an urgent need to step up research, monitoring and assessment of water quality in Mali; taking an integrated approach using the basin as a management unit. Scientific findings from research should inform sound policy formation and implementation. Furthermore sufficiently funded and manned regulatory functions are required to ensure compliance with and enforcement of rules and regulations.

These are the questions that will be addressed by the Watershed project in Mali during the next five years and ask for your strong support and contribution to the achievement of these results!

**Reference** : Livre bleu Mali-Edition 2016