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From Scientific Understanding to a participative framework for Joint Action: the RAMOTSWA Project

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The importance of groundwater and transboundary aquifers is receiving growing attention in Africa. Demand for optimal cross-border management of these shared resources has risen with growing recognition of their existence and critical links to water supply and sanitation, livelihoods, and other productive activities. In practice, cooperation on such shared aquifers nonetheless remains quite scant. Limited cooperation is due in large part to constraints on knowledge, which is needed to inform the shape that cooperation takes.

The Ramotswa transboundary aquifer is shared between Botswana and South Africa. The RAMOTSWA project is a 5-year project that aims to develop a long-term joint vision and cooperation on the shared groundwater resources of the Limpopo basin and build a community of practice around transboundary aquifer management in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The project has recently completed its first phase (2014-2017), which focused extensively on compiling knowledge on the nature of the resource, socioeconomics, and institutions. The project's second phase (2017-2019) will build on the scientific understanding of the first phase by focusing on particular areas including the development of a groundwater model and exploration of opportunities for Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR). More broadly, the second phase will elaborate – in collaboration with stakeholders on both sides of the border – a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) that aims to translate scientific understanding into jointly prioritized actions for improving water management in the Ramotswa Transboundary Aquifer Area. Underpinning this effort will be the project's continued focus on the Ramotswa Information Management System (RIMS), reflecting the need for ongoing and institutionalized monitoring.

The presentation will provide an overview of the project, outline the process through which the SAP is currently being developed, and discuss transferability of the approach utilized in the Ramotswa aquifer to other aquifers and surface-groundwater systems in and beyond the SADC region.