

Paul Ouederago, is the Senior Advisor for Africa at the Ramsar Secretariat based in Gland, Switzerland. He shared his views on how African countries can accelerate the protection of wetlands during the Kigali Forum for Wetlands, which took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 8 to 12 July 2013.



UNEP-TEEB: *What can you identify as some of the challenges that hinder countries mainly in Africa to implement the Ramsar Convention?*

Paul Ouederago: Many countries in Africa find it challenging to translate the Ramsar resolutions into national and regional policies. This can be attributed to various factors, the main one being that the Contracting Parties struggle to translate the Ramsar principles into national planning mechanisms. We are therefore working together with them to overcome some of these challenges before 2015.

UNEP-TEEB: *What are some success stories from Africa related to conserving wetlands, and what would you say are the key reasons for this success?*

Paul Ouederago: The establishment of regional initiatives such as RAMCEA, NIGERWET and WACOWET that provide guidance to countries can be considered success stories. This is because these initiatives are supporting the work of the Ramsar Secretariat to mainstream wetland issues within national policies and strategies. There is a need for more of these regional initiatives to extend to other basin systems such as the Nile, Southern Africa and Congo Basin. It is also important to mention the role of the focal points who have been instrumental and lead the implementation of the convention at the national level. The international partners are also facilitating activities such as the opening of new Ramsar sites, trainings, and the establishment of National Ramsar Committees, etc...

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UNEP-TEEB: *The theme of the Kigali Forum is wise use smart plans, what are some of the important take home messages for the delegates?*

Paul Ouederago: Africa hosts a lot of water towers but they are not conserved in a sustainable manner. Wise use is important because it promotes conservation as well as the use of wetlands. It is important for participants here today to leave with the vital message, that to successfully implement the Convention, there is a need for continued research, essential to strengthen existing networks and finally to provide African countries with science based knowledge that supports decision-making. However this is not enough, we also need a mechanism in Africa to influence policy. I propose that the Contracting Parties appoint six ambassadors representing the six sub regions of Africa to boost and mainstream wetland issues in strategies and policies at the regional level.

UNEP-TEEB: *The TEEB for Water and Wetlands report contains a raft of recommendations for various stakeholders. What are your views about the report especially for Africa?*

Paul Ouederago: When I saw the process that lead to the writing of this report, I felt that this is exactly what would bring change to Africa. I would like to translate the report into a module so as to teach the findings because it provides concrete recommendations and guidance to take actions. The TEEB report is an important tool that shows the Ramsar Convention is a really global convention.