



Summary report ¹

Workshop
“Managing water information in Central Asia”
Almaty, 7 December 2011
in the framework of the UNECE-GIZ Programme
“Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water
Resources Management” and with organizational support from the
Executive Board of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Venue: Hotel "Kazzhol", Almaty

The workshop was attended by 57 people, including representatives of five Central Asian countries, IFAS, BWO Amu Darya and BWO Syr Darya, SIC ICWC, Regional Centre for Hydrology (RCH), representatives of organizations such as the World Bank, the Swiss Agency for Cooperation, USAID, the German Society for International Cooperation, the EU, International Office for Water in France, UNDP, UNECE, UNRCCA, OSCE, ESCAP, CAREC, International Water Assessment Centre and the International Water Management Institute.

This workshop report is developed by the UNECE Secretariat in cooperation with EB-IFAS that provided logistical support for the organisation of the Workshop. Presentations and other documentation of the meeting are found on the UNECE website.²

Mr. Bo Libert, UNECE noted that the management and exchange of water-related information is an important part of transboundary water cooperation and is an obligation under the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. UNECE had been working for some years in this area in close collaboration with SIC ICWC and other institutions in the region. While there are some new promising initiatives, the development of information management and exchange is difficult in the region as there are barriers, technical as well as political. Mr. Libert explained that the objective of the Workshop is to discuss and share information about: (a) On-going and planned water-related information initiatives in Central Asia; (b) Principles for further development of water information management on the regional and the bilateral levels, and (c) Opportunities for coordination between different organizations and projects.

¹ This report has been issued without formal editing by the Environment Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

² See <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/water/envwatermeetings/water/other-events/2011/envwaterdialogueinform-meeting/workshop-managing-water-information-in-central-asia.html>

The Chairman of the *Executive Committee of IFAS*, **Mr. S. Ibatullin** made an introductory speech and stressed that the information issues are an important part of the third Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP 3).

Mr. K. Ballyev, EC IFAS pointed out that it is important to develop information links on the national as well as the regional levels. In the development of ASBP 3 it is suggested to include all interested organizations in Central Asia, as well as Afghanistan, in an information network with data that would be used for GIS and modelling.

Results of the project “Capacity building in data administration for assessing transboundary water resources in the EECCA” were presented by **Mr. Paul Haener, the International Office for Water**. Within this project the current situation with regard to established sources of information and their use as well as information needs is being analysed. The project will define a data management action plan and support its implementation.

Mr. Laurent Guye, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), made a presentation on behalf of **Dr. Tobias Siegfried** outlining a possible future direction of SDC engagement in the information sector with a focus on the development of information systems supporting decision making on the national and regional levels.

Mr. Iskandar Abdullaev, GIZ, presented data management activities in the framework of the programme "Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia". These activities include technical support, capacity building and improvement in the decision making process and are implemented in 7 sub-basins, transboundary as well as national.

Information on land resources in the region was presented by **Mr. Reinhard Bodemeyer, GIZ - Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management - CACILM**. A database has been built up under CACILM; at present, it is not available on the internet.

A new approach to environmental information in the European Union was presented by **Mr. Nikolay Denisov and Mr. Victor Novikov, Zoi Environment Network**. EU countries are presently implementing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) that could serve as a possible model for the countries in Central Asia. Key principles of SEIS include that information should be managed as close as possible to its source, that it should be readily accessible to all users including the public and that it should allow for comparisons at appropriate scales.

The presentation of **Ms. Daryl Fields, the World Bank**, focused on the World Bank Energy-Water Development Programme and the need for data and information in this context. A demonstration model using Earth System modelling and its findings were accounted for.

The regional energy security information system RESET was presented by **Mr. Oleg Ryaskov, USAID**. RESET has been developed as a fully integrated information system as a key part of electricity market operation.

Ms. Svetlana Shivareva, RCH, presented the Regional Centre for Hydrology and accounted for a survey related to the improvement of the information service for the water sector in Central Asia as well as a concept for the future development of information exchange in the region.

Mr. Iskander Beglov, SIC-ICWC, presented the experiences and achievements of the CAREWIB project as well as a vision on its further development. This vision included the decentralisation of certain functions of the regional water portal to EC IFAS, RCH and ICSD.

Mr. Jusipbek Kazbekov, IWMI, presented an analysis of the information needs and management from the perspective of water users. He stressed the low sustainability and technical capacity of the water user associations (WUAs) and concluded that information is key to good governance as well as proper behaviour on the ground. Existing tools and instruments need to be assessed and those best disseminated. State-led WUA support systems should be developed.

Ms. Bakhit Abdildina, UNRCCA, reported on a seminar in September 2011 held by UNRCCA with the support of the U.S. Government, on the topic: "Early warning on potential problem situations in the transboundary rivers in Central Asia". This seminar concluded that a quarterly "early warning bulletin" should be developed as an important measure to improve access to crucial information.

During Session 2 "Improving information and data management", **Mr. Nikolai Denisov, Zoi**, presented a Concept Paper giving a vision of a future information system. It was proposed to make a coordinated effort of Central Asian countries as well as regional and international organisations and donors for strengthening the axis "national data – regional information" by building:

- Capacities for regularly communicating water and related environmental information in a synthesised format to regional and national decision-makers and the public;
- Regional capacities for the integration and management of comparable national information, and
- National capacities for the improved collection and sharing of the related data.

Two major conditions to move towards the proposed vision are:

- Close cooperation among the existing and unfolding initiatives in Central Asia, and that
- Countries, their institutions and regional organizations subscribe to the vision, and that political issues with regard to the accessibility and exchange of information can be resolved.

During the concluding discussion, various points of views and recommendations were expressed by the representatives from the five Central Asian countries as well as representatives of international organisations. The discussion touched upon issues of technical as well as of more political character.

It was stated that information systems need to better support specified objectives including for operational decisions and policy making, public information, emergency situations, international reporting, and economic planning. "Often in the end we need what we do not collect, and what we collect we often do not use."

Some participants stressed that after independence the developments in the Central Asian countries are diverging in terms of legislation, institutional structure and principles of water management. Barriers between countries but also between agencies in countries are bottlenecks for cooperation in the information sector. In this context it was stated that the interests of the

individual countries must be taken into account as a basis for the development of regional information systems.

Several speakers concluded that the inputs and active participation of all Central Asian countries in the collection of information for analysis and exchange should be promoted. It could be a task for IFAS to facilitate the development of a legal basis for cooperation on energy, land and water resources information and data sharing. Information cooperation and exchange beyond the region, e.g. with Iran and Afghanistan, also need to be developed.

It was a general view that donor activities should be better coordinated with EC IFAS playing a role in coordination and reporting of projects. In the information sector there are many interesting initiatives in the region under development and these efforts can benefit greatly from coordination and identification of synergies.

The problem of data generation was raised as a key problem: a decrease of hydromet observation sites, and reduced snow observations being mentioned as two examples. Additional efforts to generate the necessary data are needed.

The conditions of regular and open provision of information from the national Hydromet organizations were discussed. Some participants argued for an increased and open exchange of key information.

Several participants expressed their support of the CAREWIB project as an already operational and sustained information exchange effort. Challenges for the project such as the dependence on donor funding, non-participation of some Central Asian countries and full transparency and access to information were noted in the discussion.