

The History of an Association with a Continental Calling

UAWS was created after many negotiations which led to predict an uncertain future. Yet, slowly but gradually, it built a soul and an identity for itself by becoming an unavoidable association among water, sanitation and environment professionals.

Its long walk lasted 31 years and enabled it to boast of a rich past and many achievements.

Part One: The beginnings

1. Motivations and objectives Because of the continued decrease of rainfall, population increase, health and sanitation problems, UAWS's founding fathers paved the way for the future UAWS during a preparatory meeting in Abidjan on Wednesday, February 7, 1979. Given the never-ending problems that plague the water sector, this Union appeared as crucial. But so much bargaining took place before it was created!

2. Approaches and negotiations From the Ivoirian Marcel Zadi Kessy (1980-1990) to the Congolese (2004-2005), through the Moroccan Fouad Mohamed Djerrari (90-92), the Gabonese François Ombanda (92-94 et 97-99), the Ghanian E.K. Y Dovlo (94-96), the Benin presidents Geofroy Chekete (February-December 96) and Tamama Roufaï (January-June 97), the Senegalese Abdoulaye Bouna Fall (2000-2002), the Tunisian Abdelaziz Mabrouk (2002-2004). The several presidents from throughout Africa have shared the honor of presiding over the fate of UAWS, thus lending that Union the continental calling that its founding fathers assigned it. But what difficulties there were at the beginning!

Indeed, the February 1979 meeting mentioned earlier was held only after aggressive and long-term diplomatic dealings throughout Africa and the world.

Part Two: The way the Union has come

1. The First Congress at the Hotel Ivoire (February 4 to 8, 1980) The first Congress was held From February 4 to 8, 1980 at the Hôtel Ivoire in Abidjan. What was only a dream for some people came into being!

The Abidjan Congress was a tremendous success, well beyond what the founding members expected, with a promising new membership rate (18 Members) and an agreement of the various views on the issues raised.

Thus, on February 8, 1980, at the close of the Abidjan Congress, the appointments at the important positions in the Union were made at everybody's satisfaction.

2. The Organs and the types of members For its operation, UAWS created several bodies. As the executive body of the Association, the Executive Board was responsible for managing and attending to the business and common interests of the Union.

- **The Congress**, which takes place other year, is a scientific and technical forum during which the Assembly take stock of the development of the water, sanitation and environmental sector in Africa.
- **The General Assembly**, held which takes place once a year, brought together mandated representatives of the Regular, Affiliated and Honorary Members. As the

top organ of the Association, it ratified the decisions or proposals put forth by the Executive Board.

- **The Executive Board manages and represents the political entity of the ASSOCIATION.** It proposes the actions and the decisions to be discussed by the General Assembly . The Scientific and Technical Council studies all the problems arising in all the fields of activity of the public production and supply of water or sanitation. The Administrative Secretariat is the permanent executive agent of the Executive Board. In this capacity, it accomplishes tasks assigned to it by the latter. It dispatches information on current business, take care of correspondences and keep the minute books of the Union. There is three types: **Regular, Affiliated and Honorary Members.** From 18 Regular Members in 1980, that number has increased to 37 since the Cape Town **General Assembly** held in 2003. The trend is also on the increasing side regarding **Affiliated and Individual Members**, for UAWS's international calling is further asserted as time goes by.
- **Regarding the resources**, the Union mainly relies on the contributions of its Members but also on gifts and aids from international agencies.
- As far as communication is concerned, UAWS set up, in the early days (as early as 1982), a quarterly bulletin known as UAWS-INFO. This journal which is more than 21 years old has always acted as liaison between Union Members.

3. A Continental and international calling

On April 5, 1982, the second Congress of UAWS was held in Rabat, following the constituent assembly held in Abidjan. The theme chosen was : Pricing, Subscribers' management and vocational training.

Beyond the success of that Congress, there was the landmark call by Mr. Divungi Di Ndinge, a UAWS founding Member and new Minister of Energetic and Hydraulic Resources of Gabon.

This call held the attention of congress attendants because it called upon all decision-makers, all African governments on the UAWS and its. This call issued in Rabat elicited favorable reactions in June 1985 in Libreville, on the occasion on the third Congress as the Ministers supervising a few UAWS Corporate Members decided to discuss the Union's activities.

On the other hand, the theme of the Congress, "The Decade at Mid-Term" was UAWS's call on international conscience following the call by the United Nations.

4. The change of headquarters (March 1988)

Following the Bangui Extraordinary General Assembly in March 1988, several decisions were taken:

- The headquarters of the Union was from then on set in Abidjan, Côte-d'Ivoire.
- The functions of Administrative Secretary will be taken care of by the Société de Distribution d'Eau de la Côte-d'Ivoire (water supply utility of Cote d'Ivoire) (SODECI).
- The General Assembly decided to keep the composition of the Executive Board as it was (it was last renewed in March 1986) until the General Assembly scheduled to be held in Abidjan in February 1990 on the occasion of UAWS's 5 th Congress.

Another change occurred in Bangui at the level of the presidency of UAWS. President Marcel Zadi Kessy did not want to seek another term of office. Indeed, two years later, during the 5th Congress held in Abidjan, the first president of UAWS handed over his seat to the Moroccan Fouad Mohamed Djerrari.

5. Many Congresses held up to this day

Twelve congresses (including the Accra Congress) have been held since the inception of the Union : The congresses are international fora during which the experts from all over the world come to present their experiences on several topics dealing with water, sanitation and the environment.

Beside the congresses, many seminars and workshops have been organized on interesting topics on the Corporate Members' various fields of activities.

6. Many actions carried out

Given the objectives UAWS set for itself, it has succeeded in:

- providing its members with results of studies, researches and surveys in all the water fields of activity.
- arousing a lot of general interest and the desire to improve the means of the profession.
- maintain close relations with all the regional, continental and international agencies related to the object of the Association.
- organize congresses, colloquia, seminars, workshops and technical sessions.
- institute awards and distinctions in order to promote and encourage Members to perform better.

Third Part: The new lines of action

1. Third Part: The new lines of action

The reorganization of UAWS initiated in 2000 right after the Durban Congress and materialized by the setting up of an Ad Hoc Committee was implemented by experts and consultants, including Mr. Traoré Zakari. The process consisted in trying to find out what could be the new mission and lines of action of the union.

Noting that new partners such as water vendors or small water supply systems that are not part of water management in general have emerged because of the slow investments or shortage of equipment in our countries, Mr. Traoré Zakari thinks that a new partnership is necessary in order “to cover the areas which have remained untouched and ultimately to enable consumers, be they dependent on our services or on other services to be satisfied.”

2. The change of course

It was on April 25, 2003 in Cape Town in South Africa that UAWS changed its course. The statute and bye-laws were modified.

UAWS changed its name to become the Association africaine de l'eau (Glossary Link AAE) in French and African Water Association (AfWA) in English. The purpose was revised to take into account general environmental issues.

3. More dynamic organs To become more dynamic and achieve the means to meet its new challenges, UAWS restructured its organs.

Since 2000, individual members (private individuals or corporate bodies, namely professionals, scholars and researchers, whose works are related to the potable water, sanitation and environmental sector) joined the Union. The number of Executive Board members has increased from 10 to 12 since February 2002 in Libreville. Since the Cape Town General Assembly (2003), The Administrative Secretary has become the General Secretary.

4. Water Utility Partnership (WUP)

The Water Utility Partnership (WUP) is an African regional capacity building programme with a focus on urban (including the urban poor) water utilities. It is a joint Programme initiated by institutions ; the African Water Association (AfWA), the Regional center for Low Cost water and Sanitation (CREPA), the Training, Research and Networking for Development (TREND) and the World Bank. The Programme was launched in July 1996 during an international conference on the reform of the Water Sector in Africa. In addition to these founding agencies and in the broader context of programme implementation, the WUP considers all agencies providing support for the implementation of this programme as Partners.

Conclusion

After 31 years, UAWS decided to change its course by initiating another stage of its growth. Now known as the African Water Association (AfWA). It wants to win the challenge for a partnership for African populations' sustainable access to potable water and sanitation services.