A remark by Thomas Fuller quoted in the new Africa Water Atlas re-echoed at the Third Africa Water Week on Thursday in Addis Ababa. “We never know the worth of water till the well is dry,” maybe about three centuries old but it is still an apt remark that strikingly captures what is happening with water sources in Africa. Sources such as rivers, lakes and dams, which have always been rich endowments with the precious life supporting commodity are either drying up or becoming silted with soil.

On a positive note, the Atlas also maps out new solutions and success stories from across the continent, like rainwater conservation that is improving food security in drought-prone regions and irrigation projects in Kenya, Senegal and Sudan that are boosting food production. Compiled by a team led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on behalf of the Africa Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW), the new atlas contains some of the most compelling images of Lake Victoria, showing how the world’s largest fresh water lake is being choked with algal blooms. Algal blooms are microscopic plants, which grow in water that is heavily polluted with soil containing nutrients washed into the lake. Most forests and wetlands that shielded the lake against agricultural run-offs have been removed as the quest for new productive agricultural lands intensifies.

The report relied on hundreds of images, which the UNEP research team refers to as “before and after” images vividly captured concerns that Chad-once Africa’s sixth largest lake-has shrunk to only 10 percent of its original size. The Atlas research clearly shows how the amount of water available per person in Africa was fast dwindling and presently only 26 of the continent’s 53 countries are on track to attaining the water-provision target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that pitches for reduction by half the proportion of the population without sustainable access to drinking water by 2015. Other worrisome pictures shown to the delegates attending Africa’s leading water summit included erosion of the Nile River in Egypt which has lost a 3km segment to erosion. The report also attributes years of reckless exploitation of oil in Nigeria to having exacted massive oil spills in the Niger delta leaving it to choke under heavy pollution. Another major concern was the destruction of Kenya’s Mau forest that the new atlas refers to as one of Africa’s water towers with its complex biodiversity. “Water towers…are sources for many of Africa’s trans-boundary rivers and contribute immensely to the total stream flow of African major rivers,” the report states. “These supply life-giving resources and services in the down stream areas such as water for hydro-electric power, wildlife and tourism, small scale agriculture, municipalities and ecosystem services.”

The well attended launch of the atlas was treated to a gripping seven minutes video clip with sad echoes of millions of people crying, “When I was growing up getting water was easy. Not any more.” The study also indicated that challenges of water scarcity in Africa are...
compounded by among others, high population growth, socio-economic and climate change impacts and in some cases, policy choices. Not only does the report highlight, “hot spots”, but also highlights “hope spots” where conservation practices are taking root and rain water harvesting in the horn of Africa and Kenya. The Atlas pointed out how such practices are helping to lift people out of food insecurity and reversal of environmental degradation. Other well meaning efforts are the water management that are protecting against, and even reversing, degradation enumerated in the report, and the damming of Logone River in the Lake Chad Basin in the 1970s that coincided with a period of drought that reduced overbank flooding and disrupted local livelihoods on the Waza Logone Floodplainreta. There is also the Great Man-Made River Project that brings water from well fields in the Sahara to Libya’s growing population that began roughly 30 years ago and is considered among the largest civil engineering projects in the world.

The new Africa Water Atlas outlines challenges and opportunities for Africa as the continent strives to improve quantity, quality and use of its water resources.

Experts call for Special fund to promote capacity building in water management

by Oseloka Zikora

Experts at a session on science institutions and capacity building for managing Africa’s water resources Tuesday called for the establishment of a regional Water Research and Development fund under AMCOW administration to ensure the sustainability of the capacity building networks and research capacity and infrastructure to support them. They also recommended that measures should be taken to ensure that all networks and R&D institutions and Centers of Excellence are aware and aligned to the African Water Vision 2025.

Meanwhile, Programme Officer M&E at AMCOW AU office, Anselm Vodounhessi says that to effectively monitor Africa’s performance in water and sanitation levels, there is need to Produce Annual African Water Security Performances Report with a Water Security Index for each country (scanning the best and worse country of the continent). He also recommended the need to discuss such report at the annual Africa Water Week and to encourage and award best performing countries.

Speaking at a session on capacity building support and resources for implementing the African Water Vision 2025, Vodounhessi advocated openness, transparency and accountability in decision-making processes; ability to generate and receive knowledge and information; and cooperation and team work by all countries in the region to achieve common, mutually beneficial objectives.
Poor governance in the water sector is preventing millions of Africans from accessing clean, safe drinking water and adequate, reliable sanitation, a report launched at the 3rd Africa Water Week by the African Development Bank (AfDB) has revealed. The report, “Water Sector Governance in Africa” noted that “this situation prevails despite numerous and rigorous technical, financial, economic and institutional assessments in support of investments in water and sanitation projects in Africa.”

The report which investigated poor governance’s impact on the need for sustainable water provision in the African water sector concluded that substantial gains would be made if government assessments became standard procedure and if governance criteria were introduced in donor project approval procedures. It also identified numerous common governance risks that were easily identifiable and preventable. “While local and national institutions have the most visible role to play in governing the water sector, it is the sector’s underlying policies, legislation and regulations that provide the foundation for overall governance”.

Tom Roberts, the report coordinator, highlighted some of the key roles that sector institutions and organizations need to fulfill in developing and carrying out the underlying legislation, policies and regulations to tackle the continent’s water challenges. The roles, according to him, include strategic policy-making and planning for water and related sectors; conflict resolution and arbitration, and the regulation and monitoring of water users and service providers. “The report addresses each of these roles and the various related approaches and principles individually.”

AfDB Vice-President for Infrastructure, Private Sector and Regional Integration, Bobby Pitman, said contemporary literature on water sector financing understandably focuses on the mechanisms and challenges associated with funding tangible water supply and sanitation services. Our new study, however, draws attention to the importance of financing overarching water management and governance functions, from strategy, planning and policy-making and engagement with sector shareholders to water resource development, allocation and management,” Pitman said.

Millions in Africa lack water due to the sector’s poor governance

by Alex Abutu

PPPds needed for effective rural and small town water supplies

by Sheikh Alkinkky Sanyang & Lucile Adrienne

The rural water supply sub-sector in Africa is in a bad state as new investments are hard to come across and non-functioning rates remain high. This calls for urgent measures to improve cost recovery, augment service levels, and increase user satisfaction, while introducing a high level of accountability according to Africa Development Bank (AfDB) and Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP).

Unlike the larger urban water systems that have embraced professionalism in management under Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), rural point source supplies are still mainly manned by communities with limited scope for private sector investment.

The methods applied in rural areas are not effective with low functionality rates, and small piped systems are even more constrained than simple point sources or large piped systems. But Joseph Narkevic, a consultant with Water Supply and Sanitation (WSP), said the findings on sustainable management of small piped water systems demonstrated that delegated management mostly in the form of PPPs is steadily taking root, and points to encouraging results. One area of interest, he said, was the blending of public and private finance to increase investments for small piped water schemes.

Narkevic however said that some constraints exist including sharing water resources and cost, relative population sizes, power, distances and population density. Furthermore, there is also the lack of capacity of local private sectors, resources to employ and keeping high qualified staff as well as inadequate data for bids preparations.

The AWW-3 session that focused on the potentials of domestic private sector engagement in the construction, operation, maintenance and management of rural water supplies in Africa was convened by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Water and Sanitation Program (WSP). Also discussed during the session were long-term solutions for the sustainable management of rural and small water supplies in partnership with the private sector.
Panoramic view of the 3rd Africa Water Week
Event managers, Flawless Events pose for a photo take with AMCOW’s Charles N’Gangoue
Participants speak on 3rd Africa Water Week

The African Water Week is a step in the right direction and it has come to stay. Today the Week is recognized as a vital platform for Africa to assess its water situation and strategies on how best to meet challenges in the sector.

“It is my hope and wish that that participants will return to their countries and move from paper work to action so as to save the continent,” she said.

Paul Van Koppen, Coordinator, European Union Water Initiative – African Working Group— The Week is very productive and had provided the opportunities for participants especially governments and donors to share knowledge and experience in various water related issues.

“Africa should rise from this Week with concrete commitment to plan and act for water and sanitation. It is important to have in place national polices in various countries and donors should stick to their commitments,” he said.

Saskia Castelein, Programme officer of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, Geneva, Switzerland.
“It is been a wonderful Week. One has the opportunity to meet various stakeholders in the sector, network and make achievable plans,” Africa should invest in clear leadership for the sector and focus more on sanitation and hygiene.”

Flavia Rocha Loures, Senior Programme Officer, WWF International
The sessions that I attended were interesting and a good mix of experiences from other places with that of Africa which gives the realities on the ground and the perspectives are. I found the sessions very rich in content and the format involving interactions with participants in a less formal environment than the Stockholm event was very helpful. An issue such as cross boundary dimensions of climate change is not yet sufficiently explored but it’s good that discussion has been opened up on it here.

Peter Hawkins, Team Leader of the Mozambique Water and Sanitation Project (WSP)
The forum was an opportunity to meet colleagues, experts and stakeholders to discuss matters related to water and sanitation in Africa. I have been pleasantly surprised by the quality of the presentations, as the sessions have been very useful. We need support from international organization in pushing the way forward towards the achievement of MDGs. I also want to suggest that the next event’s need advanced preparations, so as to allow participants ample time to prepare themselves.

Fatoumata Jallow Ndoye - Dept. of Rural Economy and Agricultural/Environment, AUC.
I believe that a forum like this is very useful for AMCOW and its various development partners since periodic meetings act as crucial vehicles for carrying out discussion on our socio-development efforts. The 3rd AWW “rings a bell” at policy makers to take issues of water and sanitation seriously, and without infrastructural development and adequate financing, it will be difficult to achieve our MDG targets.
Reception Dinner in honour of participants at the Addis Hilton

Host Minister, Hon. Alemayehu Tegenu with AMCOW President and South Africa’s Minister for Water & Environment, Hon. Edna Molewa at the dinner.

Participants relax and live the fun
Widow, Renowned Musician, Sanitation Entrepreneur on the roll call of AfricaSan Awards

by Oseloka Zikora

Ms. Achame Takiso a widow and mother of seven kids from a marginalized community in the remote village of Sahshera in southern Ethiopia was last Wednesday honored with the Distinguished Woman Leader in Sanitation Award at the 2010 AfricaSan Awards ceremony held at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. MS Achame was honoured for her dogged commitment to the cause of making her disadvantaged community open defecation free in spite of the difficult challenges she faces.

Other major winners are the internationally renowned Mozambiquan Musician Feliciano dos Santos and his Massukos Band and David Kuria, a Kenyan sanitation and toilet entrepreneur, who introduced a novel public toilet concept and was the first individual to successfully construct and manage hygienic public sanitation facilities in Kenyan slums and other informal settlements. Feliciano dos Santos received the winner’s trophy in the Grassroots Champion Category while David Kuria won the award in the Public Service Category. In all, nine persons and institution were presented with trophies, certificates and token sums of money for their outstanding contributions to the improvement of sanitation and hygiene practices on the continent of Africa. They were carefully selected from among 45 entries received in the three categories on offer by a distinguished panel of judges.

Ethiopia fetes participants at Addis Hilton

His Excellency, Ato Alemahyehu Tegenu, Ethiopia’s Minister of Water & Energy organized a reception in honour of participants attending the 3rd Africa Water Week hosted by his country. The occasion which took place at the prestigious Addis Hilton Hotel attracted the AMCow President and South Africa’s Minister for Water & Environment, Hon Edna Molewa, a former AMCow President and Congo’s Minister for Energy and Water, S.E.M. Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua, Nigeria’s Minister for Water Resources, Chief Obadiah Ando, other AMCow member Ministers, AMCow Executive Secretary, Bai-Mass Taal, AMCow development partners, country delegates and other participants. On hand to entertain the guests were several cultural dancers and musicians.