



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/CEP/2009/6
7 August 2009

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Sixteenth session
Geneva, 20–23 October 2009
Item 4 (a) (ii) of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON COUNTRIES
UNDER THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its fifteenth session (21–23 April 2008), the Committee on Environmental Policy agreed to hold problem-oriented discussions during its sessions on selected issues related to the ongoing country reviews (ECE/CEP/148, paras. 9–10). On the occasion of the peer review of Uzbekistan during its October 2009 session, the Committee is expected to hold a discussion on regional and international legal and institutional frameworks or initiatives that could further support cooperation between Central Asian countries, in particular with respect to climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) are experiencing a number of the effects of the climate change, for instance an increased number of heatwaves, more frequent and intense floods and droughts, and drastic changes in precipitation patterns. It is expected that these impacts will increase even more in the near future, even if their magnitude will vary from subregion to subregion.
2. To effectively mitigate the causes of the increased climate variability and to take the necessary actions to adapt to climate change, a thorough analysis and assessment is needed from a viewpoint comprising multiple perspectives. The second Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Uzbekistan is the first EPR to feature a specific chapter on climate change. This chapter examines climate change policy from a cross-sectoral angle, enriching analysis with insights from other sectoral chapters, in particular on water, land and energy.

II. STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

3. In Central Asia, major environmental issues are predominantly transboundary in nature and scope, and can be solved only by cooperation and coordination between the countries in the subregion. Despite some progress in this crucial area, much remains to be done.
4. Water and energy resources are the key components to maintaining the delicate equilibrium existing between Central Asian countries. Due to the subregion's geography and geology, a distinctive feature of the energy and water resources in Central Asia is their uneven distribution. On the one hand, the upstream countries are net importers of energy resources. At the same time, they have abundant hydropower potential and would like to increase its share in their energy balance. On the other hand, almost all existing fossil fuel reserves are concentrated in the downstream countries. This makes the countries net exporters of energy resources, yet at the same time reliant on surface waters formed outside of their territories. Therefore, diverse water uses for both irrigation and energy generation have been closely intertwined in the past in a transboundary network of interdependency, and may well continue to do so in the future.
5. If the current wasteful water use patterns remain unchanged, a potential reduction of river water resources may lead to serious or even critical problems in terms of water supply for agriculture and household consumption, and may eventually pose risks to public health. The transboundary nature of watercourses in the subregion are very important in this regard. For example, the sources of more than 90 per cent of the surface waters in Uzbekistan lie outside the country, namely in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Only 8 per cent of water resources are directly formed on the Uzbek territory; these come from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins.
6. Existing agreements regulate the sharing of transboundary rivers between upstream and downstream countries in Central Asia. Regional cooperation between countries is therefore beneficial to improving the inter-State water allocation system and is a prerequisite for the subregion's stable development and environmental safety. It is also an important factor in terms of ensuring that changes in the established balance of water use of transboundary rivers strictly adhere to regional and international agreements.

7. To this end, the upstream and downstream countries in Central Asia should continue to strengthen their efforts to engage in continuous dialogue to better plan and coordinate their actions vis-à-vis the fast-changing environmental and climatic conditions in the subregion. A number of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including those under auspices of UNECE, serve as platforms for this dialogue. When developing their climate change mitigation/adaptation policies and strategies, countries should both take into account their obligations under such international agreements and take advantage of the tools and guidance of the relevant MEAs.

III. THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

8. At the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007), the UNECE member States acknowledged UNECE’s crucial role in contributing to the success of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in the region. A key driver in the fight against climate change in the pan-European region and beyond, UNECE has also spearheaded the region’s efforts to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, in particular to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and to reverse the loss and deterioration of environmental resources. More concretely, the environmental conventions of UNECE pursue a range of actions to mitigate climate change in their programmes of work.

9. The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is using different models and methods to analyse environmental effects and to calculate the necessary emission abatement and related costs. In this way, cost-effective pollution control strategies can achieve the desired environmental targets with the least overall expenditure. Recent use of the Greenhouse Gas and Air Pollution Interactions and Synergies (GAINS) model, developed by the Convention’s Centre for Integrated Assessment Modelling, has explored the synergies and trade-offs between emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases (GHGs) for current and projected energy use. The model includes both end-of-pipe controls and non-technical measures such as behavioural changes with respect to traffic or economic instruments. Discussions in the Convention’s bodies have focused on the strong links between air pollution and GHG emissions, and have highlighted specific issues where the integration of strategies is needed.

10. The intrinsic relation of the hydrological cycle – and thus water availability, quality and services – to climate change makes adaptation critical for water management and water sector in general. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) provides the legal framework for cooperation on the transboundary aspects of climate change and for the development of adaptation strategies. To this end, it has prepared a Guidance on Water and Climate Adaptation. This marks a first attempt to flesh out a climate change adaptation strategy in the water sector with a particular emphasis on transboundary issues. A number of provisions of the Protocol on Water and Health are also highly relevant to adaptation to climate change.

11. The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) is an important framework for ensuring that mitigation and adaptation actions and measures taken in one country do not have transboundary impacts on neighbouring countries. The Espoo Convention specifies the rights and duties of Parties with regard to

transboundary impacts of proposed activities and provides procedures for the consideration of transboundary environmental impacts in the decision-making process. The Convention's Protocol on Strategic Environment Assessment will see that Parties integrate the consideration of the environment into their plans and programmes at a very early planning stage. The Protocol can be used to introduce climate change considerations into development planning and is therefore important for boosting adaptive capacity, e.g. by including adaptation measures in land-use planning and infrastructure design and/or by reducing vulnerability through existing disaster risk reduction strategies.

12. A fundamental tenet of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) is that public access to scientifically based information can raise awareness and prompt the public to back environmentally sound policies. Access to information and public participation in decision-making on environmental issues are widely recognized as important foundations for climate change mitigation efforts. Environmental information can help to raise awareness about climate change issues and to strengthen synergies between mitigation and adaptation needs. Public participation in this process ensures that social values and trade-offs are represented in political decisions on climate-related issues.

13. The Environment Performance Review programme promotes continuous dialogue between the UNECE member States on the effectiveness of specific environmental policy measures. As with the current EPR on Uzbekistan, the country reviews may provide a comprehensive analysis of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and the implementation of related strategies. By disseminating relevant information, the EPRs help enhance public access to information about the environment and environmental issues, thus leading to more informed decision-making, which is highly relevant to the climate change debate. In the future, the EPRs can provide an analysis of the instruments used in the context of regional climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. They are also a means to share good practices and to highlight gaps in this area, as well as a way to offer important policy recommendations.

IV. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

14. The critical issues addressed in this note on the scale and nature of the challenges posed by climate change may require a regional or subregional, rather than a national, approach. Member countries are therefore invited to share and discuss their experiences, guided by the following set of questions:

- (a) According to your experience, what are the benefits and the mechanisms for transboundary cooperation on adaptation in climate change?
- (b) How can the UNECE environmental conventions continue to support UNFCCC, and how can the synergies between them best be promoted at the international and country levels?
- (c) Has the topic of climate change and the environment been adequately addressed in the chapter 9 of the review of Uzbekistan? Although this chapter is country-oriented, from your country's perspective are there other issues that need to be covered?

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