People and the River

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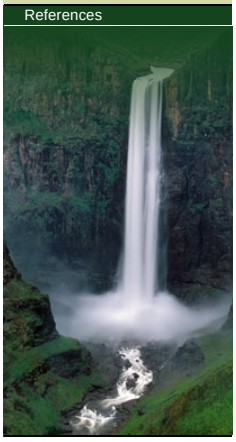


Socio-economics in the Basin:

The Basin as a Socio-Economic Entity

Overview

The Orange-Senqu River basin originates in the highlands of Lesotho and flows westward through six provinces in South Africa. The Orange-Senqu basin enters into Namibia and Botswana and the Lower Orange River forms the border between South Africa and Namibia. Of the approximately 1 000 000 km² area of the Orange-Senqu River basin, 64.2% lies in South Africa, 24.5% in Namibia, 7.9% in Botswana, and 3.4% in Lesotho; Lesotho lies entirely within the basin.

Table: Percentage of riparian countries found inside the Orange-Senqu River basin

Country	Area of the country within the basin (km²)	Total area of basin (%)
Botswana	79 000	7.9
Lesotho	34 000	3.4
Namibia	245 000	24.5
South Africa	642 000	64.2
Total	1 000 000	100

Source: ORASECOM 2009

The Orange-Senqu River basin is home to over 20 million people. Most of this population resides in South Africa (85%) and Lesotho (13%). The northern and western parts of the basin in Botswana and Namibia are sparsely populated.

South Africa is by far the largest water user of the Orange-Senqu basin and accounts for 97% of total water use in the basin; Lesotho accounts for 1%, Namibia 2% and Botswana <1% (Lange *et al.* 2007).

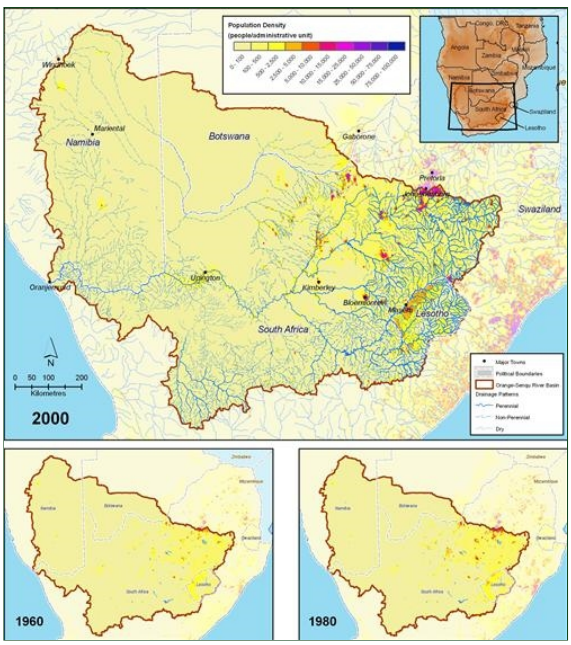
Agriculture accounts for 61% of water demand from the Orange-Senqu basin and is the major user in basin countries with the exception of Lesotho. In Lesotho industry and domestic water demands are higher than agricultural demands (Lange *et al.* 2007).

While the basin states are delineated by political boundaries, the distribution of tribal and language groupings has, historically, developed quite differently. The culture of the region is brought together in the often vibrant cities of the region, with languages and cultures mixing to provide a rich tapestry of life. In addition to factors such as land and water rights, a significant factor in the shaping of the cultural fabric in southern Africa has been the mining industry and employment opportunities in the mines. Husbands and fathers still migrate across great distances to find work in the mines of southern Africa further distributing the people and even necessitating new languages, such as *Fanagolo*.

Difference between Urban and Rural areas

In the Orange-Senqu River basin the standard of living for the poorer segments of the population is much lower in rural and informal peri-urban areas in comparison to urban areas. Whereas in cities and towns modern housing is available, accommodation in informal settlements and villages is often very basic and/or traditional. Most of the jobs in industry and services are in the urban areas; the rural poor often have to rely on subsistence agriculture; the poor in per-urban informal settlements on menial jobs. Acess to proper education and health services also is much more difficult in rural areas.

The map below shows population density per administrative unit (not per km²).



Population density in the Orange-Senqu River basin (per administrative unit).

Interactive

Basin Map

Explore the sub-basins of the Orange-Senqu River

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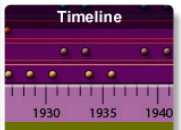
Video Tour

Tour video scenes along the Orange-Senqu River related to People and the River

enter

Timeline



View a historical timeline of Orange-Senqu countries, including water agreements & infrastructure construction

enter

River Journey

Journey along the Orange-Senqu River through images and interviews

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Source:UNESCO 2008
(click to enlarge)

Differences between upstream and downstream areas

The Upper Orange-Senqu River includes the Orange–Senqu River in Lesotho and the Orange River in South Africa above the Vaal River confluence. The Lower Orange River includes the South African stretch below the Vaal River confluence, and Botswana and Namibia sections.

Along the Orange-Senqu River in Lesotho, extensive sheep and cattle farming are characteristic throughout the upper reaches. An estimated 70% of rural households produce vegetables in their home gardens and most of these gardens are rain-fed, supplemented with irrigation from household and/or community domestic water supplies. Produce from home gardens is mainly consumed at home, with small quantities sold at village markets. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project in the Upper Orange-Senqu water management area (WMA), and the huge investment associated with it are having a significant impact on the Lesotho's economy.

In the Upper Orange River WMA in South Africa the scale and magnitude of population and infrastructure is much greater than in Lesotho. The main economic activity is livestock farming and there are extensive areas under dry land cultivation. Mining activities used to be a dominant sector in the Upper Orange but have declined in recent years and salt works and small diamond operations are the remaining operations.

The Lower Orange River is home to far fewer people than the Upper Orange-Senqu and Vaal River basins. This is driven largely climatic, physiographic and historical socio-economic factors. Economic activity is focused mostly around the small to medium sized towns located along or close to the river.

The major economic sectors in the Lower Orange River region are government, mining, agriculture and trade. Cultivation takes place along a fertile strip of alluvial soils that follows the Orange River valley and also in areas of higher rainfall. Most of this commercial agriculture is irrigated using water extracted from the river and from groundwater. Crops grown in this region include high-value crops – mainly grapes; also some dates, flowers, pecan nnuts, vegetable and grain crops. Many of the high-value crops are exported to Europe. While these activities are localiSed along the river channel, sheep and goat livestock farming (often on asubsistence level) is prevalent across the entire region.

While mining activities do play a role in economic activities in the region, much of it is alluvial diamond mining, located along the coast to the north and south of the Orange River Mouth. Other minerals extracted in the region include: copper (around Springbok, Nababeep and Aggenys), asbestos, Tiger's eye, aluminum silicate, limestone and dolomite).

Main economic activities

The economies of countries within the Orange-Senqu River basin vary significantly from an economic perspective. The gross national capita income in 2011 (HDR 2011, please include in literature list) is highest in Botswana with 13.049 US-Dollars; in South Africa it's 9.469 US-Dollars, in Namibia 6.206 US-Dollars, in Lesotho 1.664 US-Dollars.

Table: Economic characteristics of countries in the Orange-Senqu River Basin in 2010

	Lesotho	*South Africa*	*Botswana*	*Namibia*
Population, thousands	2065	1925	2148	50
GDP (million US$)	14.03	2.13	11.87	357.3
GDP per capita (US$)	14.000	1.700	6.900	10.700
Composition of GDP				
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2.1%	8.4%	8.8%	2.5%
Mining and quarrying	<1%	7%	35%	11%
Manufacturing and utilities	45.8	33.9%	33.7%	30.8%
Services	52%	57.7%	57.5%	66.7%

Source: www.indexmundi.com 2011

The Orange River plays a major role in supporting agriculture, industry and mining. Two large water schemes have been created, the Orange River Project and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Agriculture (most of it subsistence agriculture) employs more than half of the basin's population; a considerable portion is also employed in the industrial sector. Distribution of water use differs substantially between the Vaal River and the Orange River. While most of South Africa's heavy industry and mining activities are situated within the Vaal catchment, making urban and industrial consumption most important, irrigation gains more significance in the middle section of the basin, and ultimately accounts for 94% of water use on the Lower Orange River (Davidsen 2006).

Next: Key Issues for Human Development