
Interview: Sanusi Abdullahi

Preparing the Way for The Transaqua Project

Sanusi Abdullahi, an engineer, is the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Lawrence Freeman interviewed him on Nov. 20 in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad.



LCBC

EIR: This week we completed the inaugural session of the International Scientific Advisory Committee of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), which you initiated. Could you summarize what was accomplished in these discussions?

Abdullahi: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. Let me say that during the last donors' conference for funding the five-year investment plan, it was recommended that we should set up an international scientific committee to guide us in the implementation of the program. We also had that idea, but the meeting reinforced the need. During this same operation, we are pleased to have people who have a wealth of experience, and the discussions were very rich indeed. It was concluded that the committee will intensify activities in 2015 with a set roadmap and specific activities that will help the commission to actualize the program in place.

EIR: Was the meeting successful in your evaluation?

Abdullahi: The meeting was really very successful, because to have participants come from the U.S. and Europe shows the commitment, at least from the people we selected—the fact that they would spare the time. The full participation of the members we invited was very successful.

EIR: We discussed during our deliberation, the need to transfer water to Lake Chad; that simple conservation would not be sufficient. The Transaqua water project, which was developed over 30 years ago to transfer 100 billion cubic meters of water from the Congo River Basin to the Chad River Basin, was discussed in our meeting, but it has not been supported by the donors, nor by institutions from the West. What are your thoughts about the need for us to begin to work on the Transaqua proposal?

Abdullahi: Thank you very much for this question. Let me say we have had the opportunity to get in contact with Dr. [Marcello] Vichi, who was lead engineer for the conceptualization of this Transaqua program; that contact became possible as a result of setting up this committee. That adds value to the fact that the meeting was a success.

The issue of transferring water from the Congo to Lake Chad is, to my mind, the surest way to save this region from so many other problems: not only the issue of climate change, but social, economic integration, and so many other things. During the donor conference, the decision of the political leaders was to stick to taking necessary steps within the Lake Chad area and the tributaries that feed Lake Chad, as a prerequisite to the grand plan to transfer water. From the engineering standpoint, you cannot begin to actualize the transfer of water from the Obangi to Lake Chad, when you know that Lake Chad, as it is now, cannot receive the water.

So yes, we may have some people who are not supporting it at this point in time, but we are not deterred. We are able to articulate good reasons to show them the need to support this program. We are trying to make the work for the transfer of water from the Obangi to Lake Chad a priority; we will show the details and the economic analysis for the program to sell itself, so the revenues can be generated. But now we are concerned about the immediate actions needed to prepare the ground, as it were, for receiving the water.



EIRNS/Donielle DeToy

A boat transports schoolgirls to islands in Lake Chad where they live. The islands appeared as the lake's waters dried up, and the villages on them are illegal. Villagers will have to be resettled when the Transaqua program brings water from the Congo to replenish the lake. Sanusi intends to make sure that the people are relocated to more attractive places and a better life.

EIR: Yesterday my wife and I had the pleasure of taking a boat ride on Lake Chad; we visited a fishing community, where unfortunately, the living conditions were not sufficient for the kind of development of people we need. Do you think that the development of Transaqua would improve the economic conditions of these communities that depend on the lake?

Abdullahi: This is one of the issues we are trying to address, really, to say that this interbasin water transfer program is a long-term issue. The village you saw is an “illegal settlement”; it is supposed to be part of the lake. So we are actually doing a census to map out these locations for eventual relocation in the future. We carry out activities to identify new [villages], and to see if old ones have moved; we are tracking them. Eventually, we will know how to plan to relocate them in an environmentally friendly way, with less social problems, because once you bring in water, you are telling those villagers they have to go. So we are planning.

I had a TV interview about a year and half ago, and I mentioned that we need to identify the people who are living in the lake illegally, as it were. and then try to relocate them properly, with their own consensus, in an environmentally friendly way, prior to the actual transfer of water. We are not even encouraging infrastructure development in those places for now, because we need to relocate the people. We want to ensure that the new locations we are proposing that these people go to will be so attractive that they would

prefer to go there than stay where they are—hopefully, if we get the support.

EIR: We received a letter from Dr. Vichi, the author of Transaqua, which he wrote for the meeting of the International Scientific Advisory Committee [see accompanying article], and he challenged the LCBC and its members to take up Transaqua, because it is an economic development program that will affect not only the Lake Chad

Basin but the Congo Basin as well. He said in his letter, “It is in the interest of your children and grandchildren” to take up this challenge. I was wondering if you could respond to that.

Abdullahi: Yes, thank you. Actually, I am writing a reply to Dr. Vichi to appreciate his interest in this issue and his commitment to Transaqua and the transfer project.

Reality speaks for itself. Since I came on board, I have been trying to find this guy. and luckily for me. I met one gentleman, Lawrence Freeman, in Washington, D.C., who was able to catalyze this process and got me involved. I hope before the end of this year I will go to Italy to find Dr. Vichi, because I consider him the key to our success. I consider him a “reservoir” of knowledge that we need to go to and swim in and drink. And I am sure that knowing him is going to help this program a lot and help the commission.

EIR: Thank you very much for this interview. My wife and I wish the greatest success to the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and we believe that they are in good hands under your leadership, and look forward to future trips and travels and collaboration with you.

Abdullahi: Thank you very much, and my regards to *Executive Intelligence Review*, and we hope to collaborate more, and we need you to make our case known to all those who will listen and try to convince them to do something. And that the time is now!