

Concept Note

Further development of regional cooperation among the countries of Central Asia in the management of information on the environment and water resources

Almaty, 9-10 June 2014

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012 has generated new momentum, with governments renewing their political commitment to drive progress in the social, economic and environmental spheres. The Rio+20 outcome document speaks about the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks. Based on the decisions of the 2009 IFAS Summit, the UNECE has provided support to the institutional and legal strengthening of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

Reliable, comprehensive, agreed and easy to interpret information is an important part of effective decision support at the national and regional levels. A systematic effort to strengthen regional cooperation should include, as one of the first steps, concrete measures to improve information management. In Central Asia a well-functioning regional platform for information on sustainable development, environment and water management has yet to be developed.

Last year a SIC ICSD Task Force supported by the UNECE prepared an analytical report that contains several recommendations on strengthening ICSD. Based on this report, a Road Map, containing a series of concrete steps and projects has been developed and was discussed by the ICSD in its meeting in Dushanbe on 3 April 2014. Both the Analytical Report and the Road Map highlight the need to improve the management of environmental information at the regional level. In Dushanbe ICSD adopted a decision requesting the UNECE to provide assistance to organise a seminar on the elaboration of methodological approaches and requirements for the development of a unified information space on the environment and sustainable development in Central Asia.

Information on the environment, water resources and hydro-meteorological data often overlap or are complementary. Creating a decentralized but unified information space that would cover all the above areas would not only be more economical but would significantly increase the usefulness of the information space both for scientific purposes and for decision making.

Indicators of sustainability of economic development in turn need to be developed and agreed upon in light of data and analysis in all three of the above areas.

The UNECE seminar on 9-10 June 2014 in Almaty on regional information management will focus on environmental information as part of a broader regional information space for Central Asia. The seminar will gather representatives of national agencies and regional organizations and institutions responsible for information management in the above areas. Invitees will include experts of ministries of environment protection, water resources management and hydro-meteorological organizations, as well as ICSD, SIC ICSD, EC IFAS, SIC ICWC, the BVO-s and the RHC. Representatives of key donors, relevant regional organizations, the Global Water Partnership, the International Office for Water as well as CAREC will also be invited to provide information on their on-going projects, availability of technical assistance and funding.

The seminar builds on the results from the meeting “Strengthening Analysis for Integrated and Adaptive Water Resources Management in Central Asia” held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in July 2012 in cooperation with the World Bank and SDC. It also builds on the “Report on the results of analysis of the survey on improving informational services in the water sector of Central Asia (July 2011, Tashkent – Almaty – Geneva)” (<http://cawater-info.net/concept/>).

A specific focus of this meeting is to follow up on the objective to strengthen the regional institutional capacity. The experience, knowledge and know-how on information management that exist in the region would provide a solid basis for the development of the unified regional information space. The workshop is expected to undertake a general assessment of information management at the regional level with a specific focus on the role of regional organizations now and in the future including their institutional and legal strengthening. It will focus on environmental information, identify shortcomings and needs and discuss the fundamental principles that need to be respected when developing a unified regional information space:

1. Balance of national and regional ownership
2. Importance of consultations and collaborative efforts
3. Increasing accessibility of analyses through improved formats
4. Emphasis on open source data and information products
5. Building human capacity in combination with emerging technologies
6. Institutional and financial stability.