



**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA
(SPECA)**

Twelfth Session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 6 December 2017)

**PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE SPECA THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS**

This document contains information on the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council which was held in Ganja, Azerbaijan, on 23 November 2016.

**A. ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED INSIDE AND/OR OUTSIDE THE SPECA
REGION**

I. WORKING GROUP ON WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The 21st session of the SPECA Working Group (WG) on Water, Energy and Environment was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 14 June 2017. The meeting was conducted in the margins of the 8th International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development and followed the official opening of the EXPO-2017 “Future Energy”. Participants stressed the importance of SPECA both in strengthening regional cooperation and on a deeper integration of the region in global economy. The participants also stated an existing potential of the WG in facilitation of the achievement of SDGs in SPECA countries, and that the WG efforts to support attainment of the countries’ sustainability in water, energy and environment issues should be further intensified.

At its 21st session the WG agreed that it will:

- Provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving SDGs with a focus on the SDGs directly related to water, energy and environment (including, but not limited to SDG 6 and SDG 7);
- Improve awareness of SPECA countries on the water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, including taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; and
- Become a platform for identification and coordination of technical issues within the scope of WG competence. This might further promote strengthening of mutual trust at political level.

It was highlighted that SPECA may consolidate and facilitate efforts of regional organizations, particular the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development of Central Asia (ICSD), the Central Asian Regional Environment Center (CAREC) that are assisting countries in achieving those targets that are heavily dependent on strong and coherent regional cooperation, such SDG 6. It was also noted that within the foreseen perspective, fossil fuels in several countries will continue to dominate energy balances,

while other countries will remain reliant on hydropower. At the same time, the necessity to accelerate a move towards a more sustainable energy system based on diversified energy mix was widely acknowledged. Widespread adoption of clean coal technologies, broader use of renewable sources of energy, increase energy efficiency, and hydropower capacities' upgrades can make a significant contribution towards increasing sustainability.

With regard to the future role of the participants from the SPECA countries agreed that the WG should: continue providing a platform for supporting progress towards achieving SDGs with a focus on the Goals directly related to water, energy and environment; raise awareness in SPECA countries on water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs through facilitating extensive exchange of information and sharing of best practice experiences; retain the status of a platform for identification of emerging trends and coordination of technical issues within the scope of the WG competence.

The directions of work during the reporting period included the following:

Dam Safety in Central Asia: Capacity-building and Subregional Cooperation

During the reporting period, the 3rd phase of the UNECE project focused on the development of national legal and institutional frameworks for dam safety in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, and initiated in Kyrgyzstan. A new safety monitoring system on the Ortotokoi dam in Kyrgyzstan was established with support of the project. The monitoring system went through operational tests and found fully functional. On the regional level a model of national regulation for the establishment of a cadastre for hydro-technical installations, and a report on recent global developments in the area of dam safety was produced.

A Regional training seminar took place in St. Petersburg in April 2017. Seminar participants stressed the importance of national legislation in improving dam safety. Challenges discussed included the need for new or revised laws to better control the safety of ageing water infrastructure, the establishment of responsible institutions and improved safety inspection procedures and monitoring. The necessity to improve dam safety cooperation on transboundary rivers in Central Asia was also highlighted. They also stressed the importance of continued capacity-building and development of cooperation between the countries in Central Asia, including with the support of UNECE.

More information on the project can be found: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety.html>

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

The UNECE project on “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Chu and Talas River Basins”, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, started in 2015. It aims to broaden the bilateral cooperation, including on environmental issues. UNDP and UNECE are responsible for project implementation. Project activities in 2016 were mainly linked to the development of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis. Information about the work under the Commission can be found at <http://www.chutalas-commission.org/>.

UNECE contributed, including through consultations with the Chu-Talas Commission and its Secretariat and drafting of terms of references, to the establishment of the Working Group on Environmental Protection as well as the Working Group on Adaptation to Climate Change and

Long-term Action Programs. Information about the work under the Commission can be found at <http://www.chui.at.kg>

National Policy Dialogue Steering groups in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, managed by UNECE and supported through a number of meetings, were used as inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms between two countries.

Promoting Cooperation to Adapt to Climate Change in the Chu-Talas Transboundary Basin

A follow-up of the previous UNECE project on climate change adaptation with the objective to develop a joint strategy for climate change adaptation was initiated in 2015. This UNECE project aims to further improve the adaptive capacity of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to support dialogue and cooperation on assessing impacts of climate change on water resources and identification of possible adaptation measures in the transboundary context and thereby prevent controversy on the use of water resources. The project is closely coordinated with the above mentioned GEF project and is funded by Finland.

The project has provided extensive inputs to the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) drafting process. The climate change related component of the TDA was drafted by the project and presented to the stakeholders for their comments. The project team participated in the first joint meeting of the Working Group on Adaptation to Climate Change and Long-term Programs of Action (Bishkek, 25-26 May 2017) and held a dedicated session on climate change adaptation. A training on water and health in the context of climate change was organized on 8 December 2016. The training built capacities of the members of the Chu-Talas Water Commission's Working Group on the Protection of Environment on understanding linkages between climate change, water quality, drinking water and sanitation. Identification of pilot adaptation measures for support through the project was initiated and preparations are underway to start implementation at the end of 2017.

Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia

The Programme "Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia" was launched in 2008 by the Government of Germany. A Programme component "Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management" has been implemented since 2009 by the UNECE, with the aim to empower the countries of Central Asia to develop and implement mutually acceptable, long-term solutions to improve cooperation on transboundary water resources. Enhancing the regional dialogue and strengthening the capacity of regional institutions for water resources management are the major objectives.

Phase III of the UNECE project was initiated in 2015 with the main focus on the development of a shared information space for water and environment in Central Asia and further capacity-building on international water law. The fourth meeting of the Coordination Group for the establishment of a Regional Information Space for energy, water and environment took place in December 2016. The group consisting of representatives of regional organizations agreed to produce regular e-bulletins and a catalogue on new digital information products issued in Central Asia. More information is found here: <http://www.cawater-info.net/information-exchange/index.htm>

In June 2017, the process of IFAS rotation to Turkmenistan has been completed. UNECE co-organized a number of preparatory and capacity-building events: training on administrative, financial and operational procedures for the functioning of IFAS, a donor and stakeholders

meeting, and a meeting for donors and international organizations. The June session of Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) decided on including the revision of Regional Environment Action Plan as the voluntary contribution to Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E). For more information see:

<http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.html>

Water Quality in Central Asia, second phase

In cooperation with authorities from all countries the UNECE project, funded by Finland, aims to further develop regional cooperation on water quality. In November 2016, the First Regional Group meeting of water quality professionals convened to discuss problems of water quality in the region and took a decision on the need of establishing a permanent Regional Working Group on Water Quality in Central Asia and to start the process of official nomination of members of this Working Group. The annual work plan was finalized in March 2017. The key and immediate areas the working group identified are: water quality specialist's capacity building and development of a knowledge product on water quality at the regional level (For information see:

<http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>)

Strengthening Cooperation on Transboundary Watershed Management between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the Upper Amu Darya River Basin

The UNECE project supports Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the development of hydrology and environment cooperation in the upper Amu Darya basin. The Ministry for Water and Energy and the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan and the Committee for Environmental Protection and the Hydromet of Tajikistan are project partners. On the basis of existing bilateral agreements the two countries aim to strengthen their cooperation and information exchange. Building on successful cooperation on exchange of information on hydrology of the Pyanj River the countries are now aiming at signing the new agreement on strengthening environmental cooperation over the Pyanj River. The OSCE Office in Dushanbe has expressed its interest in revitalizing its support to the project in cooperation with UNECE.

Project activities are funded by the Russian Federation and Finland. More information including an "Atlas of cooperation" can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/water/areas-of-work-of-the-convention/envwatercentralasia/strengthening-cooperation-on-hydrology-and-environment-between-afghanistan-and-tajikistan-in-the-upper-amu-darya-river-basin.html>.

Application of clean, renewable and/or alternative energy technologies for rural areas in Central Asian countries

The objective of the UNECE project is to strengthen national capacities of the Central Asian countries to enhance access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy through off-grid, micro- and mini-grid solutions in rural and remote areas.

The objective of the project has been achieved through the following strategy:

- Conducting national assessments for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy provided by off-grid solutions with the focus on rural and remote areas, and on identifying potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas.

- Developing a prefeasibility study for future implementation as a pilot project.
- Organizing an end-of-the-project workshop for experts and governmental officials from Central Asian countries to present the results/recommendations of the project.

As a result of the project, potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas have been identified and pre-feasibility study on the biogas plant at the farm near Kant town in Kyrgyzstan has been developed.

Promoting Renewable Energy Investments for Climate Change Mitigation and Sustainable Development

Under the framework of this UNECE project, 25 experts from 5 SPECA countries participated in the International training course on “Business Planning for Renewable Energy”, Policy seminar on “Enabling Policies to Promote Financing Renewable Energy Investments” and Regional Workshop on “Developing a Regional Renewable Energy Investment Pipeline”. The training events were designed to help representatives of private and public companies better prepare and implement renewable energy (RE) projects. It also aimed at raising awareness about RE investments, including through public-private partnerships, among financing organizations. Participants improved their financial engineering and business planning skills to identify, select and develop RE investment projects and prepare bankable project proposals.

Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

Among others three SPECA countries are the beneficiary of the project: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Development Account project Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia aimed to help countries with economies in transition to identify best practices, measures and procedures relevant to prepare a sustainable energy transition, with a particular focus on the cross-cutting nature of energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy access. The project assists target countries in development of their national action plans for energy for sustainable development drawing on best practice guidance from the UNECE and ESCAP, and will help to convert the plans into effective national policy frameworks. Two training sessions were held in 2017 focused on methods for collection, verification, aggregation and reporting of data, as well as statistical indicators relevant for monitoring of sustainable energy development. The trainings increased knowledge of national experts on relevant best practices on collection and monitoring of national data on sustainable energy in compliance with international standards.

Tracking progress in implementation of SDG 7 in SPECA countries

ESCAP is working on tracking progress in implementation of SDG 7 by collecting sustainable energy related indicators, policies and information on the energy infrastructure development in SPECA countries. This is a part of the region wide knowledge hub called Asia-Pacific Energy Portal - a “one stop shop” aggregator of open-access energy information for the Asia-Pacific region. It is a web-based, interactive information platform designed to increase the accessibility and use of Asia-Pacific regional energy information to support research, analysis, and, ultimately, informed decision-making. It is the only platform to offer free access to an extensive set of energy statistics, full-text policies, and infrastructure maps. It offers a collection of more than 200 datasets covering access, efficiency, renewables, trade flows, subsidies, investment and more from global institutions including the UNdata, International Energy Agency (IEA), World Bank,

International Monetary Fund (IMF), Energy Information Administration (EIA), United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), and Bloomberg. It also provides a set of policies sourced from official websites. With the InfraMap section, the Portal offers an interactive spatial and temporal display of power plant infrastructure in SPECA countries plotting more than 300 points of conventional and renewable energy power generation. Combining the three main information types of data, policy, and infrastructure creates a powerful analytical tool for all energy related stakeholders in SPECA countries. The Asia-Pacific Energy Portal can be found at: www.asiapacificenergy.org.

Promoting an integrated approach to the Sustainable Development Goal planning, focusing on Goal 6 on water and sanitation, with a pilot project in Tajikistan

In May 2017, ESCAP released a publication on “Integrated Approaches for Sustainable Development Goals Planning: The Case of Goal 6 on Water and Sanitation”.

The publication highlights how the system thinking approach can be used to develop strategies and plans for the integrated and holistic implementation of the 2030 Agenda, focusing on the example of SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation and its linkages and relationship with other Goals.

The comprehensive methodology assists policymakers in:

- reviewing existing institutional architecture and mandates to determine their relationship with the 17 SDGs;
- assessing the impacts of policies and identifying effective policy interventions (leverage points) for impactful investment and use of scarce resources; and
- stakeholder mapping and engagement in collectively developing the aspirational qualitative vision for societal change.

A pilot project for the application of this ESCAP analytical framework has been implemented in Tajikistan by the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) with the objective to introduce the framework at the subregional level as well.

A full model was developed in a multi-stakeholder fashion. Water Quality (SDG 6.3) and Water Governance (SDG 6.a) were the two leverage points identified for effective and impactful interventions at the policy level.

Application of Biogas Technology Model for Rural Areas in Kyrgyzstan

The objective of the UNECE project is to introduce a cost-effective green technology biogas model in the rural area of Kyrgyzstan. The project delivers concrete renewable energy solutions for rural application and targets the rural community near the Kant town in Kyrgyzstan. The objective of the project will be achieved by installation of a biogas unit. Also capacity-building workshops on small-scale renewable energy solutions in Central Asian countries will be conducted after installation of the unit.

The proposed project supports Sustainable Development Goal 7 “Affordable and Clean Energy”. The project also supports one of the Action Areas, which were developed by the Secretary-General’s High-Level Group on SE4ALL, i.e. “Providing access to electricity through off-grid, micro- and mini-grid solutions, including targeted applications for productive uses.”

II. WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY

Efficient transport connectivity plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries. Therefore, inland transport infrastructure development, facilitation of border-crossing procedures, railway and intermodal transport development and improvement of road safety is a priority for cooperation in the SPECA subregion. Since 1998, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) have been supporting these developments as alternating secretariat to the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG-STTC).

The 22nd session of the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG-STTC) was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 1-2 November 2017. The session was hosted by the Ministry of Investment and Development of Kazakhstan, assisted by UNECE and ESCAP. Representatives of SPECA countries, multilateral development banks and international and domestic transport organizations participated in this event.

Transport-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and assistance to SPECA countries in implementing and monitoring SDGs was the focus of the 22nd session of the SPECA WG-STTC. Proposal on how to include SDG-related actions in the Programme of Work for 2018-2019 and to address challenges in SDGs achievement was prepared for adoption by SPECA countries. Furthermore, the following topics were be discussed: importance of regional cooperation in transport infrastructure development, better regional and international connectivity and border-crossing facilitation. SPECA countries' representatives and UNECE and ESCAP shared the information on recent transport infrastructure developments and activities for more efficient transport operations. The session of the WG-STTC discussed:

- Facilitation of international road and rail transport;
- Accession to and implementation of UN transport conventions; and
- Activities for better road safety.

All documents and presentations of the 22nd session are available at: <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/>

The aim of the SPECA Workshop “*How to achieve transport related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*” (2-3 November 2017) is to strengthen the transport-related SDGs knowledge of SPECA and East-European countries. Capacity-building event, under the SPECA WG-STTC umbrella, provided information on transport-related SDGs, presented the UNECE activities related to achieving the SDGs, and then went on to specific knowledge-sharing on how to gather reliable and comprehensive transport and road safety statistics. The Workshop increased knowledge of transport SDGs and assisted in understanding the methodology for gathering transport statistics, as well as how best to make this information available to decision-makers, the transport community and the general public, in such a way that data are comparable across countries and time. The UNECE invited representatives of SPECA and East-European countries, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Euro-Asian Economic Commission to share and learn, and to understand positive aspects and difficulties in providing vital transport information. Furthermore, invited international experts presented best national practices in data collection and dissemination, and how to use available data to monitor/report SDGs

implementation. The workshop was hosted by the Ministry of Investment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The United Nations Development Account Project “*Strengthening connectivity of countries in South and Central Asia, particularly Landlocked and Least Developed Countries, to link with, sub-regional and regional transport and trade networks*” – lead by ESCAP and implemented in cooperation with UNECE, seeks to contribute to the capacity of the stakeholders in the countries of South and Central Asia, especially in the landlocked and least developed countries, to strengthen their links with the subregional and regional transport and trade networks. The SPECA countries - beneficiaries of the Project are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In order to achieve its objectives, the Project explored the possibilities of:

- linking beneficiary countries to the existing and proposed subregional road and railway networks along the Asian Highway (AH) and Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) routes and Europe-Asia Transport Linkages (EATL) corridors based on minimal investments;
- facilitating the movement of goods along these corridors in a mutually beneficial manner, especially for the benefit of the landlocked and least developed countries (LLDCs and LDCs) in these subregions; and
- facilitating trade and investment through the promotion of paperless trade and the creation of economic corridors at the border crossings that could be of particular interest to LLDCs and countries emerging from conflict, such as Afghanistan.

In 2017, the following meetings took place:

- ESCAP organized an Expert Group Meeting on the Draft Regional Framework for the Development of Dry Ports of International Importance, Bangkok, 6 and 7 June 2017 with two SPECA participating countries (Kazakhstan and Tajikistan).

The Expert Group Meeting reviewed the draft regional framework and agreed on the importance of developing the framework and provided comments to refine it. The Meeting also noted that the draft regional framework should be further reviewed by relevant experts of government and industry. Please see: <http://www.unescap.org/events/expert-group-meeting-draft-regional-framework-development-dry-ports-international-importance>.

- ESCAP is undertaking a study to identify infrastructure gaps and challenges, assess existing operational status, and propose mechanisms and measures to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and seamlessness of transport and logistics along three major corridors connecting Asia and Europe by road and railway under the project “*Comprehensive planning of Eurasian Transport Corridors*”. In this connection, two Expert Group Meetings were organized in Beijing, China on 5-6 July 2017 and in Istanbul, Turkey on 20-21 September 2017 with the representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated.
- The UNECE Group of experts meeting was organized in Geneva on 18 September 2017 in order to identify key issues related to existing connectivity capacity and challenges for selecting road and rail corridor(s) that would maximize the economic and social benefits.

The national representatives provided comments to draft report already prepared by the UNECE secretariat.

- The UNECE secretariat organized the Subregional capacity-building workshop in Geneva on 13 October 2017 in order to prepare draft action plans to enhance connectivity in the subregion with active participation of subregional development partners including international financial institutions as well as drawing upon existing training materials and guides prepared by UNECE.

III. WORKING GROUP ON TRADE

In the period between the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the SPECA Governing Council, activities of the Working Group on Trade focused on trade facilitation and the trade-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in collaboration with strategic partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and other development partners.

The main activities of the SPECA Working Group on Trade included:

Trade policy cooperation

The **eleventh session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade** took place at the WTO headquarters in Geneva on 10 July 2017, hosted by the WTO, back-to-back with the WTO Aid-for-Trade Bi-annual review on 11-13 July 2017. Organized at the same time as a High-Level seminar and as a Working Group session, it concentrated on trade facilitation and the link of trade to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Seminar resulted in a set of policy recommendations, endorsed by the Working Group on Trade, as follows:

- Support for SDG 17.10: promotion of the multilateral, rules-based trading system under the WTO should continue, notably, by assisting the countries in their accession and post-accession reform processes; implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement; supporting the regional network of trade negotiators and policymakers, etc.
- On SDG 17.11: continue monitoring and supporting efforts of the countries to raise their share in global exports, notably through trade facilitation and increasing intra-regional trade. Explore possibilities to carry out a study on the impact of increasing regional trade on the countries' economies and their ability to address the SDGs.

As enhanced trade facilitation is required to reduce trade costs, the countries and the Working Group can explore possibilities to:

- Ratify and effectively implement international and regional agreements for trade facilitation; harnessing the potential of Aid-for-Trade.
- Cooperate closer as a single region, which is essential for trade facilitation, and attracting regional investments, developing transport corridors and connectivity.
- Together with development partners, promote integrated trade facilitation.
- Support implementation of category C measures in WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement.

- Further develop transport infrastructure for transit and access to ports; mutual recognition of certificates, on technical and agricultural regulations; harmonize the region's transit system; and to ensure interoperability of Single Window systems in the region.
- Under the guidance of Tajikistan, collect comments from the SPECA countries on the draft regional trade facilitation strategy, with a view to finalize, adopt and implement it.
- Carry out, if possible, a regional study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in the SPECA region.
- Define areas, in which subregional projects in support of trade facilitation, development of regional supply chains, best practices and standards for sustainable trade, would be likely to attract funding.
- Carry out a survey on SPECA countries implementing SDG 17.12: grant duty-free, quota-free preferential access to markets to Least Developed Countries in accordance with the WTO norms.
- Foster the development of a business network in support of trade facilitation in the SPECA subregion, using the expertise of the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation.
- Collaborate on the electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents, in particular under the new United Nations treaty entitled "Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific» (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/RES/72/4&Lang=R)

On the link between trade and social, economic and environmental sustainability, the countries and the Working Group can explore possibilities to:

- Work with international partners such as the Environment and Trade Hub of UN Environment to improve awareness of SPECA countries on the link between trade and the SDGs in the social, economic and environmental fields; develop policy papers on this issue. Possible studies may include the link between trade and environmental sustainability, water management, food security, or other related issues in the region. On this basis:
 - a. recommend possible input to policy decisions in SPECA countries' sustainable development plans;
 - b. help identify next steps, in terms of work programmes, cooperation plans, exchange of best practices, which would incorporate environment and sustainable development more generally into national trade policies and regional trade agreements, promote standards and tools for sustainable trade and the achievement of the SDGs in the subregion; and
 - c. develop a training module for civil servants in Central Asia on sustainable trade.
- Support the exchange of best practices, capacity-building, and joint projects, with the participation of countries in the subregion, in collaboration with UNECE, ESCAP, UN Environment, UNCTAD, the World Bank, ADB, OSCE, GIZ, USAID, and other

organizations. Develop synergies with trade facilitation programmes under CAREC, the EAEU, TRACECA, ECO, and other regional mechanisms.

- Foster subregional cooperation for the use of rules and standards supporting sustainable trade. Focus on growth patterns that support environmental sustainability and job creation as the blue print to ensure sustainable development. Through development projects target environmental sustainability, pollution control, resource efficiency, job creation, and inclusiveness and ensure that trade works towards meeting the SDGs. Promote development strategies and projects that support:
 - a. integrated development planning for inclusive and sustainable growth;
 - b. employment creation, decent work, and redistributive programmes to address poverty, inequality and exclusion;
 - c. managing risks of globalization and building economic resilience;
 - d. economic and trade diversification, which would create sustainable trade opportunities, support environment, sustainable development and efficiency, while creating new “green” jobs; and
 - e. mobilizing financing for the transition to inclusive and sustainable growth.
- Assist the countries in mobilizing additional support for national and subregional implementation of SDGs relevant to trade. Search for a combination of public, private and development partner funding for the achievement of the SDGs. Continue integrating the SDGs into the strategic development documents of the SPECA countries.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships to support the middle class and sustainable development in the countries. Strengthen civil society participation and raising public awareness to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue on Agenda 2030.
- The Working Group, the UNCTs and other development partners will continue collaboration to assist the SPECA countries achieve the SDGs.

Trade facilitation

In 2016, UNECE in collaboration with UNCTAD and the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan carried out an assessment of the readiness of Kazakhstan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). As a follow up to this assessment, UNECE organized a capacity-building seminar on how to establish a National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC): art. 23.2 of the TFA and UNECE TF Recommendations 4 and 40. UNECE assisted Kazakhstan for the notification of measures category B (measures for which the country needs more time) and category C (for which the country needs more time and international assistance). The Government used the results of this seminar to prepare its notification of B and C measures and develop a work plan for the NTFC. The seminar provided assistance for drafting the founding documents of the NTFC of Kazakhstan: decree, ToR, action plan, etc., and identified areas for future work on the implementation of the WTO TFA and other TF activities.

In November 2016, UNECE in collaboration with UNCTAD, GIZ and the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan started an assessment of the readiness of Azerbaijan to implement the TFA, as the Agreement has now entered the package for Azerbaijan’s WTO accession negotiations. In March 2017, UNECE hired a consultant to carry out a survey and organized an opening seminar with the Ministry of Economy. The assessment report was finalized in September 2017.

Support for the implementation of the SDGs

In addition to the UNECE-WTO Trade Policy Forum on 11-13 May 2016 (on SDG 17.10), UNECE developed a policy paper identifying the key SDG targets, on which the SPECA Thematic Working Groups will concentrate. These targets fall within the mandates of the TWGs, and subregional cooperation may significantly help the SPECA countries achieve the SDGs.

Trade Support Institutions

The UNECE Russian-funded project on “*Strengthening the national capacity of trade support institutions of Kyrgyzstan*”, approved in June 2016, is a 24-month project that aims at developing training materials for trade support institutions and familiarizing traders and government officials with international and national trade-related regulations, policies, trends and issues. During 2017, training materials on conformity assessment, market surveillance and risk management in regulatory frameworks were prepared and consolidated.

With respect to the request of SPECA countries (as reflected in the Ganja Declaration of 2016), a conduct of a regional research on streamlining trade regulations and procedures in SPECA countries to enable intra-SPECA trade, to be implemented by ESCAP and UNECE secretariats, a preparatory work (literature survey and secondary data collection) was completed.

Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade

The UNECE secretariat has continued supporting the Governments of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in their efforts to implement the recommendations made in the studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in these countries. The UNECE secretariat has helped the Governments to identify funding for the implementation and is supporting national efforts as appropriate. Funding has been identified among others from the Russian Voluntary Fund and the United Nations Development Fund. The secretariat will continue supporting the implementation efforts.

The UNECE secretariat is identifying additional resources for further national studies in interested SPECA countries and for a subregional study in Central Asia.

Support for the implementation of agricultural quality standards in SPECA countries

Activities organized and financed under UNDA-9 with a focus on Central Asia continued in 2017. UNECE and UNDP organized a workshop on the cross-border trade of fresh fruit and vegetables in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 10-13 July 2017 (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45835>). UNECE international experts from Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, and Thailand trained participants from Central Asia, as well as project managers from UNDP and GIZ on how to improve food security, food quality, food safety and trade in the Central Asian region.

Following the adoption of new UNECE Standard for Dried Apricots in 2016, UNECE continued to support the adoption and implementation of the standard in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. UNECE also developed training material on dried apricot quality in English and Russian. UNECE continued to advise UNDP and aid agencies in the region running a related multi-year training project for producers in all three bordering countries of the Fergana Valley to combine the harvest in a cross-border production scenario, increase export opportunities and provide the Valley’s family farmers with employment and a sustainable income. Currently,

representatives from all three countries have expressed interest in similar work (standard adoption, implementation and training) for several other commodities.

From 31 May until 1 June 2017, ESCAP organized a regional Workshop on Advancing Interoperability of Single Window systems in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan.

IV. WORKING GROUP ON STATISTICS

The objective of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics is to strengthen the statistical capacity in the SPECA countries to produce statistical information in order to monitor demographic, social and economic progress, and the regional integration of their economies. It aims particularly to implement international standards and guidelines for enhancing the capacity of the SPECA countries to produce internationally comparable and reliable data, with a focus on the data needed to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Particular attention is paid to promoting the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which provide the basis for a sound legal and institutional framework for national statistical systems.

UNECE provided the following main types of technical cooperation services:

- Advisory services, aimed at assisting beneficiary countries on the implementation of international guidelines and methodology, and formulation of specific technical cooperation projects/programmes.
- Capacity-building workshops aimed at promoting international guidelines, stimulating the exchange of best practices and supporting the establishment of active networks of experts at the subregional level.
- Technical cooperation projects, including those with multi-sectoral and/or subregional focus, in areas where the UNECE has mandate and expertise.

Technical cooperation activities conducted by UNECE are demand-driven, results oriented and strongly rely on ongoing “Global Assessment” reviews of national statistical systems, undertaken in partnership with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association.

A new round of Global Assessments is underway, with assessments of the national statistical systems of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan completed during 2017. The objective of such assessments is to provide a comprehensive analysis of institutional, organizational and technical capacity of a country to produce official statistics and comply with international standards and recommendations. They cover all national producers of official statistics, including the National Bank and the Ministry of Finance. Global assessment reports provide detailed recommendations for the further development of national statistical capacities with the objective to help national authorities, as well as international organizations and other bilateral partners, to better coordinate and prioritise statistical capacity-building programmes.

Global Assessment reports for SPECA countries provide detailed recommendations for the sustainable development of national statistical systems that are incorporated into statistical capacity-building programmes and strategies (e.g. Master Plans or National Strategies for the Development of Statistics from the World Bank). These strategies are then made operational through annual statistical programmes of work and implemented by the beneficiary countries, with the support of the multi-lateral and bilateral partners, including the UNECE.

In Tajikistan, a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics is being developed with funding from the World Bank, and will build on findings and recommendations provided in the last Global Assessment.

In 2014-2017, the implementation of Global Assessment recommendations is supported through the UNDA 9th tranche Project on Statistics. This project aims to strengthen national capacity of selected SPECA countries for sustainable development of statistics. In 2017, UNECE organized subregional meetings on statistics for SDGs, national accounts, population censuses, measuring poverty, gender statistics, and risk management in statistical organizations. UNECE also organized several national workshops in SPECA countries, including on environment statistics, gender statistics, and modernising statistical production.

A major project, funded by the World Bank, on “*Enhancing Coherence and Integration of Economic and Social Statistics in Support of the Implementation of 2008 System of National Accounts*” started in mid-2017 and will run until 2020. It will include several activities targeted at SPECA countries.

The SPECA countries have been participants and contributors to many ESCAP regional and subregional meetings during the reporting period. This has included meetings on: SDG monitoring, environmental statistics, disaster statistics, economic statistics, social statistics, disability statistics and civil registration and vital statistics. These meetings enhance statistical capacity by supporting the implementation of international guidelines, the exchange of best practices and the identification of development projects.

The SPECA countries are involved in regular capacity screenings conducted within the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (RPES). In 2017, the capacity screening was undertaken for the second time. The results of the screening will be used to identify key topics for statistics development where a regional approach is needed and, by comparing with previous reporting, will be used to provide a measure of the development of statistics in the SPECA region since 2013 (the year of the baseline capacity screening).

With the support of ESCAP, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan conducted studies to improve economic statistics. These projects focused on trade margin surveys and a review of business statistics with a focus on improving the coverage of business statistics.

During 2016-2017, 76 government officials/statisticians from SPECA countries have developed their skills and improved their knowledge on internationally agreed standards, methods and frameworks for official statistics through training opportunities organized by SIAP, particularly related to the following areas: (i) Producing official statistics and indicators for monitor the progress of SDGs; (ii) implementing the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA); and (iii) improving agricultural and rural statistics.

2017 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics

The 2017 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 24-26 October. The main topics for discussion were:

- Progress in the implementation of the SDG indicators, and emerging needs for technical assistance; and

- The use of administrative data for official statistics, including for statistics on SDGs and for agricultural registers.

V. WORKING GROUP ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

This report contains activities organized by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats within the framework of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (WG on KBD). UNECE and ESCAP secretariats carried out the following capacity-building activities for the SPECA countries:

Ninth session of the SPECA WG on KBD

The ninth session of the SPECA WG on KBD was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, on 23 June 2017. The session approved its progress report since the eighth session, adopted its Programme of Work for 2018-2019 and adopted its decisions.

Regional Workshop “Making innovation work for the SDGs”

Alongside the ninth session, the Regional Workshop “Making innovation work for the SDGs” was held in Bishkek on 22-23 June 2017. Topics covered during the Regional Workshop included:

- Peer review of policy recommendations of the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan;
- Regional insights on making innovation work for the SDGs;
- Innovation, Disasters and SDGs in Asia and the Pacific; and
- Social enterprise and impact investment for sustainable development.

Implementation of the UNECE project “Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews”

- Within the framework of the project, *Innovation Performance Reviews of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and other CIS countries* have been completed. Reports are available in English and Russian. The Review process and structure has been updated to reflect the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the reviews becoming Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews.
- Within the framework of the preparation of the *Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan*, the preparatory mission to Bishkek for the Review was carried out in December 2016 by UNECE secretariat and the fact-finding mission to Bishkek was carried out in April 2017 with participation of a team of international and local experts. Ongoing preparation of the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan, in particular the peer review of policy recommendations, was discussed during the *Regional Workshop “Making innovation work for the SDGs”* in Bishkek on 22-23 June 2017. Main findings of this Review were presented at the tenth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies in Geneva on 19-20 October 2017.

Implementation of ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative

- ESCAP finalized a study titled *Building a Resilient Digital Economy: Fostering SMEs in Central Asia* which discussed natural disasters that affect SPECA countries, with particular emphasis on their effects on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and how resilient ICTs (e-resilience) can promote inclusive and sustainable digital economy for the achievement of the SDGs. ESCAP Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, which aims to promote seamless regional broadband connectivity across the Asia-Pacific region, was highlighted as a way forward.
- ESCAP carried out a study titled *The Belt and Road Initiative and the Role of ESCAP*, which examined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including ICTs as a means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The study examined the existing fiber-optic corridors and their capacity, and identified missing links in the cross-border fiber-optic routes in the SPECA countries.
- In preparation for the High-Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) for Enhancing Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP carried out a subregional study of *North and Central Asia as a Transit Hub: Potential, Challenges and the Way Forward*; and a regional study, *Enhancing Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific*, which called for enhancing regional ICT connectivity through RECI, which could offer enormous potential in generating trade, growth and employment, improving social outcomes and managing environmental risks and shared vulnerabilities.

Activities within the framework of the ESCAP - APCICT

- CIS Subregional Workshop Training of Trainers on “Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI)” was organized in Bishkek, 24-26 April 2017.
- Kyrgyzstan National Launch of WIFI was organized in Bishkek, 27 April 2017.
- Localization of WIFI training modules in Russian was completed.
- A session on “Women ICT Frontier Initiative: ICT Enabled Women Entrepreneurship” was organized at the Second Regional Central Asia Research and Education Network (CAREN) Conference in Bishkek, 26 April 2017.
- High-level Briefing on “the Primer Series on ICTD for Youth” was organized in Bishkek, 27 April 2017.

VI. WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND ECONOMY

Women continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market and other realms of economic and social life, and thus are at higher risk of exclusion and poverty. A gender-transformative approach to economic policies and targeted programmes and measures that promote gender equality across all domains of economic activities continue to be of great importance for the economies of Central Asia. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development achieving gender equality as part of the broader sustainable development framework requires holistic approach and coherence of economic and social policies. Being not only a goal – SDG 5 – but an enabler and accelerator for all the SDGs, achieving gender equality could speed up and spread the gains of sustainable development to many regions where women face multiple challenges in the SPECA countries.

The objective of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy (WGGE) is to promote gender-transformative economic policies through discussions and exchange of best practices, developing strategies, programmes and pilot projects, and raising awareness of the policymakers that gender equality is an economic asset and pre-condition for sustainable and inclusive growth.

The main activities of the SPECA WGGE during the reporting period included the following:

Annual session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy, 27 February 2017

The annual session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy was organized by the UNECE secretariat on 27 February 2017 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. At the meeting, the WGGE reviewed the activities over the period 2015-2016; shared examples of gender-transformative economic policies to address gender gaps in the SPECA countries; and identified priorities for regional cooperation on the implementation of SDG 5 and its mainstreaming into other SDGs. Participants included government representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, as well as representatives from the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub (representing the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Regional Working Group on Gender co-chaired by the ECA UN Women and UNFPA Regional Offices), the UNDP Office in Geneva, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Environment, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and UNECE.

The session recognized the importance of regional cooperation in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and the role of the Working group as a platform for discussion of gender-transformative policies, programmes and models of legal instruments in SPECA countries and with international institutions, including the challenges the countries face in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Discussions were organized into two main sessions. The first session focused on key gender gaps in the SPECA economies, policies implemented to close these gaps and how regional cooperation has contributed to these processes. Within the theme of the meeting on *Identifying Barriers and Defining Opportunities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in SPECA countries through a Gender Lens*, discussions had a particular focus on gender inequalities in the workplace, in public and private sectors. Mainstreaming gender in a broad range of economic policies was acknowledged as a strong means for closing gender gaps in various economic areas. Further development of gender budgeting, gender-sensitive employment strategies, training and education, and exchanging experience through study visits and projects were outlined as opportunities to expand regional cooperation in gender and economy.

The second session of the meeting provided a platform for a policy-oriented dialogue and exchange of ideas for the nationalisation and localisation of the SDGs, with a focus on SDG 5. Representatives of the SPECA countries shared information on the preparatory work and the challenges arising from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, in particular, the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The key recommendations that emerged from the discussions of the meeting were as follows:

- The participants of the SPECA WGGE underscored the importance of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the fundamental role of gender equality in it both as a stand-alone goal – SDG 5 – and as an accelerator to other SDGs.

- Participants acknowledged the potential of the Working Group to promote gender-transformative economic policies for the achievement of SDG 5 and accounting for the linkages with other SDGs, through exchange of experience and practices, capacity-building and joint projects. The WGGE could be a facilitator of the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in sustainable development in the region.
- The SPECA WGGE stressed the need to continue joint efforts towards promoting women entrepreneurship development, including through capacity-building for women entrepreneurs, strengthening support to improving the business environment and through related regional initiatives and projects with the support of international organizations and the UN system.
- Against this background, the WGGE will provide a platform to support progress in achieving SDG 5 and its mainstreaming in other SDGs, such as SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 9 and SDG 10, improve awareness of SPECA countries on the important linkages between SDG 5 and respective SDGs, and for regional projects on thematic areas within its mandate.

Further, the SPECA WGGE concluded:

- There is a need for improvement of coherent gender-transformative policies within the aim to increase the employment of women in public and private sectors through a range of development-oriented objectives, to ensure decent job creation for women and men with equal pay for work of equal value, to invest in education and training of skills and knowledge for women, breaking stereotypes, recognising and reducing unpaid care work, and making innovation and technology work for and by women.
- Gender responsive budgeting needs to be implemented as a tool to improve the results of budgets in general, and gender equality and women's empowerment in particular.
- Special policies have to be introduced in areas and regions where poverty is widespread and persists, in particular in rural areas.
- Financial support for women entrepreneurship development should be accompanied by the provision of capacity-building, such as financial and business literacy trainings, network building and information sharing; it has to include new financial schemes and innovations.
- Sex-disaggregated data for poverty, employment, education and entrepreneurship needs to be regularly produced and monitored; time-use surveys should be used for recognising gender gaps, in particular in unpaid care and policies need to be developed to eliminate those gaps.

Capacity-building activities to support women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region

In 2016-2017, UNECE continued to build capacity for women entrepreneurs in SPECA countries contributing to increased capacity for skills, knowledge and networking in these countries. Two international training workshops were organized on *Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship through the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)*, 29 May – 16 June 2017, and *Political and Economic Aspects of Women's Empowerment*, 12-29 June 2017 as part of the regularly organized joint activities between UNECE and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre (MCTC) in cooperation with MASHAV (Israel's Agency for

International Development Cooperation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and UN Women for the second workshop. The workshops took place in Haifa, Israel at the MCTC premises. The International workshop on Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship through the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) contributes to capacity-building for women entrepreneurs through upgrading their skills in using new information and communication technologies. In addition, it provides support on how to network and create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs in doing business in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

The workshop broadened the horizon of the participants in business creation and business development through getting them acquainted with new tools and approaches to business models generation and marketing strategies, digital strategies and planning framework, business psychology and budgeting.

The second international workshop, *Political and Economic Aspects of Women's Empowerment*, contributed to enhancing women's leadership through expanding knowledge on political and economic empowerment, strategies and tools for the promotion of citizens' participation and leadership in political and economic spheres.

Representatives of SPECA countries also participated in the Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work, which was co-organized by ESCAP and UN Women in Bangkok, 23-24 February 2017. In support of efforts of countries to develop policies and strategies to advance women's economic empowerment, ESCAP is conducting research and analysis of the key barriers and challenges as well as good practices concerning women's economic participation in the SPECA countries.

B. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST TO THE SPECA COUNTRIES HELD DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

I. WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

In 2016-2017, representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following UNECE events:

- 5th EU-Central Asia Environment and Climate Change Working Group meeting, 15-16 December 2016, Brussels
- Twenty-second session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, 25-27 January 2016, Geneva
- Session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Gas, 27-28 March 2017, Geneva
- Session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Resource Classification, 26-28 April 2017, Geneva
- 6th Meeting of the EU-Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change, 10-11 July 2017, Astana
- Session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane, 24-25 October 2017, Geneva
- UNECE Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels, 26-27 October 2017, Geneva
- Session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency, 31 October – 1 November 2017, Geneva
- Session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, 2-3 November 2017, Geneva
- Twenty-third session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, 14-17 November 2017, Geneva

II. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY

In 2017, the following meetings took place:

- The third session of the Ministerial Conference on Transport was organized by ESCAP and the Ministry of Transportation of the Russian Federation on 5-9 December 2016 in Moscow, Russian Federation. Transport ministers and senior government officials from across the Asia-Pacific region, including representatives of all SPECA countries, exchanged views on emerging issues in developing sustainable transport connectivity, and discussed ways to make transport systems in the region integrated, safe, affordable, inclusive and environmentally sound.

Ministers assessed the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016) and adopted Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, including a Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-2021) to support countries in achieving transport infrastructure and operational connectivity. The new regional action programme is expected to introduce maritime transport corridors that complement existing land networks to form a regional intermodal transport system for enhancing the transport connectivity of landlocked developing countries, including SPECA countries.

Ministers adopted a set of transport facilitation tools, namely the model bilateral agreement on international road transport, the model subregional agreement on transport facilitation,

the model multilateral permit for international road transport and the standard model of logistics information systems. The Ministers also updated Regional Road Safety Goals and Targets for Asia and the Pacific 2016-2020.

- The ESCAP secretariat continues to actively support the development and operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway network. The fifth meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network was held on 13 and 14 June 2017 in Busan, Republic of Korea with four SPECA countries participating (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The Working group it recognized that the Trans-Asian Railway network could form an important basis for the development and operationalization of rail-based international intermodal corridors supporting the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- ESCAP organized a Subregional Meeting on Rail-based Intermodal Transport in Northeast and Central Asia from 18 to 19 September 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand under a project entitled “Development of seamless rail-based intermodal transport services in Northeast and Central Asia for enhancing Euro-Asian transport linkages”. The project is being implemented with the active participation of transport officials and railway managers of China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

III. TRADE DEVELOPMENT

In May 2017, UNECE in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and Turkey finalized a Regional BSEC Trade Facilitation Strategy, which can be used as a best practice in the process of drafting a regional SPECA trade facilitation strategy. Azerbaijan participates in the BSEC regional TF strategy.

ESCAP organized a number of capacity-building events in Bangkok, involving the SPECA countries:

- Workshop on using technology in support of Trade for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), 30 November -1 December 2016;
- Regional Seminar on International Investment Agreements (IIAs) and Sustainable Development, and 6th meeting of the Asia-Pacific Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Network, 1-2 December 2016;
- 3rd Meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, 23-24 March 2017; and
- Capacity Building Workshop on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, 24 March 2017.

ESCAP also organized a Workshop on linking Central Asian SMEs with foreign companies and investors (including demonstration of the Kazakhstan SME online platform) in Incheon, Republic of Korea, 25 May 2017.

IV. KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- APCICT/ESCAP Training of Trainers on “Women ICT Frontier Initiative”, Phnom Penh, 19-21 December 2016;
- APCICT/ESCAP High Level Briefing on “the Primer Series on ICTD for Youth”, Phnom Penh, 23 December 2016;
- Eleventh session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships with its high-level substantive segment on “Impact Investing – Financing Innovation and People-First PPPs for Sustainable Development”, Geneva, 20 - 22 March 2017;
- High-Level Dialogue on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration for Enhancing Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 20-21 April 2017;
- Tenth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies with high level policy segment on innovation policies to promote sustainable consumption and production - towards a circular economy, Geneva, 19-20 October 2017; and
- First session of the UNECE Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships, which considered the contribution of the UNECE’s People-first Public-Private Partnerships work to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and cooperation with China on the “Belt & Road” (B&R) initiative in support of the UN SDGs, Geneva, 20-21 November 2017.

V. SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

The 10th Tranche United Nations Development Account project “Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia” is implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in cooperation with the UNFF, UNDP, UNEP and GIZ. The project has the principal objective to strengthen the capacity of countries, inter alia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to identify appropriate criteria and indicators that are practicable, communicative, measurable, feasible and relevant to assess sustainable forest management in each country. The project duration is 2016 until 2019.

The project will enable countries to actively participate in international processes related to forests, and contribute to the sustainable development of the sector towards a green economy.

A national set of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management can serve as a basis for evidence-based policy and communication. It is beneficial for:

- monitoring, assessing and reporting on the state of a countries’ forests;
- strengthening the development of national forest programmes and monitoring their implementation;
- providing incentives for sustainable forest management practices;
- supporting dialogue between the forest and other sectors as well as with society; and
- demonstrating forest contributions.

In 2016-2017, the activities were focused on the release of training material, organization of one national coaching workshop in each country, and setting up national working groups.

Within the framework of the project the following events were organized by the UNECE and FAO:

- National Coaching Workshop “Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in Kyrgyzstan”, Bishkek, March 2017;
 - National Coaching Workshop "Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in Kazakhstan", Astana, June 2017; and
 - National Coaching Workshop "Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in Uzbekistan", Tashkent, August 2017.
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