



Report

Seminar of the Regional Working Group and the first meeting of the Expert Group in the project «Strengthening cooperation on water quality in Central Asia»

November 24-25, 2016 – Almaty, Kazakhstan

1. Brief background
<p>The seminar of the Regional Working Group along with the first meeting of the Expert Group was organized in the framework of the “Strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia” project, which is implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), and funded by Finland and FinWaterWEI. The main goal of the Project is to support improvement of basin-wide, regional cooperation on water quality.</p> <p>UNECE and CAREC have already been working in this direction within a previous project of 2009-2012.</p>
2. Goal
<p>The main purpose of the meeting was to strengthen cooperation in the Central Asian region on water quality issues through joint discussion, development of an Annual Work Plan at the regional level, and building the capacity of specialists from national agencies in order to improve water quality management.</p> <p>The Agenda is enclosed (Annex 1).</p>
3. Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- To present best practices on water quality cooperation in Central Asia;- To study the experience of European countries and to discuss the possibilities of its adaptation in the region;- To develop skills and discuss the opportunities of best practices adaptation in the region;- To discuss possible activities at the regional level;- To approve an Annual Work Plan to be implemented within the Project.
4. Participants
<p>The two events were attended by representatives from Central Asian Environmental</p>

agencies, Water ministries, Hydromet services, Departments of the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Control, academia and independent institutions. Most of these institutions have also contributed to the activities performed within the previous Project in 2009-2012. All 5 CA countries were represented at the meeting.

Including representatives of the UNECE, CAREC, International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), Chu-Talas Water Commission (Kazakhstan part), World Bank and international experts, altogether more than 30 people participated at the meeting. The full list of participants is attached as Annex 2 to the Report.

5. Executive summary

The issue of water quality presents substantial importance for Central Asian countries, which are connected by transboundary rivers, especially, from the perspective of irrigation and drinking water supply. However, the decision-making in these countries is more concentrated on matters of water allocation, overshadowing the crucial problem of water quality in the region.

In order to foster cooperation in addressing the abovementioned issues UNECE and CAREC launched the implementation of this Project in early 2016. A two-day regional seminar on «Strengthening cooperation on water quality in Central Asia», along with the first meeting of the Expert Group are the initial activities within the Project.

The seminar was mainly focused on enhancing the capacity of specialists from national agencies of five CA countries through exploring the best practices on water quality monitoring and management in both Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The participants were acquainted with the progress analysis of national monitoring systems in CA countries. The development over the past 20 years has resulted in a poor performance due to lack of funding and equipment, bottle-necks in the sharing of information and, in some cases, insufficient qualification of lab tech experts. Some positive developments can also be observed such as an evolving cooperation on water quality between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. To some extent this is related to the previous actions of the UNECE-CAREC project on Water quality in 2009-2012.

Cooperation on water quality was presented from the two following perspectives:

- International – the experience of Moldova in monitoring and water quality control based on water quality classes, as well as the cooperation between Ukraine and Moldova with focus on joint water sampling and development of a transboundary water agreement on the Dniester River. Another example of cooperation and experience exchange on this level was the study tour for the Chu-Talas Water Commission (Kazakh and Kyrgyz parts) to the Sava River Basin (Croatia) that was accounted for;
- Regional – the efforts of EB IFAS towards establishing cooperation on water quality in Syr Darya River Basin as part of the Aral Sea Basin Programme 3, laboratory and monitoring cooperation in the Chu-Talas basin, CAREC's work for sustainable water quality management in CA and the initiatives under the UNECE Water Convention.

The main challenge that emerged during presentations and discussions was the difficulty to adopt best practices and new mechanisms for water quality control (e.g. water quality classes, joint monitoring, multilateral data processing, etc.) without regular and sustainable regional cooperation and harmonization of national policies related to water quality management.

The regional working group members also discussed an interactive case to exercise critical thinking, collaboration and planning skills in resolving the consequences of a chemical accident on a certain river from the standpoint of different stakeholders.

On the second day of the event the participants alongside the water experts discussed and

prioritized activities for the Project Annual Work Plan.

The overall openness of the discussion, free exchange of opinions, numerous questions and suggestions by participants during the meeting and seminar contributed to strengthening and expanding cooperation among five Central Asian countries within the framework of the Project.

6. Minutes

• Opening of the event

Mr. Bo Libert, UNECE Regional Adviser on Environment Division, and Mrs. Yekaterina Strikeleva, Smart Waters project manager in CAREC, addressed the participants with welcoming remarks.

Then Ms. Assel Amit, CAREC Water Initiatives Support program specialist, presented the agenda of the meeting and gave a brief overview of the project, introducing its goals, objectives and results of the preceding project.

6.1. Presentations and discussions during the seminar

• November 24, 2016

Mrs. Yekaterina Strikeleva, presented models of the national water quality management systems, accounting for the progress of the status of national monitoring systems in CA countries over the past 20 years. The progress analysis included indicators (quantity of observation stations, sampling points, sampling frequency, etc.) that mostly revealed a negative pattern. The root causes of these tendencies come from the following issues: lack of funding including for equipment, stationary and mobile laboratories; limited qualification of lab techs and poor information exchange, particularly, the absence of unified national databases on the status and use of water resources. Among other things, Mrs. Strikeleva also presented the results of the previous CAREC-UNECE project during 2009-2012.

Those participants, who were involved into the activities of the previous project made their add-ons to the presentation.

Further, Mr. Ruslan Melian, Scientific Coordinator of the Center for Strategic Environmental Research "ECOS", presented the experience of Moldova in monitoring and management of water quality. The presentation uncovered a potential for CA countries to adopt an effective system of water quality management based on water quality classes.

The subsequent discussion between local water experts and representatives of Central Asian environmental authorities showed, that despite a common post-Soviet ground of Moldova and CA countries, the implementation of a similar system in the region would be quite problematic. Mr. Amirkhan Kenshimov, Deputy Director of the Executive Board of IFAS in Kazakhstan, along with participants from the Kyrgyz Republic, highlighted the risk of switching to a method of the water quality classes, if the water management system of a second country sharing the river or lake would remain based on indicators of the threshold limit value (TLV). Different approaches may make it difficult for countries to establish a constructive dialogue. The lively discussion reflected the willingness and importance of developing sub-regional cooperation on water quality management.

Mr. Bo Libert made a presentation "Transboundary cooperation on water quality: international experience" referring to experiences from implementation of the UNECE Water Convention. He also referred to the previous practices of improving the legal framework for regional cooperation on water quality within the UNECE-CAREC project on Water quality in 2009-2012, highlighting the specific recommendations for Central Asia.

The afternoon session started with a second presentation by Mr. Ruslan Melian, where he

demonstrated the case of Moldovan-Ukrainian cooperation in the Dniester River as an example of transboundary cooperation on improving water quality management. The participants became acquainted with the aspects of joint water sampling, consistent water quality indicators and transboundary water agreements between Moldova and Ukraine. During a follow-up discussion, the interest focused on activities of 2 bilateral working groups at the Dniester River, as well as on perspectives for the development of coordinated and collaborative monitoring system, communications and data processing methods for Central Asian countries.

Another example of cooperation on water quality was demonstrated from the perspective of capacity building and experience exchange between the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Chu-Talas Water Commission and the International Sava River Basin Commission with its Secretariat in Croatia. Representatives of the Chu-Talas Water Commission, national experts from the Departments of Water Resources and environmental agencies of the two countries participated in a study tour to the Sava River Basin. Having been part of the Chu-Talas delegation, Ms. Lyudmila Nyshanbayeva from the Agency on Hydrometeorology at the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic, presented the program of the study-tour and training, impressions and results.

Mr. Atabek Umirbekov, CAREC specialist on climate change, finally presented the project "Influence of climate change on surface water quality in the Amu Darya River Basin".

- Case study and group work

The final task of the first day included the presentation of a case study and discussions of this case study in 5 groups where countries and agencies represented were mixed.

The case presented and discussed dealt with an accident on the agro-chemical factory leading to the discharge of approx. 30 tons of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals into the River "X". In order to address the problem of water quality in the River "X", each group member had to choose one of the following stakeholder-roles:

- Upstream countries (the political level);
- Downstream countries (the political level);
- Farmers using water from the river for irrigation;
- The civil society (non-governmental organizations, the media, activists);
- Industry and large agricultural production.

Participants tended to choose roles, which were opposite to their career positions/geographic location of their country in real life. Thus, the representatives from upstream countries wanted to look at the situation from the downstream country's perspective, while the decision-making participants tried to solve the issue from the stance of ordinary farmers.

All 5 groups presented their solution to the case study. Generally speaking, the solutions to the challenge proposed by participants included the following steps:

- emergency information campaign from the upstream countries to the downstream countries about the accident, and also deployment of trained personnel, timely communications, necessary equipment and tools;
- study of the real causes and possible consequences of the accident;
- negotiation processes within / between countries involving government, emergency, environmental and sanitary agencies, public and media on how to

deal with the consequences of the accident;

- creation / activation of a bilateral working group for emergency situations, which may cause a serious damage to the water quality of the River "X".

- **November 25, 2016**

Mr. Batyr Hajiyev, Economic Affairs Officer, Deputy Head ESCAP/UNECE Office, made a presentation on current global trends and state of political cooperation in Central Asia.

Ms. Aigul Dauletkulova, specialist at the Zhambyl branch of Kazhydromet, presented the specifics of water quality control in the Chu-Talas basin and the possibility of joint monitoring at the basin. The presentation displayed actual data on surface water sampling and laboratory measurements on such pilot rivers as Talas, Shu, Aksu, Karabalty, Toktash and Sarykau.

Mr. Amirkhan Kenshimov made the final presentation of the two-day seminar, which reflected the efforts of EB IFAS in Kazakhstan to develop cooperation on water quality in the Syr Darya River Basin. He reported on the latest results of water quality monitoring in the Syr Darya River Basin, and accounted for the relevant interstate agreements. However, some of the results, particularly, the increased level of water salinity, require a basin-wide collaboration in order to prevent the further deterioration. This is another reason, why the activities of the project "Strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia" are so important.

6.2. Development of the draft Annual Work Plan

Most of the participants in the Regional Working Group meeting also participated in the Expert Group Meeting that had as the objective to provide input to the development of the Annual Work Plan for the project. Ideas were collected for the following three thematic categories:

1. Development of a knowledge product on water quality at the regional level;
2. Support activities related to water quality for specialists in CA countries;
3. Joint water quality monitoring.

On the basis of individual priority-setting and general discussion on components of the Annual Work Plan for the project, the working group agreed on the following priorities:

- Under **Category №1** – to undertake 5 national needs assessments aimed at national / regional Hydromet laboratories to determine measures needed for effective water quality management, the subsequent consolidation of the 5 national needs assessment reports into a regional report;
- Under **Category №2** – to hold trainings with practical as well as theoretical content on specific topics for selected groups of experts;
- Under **Category №3** – to organize a joint monitoring pilot of a defined river stretch for CA lab tech specialists in order to determine the quality of water using a unified methodology according to the standards and regulations of a specific country (the following pilot rivers were suggested: Kokbulak, Chu-Talas, Syr Darya, Mailuu-Suu, Shahimardan, Naryn, Isfara).

It was agreed that the list of priority actions in each of the categories will be further developed in the framework of the project and reflected in the Annual Work Plan.

7. Outcomes and recommendations

The participants of the Meeting adopted the following conclusions and recommendations concerning the issues on the agenda:

- To acknowledge the importance and productivity of the work carried out within the framework of the previous project during 2009-2012 as a solid foundation for implementation of the current project;
- To approve the prioritization made for the draft Annual Work Plan. CAREC and UNECE will finalize the Annual Work Plan;
- To recognize the need of permanent Regional Working Group on water quality in CA region and to start the process of official approval of the participants of the Meeting as designated members of the WG.

1stday, 24 November, 2016

Time	Presentation	Speaker
Seminar of the Regional Working Group		
09.30 – 10.00	<i>Registration of participants</i>	
10.00 – 10.15	Welcome speeches. Introduction	<i>Mr Bo Libert</i> Regional Adviser on Environment Division United Nations Economic Commission for Europe <i>Ms Yekaterina Strikeleva</i> Smart Waters project manager
10.15 – 10.25	Joint initiative of UNECE and CAREC to strengthen cooperation on water quality in Central Asian region	<i>Ms Assel Amit</i> CAREC Water Initiatives Support program specialist
10.25 – 10.45	Models of the national water quality management system	<i>Ms Yekaterina Strikeleva</i> Smart Waters project manager
10.45 – 11.30	Water quality management and monitoring aspects: experience of Moldova	<i>Mr Ruslan Melian</i> Scientific Coordinator of the Center for Strategic Environmental Research "ECOS"
11.30 – 12.00	<i>Coffee-break</i>	
12.00 – 13.00	Transboundary cooperation on water quality: international experience and best practices Improving the legal framework for regional cooperation on water quality: recommendations for Central Asia	<i>Mr Bo Libert</i> Regional Adviser on Environment Division United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
13.00 – 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14.00 – 14.45	Transboundary cooperation and sustainable management in the Dniester basin: water quality aspects	<i>Mr Ruslan Melian</i> Scientific Coordinator of the Center for Strategic Environmental Research "ECOS"

14.45 – 15.15	Adaptation of best world practices in Central Asian region: the results of the study-tour to Sava river basin	<i>Ms Lyudmila Nyshanbayeva</i> Agency on Hydrometeorology at the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic
15.15 – 15.40	<i>Coffee-break</i>	
15.40 – 16.00	Influence of climate change on surface water quality in the Amu Darya River Basin	<i>Mr Atabek Umirbekov</i> CAREC Specialist on climate change
16.00 – 17.30	Interactive task (consideration of the work of the multilateral Commission on Water Quality)	<i>Facilitators</i> <i>Ms Tais Reznikova, Ms Amit Assel</i>
17.30 – 18.00	Questions/Answers. Discussion	<i>Facilitators</i> <i>Mr Bo Libert, Ms Yekaterina Strikeleva</i>

2nd day, 25 November, 2016

Time	Presentation	Speaker
09.30 – 10.00	Current global trends and state of political cooperation in Central Asia	<i>Mr Batyr Hajiyev</i> Economic Affairs Officer Deputy Head ESCAP/UNECE Office, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
10.00 – 10.30	Cooperation on water quality in the Chu-Talas basin and the possibility of joint monitoring	<i>Ms Aigul Dauletkulova,</i> Branch of RSE "Kazhydromet" in Zhambyl region
10.30 – 11.00	Cooperation on water quality in the Syr Darya basin	<i>Mr Amirkhan Kenshimov</i> EB IFAS in Kazakhstan
11.00 – 11.30	<i>Coffee-break</i>	
The first meeting of the Expert Group		
11.30 – 13.00	Discussion of potential measures to improve water quality cooperation	<i>Facilitator</i> <i>Ms Tais Reznikova</i>
13.00 – 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14.00 – 16.00	Individual prioritization of actions for the development of draft Annual Work Plan – joint discussion	<i>Facilitators</i> <i>Ms Anna Inozemtseva, Ms Amit Assel</i>

List of Participants Seminar of the Regional Working Group and the first meeting of the Expert Group in the project «Strengthening cooperation on water quality in Central Asia» November 24-25, 2016				
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