

Annex VI. Terms of Reference of the evaluation

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Evaluation of the project

“Strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia”

funded by the Government of Finland

I. Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to review the implementation and assess the extent to which the objective of “Strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia project (hereinafter “Project”) was achieved. The evaluation will assess the *relevance* of the projects for the beneficiary countries, *coordination, synergies* and *complementarities* with other programmes, *effectiveness* in reaching relevant outcomes, *efficiency* in the use of human and staff resources in reaching project objectives, *sustainability* of the project and *impact* on strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia. The results of the evaluation will support improvement of the future technical cooperation projects and activities implemented by UNECE. The results of the evaluation will be important for the discussion with donors and partner organizations for any future work by UNECE in the Central Asia region and beyond

II. Scope

The evaluation will be guided by the objective, outcomes, activities and indicators of achievement established in the logical framework of the original and revised project document. The evaluation will consider to what extent the project (a) strengthened framework for water quality cooperation in Central Asia, and (b) substantive information on water quality in Central Asia jointly produced and made publicly available. The evaluation will cover the full period of implementation from September 2015 to December 2018.

The evaluation will assess how gender considerations were included the projects’ design, execution and results. It will make recommendations on how gender can be included in the design of future projects in UNECE.

The full project documentation includes project design, monitoring reports, progress reports to donors, partnership arrangements with relevant actors. All relevant information will be made available, including documentation and interviews, activities of partner organizations, any previous relevant reviews or evaluations conducted, and any other information which pertains to UNECE efforts in the successful execution of the project will be included in the evaluation.

III. Background

There is a concern in Central Asia over declining water quality with implications for human health in shared rivers such as Syr Darya and Amu Darya. However, there is no formal transboundary cooperation on this issue established in Central Asia which makes it difficult to define the magnitude of the problem as well as to efficiently address it.

There is an understanding among the experts of the importance for regional cooperation in water quality. However, weak institutional and human capacity remain the key obstacle to efficiently address water quality management policies in the region.

Based on previous activities the project aimed to reduce the deterioration of water quality through improved basin-wide cooperation on water quality by:

- Establishing and institutionalized cooperation between national authorities of the five/several Central Asian countries responsible for water quality issues;
- and,
- Producing substantive information on water quality in Central Asia and its sharing

To this end the project focused to: establish a Regional Working Group on Water Quality; strengthen cooperation on water quality management with the involvement of regional Central Asian bodies, such as IFAS, ICWC, ICSD and CAREC as well as with national environmental, health and water authorities in countries of Central Asia; and, strengthen information sharing on water quality in the region.

One of the key outcomes achieved by the project is related to the formal establishment of a Regional Working Group (RWG) on Water Quality based on the decision of the CAREC Governing Board. The project supported annual meetings of the RWG, development its annual work plans, drafting the Terms of Reference of the RWG. The project has also facilitated capacity building events, improvement of water quality management processes at the national level and regional levels thereby strengthening transboundary cooperation. Another milestone achieved by the project is the development of 5 national reports on needs assessment and monitoring systems on water quality. The reports provide a deepened analysis of existing national systems on water quality management in 5 countries, assessment of the needs and recommendations for improvement. Based on the national reports a synthesis report will be developed that will provide a regional prospective in addressing water quality issues in the Central Asia.

Result 1: Strengthened framework established for water quality cooperation in Central Asia

Indicator 1 in the Logframe: *The countries have agreed on the mandate of the Regional/Project Working Group on Water Quality*

In December 2017, the Working Group members discussed and drafted the main points to be included in the Terms of Reference of the RWG. The mandate of the RWG, including its mission and circle of responsibilities (ToR) has been drafted and submitted for consideration to the respective institutions of five Central Asian countries. The ToR planned to be endorse at the final RWG meeting scheduled to place in Tashkent in September 2018.

Indicator 2 in the Logframe: *The countries have agreed on the work plan of the Regional/Project Working Group on Water Quality and progressed in implementation*

The November 2016 meeting of RWG prioritized a list of activities on addressing water quality issues as part of the Annual Work Plan of the project. It also included enhancing capacity of professionals responsible for water quality assurance and control in Central Asia. Thus, the project supported a training session on Joint Planning of Transboundary Monitoring Network and Visualization of Data on Water Quality. The 2017 activities plan also included the assessment of needs of national hydrometeorological services on water quality monitoring issues with respect to national and regional interests (information and data, lab-capacities, transboundary cooperation). On the basis of this assessment, five national reports and the synthesis of regional report on water quality and monitoring systems of CA were prepared. Building on the progress of the project in 2017, the RWG members prioritized the following activities that were implemented in the final phase of the project:

- Translation and dissemination of the regional report on needs assessment of water quality monitoring systems in Central Asia;
- Elaboration and endorsement of the mandate of the Regional Working Group on Water Quality in Central Asian countries;
- Organization of a demo-tour to UzHydromet for representatives of respective agencies in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to learn about their methodology of hydrobiological monitoring and its application in Uzbekistan.

Indicator 3 in the Logframe: *The Regional/Project Working Group on Water Quality has been established and is convening*

Following the decision by the Board of CAREC in 2015 the Regional Group on Surface Water Quality was established. In November 2016 the meeting of the water quality experts under the project discussed and agreed upon the need on establishing a permanent body to address the water quality issues at the regional level – a Regional

Working Group on Water Quality in Central Asia. The request has been forwarded to the national agencies in 5 Central Asian countries to nominate their members to the group. At the same meeting the participants prioritized and selected priority activities to address water quality issues to be included in the Annual Work Plan (AWP) of the project. One of the key areas identified was the need to conduct assessment of national water quality management systems in countries including the proposals for improving transboundary cooperation and improving information and data management. The two meetings of the group in 2017 discussed the structure of the national reports, the group's Terms of Reference, the regional synthesis report and the work plan for 2018.

Indicator 4 in the Logframe: *Cooperation on water quality monitoring and data exchange as well as information exchange on national policies exists between the countries of Central Asia*

The seminar on «Strengthening cooperation on water quality in Central Asia» took place back-to-back with the meeting of the Regional Working Group on water quality in November 2016. It was 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. Participants were acquainted with the national monitoring systems in CA countries. During the last 20 years a gradual degradation of water quality systems in the countries was revealed. A poor performance of laboratories is explained by 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 be observed in the evolving cooperation on water quality between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan building on previous results of the UNECE-CAREC project on Water quality in 2009-2012. The RWG members suggested to focus project activities on transboundary water quality monitoring. Thus, it was decided to conduct another training on joint planning of the transboundary monitoring and visualization of data on water quality. The training took place in December 2017 for representatives of hydrometeorological and environmental agencies of 5 CA countries. Participants learned about international experience in creating goal-oriented transboundary monitoring programs and developed skills in the joint design of monitoring networks. They also learned about the GIS instruments of visualization of water quality data, which help to optimize the analysis of monitoring information and simplify its perception among decision-makers. The final set of activities included: finalization of the ToR of the Regional Working Group; dissemination of the reports on needs assessment of water quality monitoring in Central Asian countries, and a study tour for experience exchange and knowledge sharing.

Result 2: Substantive information on water quality in Central Asia jointly produced and made publicly available

Indicator 2.1 in the Logframe: *Available information on water quality and water quality cooperation in Central Asia, including information developed under the project, has been synthesized*

The project supported the development of assessment of needs of national water quality management systems including the elements of transboundary cooperation in the region. Based on this assessment, the project developed five national reports and a joint regional report on water quality and monitoring systems of Central Asia. In addition to the needs assessment, the reports provide an up-to-date analysis of legal and policy framework for water quality management in the countries of Central Asia. This data is complemented by recommendations to the regional strategy on transboundary monitoring of water quality from the Diagnostic Report, elaborated within the previous UNECE-CAREC project on Water Quality in 2009-2012. The reports were presented and approved at the RWG meeting on December 5, 2017. The reports were also presented at side-events of the Central Asian International Environmental Forum 2018 (CAIEF) in Tashkent.

Indicator 2.2 in the Logframe: *Process to include information on water quality in a database has been initiated by countries*

The project helped to identify and establish links to national sources of water quality information. Establishing a separate database on water quality issues was not feasible since none of the CA countries had the capacity to properly host it. Hence, the respective data on water quality would be presented in the regional e-library at CAREC Knowledge Hub. All regional publications on water quality are accessed through a specific «Water quality» at the e-library.

IV. Issues

The evaluation will answer the following questions:

Relevance

1. How relevant was the project to the national needs and priorities of beneficiary countries with particular focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan?
2. How relevant was the design of the projects, in line with the achievements and outcomes of other initiatives, such as the Swiss Initiative on Blue Peace Central Asia, the World Bank Central Asia Energy and Water Development Program (CAEWDP), USAID project Smart Waters and other relevant projects and programmes in the region?
3. To what extent was the project design and development interventions relevant for meeting the project objective?
4. To what extent the project was relevant to the UNECE regular programme of work?

Effectiveness

1. To what extent were the expected accomplishments (outcomes) of the projects achieved?
2. What were the challenges/obstacles to achieving the project objective and expected accomplishments (outcomes)?
3. Has the project contributed to improving management of transboundary water quality in Central Asia?
4. Has the project improved capacity of key stakeholders to strengthen transboundary water quality monitoring and regional cooperation?
5. To what extent were the planned activities sufficient to achieve the expected accomplishments (outcomes) and project objective?
6. To what extent implementation of the project supported the expected accomplishments of the UNECE regular programme of work under the Subprogramme 1 “Environment”?
7. To what extent the implementation of the project contributed to the overall objective of the Water Convention?

Efficiency

1. Were the available resources appropriate to the scale of the project and the needs identified by beneficiary countries?
2. Were the human and financial resources allocated to the project used efficiently and commensurate to the project results?
3. Were the resources (financial and human) appropriate to the design of the project?
4. Were the activities implemented according to the planned timeframe?

Sustainability

1. To what extent will the results of the project continue after completion of the project in the beneficiary countries?
2. To what degree the project influenced the practices of beneficiary countries to further pursue cooperation to improve the quality of water shared water resources?
3. Were the measures to enhance sustainability of project results given sufficient attention during the preparation and implementation phases?
4. Based on the analysis of the other projects and initiatives, such as the Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia, Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028 initiative, what are the options to further strengthen the cooperation among the Central Asian countries in the water quality management

Impact

1. To what extent have the project impacted on the institutional and technical capacity challenges at the national and regional levels to effectively address regional water quality problems?
2. To what extent the project impacted effective decision-making and information exchange between the countries on water quality?

I. Methodology

The methodology for the evaluation will include the following:

1. Desk study of project materials: all relevant project documents, including project descriptions, reports, publications, etc. and other information will be provided to the evaluator.
2. Interview with key stakeholders (face-to-face, via telephone and skype) including: the Central Asian Regional Environment Center in Almaty; Blue Peace Central Asia; ED IFAS in Almaty.
3. Some of the interviews, particular with representatives of water management authorities from Central Asian countries, will be conducted by the evaluator at the FIN Water Regional Conference planned for 26-27 September 2018 (Issyk-Kul). In addition, the event will provide an opportunity to meet and discuss the project implementation and results with donor and partner organizations dealing with the water management issues in the region. If the mission to Issyk-kul will not be feasible to arrange the consultant shall undertake another mission (to be defined in consultation with FinWaterWei) to meet and discuss the project and its results with the national and/or regional beneficiaries and experts that were involved in project implementation.
4. Interviews with key stakeholders to take place during the workshop, via skype/telephone (list of contacts to be provided).
5. An electronic survey of internal and external stakeholders, conducted in both English and Russian.

UNECE will provide all documentation, support and guidance to the evaluation consultant as needed throughout the timeline of the evaluation. The consultant shall be provided with the UNECE Evaluation Policy, evaluation report templates and checklists as guidance for the requirements for evaluation reports in UNECE.

The evaluation report of maximum 15-20 pages will summarize the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. An executive summary (max. 2 pages) will summarize the methodology of the evaluation, key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the UNECE Evaluation Policy. The consultant shall be provided the evaluation report templates and guidance for the requirements for evaluation reports in UNECE. The evaluation will comply with the UNEG Norms and Standards, including due consideration of the gender aspects of the project's design and implementation. UNECE will provide all documentation as needed throughout the timeline of the evaluation. UNECE will provide support and further explanation to the evaluator as needed.

Based on these terms of reference the evaluation consultant will write a report of maximum 15 pages (plus possible annexes such as interview summaries) with a 2-page self-standing executive summary of the evaluation results.

II. Evaluation Schedule

The evaluation schedule follows:

1. Desk review of all documents provided by UNECE to the Consultant 1-15 September 2018
2. Developing and preparing interviews 15-24 September 2018
3. Participation in Issyk-Kul workshop, interviews 28-29 September 2018
4. Follow-up skype interviews and studies 1-15 October 2018
5. Delivery of Draft Report 30 October 2018
6. Comments back to the evaluator after review by project manager and selected project participants 20 November 2018
7. Delivery Final Report 20 December 2018

III. Resources

Resources available for the evaluation is \$10,000 inclusive of all costs.

The Project Manager (Batyra Hajiyev) will manage and provide guidance during the course of the evaluation. The Programme Management Unit (PMU) will provide guidance to the Project Manager and evaluator as needed on the evaluation design, methodology and quality assurance of the final draft report.

IV. Intended Use/Next Steps

The evaluation will be consistent with the UNECE Evaluation Policy. Following the receipt of the final report, UNECE will develop a management response, and action plan for addressing recommendations made by the consultant. The results of the evaluation shall be considered, together with other project evaluations conducted during 2018, by senior management in UNECE to address systemic inefficiencies or challenges to effective project implementation in UNECE.

V. Criteria for Evaluators

Evaluators should have:

- An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant to the projects disciplines;
- Minimum 10 years of relevant experience. Working experience related to projects or issues in water management in Central Asia is highly desirable;
- Specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management, social statistics, advanced statistical research and analysis;
- Demonstrated relevant professional experience in design, management and conduct of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, and project planning, monitoring and management;
- Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations;
- Fluent in written and spoken English and Russian.
- Good computer skills (especially Microsoft office applications).

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to UNECE before embarking on an evaluation project, and at any point where such conflict occurs.

Annex: Project documents