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WHO/Europe



Republic of
Kazakhstan



CAREC



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

SUBREGIONAL WORKSHOP TO SHARE EXPERIENCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNECE-WHO/EUROPE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH FOR COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The subregional workshop to share experience in the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health (hereinafter “the Protocol”) for countries of Central Asia was held on 21 and 22 October 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The workshop was organized jointly by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Government of Kazakhstan, with support from the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe). It was the fifth subregional workshop organized under the programme of work of the Protocol for 2011-2013 within a regional project supported by the Government of Finland.
2. The workshop was attended by thirty experts coming from countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and other parts of the pan-European region, representing environment, water and health sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Representatives of international organizations and regional NGOs were also present.
3. All presentations delivered at the workshop are available at:
<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35959>

II. OBJECTIVES

4. The objectives of the workshop were to:
 - Facilitate exchange of countries’ experiences on the regulatory, institutional and technical aspects connected with the implementation of the Protocol, in particular in relation to the cooperation of the water, health and environment sectors;
 - Share information on the process of development and adoption of targets and target dates under article 6 of the Protocol, as well as on the implementation of measures to achieve such targets;
 - Present, discuss and identify solutions for the main challenges in the process of setting targets and other issues related to the Protocol’s implementation;
 - Discuss water and health issues common to all countries of Central Asia, among others, focusing on:

- a) Small-scale water supply and sanitation systems;
- b) Water safety planning approaches;
- c) Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases;
- d) Public participation in issues related to water and health;
- e) Post-2015 development agenda and the possible Sustainable Development Goal(s) on water;
- f) Levels of performance of water supply and sanitation systems, including technical aspects of drinking water and wastewater systems management.

III. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Session 1: Introduction to the Protocol on Water and Health and to its main obligations

5. During this session participants were familiarized with the main obligations for Parties under the Protocol with focus on the process of target setting.

Session 2: Application of the Protocol with focus on the process of target setting

6. During this session participants learned about the experience of Hungary and the Republic of Moldova in setting and implementing targets and targets dates under article 6 of the Protocol and discussed how this experience could be useful for the countries of Central Asia. Representatives of subregional countries shared the status of their progress in the application of the objectives and principles of the Protocol. Specifically, the following was mentioned:
 - In Kazakhstan, a study to analyze the effectiveness of application of the Protocol was initiated with the support of the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogue on water resources management (NPD). The study will cover legal, institutional and financial aspects of possible accession of Kazakhstan to the Protocol and its implementation in the country;
 - In Kyrgyzstan, the targets and target dates set in the context of the Protocol were officially adopted in June 2013. The process of their implementation will be linked with the realization of the national health strategy and other key national programmes;
 - In Tajikistan, draft targets and targets dates in the context of the Protocol were adopted at the national NPD Steering Committee meeting in May 2013. Targets were drafted in 11 out of 20 target areas and are closely linked with main strategic documents adopted by the Government;
 - Representatives of Uzbekistan and the NGO community of Turkmenistan shared information on water and health related challenges in their countries and steps taken by national authorities to continuously improve access of population to water and sanitation.

Session 3: Water and sanitation safety planning

7. In the course of this session, the representative of WHO/Europe introduced the main concepts of water and sanitation safety planning as promoted by the WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality. A case study on the application of the water safety plan approach in Tajikistan was also presented.

Session 4: Surveillance of and response to water-related disease

8. The representative of Hungary introduced obligations under the Protocol related to surveillance of water-related disease and the experience of Hungary in this field. Particularly, the discussions covered: i) the provisions of article 8 of the Protocol on response systems; ii) guidelines documents published by WHO to assist Parties in the implementation of those provisions; and iii) main water-related diseases and the situation in Central Asia with their incidence and outbreaks.

Session 5: The role and the modalities of public participation in the implementation of the Protocol and in setting targets and reporting

9. During this session, representatives of NGOs from Armenia and Tajikistan shared their experience in promoting public participation on issues related to water and health. Participants were also familiarized with the process of preparation of the *Guide to Public Participation under the Protocol on Water and Health*.

Session 6: Small-scale water supplies and sanitation

10. The representative of WHO/Europe introduced issues related to small-scale water supplies and sanitation in the pan-European region and how they were addressed within the scope of the programme of work under the Protocol. A representative of CAREC presented a case study on the sustainable water supply project in remote villages of Kazakhstan, focusing on the involvement of local communities in the reconstruction and further maintenance of the water supply systems. Participants noted that small-scale water and sanitation presents one of the key priority areas for all countries of Central Asia as a majority of rural population is served by such systems.

Session 7: Case studies from the subregion in support of the Protocol implementation

11. During this session the representative of NGO Oxfam presented a case study on its activities on water and sanitation in Tajikistan.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

12. Inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure and significant deterioration of existing facilities, especially wastewater treatment plants, were underlined as key challenges for Central Asian countries along with specific problems faced by small-scale water supply and sanitation systems.
13. Participants also highlighted the importance of improving interministerial and intersectoral cooperation and the need to involve the public more actively in the work under the Protocol.

14. Based on the results of the discussions in plenary and in break-out groups, the following additional challenges were raised by participants:

- a) Uneven allocation of water resources within countries. Even in countries with abundant water resources, acute water shortages on local level may occur due to local conditions;
- b) Inadequate progress on sanitation, especially in relation to national Millennium Development Goals;
- c) Inadequate access to water and sanitation, especially in rural areas;
- d) Lack of maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure, especially in rural areas;
- e) Lack of qualified personnel to manage water and sanitation facilities;
- f) Relatively high incidence of water-related diseases and their outbreaks;
- g) Need to update institutional structure and relevant norms and standards in water and sanitation sector;
- h) Need to manage water resources in an integrated manner, especially in the light of climate change and its impacts on water resources in Central Asia.

Annex: Evaluation of the subregional workshop to share experience in the implementation of the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health for countries of Central Asia

1. The participants were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the event by assigning each of the following indicators a mark from 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (extremely useful):
 - Relevance of subject to your work/area of expertise
 - Knowledge and skills obtained for your future work
 - Providing a forum for exchange of information with other participants
 - Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts
 - Identification of good practices and lessons learned

None of the participants answered, that the event was ‘not useful at all’; the results of the evaluation of the usefulness of the event are presented below in Figure 1.

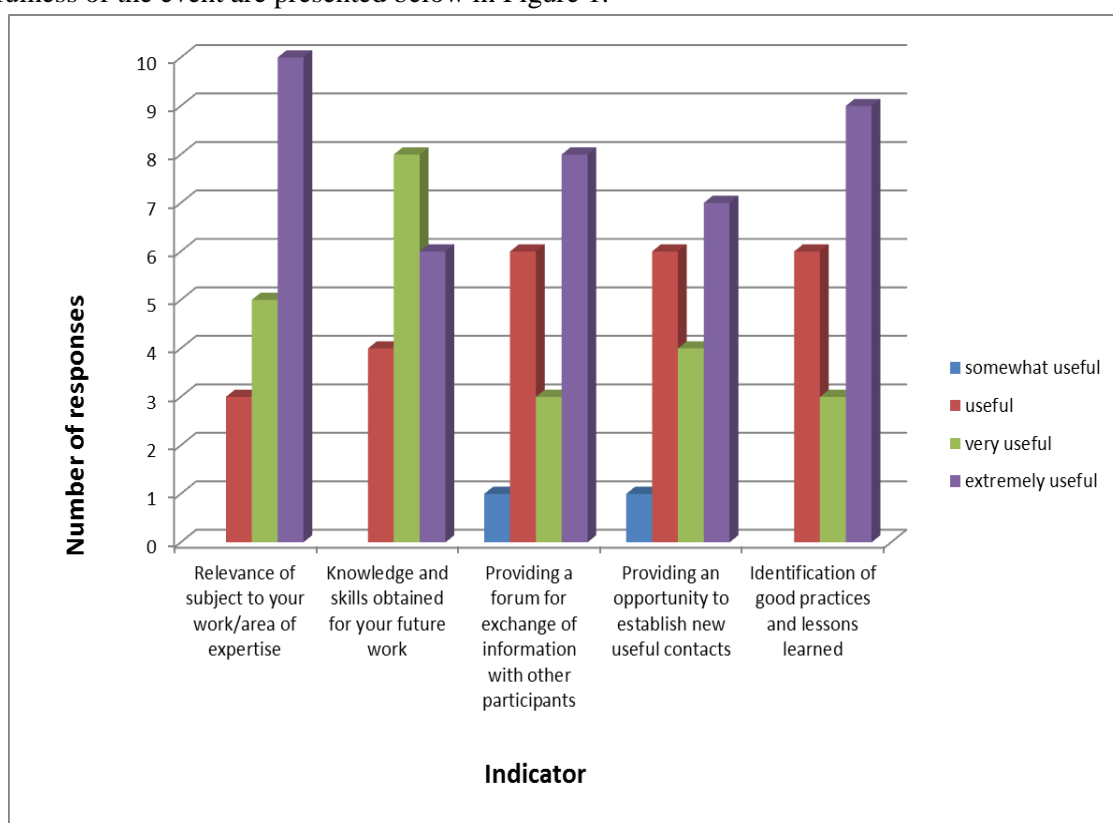


Figure 1. Usefulness of the event

2. The participants were also asked to evaluate the organization of the event by assigning each of the following indicators a mark from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent):
 - Structure of the programme
 - Quality and clarity of presentations
 - Quality of written material circulated by the organizers
 - Organizational arrangements before and during the event

None of the participants answered that the organization was poor; the results of the evaluation of the organization of the event are presented in Figure 2:

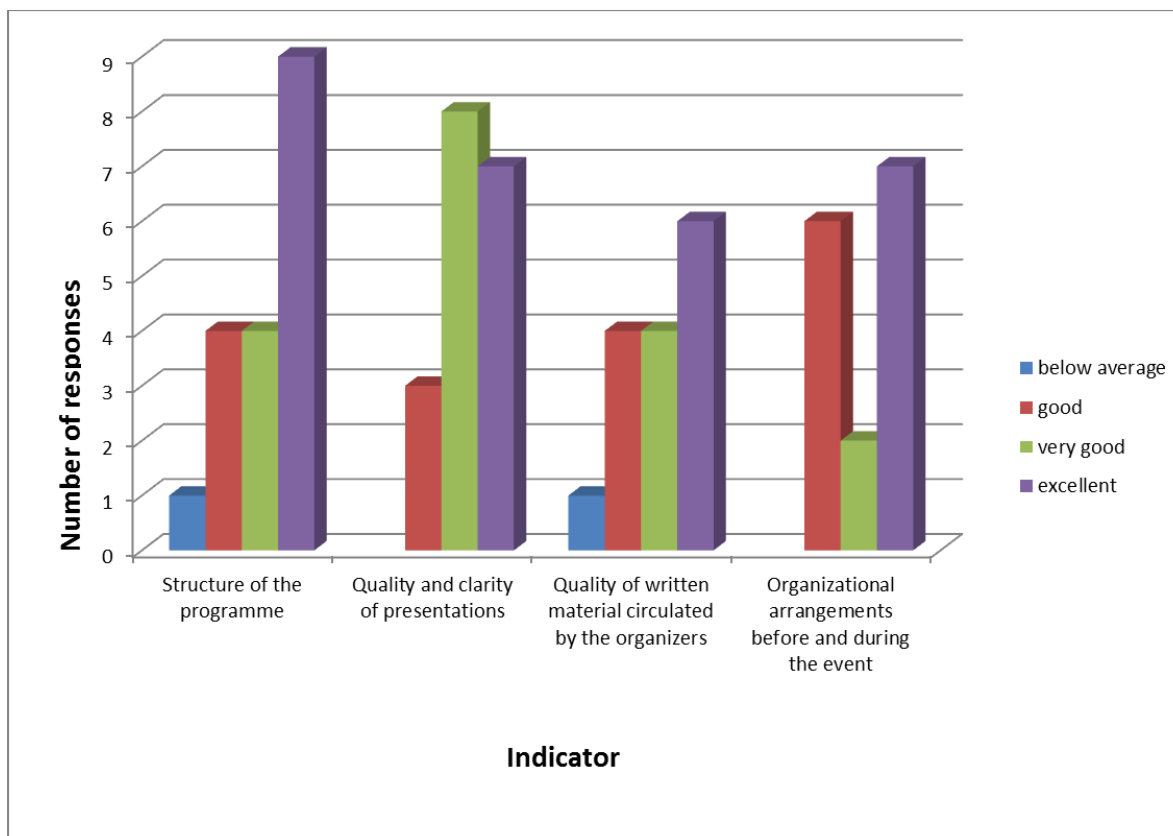


Figure 2. Level of organization of the event

3. The majority of participants described their overall impression of the workshop as very positive. The participants mentioned the following in relation to the event: i) was a good platform to discuss issues with colleagues from other countries; ii) presented very relevant topics; iii) had high level of organization; and iv) provided a very pleasant environment, both professionally and personally.
4. The participants were positively impressed with the following characteristics and components of the event:
 - reports on the state of water situation in the countries
 - sufficient time for discussing the topics
 - secretariat's competency and comments
 - quality and conciseness of the presentations
 - range of topics and flexible program
 - presentations by the experts from countries that are Parties to the Protocol; shared experience in setting targets and target dates
 - active participation and experience sharing between the experts from different countries
 - good selection of the participants and topics of their presentations
 - overall organization, because the event went very smoothly

The participants also pointed out to the following areas where the organization of the workshop could be improved:

- not enough time for clarifying questions
- repetition of some of the presented materials

- insufficient opportunities for networking
 - not enough representatives of the health sector
5. Generally, the participants highly evaluated the relevance of discussed topics for their work, and all of them answered that they will be able to share acquired knowledge with colleagues in their current or future work. Some of them mentioned they will attempt to implement some of the practical knowledge obtained during the workshop, and some indicated that the workshop allowed for a better understanding of the provisions of the Protocol.
6. Finally, the participants were asked to propose 3 concrete suggestions about aspects that could be highlighted in future workshops/meetings that could be grouped as follows:
- Financing:
 - Present solutions that could be implemented under the conditions of the financial constraints;
 - Present financial and economic mechanisms and instruments that could help in implementing the provisions of the Protocol;
 - Attract potential donors to the workshop.
 - Case studies:
 - To include more best practices in the case studies, especially from Central Asia and from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus;
 - To include best practices on setting and implementing targets under the Protocol.
 - National level:
 - To investigate if certain provisions of the Protocol already exist in the national legislation;
 - To elaborate on the role of the government in implementing the Protocol;
 - To elaborate on national methodologies of assessing the access to drinking water and sanitation;
 - To develop a regional mechanism of implementing the Protocol, that would suit countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
 - Practical implementation:
 - To elaborate on concrete challenges of implementing the Protocol, such as data collection, setting targets, prioritizing among several issues;
 - To develop pilot projects for demonstration;
 - Present mechanisms for attracting experts' support;
 - Bring more practitioners to the workshop;
 - Present rapid assessment tools;
 - Water safety plans and their implementation;
 - Cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness of the implementation mechanisms.
 - Public participation:
 - Elaborate on means of communication under the Protocol;
 - Present interactive methods of attracting attention to water and sanitation issues.