



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

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

Implementation of the SPECA Work Plan for 2012-2013, adopted by the Governing Council at its sixth session on 11 November 2011 in Ashgabat, has proceeded according to schedule. The activities carried out by the six SPECA Project Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council are summarized below.

**A. ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE SPECA
COUNTRIES AND/OR HELD IN THE SPECA REGION**

I. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES

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

This project, aiming to improve the safety of dam operations in Central Asia started in 2006. There are two main results from the first phase of the project: (i) a model national law on safety of large hydraulic facilities, including dams, intended to be a basis for national harmonized legal frameworks for dam safety; and (ii) a draft of the regional agreement on cooperation on dam safety, which stipulates, inter alia, exchange of information and notification of other countries in case of dam accidents.

The second phase of the project was implemented during the period 2008-2011 with funding from Finland and the Russian Federation. The main results of the second phase include further negotiations and development of the draft regional agreement, input to the development of dam safety legislation in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as joint training for experts in the region. A Technical Regulation for all five countries was approved, and a joint Kazakh-Kyrgyz safety review of the Kirov dam on the Talas River performed.

During a third phase starting in 2012, the main focus has been to establish cooperation on training of experts and students in the region and to continue the work to safeguard the safety of individual dams. A “train the trainers” course was held in Taraz, Kazakhstan in 2013 and safety work on the Kirov and Ortotokoi dams in Kyrgyzstan is underway.

Information about the project can be found on: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety.htm>.

Water, Environmental and Energy Information

The “Central Asian Regional Water Information Base” (CAREWIB) Project was launched in 2004. It is implemented by the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (SIC-ICWC) in Tashkent in cooperation with UNECE and UNEP/Grid-Arendal. The project includes a Water Portal (www.cawaterinfo.net) that provides access to Central Asian water information, a bibliographic database of Land and Water Resources Use in the Aral Sea basin, lists of, and links to, donors active in the Aral Sea basin, databases for the Aral Sea basin, the AmuDarya and the SyrDarya river basins, etc. The portal also hosts the websites of various projects. The work further includes the development of an Information System on Water and Land Resources in the region for experts and decision makers in the five Central Asian States.

The second phase of the CAREWIB project, starting in 2007, has focussed on developing national water information systems. Discussions on the continued support of the project in a third phase are ongoing.

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

On 26 July 2006, the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Chu and Talas Rivers Commission was inaugurated with the support of UNECE and ESCAP. The establishment of the Commission created a mutually beneficial way for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to share responsibility for water infrastructure used by both countries. Project support in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) - started in 2008 and ended in the end of 2011. This project has contributed to the further broadening of cooperation to improve the joint management of the Chu and Talas rivers, including, among other results, the improved protection of ecosystems and greater stakeholder participation in river management.

Information about the work under the commission as well as the project results can be found on <http://www.chutalas-commission.org/>.

Funds have been approved for continued support by the Global Environmental Facility in order to broaden the bilateral cooperation, including on environmental issues, and preparations for this project will be concluded in spring 2014.

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

This UNECE-UNDP project aims to improve the adaptive capacity of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well as to support dialogue and cooperation on assessing the impacts of climate change on water resources and the identification of possible adaptation measures in the transboundary context; thereby promoting consensus and avoiding disagreements on the use of water resources.

The status of the project was reviewed and main conclusions were agreed in a meeting of the project's key experts in Bishkek on 30 May 2013. The day after, the preliminary results of the project were presented and discussed at the bilateral Kazakh-Kyrgyz Chu-Talas Commission.

A draft final report, including a vulnerability assessment, has been prepared by the national experts and was being revised at the time of this report. The information presented involves e.g. a review of past climatic changes, predictions for the coming decades using a harmonised approach, a consideration of the economic implications of climate change on agriculture and a discussion of

possible adaptation measures in the basin. A set of maps and graphics as well a text summarising the findings has been prepared as elements of a visual brochure for eventual wide dissemination.

The final workshop of the project, involving the concerned authorities of the two countries and other relevant stakeholders, is planned to be held in Bishkek in November 2013.

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” was implemented in 2009-2011 by the UNECE, with the goal 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 were the major objectives.

In the first subcomponent, the countries of Central Asia were supported to analyse the need for reforms in the legal framework and in the overall institutional setting for transboundary water management, with a focus on the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). The project further facilitated the development of proposals for the adaptation of mandates, objectives and responsibilities of regional water institutions, as well as the development by Central Asian countries of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme.

In the second subcomponent, International Water Law, activities focused on building capacity on international water law and policy in Central Asia. This work was based upon existing frameworks such as the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, and other relevant international legal instruments in the area of water management.

The last component, Water Monitoring and Data Exchange, provided support to regional institutions and representatives of five Central Asian countries in strengthening water monitoring and improving data exchange, in close coordination with ongoing UNECE and other projects.

Phase II of the project started at the end of 2012 and aims to achieve the following objectives:

- The capacity of the International Fund for saving The Aral Sea (IFAS), including its organizations and institutions, is improved and the process of modernization of their legal basis is continued.
- The capacity of Central Asian governments to apply international water law is improved and the relevant instruments and best practices are increasingly used in interstate relations.
- Improved application of the principles of integrated water resources management (IWRM) at the river basin and regional levels in Central Asia.

For more information see <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.html>.

Water Quality in Central Asia

The United Nations Development Account made funding available to UNECE for a project to improve cooperation and policy related to water quality in Central Asia. The project, implemented in collaboration with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), started in the beginning of 2009 and was concluded in the autumn of 2012.

In cooperation with authorities from all countries the project has outlined common principles, in water quality, for measurement, exchange of information and joint assessment. The development of more efficient national policies, including the standards and principles applied in the regulation of environmentally harmful activities, was another key aspect. As water quality monitoring has seriously deteriorated since the early 1990s, support was given to a basic monitoring network. The project contributed to a more active discussion of water quality issues in the region and a regional plan for further development of cooperation in this area was presented during the Astana Ministerial Conference in September 2011. In 2012-2013, work is ongoing to establish a political platform for continued regional cooperation on water quality.

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

This project supports Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the development of hydrology and environmental cooperation in the upper AmuDarya Basin. The Ministry for Water and Energy, the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan, the Committee for Environmental Protection of Tajikistan and Tajik Hydromet are project partners. On the basis of existing bilateral agreements the two countries aim to strengthen their cooperation and information exchange.

Three bilateral meetings have been held, two during 2013; in Kabul in January and Dushanbe in March. The main directions of future cooperation to address pressing issues on the shared upper part of the AmuDarya River Basin have been outlined and a bilateral working group is being established. Planned further work includes joint hydrological monitoring and an exchange of information on the shared river basin.

More information, including a recently published “Atlas of cooperation,” can be found at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>

II. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON TRANSPORT AND BORDER CROSSING

The Project Working Group (PWG) on Transport and Border Crossing focuses on developing new, and extending existing, road and rail networks in the region, as well as addressing the specific problems of transit transport from, in and through SPECA countries. It is also a privileged place to prepare for the final Review of the Almaty Declaration of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries.

The 18th session of the SPECA PWG-TBC was held on 2-3 May 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The session was hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the lead SPECA country in the field of transport. Following the presentations, the meeting deliberations and consideration of the session’s documents as stipulated in the Agenda of the 18th session of SPECA PWG-TBC, the Project Working Group arrived at the following conclusions and recommendations:

The PWG invited those SPECA countries that have not yet done so, to take measures towards the acceptance, approval or ratification of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway network. The PWG encourages SPECA countries that are parties to the agreements to consider proposing amendments to the AH and TAR networks in order to reflect the latest developments in infrastructure development planning from the subsequent meetings of the respective Working Groups.

Welcoming the progress made in the implementation of the project on the development of Euro-Asian transport linkages, the PWG took note of the Declaration adopted at the last UNECE Inland Transport Committee session. The PWG encouraged SPECA countries to actively participate in phase III of the project and, in particular, to take part in the Seminar on Infrastructure financing to take place during the next WP5 meeting, held in Geneva on 13 September 2013.

The PWG reaffirmed the importance of the international legal instruments and invited SPECA countries to intensify their efforts to accede to and effectively implement the conventions. In this respect, the PWG encourages SPECA countries who are not yet parties in the Agreement concerning transport of dangerous goods by road (ADR) and the Agreement concerning the transport of perishable foodstuffs (ATP) to do so as soon as possible. As far as dangerous goods are concerned, the PWG welcomed the invitation of the Kazakh Authorities to hold in autumn (17 October 2013) a capacity-building workshop on this topic open to all SPECA countries.

The PWG encouraged concerned SPECA countries to proceed swiftly with the signing of the SCO Agreement on Facilitation of International Road Transport. It also advised SPECA countries to conceive and plan facilitation measures in line with the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport in order to achieve synergies among facilitation measures. The PWG invited SPECA countries to actively participate in the ESCAP Regional Network of Legal and Technical Experts on Transport Facilitation. The PWG highlighted the need to identify any outstanding issues related to the accession to and implementation of the conventions, and requested UNECE and ESCAP secretariats to provide assistance in assessing the implications of acceding to and implementing the transport-related international legal instruments, when possible.

After the signature of the Declaration towards the unified railway law, the PWG encouraged SPECA countries to promote the facilitation of railway transportation and, in particular, to effectively participate in the Group of Experts on Unified Railway Law.

The PWG welcomed the adoption of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports and encouraged SPECA countries to take the necessary actions for being able to sign this agreement during the second session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport in November 2013.

The PWG was informed on the Development Account Project on the application of the transport facilitation toolkit in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The PWG took note that the use of this toolkit could be expanded to other SPECA countries in future, upon request. It encouraged SPECA countries to use other ESCAP transport facilitation tools as well as the handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings, jointly published by UNECE and OSCE. The PWG took also note of the development of the UNDA funded Project for Future Inland Transport Systems (ForFITS).

The PWG noted the potential benefits of Public-Private Partnership modalities and encouraged SPECA countries to pursue policy measures to create the appropriate legal and institutional environment for the development of public-private partnerships. The PWG also encouraged SPECA

countries to strengthen the training programmes for government officials and other relevant stakeholders by taking advantage of training materials on PPPs prepared by UNECE and ESCAP.

The PWG welcomed the initiative of NIITK on the preparation of an overview of the transport sector in the SPECA countries and requested SPECA countries to provide their comments / suggestions on the draft overview before the document is published on the SPECA Transport website. The PWG noted that despite this deserved conclusion, the report, which contains useful information, has never been translated in English nor made available to the public via UNECE or ESCAP SPECA websites. It requested that this to be done as soon as possible. In this respect, the PWG highlighted once more the role of NIITK as an institute of technical support through the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Kazakhstan in the implementation of the PWG-TBC projects and activities, and highlighted the need for financial and other assistance to NIITK along with continuing advisory assistance from ESCAP and UNECE.

Once more, the PWG invited SPECA countries to take actions in order to respond to the decade of action for road safety and embrace the United Nations work undertaken at global and regional levels and report, if possible in written form, to the two United Nations Commissions on decisions and actions taken in this respect.

The Project Working Group noted with great interest the presentations made by the representatives of SPECA countries on transport infrastructure and facilitation projects, activities and initiatives at the national level that had been implemented or were being implemented in line with the Almaty Programme of Action. It requested that such presentations be made regularly, if possible during each session of the SPECA PWG TBC, in view of making SPECA countries and other stakeholders in the region aware of the activities undertaken for the facilitation of transport in their immediate neighbourhood. The PWG was also informed of the activities undertaken by national associations and private organizations aimed at facilitating international transport and integration. It noted with satisfaction the contribution of IDB to the debate, showing the interest given to SPECA countries by the international community and illustrating the potential of the region for international transport.

Having considered the guidelines to improve the efficiency of the PWG-TBC, as set up in 2005, the PWG agreed that these guidelines do not need to be amended for the time being. It also invited SPECA countries to use more proactively the different platforms offered by UNECE and ESCAP in order to facilitate access to sea ports via transit countries which are non-SPECA countries.

Lastly, the PWG adopted its programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 and a draft Agenda for the 19th session of the SPECA PWG-TBC as modified during the session, while recognizing that changes might need to be made in writing before the next session.

III. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON TRADE

Projects on Trade Facilitation, e-Business and the Single Window

UNECE, working with UNDP, organized a regional training workshop on the new Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, which includes instruments for implementing trade facilitation: namely on how to use international standards, Business Process Analysis, data harmonization, Single Window project implementation guide, Coordinated Border Management, etc. Materials on training on the use of the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) and the training in Bishkek on 10-13 June 2013 can be found at <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/capacity-building-for-trade-facilitation/trade-facilitation-implementation-training.html>.

UNECE, working with ESCAP, continued to build on the achievements of the UNDA projects in trade facilitation in the SPECA countries, since the UNDA 5th tranche project. UNECE supports activities on building Single Window mechanisms, data harmonization, and alignment to international standards, in collaboration with the UNNExT network, the European Union, GIZ, ADB, USAID, UNDP, EurAsEC, and the Eurasian Economic Commission.

The Single Window project in Azerbaijan has developed further, and several agencies are now included in the joint collection of trade data for carrying out the regulatory procedures required for the clearance of goods in international trade.

Uzbekistan announced the launching of the first phase of its Single Window project, which is now listed in the World Bank repository of Single Window projects. The UNECE, in collaboration with UNCTAD, UNDP, the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan, organized a number of capacity-building activities that led to the launching of this project.

UNECE and UNCTAD are further advancing a project proposal for simplified data exchange for Customs transit for Afghanistan, Tajikistan and other SPECA countries.

Since the 2012 session of the SPECA PWG on Trade, UNECE has provided three trainings on trade facilitation at the OSCE Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe. UNECE provides this training for senior officials mostly from Border Police and Customs. The training concentrated on border control (the tasks of border police), trade facilitation, Customs matters, transit (TIR Convention), coordinated border management (the UNECE Harmonization Convention), as well as the new UNDA project focused on the implementation of an electronic TIR procedure, and presentations on the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG).

Projects on Overall Trade Development, Aid-for-Trade, and Standardization

As the secretariat of the SPECA Aid-for-Trade (AfT) Monitoring and Implementation Council, UNECE is assisting SPECA countries in implementing of the AfT Roadmap for SPECA initiative. Progress to date has involved the preparation of standardized national and regional AfT action matrices using the logical framework approach (The matrices can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=29210>). Within the context of a UNDA project, UNECE is assisting Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in preparing project documents for mobilising the required resources for ensuring the successful implementation of planned AfT activities.

In addition, and together with the UN Trade Cluster, the UNECE organized a meeting on improving food security through supply chains in Central Asia on 8 July 2013 in Geneva during the WTO's 4th Global Review of Aid for Trade. It also held a two-day Conference on the implementation of the AfT Roadmap for SPECA on 9 to 10 July back to back with the 4th Global Review and held a seminar on AfT in SPECA countries on 8-9 October in Dushanbe, back to back with the 8th session of the SPECA PWG on Trade. These events are meant to support SPECA countries' resource mobilization efforts and the exchange of views and experiences on the implementation of AfT activities. Presentations made during the two-day conference are available at: <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/trademeetings/other-meetings/aid-for-trade-roadmap-for-speca-initiative/2013/implementing-aid-for-trade-road-maps/ppts.html>

Training on standards-setting and technical regulations for Central Asian countries was held in Kyrgyzstan in May 2013 and another for all CIS countries is planned in Warsaw in April 2014. To compete on world markets, countries of the SPECA region need to participate as full players in standards-setting and technical regulation activities at the regional and international level. This requires expertise in public administration and business as related to standards and technical regulations. Training in this domain is an important priority. UNECE is working with UNIDO and contributing to training activities for the countries of Central Asia on these topics.

Best practices in risk management allow authorities to choose actions that are optimal for the achievement of policy goals. Authorities in the SPECA countries are invited to join in the activities of the UNECE Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems, which has developed guidance and recommendations in this domain (see Recommendations on [Managing Risk in Regulatory Frameworks](#) and [Crisis Management within a Regulatory Framework](#)). Practical guidance is also available in the recent publication "[Risk Management in Regulatory Systems](#)".

Agricultural Quality Standards

Following up on UNECE promotional activities in Central Asia, Tajikistan submitted drafts of two new UNECE standards for quince and persimmons - important regional products having a high export potential. UNECE worked on them and submitted the texts to the November 2013 session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for adoption as recommendations for a one-year trial period. Tajikistan is also contributing to the development of an explanatory brochure on the standard for persimmons. The first draft of the brochure will be discussed at a workshop in Spain in November 2013, after which Tajikistan will host another workshop in the autumn of 2014 to finalize the brochure and submit it to the Working Party for approval. Tajikistan's participation in these activities is supported from the Russian Voluntary Fund contribution to UNECE. UNECE also is also helping Tajikistan to adopt the UNECE Standard for Dried Apricots (8.1% of Tajikistan's exports) as the national standard. Tajikistan has already adopted UNECE standards for dried plums and dried apples.

IV. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON STATISTICS

The objective of the SPECA PWG on Statistics is to strengthen the statistical capacity of member countries of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) and 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. Particular attention is paid to promoting the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which provide the basis for a sound legal and institutional framework for national statistical systems.

UNECE technical cooperation provided senior government officials and professionals from SPECA countries with high-level expertise in the field of statistics.

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, seminars, study tours and training courses aimed at promoting international guidelines, stimulating the exchange of national best practices and supporting the establishment of an active network of experts at subregional level; and
- Technical cooperation projects, including those with multisectoral and/or subregional focus, in areas where the UNECE has a mandate and expertise.

Technical cooperation activities conducted by UNECE are demand-driven, results oriented and strongly rely on recent reviews of national statistical systems (Global Assessments).

To accomplish these tasks in an efficient and effective way, linkages are actively developed with other multilateral and bilateral organizations involved in statistical capacity-building activities in the subregion.

In recent years, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan requested the UNECE to conduct Global Assessment of their respective national statistical systems. Global Assessments (GAs) of national statistical systems provide in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the institutional, organizational and technical capacity of countries to produce official statistics that comply with international guidelines and recommendations, including the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPs).

GAs do not focus exclusively on national statistical offices/committees but encompass all major producers of statistics (e.g. Ministries of Finance and National Banks). Thus, GAs are a unique opportunity for governments, national authorities, users and other national and international stakeholders to obtain a comprehensive picture of the overall state of development of statistical systems.

GA reports for SPECA countries provided detailed recommendations for the sustainable development of national statistical systems that were incorporated into statistical capacity-building programmes and strategies (e.g. Master Plans or National Strategies for the Development of Statistics from the WB). These strategies were then made operational through annual statistical programmes of work and implemented by the beneficiary countries, with the support of the multilateral and bilateral partners, including the UNECE and ESCAP.

ESCAP is currently expanding its activities on statistics capacity-building in SPECA countries, in particular in the context of the Asia-Pacific Regional Programme on Economic Statistics, with funding provided by the Russian Federation. The direction and focus of the expansion is under development in close collaboration with UNECE and other development partners and has been initiated through participation and co-organization of a number of events on Global Assessments and economic statistics with UNECE, UNSD, EFTA and Eurostat during 2013.

Based on its revised Terms of Reference (ToR), endorsed by the SPECA Governing Council in November 2012, the PWG on Statistics enhanced its role as the coordinating body for technical cooperation activities in the field of statistics in the subregion. In 2013, for the first time, a donor coordination survey was conducted jointly with major stakeholders and was presented and discussed at the 2013 session of the PWG on Statistics. The main objective of the survey is to improve the coordination of capacity-building activities, enhance synergies among major multilateral and bilateral donors and avoid gaps and overlaps. As a result, the PWG on Statistics attracted the interest of major donors with the participation in the last annual meetings of the World Bank, CIS-STAT, International Labour Organization, Eurostat, ROSSTAT, TürkStat, Statistics

Norway and Sweden, the Department for International Development from the United Kingdom and others. The Statistical Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission also mentioned its interest to participate in the future.

V. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

This progress report contains activities carried out/to be carried out by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats either within the framework of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD), or addressing topics within its thematic areas that were held since the seventh session of the SPECA Governing Council in Bangkok, Thailand, 28 November 2012.

These activities are in line with the Programme of Work of the PWG for 2012-2013 which was adopted at the fourth session of the PWG on KBD, held in Baku on 24 November 2011. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats carried out the following capacity-building activities in SPECA countries:

- ***Implementation of the project, “Building the capacity of SPECA countries to adopt and apply innovative green technologies for climate change adaptation”***, funded by the United Nations Development Account. Within the framework this project, the National Seminar and the Stakeholder Meeting on Promotion and Financing of Innovative Green Technologies were held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on 15-17 May 2013 and the Joint National Seminar and Stakeholder Meeting on Promotion and Financing of Innovative Green Technologies will be held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 23-25 October 2013. The final event of the project “Regional Meeting on Promotion and Financing of Innovative Green Technologies” is organized by UNECE as the Expert Segment of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum “Inclusive and Sustainable Development through Economic Cooperation” in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 19-20 November 2013.
- ***Implementation of the UNECE project, “Innovation Performance Reviews”***. Within the framework of this project, an event to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan was held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 19 April 2013.
- ***Implementation of the UNECE project, “PPP Readiness Assessments in Countries of Central Asia”***. A Seminar on the PPP Readiness Assessment of Tajikistan took place in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 17-18 September 2013. Final reports of the PPP Readiness Assessments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been finalized. Russian versions of these reports are currently being prepared.
- ESCAP High-level Policy Dialogue “***Macroeconomic Policies for Sustainable and Resilient Growth in North and Central Asia***”, in collaboration with National Bank of Kazakhstan, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 27-28 August 2013. The Almaty policy dialogue provided a platform for Ministers of Finance, Governors of Central Banks, high-level policymakers, eminent experts and diverse stakeholders from across the region to address the challenges of growth, stability, diversification and jobs, and take a fresh look at how macroeconomic policy tools could better serve national development agendas. At the same time, it explored challenges and opportunities in regional infrastructure development, economic diversification, and cooperation with the rest of Asia, including in the context of enhancing the productive capacity and connectivity of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).

- ESCAP/APCICT contribution to a training workshop on ‘Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICTD) for Youth’ and ‘Social Media for Development’ organized by Tashkent University of Information Technologies (TUIT), Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 27-28 February 2013.
- ESCAP/APCICT contribution to the localization into Turkmen of Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) training modules for government officials, undertaken by the Supreme Counsel of Science and Technologies under the President of Turkmenistan, June 2013.
- ESCAP/APCICT co-organized an e-Leadership International Conference, in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Open Society Institute (OSI), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 5 June 2013.
- ESCAP/APCICT training workshop on the use of ICT in disaster risk management, climate change and green growth, co-organized with UNDP on 7-8 June 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
- ESCAP/APCICT national workshop on ICT4D for government officials and youth, co-organized in partnership with the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation and the Association of Internet Service Providers of Tajikistan in Romit, Tajikistan, 20-23 August 2013.

Strengthening Cooperation for Disaster Risk Reduction in North and Central Asia

Specialists of hydrometeorological services from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and other CIS countries attended a subregional meeting and two subregional training workshops, organized in cooperation with the Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring (Roshydromet), on 23-25 July 2013 at Issyk-Kul lake, Kyrgyzstan, and on 8-10 October 2013 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The participants presented national reports containing overviews of their: legal and regulatory frameworks in the field of DRR; early warning systems; interaction with hydrometeorological services of neighbouring countries; the challenges of hydrometeorological services; and national strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction. The meeting also included presentations of new technologies for processing operational hydrometeorological information. At both trainings participants improved their knowledge and gained new skills, working with software, designed for processing operational hydrometeorological information.

The project contributed to raising awareness and sharing knowledge and information in the countries of the subregion.

VI. WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND ECONOMY

The Governing Council of SPECA officially established the Working Group (WG) on Gender and Economy at its session in June 2006, Baku, Azerbaijan. The WG on Gender and Economy is jointly supported by UNECE and ESCAP.

The main objective of this WG’s activities is to raise awareness of and mobilize women’s potential for sustainable development and to contribute towards reaching gender equality and women’s empowerment in member countries. Economic policies that generate sustainable development need

to be inclusive and reflect a gender dimension in order to reduce inequality in all its forms, including gender. Along with gender-sensitive fiscal and employment policies, support to establishing an enabling environment for developing SMEs and entrepreneurship is an important part of mobilizing women's economic potential in the SPECA region.

In line with its Terms of Reference, the WG: (i) raises awareness, that gender equality is a smart choice for economic policy, through policy oriented research, exchanges of good practices and the preparation of policy guidelines and recommendations; (ii) develops pilot projects in selected areas (in particular gender-sensitive SME policies and gender budgets); and (iii) promotes cross-sectoral linkages and synergies with other relevant areas of SPECA activities, such as statistics, trade, and information and communication technologies.

In 2012, the Working Group on Gender and Economy met on 15 November in Baku, Azerbaijan. During the session, the WG reviewed its activities over the 2012-2013 period and discussed key conclusions of the Third UNECE Forum of Women Entrepreneurs. The group shared examples of gender-sensitive economic policies in Central Asia, identified priorities, discussed project proposals for new activities and agreed on a workplan for 2013-2014. At the session, Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of Azerbaijan, was re-elected as a Chairperson of the Working Group.

Gender and Economy Activities Carried Out Under the 2012-2013 Work Plan

Sharing Experience and Knowledge on the Economics of Gender

In 2012-2013, a broad exchange of information among the members of the SPECA WG on Gender and Economy continued. In the area of the economics of gender, special attention was given to the information on new regulations and the implementation of policies empowering women in the SPECA countries, including policies enabling a positive business environment of women entrepreneurs. Many examples were discussed at the Third UNECE Forum of Women Entrepreneurs and its follow-up. In 2013, at the 5th Congress of Azerbaijani Women held in Baku on 14 June 2013, discussions were held with representatives of women associations and entrepreneurs from various regions on organizing capacity-building workshops for women entrepreneurs in cooperation with other States from Central Asia.

Also in 2012-2013, UNECE organized and facilitated various forms of exchange of information and sharing of good practices among women entrepreneurs and institutions working in this area in the countries of SPECA, thus supporting women entrepreneurs, institutions and women's business associations with practical tools. For example, the ***Roundtables in the areas of the economics of gender in Central Asia***, which are facilitated by UNECE, provide a platform for sharing information among representatives of member States in different sectors. During the review period, three Roundtables were organized on key issues such as current gender-sensitive policies and emerging issues at local and national levels; specificities in the design and implementation of these policies in the countries in Central Asia; and gender differences in the perceptions of entrepreneurs in rural and urban areas, and in different economic sectors with various levels of education and different age groups. The three Roundtables took place in December 2012, July 2013 and October 2013, in Haifa, Israel during workshops for women entrepreneurs from Central Asia.

Capacity-building Activities to Support Women Entrepreneurs in the SPECA Region

Following the work plan for 2012-2013, UNECE continues to cooperate with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre, in organizing biannual international training workshops on “Women entrepreneurs and information communication technologies” (3-20 December 2012) and “Support systems for women entrepreneurs at national and local levels” (17-30 July 2013).

The latest workshop for training women entrepreneurs on information and communication technologies took place on 7-20 October 2013. This workshop on “Women Entrepreneurs and ICT,” contributed to capacity-building and provided support to women entrepreneurs through the provision of guidance and managerial tools on the use of ICT in business. The Workshop discussed ways in which new technologies can influence small business management and how women entrepreneurs can both benefit from and cope with the challenges of ICT.

While the capacity-building workshops targeted women entrepreneurs from Central Asia, participants also included government officials from institutions that support entrepreneurship of women at local and national levels. Accordingly, workshop discussions addressed cooperation between sectors and countries, as well as involving the exchange of good practices in both the public and private sectors within the region and the development of project proposals for various businesses, based on the knowledge they received during the workshops. In addition, the workshop participants received guidance and managerial tools on the use of new technologies in establishing and managing small businesses.

The workshops, in turn, addressed the needs of government institutions responsible for small and medium-sized enterprise development at national and local levels, women’s business associations and other civil society organizations in relation to building their capacity and strengthening the supportive environment for women entrepreneurs. The workshops provided the participants with knowledge and skills to analyse the role of managers and ICT in small business management; to get support in setting up and/or building up a company, including technological incubators, as well as to build and strengthen support systems for small-scale entrepreneurs as a tool for regional and local development. Participants became acquainted with support systems in Israel, including building incubators; discussed the position of women entrepreneurs in times of rapid global change and reviewed the role of rural tourism as an income generator. To date, over 330 professional women have participated in these trainings.

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

I. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES

Analysis of Advanced Technologies in Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in the Framework of the Global Energy Efficiency 21 Project and Preparation of Recommendations on its Application with Special Emphasis on the Central Asian Region

This project, supported with funding by the Russian Federation, has been under implementation since December 2011. The primary objective of the project is to identify the most effective institutional, legal, financial, technical and other mechanisms to improve performance in energy

efficiency and renewable energy, with an emphasis on the identification of appropriate Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy technologies for the Central Asian region.

The project analyses existing world experience in the development and application of advanced energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. It produces recommendations to improve the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement policies and practices that favour technological capacity-building and the strengthening of technological capabilities for the implementation of advanced energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. It also assists countries of the region in their efforts in developing a common regional energy policy.

Promoting Energy Efficiency Investments for Climate Change Mitigation and Sustainable Development

The overall goal of this project is to strengthen the capacity of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to attract investments in energy efficiency projects in the context of climate change mitigation and sustainable development.

The project brings a significant contribution to all world regions through a replication of the UNECE experience with regard to energy efficiency market formation within UNECA, UNECLAC, ESCAP and UNESCWA and through the joint implementation of actions for scaling up energy efficiency market formation at the regional and national levels.

The project will (a) develop the skills of the public and private sectors at the national level to identify, develop and implement energy efficiency investment projects; (b) provide assistance to authorities to introduce regulatory and institutional reforms needed to support these investment projects; and (c) enhance financing of energy efficiency projects in selected countries.

The project will provide case studies on experiences with policy reforms, regional training activities, workshops and seminars focusing on policy reforms and the development of investment projects.

Enhancing Synergies in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) National Programmes on Energy Efficiency and Energy Saving for Greater Energy Security

This project, supported with funding by the Russian Federation, has been under implementation since December 2011. Five SPECA countries are beneficiaries of the project (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). A network of national experts for identifying and developing energy efficiency improvements in the production, transportation and use of energy resources and enhancing energy cooperation from 10 participating countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) has been established. The national experts were nominated by the Governments of participating countries. The inception meeting for the National Experts under the Project was held on 5-6 July 2012 in Minsk, Belarus. The preparatory work for developing the National Reports, Regional Report, Regional Action Plan and Policy Recommendations has been accomplished. The national experts have prepared the national reports, which are posted at: <http://www.unece.org/energy/welcome/areas-of-work/energy-efficiency/enhancing-synergies-in-the-cis-national-programmes-on-energy-efficiency-and-energy-saving-for-greater-energy-security.html>.

Based on these national reports, the international consultant has prepared the Regional Report on the Analysis of policies of CIS countries on improving energy efficiency and opportunities for

developing cooperation and enhancing synergies in the CIS region. A Regional Action Plan to enhance synergies and promote the development of energy efficient and energy saving technologies and Policy Recommendations with a special focus on interregional cooperation are under preparation. A Workshop on Energy Efficiency Policies in the Countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and the Potential for International Cooperation was held on 12-13 November 2013 in Geneva.

The Asian and Pacific Energy Forum

The Asian and Pacific Energy Forum (APEF) was organized by ESCAP and hosted by the Russian Federation in Vladivostok on 27-30 May 2013. It was organized to set a path towards an, “energy future we want,” for Asia and the Pacific. The Forum brought together ministers and high-level officials from 35 ESCAP member States, including SPECA countries.

The APEF concluded with the formulation and the adoption of the *Ministerial Declaration* and *the Plan of Action on Regional Cooperation for Enhanced Energy Security and the Sustainable Use of Energy in Asia and the Pacific*, 2014-2018. The Ministerial Declaration sets the major principles for implementing regional cooperation taking into consideration both the general principles of sustainable development, as contained in agreed international documents, and the specific characteristics of the diverse Asia-Pacific region.

The Plan of Action formulates the vision for regional cooperation on energy: “*An Asia and the Pacific where: • Sustainable energy for all is a reality; • Enhanced energy security is present from regional to household levels; • An energy future of equity, diversification and access to all is secured; • The share of cleaner energies in the overall energy mix is increased*”, and suggests specific areas to address both through concerted effort at the regional level and to tackle individually by the subregions.

For more information please visit <http://www.unescap.org/apef/>

Database of Policies and Regulations on Sustainable Use of Energy and Renewable Energy Sources in Countries of North and Central Asia

As one of the outcomes of the ESCAP project “*Enhancing energy security through regional cooperation*” funded by the Russian Federation, the Database of Policies and Regulations on Sustainable Use of Energy and Renewable Energy Sources in Countries of North and Central Asia has been developed and is now openly available online at www.asiapacificenergy.org.

The database currently contains over 1000 documents from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is continuously updated and reflects the current policy and regulatory framework for energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy development in North and Central Asia.

The database has been developed to serve as an information tool for policymakers and researchers to compare the policy and legal frameworks of the countries covered by the project and to identify trends in their development. It is a useful source of information on the experiences and the approaches of these countries in developing relevant national policies and legislation. There are plans for further expansion of the database to cover more countries of the subregion.

Fourth International Forum: Energy for Sustainable Development

The Fourth International Forum, “Energy for Sustainable Development,” took place in Tbilisi, Georgia on 17-19 September 2013. The Forum was organized jointly by the Government of Georgia, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Over 210 delegates from 28 countries attended the Forum, including the SPECA countries. This Forum was a follow-up to the International Energy Efficiency Forums held in 2010 in Astana, Kazakhstan, in 2011 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan and the Third International Forum “Energy for Sustainable Development” held in 2012 at Issyk-Kul Lake in Kyrgyzstan.

The participants adopted the *Joint Statement of the Fourth International Forum: “Energy for Sustainable Development”*, in which they called the Forum an important platform for discussing energy and sustainable development in the European and Asian regions and a substantive input into enhanced regional energy cooperation. They stressed that one of the major aims of sustainable development in the energy sector in the countries of the European and Asian regions is securing a sustainable balance between supply and demand in the energy sector. The increase of renewable energy sources’ role in the energy mix is important and energy efficiency improvement is critical for curbing energy consumption growth levels in the region. The Joint Statement called upon UNECE, ESCAP and UNDP to continue holding such Fora on a regular basis and recommended to convene the next Forum in 2014.

During the plenary sessions and thematic workshops, the Forum explored a wide range of topics, including the key elements needed to support improvement in energy efficiency and access to cleaner energy in Eurasian countries, including the formation of favourable policy, investment and market conditions. Experiences and good practices from Asia and Europe, as well as examples of technological advances in energy efficiency, renewable and cleaner energy were shared and discussed.

For more information, please visit <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32843>

II. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON TRANSPORT AND BORDER CROSSING

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- Final Regional Review of the Almaty Programme of Action on Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries, which was organized by ESCAP, OHRLLS, UNECE and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 5-7 March 2013.
- Meeting on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in Asia and the Pacific, which was organized by ESCAP and the UN-OHRLLS in Bangkok, Thailand on 24 April 2013.

III. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON TRADE

Projects on Trade Facilitation, e-Business and the Single Window

UNECE started the implementation of a project with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), comprising Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, on *Support to Trade Facilitation and Single Window projects in the Customs Union and the Single Economic Area*. Kazakhstan has the most advanced project on establishing a Single Window in this group, and the other countries are interested in learning the lessons from its implementation. Under this project, UNECE organized the Second joint UNECE-EEC Conference on Trade Facilitation and the Single Window for policymakers and experts on 24-25 April 2013. This Conference confirmed the political will to build a system of three national Single Window facilities, linked through the IISVVT integrated IT system, and noted the first practical steps made in the direction of building the IISVVT system. The presentations and results of this Conference can be found at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32700>. UNECE is sponsoring a study on the implementation of international standards for trade data and document exchange within the IISVVT, which should be used in the creation of an EEC Data Model that can be used by the developers of the Single Window systems in the EEC Member States. The next seminar on Master Plans for the development of Single Window in the three EEC Member States is scheduled for 26-27 November 2013 at the EEC headquarters in Moscow.

Representatives of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan also participated in the Third Regional Conference on Trade Facilitation and Caucasus Transit Corridor (CTC) Promotion, held in Batumi, Georgia on 24-25 June 2013, indicating the strong interest of these countries in developing and utilizing the Caucasus Transit Corridor. The materials from this Conference are on <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32922>.

ESCAP has provided advisory and capacity-building support to SPECA countries, mainly using the regional expert network (United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, or UNNExT). On 18-19 November 2012, ESCAP organized the UNNExT Capacity-Building Workshop for Tajikistan Single Window Implementation, jointly with EU, by bringing around 20 Tajikistan officials to Bangkok, Thailand, including a study visit to Thai Customs.

ESCAP also annually brings SPECA officials to a regional platform, the Asia Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (APTFF), for networking and knowledge-sharing with other regional stakeholders in trade facilitation and paperless trade. For the APTFF 2013, organized on 10-11 September in Beijing, China, officials from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan joined the Forum as well as several relevant back-to-back events in the same week.

For Kyrgyzstan, based on official advisory service request received, ESCAP has provided advisory and capacity-building support, including organization of Workshop on Business Process Analysis Introduction on 14 June 2013 in Bishkek, support in revising and refining a draft National Trade Facilitation Strategy, and has invited two officials to join an intensive two-week capacity-building training on Single Window implementation, UNNExT Masterclass 2013 on Implementing Single Window and Paperless Trade on 7-18 October 2013 in Cheon-an, Republic of Korea.

Projects on Overall Trade Development, Aid-for-Trade, and Standardization

Using an in-house evaluation methodology, the UNECE carried out two studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, one on Belarus (2010) and on Kazakhstan (2011). The first is available

in print and on the website and the latter is in the process of being printed. The secretariat is now carrying out a third study on Tajikistan. The results of the studies are available on the UNECE website: <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/trade-needs-assessment-studies.html>

UNECE welcomed the participation of SPECA countries at a Conference on "[Standards and Regulatory Frameworks](#)" (Geneva, November 2013). The Conference will promote dialogue between standards-making bodies and authorities, as a high-level event, with participation - among others - from the UK Cabinet, the EEC Minister for Technical Regulations and top representatives of the standards-making community. It aims at providing countries with practical guidance at how to use standards in regulatory work. Specifically, the Conference is expected to produce a revised recommendation on, "[Reference to Standards](#)", and consensus on the practical tools countries need in this domain.

Existing regulations, even if they are of a high quality, are effective only if they are backed up by a sound enforcement system. The UNECE Advisory Group on Market Surveillance helps the countries of the UNECE region coordinate their efforts to contain the proliferation of dangerous, sub-standard and counterfeit goods on national markets. It has developed best practice (see Recommendation on "[Good Market Surveillance Policies and Practices](#)") and is now developing a general model for supporting the decision making process of market surveillance authorities from the phase of planning of inspections to the phase of product recall, in accordance with each country's national legislation. It has also published a [glossary of terms](#) and their definitions relevant to market surveillance and post-market surveillance of non-food products in English, Russian and French. The glossary is intended to promote a common understanding of these terms and definitions and to harmonize the way they are used in national legislation. Another achievement of the Group is a simple, broad system of information on market surveillance authorities, available [online](#).

V. PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Representatives of the SPECA countries take part in the implementation of the ESCAP project "*Expanding connectivity of North and Central Asia with the Asia-Pacific region through the development of ICT infrastructure and networks*":

Map of the fibre-optic backbone network in Asia and the Pacific, including North and Central Asia, to be launched in Bangkok, Thailand, 18 November 2013.

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- Seventh session of the UNECE Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration, Geneva, Switzerland, 5-7 December 2012.
- International Conference "Master Class on PPPs in CIS countries: Towards best practices, Moscow, Russian Federation, 11-12 December 2012.
- Fifth session of the Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 5-6 February 2013.
- Contribution to the High-level Segment of the 65th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on 9-11 April 2013 in Geneva, on the topic "Economic developments and challenges in the ECE region: the role of innovation in creating a dynamic and competitive economy".

- International Conference “Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Making Things Work Better”, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 23-24 May 2013.
- Workshop “Defining Excellence in PPPs: Meeting of the International PPP Specialist Centers”, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 June 2013.
- International Conference “Sustainable Growth through Long-term Investments”, Moscow, Russian Federation, 17-18 July 2013.
- Sixth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, Geneva, Switzerland, 10-11 October 2013.
- High-level Capacity-building Workshop on Public-Private Partnerships for CIS Countries, Moscow, Russian Federation, 22 October 2013.
- ESCAP Intergovernmental Meeting on Asia-Pacific Years of Action for Applications of Space Technology and the Geographic Information System for Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development, 2012-2017, Bangkok, 18-20 December 2012.
- ESCAP/APCICT Regional Training of Trainers Workshop on ‘Social Media for Development’, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 20-23 May 2013.
- ESCAP expert consultation on the Asian Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity, Manila, Philippines, 24-25 September 2013.

C. OTHER ACTIVITIES

UNECE works on the sustainable development of the timber and housing sectors, by developing guidelines on the implementation of international best practices in these areas and carries out activities in Central Asia, which could be linked to the work of the PWG on Trade.

UNDA Project “A Greener Economy in Central Asia and the Caucasus with Sustainable Forests”. In July 2013, UNECE and FAO launched a two-year capacity-building project in Central Asia and the Caucasus to increase the potential of that region’s forest sector for “greening” the economy. The project will provide training and advisory services for government officials who deal with forestry. It will include the following activities:

- Developing training materials on sustainable forest management in a green economy, on wood energy and on data collection.
- Holding regional, national and local workshops on: Forest-policy formulation; Bioenergy generation from wood; Data collection on forests and forests products.
- Sharing lessons learned and making recommendations through a concluding regional conference.
- Creating a web-based hub for knowledge management on forest-related issues.

Also included will be a coaching programme in three countries for developing national action plans to improve the forest’s sector contribution to a green economy. More information is available on the project website: <http://www.unece.org/forests-welcome/areas-of-work/forestsforestpolicieswelcome/capacity-building-in-central-asia-and-caucasus.html>

Secure land tenure and adequate housing are key factors in business investment decisions. In its work on *housing and land management*, the UNECE has undertaken a number of activities in Central Asia.

- In the area of land administration, UNECE organized a joint workshop with the State Registry of Kyrgyzstan and the World Bank on, "Land Administration in Central Asia: Building Systems for 21st Century Challenges," in Bishkek on 19-20 March 2013, and is discussing the organization of the next one in Kazakhstan. In addition, Kazakhstan has requested a land administration review. In 2013, UNECE prepared a draft report on the performance benchmarks for land administration systems in the UNECE region, and will follow up with monitoring on the implementation of transparent land administration systems jointly with the World Bank.
- In the area of urban development and housing, UNECE completed country profiles on housing and land management for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and organized a launch event, for the latter, jointly with the World Bank in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in May 2013. An action plan to implement the recommendations of the country profile was drafted. The intention is to support the implementation of the action plan with a focus on energy efficiency in housing and land administration, using a UNDA project to be implemented in 2014-2017. UNECE is also preparing capacity-building events with the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) on the topics of housing and DRR for Tajikistan.

The ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia continues implementation of the project on *Strengthening Economic Ties between Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries*. The project comprises Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and is funded by the Russian Federation. Based on the results of the first workshop, "Strengthening trade and economic relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia," held on 14-15 November 2012 in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, international consultants are in the process of developing a report on regional and national barriers to trade and economic relations, identified elements for national and regional strategies to facilitate trade and economic relations, funding gaps in regional and national trade processes, areas for donor support, and proposed priority areas for consideration in developing trade and economic relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia as well as the development of relations between SMEs. The report will also include about 60 proposed projects in agriculture, trade, roads construction, irrigation, pharmacy, horticulture and education. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2014.

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- High-level Policy Dialogue Preparatory to the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Integration, which was organized by ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand, 20-22 August 2013.
 - Second Preparatory consultation for the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration, to be organized by ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand, 13-14 November 2013.
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