



NeWater

D 1.3.5b: CHALLENGES FOR ADAPTIVE WATER MANAGEMENT AT THE TRANSBOUNDARY SCALE

Report: Stakeholder meeting Tashkent
22 April 2008

Report of the NeWater project -
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Policy Summary

This report represents the result from a meeting with representatives of the donor community in the Amudarya case study in the context of the work package on transboundary regimes.

The feedback provided to the report presented by Ecologic echoed optimistic as well as pessimistic perceptions of the current situation with regards to transboundary water management in Central Asia, and specifically the Amudarya basin. Still a range of problems exist, particularly with regards to the water-energy nexus as well as water quality issues. The cooperation and collaboration between the riparian countries is still very problematic. Insufficient knowledge about water management in the individual countries is one component of the problem, the unwillingness as well as incapacity to share adequate data with neighboring countries is the other. There is a general lack of awareness that river basins are a shared environmental good. This awareness is only slowly emerging in the wake of the respective international discourses.

There was acknowledgement for the necessity to introduce more adaptive water management practices throughout the basin. However, there was uncertainty as to the appropriate strategies to achieve this goal.

As for the role of the donor organizations there is an understanding that although there have been considerable efforts in the past, these might not have led to the best possible results. As a consequence, donor organizations are in the process of re-considering their involvement and role in water management in the region.

A task for the next steps would be to test tools developed in Newater with view to their applicability in the Central Asian region. Such strategies aimed at moving towards more adaptive water management would have to be dealing with the complexity at the national level while at the same time not losing sight of the transboundary level.

Political will or rather the lack thereof to implement changes and new approaches appears to be a major issue in the region. Still the question remains whether the pure necessity to improve information management at the national as well as the international level will create enough urgency and thus political will to move towards better implementation.

Furthering collaboration on water information should also help to improve the situation with regards to water management at the national level. While in some countries (e.g. Uzbekistan) there is a quite a lot of collaboration between different administrative levels and a good exchange of data, the situation is significantly less optimistic in other countries. The key will be to generate a common perception and understanding of the main challenges at hand. At the individual level, there are concerned water managers dealing with the lack of data and interested in improving the exchange of data. The idea would be to better link these water managers (again) and to improve collaboration and exchange at this level, if not at a higher political level.

There is clearly a mandate for donors in this regard. In addition to supporting national water management strategies it would be beneficial to support capacity-building and networking activities at the technical level.

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1 Introduction

This report details the feedback obtained from a meeting held with selected actors, which have a stake in transboundary river basin management in the Amudarya basin.

Transboundary water management is a constantly topical and persistently conflict-loaded issue in Central Asia. During the last two to three years however, the situation became even more critical.

The problematic relationships between upstream and downstream countries became so crucial, thus illuminating the importance of all factors, such as information exchange and financial aspects. Information plays a very important role in transboundary river basin management, not only technical but also legal information. In this regards, there is a lot of misunderstanding or not-understanding taking place, leading to wrong interpretations, and also conflicting political views.

2 Purpose of the Stakeholder Meeting

In the wake of the Stakeholder Meeting held in context of the Amudarya case study for NeWater in April 2008, a focus group meeting was held with the donor organizations consulted in the process of investigating the transboundary regimes. The purpose of the meeting was to elicit feedback from this group of stakeholders to the findings generated during two fieldtrips to three countries of the Amudarya basin in 2006 and 2007. The feedback is also intended to serve as preparatory material for the final workshop to be held in February 2009.

3 Attendance

The briefing meeting was attended by a selective group of donors. Present were representatives from the American Embassy in Tashkent (Bakhtior Mukhamadiev, Steven N. Prohaska, Second Secretary), as well as from USAID (Alexander G. Kalashnikov, Project Management Specialist), UNDP Uzbekistan as well as the Academy of Sciences in Tajikistan.

The meeting was kindly hosted by the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Melioration in Tashkent. Representatives from Turkmenistan had also been invited. However, due to difficulties in obtaining the visa, they could not participate in the meeting. It was mentioned by the participants present that this is a very common problem, which frequently hampers transboundary cooperation with regards to water resources.

It was noted by one of the participants that while the attendance of the briefing meeting covered some of the most important stakeholder, still clear efforts should be undertaken in order to better bring Turkmenistan as well as Afghanistan to the table.

4 Input

Input was provided by the Ecologic NeWater project team as well as the Uzbek NeWater team (Hakim and Andrej) under assistance by Ms Tatjana Babayants as interpreter

The main thrust of the presentation was based on the findings generated by Ecologic research during two fieldtrips in 2006 and 2007.

5 Comments

Comments were made regarding the following aspects of the presentation. Positions are not assigned to individual speakers, as this was a request uttered by the participants, but rather to the respective organization or country.

5.1 Access to and availability of data at the national level

In Uzbekistan the situation with respect to access to and the availability of data has improved as Uzbekistan succeeded in not losing any further monitoring posts. All the information is connected to the same system that existed during Soviet times. It can be said that in 1995 the reliability of data for researchers was a problematic issue. Now there is an Internet portal where one can receive the data. Obtaining and accessing data is an absolutely legal and open process in Uzbekistan. Data sets can be divided into groups, such as strategic data and some specific data, for example. One should consider that information about mid-flow or consumption of water in the city areas can be interesting for many, but information about flow in small channels is only interesting for water managers at a regional level. So what really needs to be in the central focus of attention in the information which is needed for broad communication with stakeholders and decision-makers.

There is a system that was supported by the USAID for providing Internet communication between different institutions and organizations which will make the information of flows available for the ministry within two hours.

From an Uzbek point of view, all in all the system works well. There are some problems but they don't appear to be unsolvable. There are personal and staff problems, and also in interstate and inter-institutional cooperation problems appear to persist.

The Tajik participant outlined the main pressures on water resources from a Tajik point of view, including salinisation, due to over-abstraction. Problems with supplying drinking water exist throughout the country. He pointed out that there is currently not enough information to understand the situation from a national perspective, let alone from a transboundary perspective. There are clearly negative impacts on the water resource, however, fully qualifying and quantifying it is a major task.

5.2 Exchange of knowledge

While the availability of data might have been mitigated in some of the riparian countries, still serious problems continue to exist; for example with regards to the wide access of information by all relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs and for those outside the government system, which play a very important role in water sharing.

In Turkmenistan there are complaints about the lack of reliable data on water resources in Tajikistan, at the same time, the Uzbek Hydromet also mentioned that there are problems receiving reliable data from the Tajiks. USAID supported hydro-meteorological services to a very great extent, but even here the interests of the countries differed. Uzbekistan has maintained most of its measuring posts, since there is a strong interest in the country to do so. There is less interest to do so in Tajikistan. Even if donors invest in maintenance and support of the stations they often would anyway deteriorate again.

There was a strong demand for donor organizations to focus on the elaboration of national strategies that take into account the interests of the other countries as well. At the same time, efforts should be put into improving the relationships between the individual countries. A lot of challenges still lie ahead in this regard

5.3 Donor assistance for water monitoring infrastructure and information exchange

Within the last seven years all international organizations and donors including the USAID and Swiss Agency, as well British government provided considerable assistance for hydro-meteorological services in Central Asia. And USAID provided a lot of effort in capacity building of hydro-meteorological services, including hardware, training for specialists. Thus one could definitely speak of an improved situation as compared to the beginning of the 90s.

Still, main challenges, especially with regards to transboundary coordination continue to exist, which can be described as follows:

- **Lack of political will** in the riparian countries to find solutions through cooperation as each country follows its own strategy. These national strategies and priorities often have very different priorities. An example was given for Turkmenistan, which is currently expanding its irrigated area by 20,000 ha each year. Oftentimes such strategies are not discussed with other riparians, they are also not part or substance of any major agreement.
- **Implementation gap:** A lot of time and money was invested by donors (e.g. the World Bank) to support regional water management. Many reports were produced; however there are very few tangible results. Also the establishment of discussion for a, such as the Water-Energy-Consortium to solve this problem have failed. There is uncertainty within the donor community as to what the reasons for this failure might be.

The role of donors is more and more shifting to establishing and facilitating policy dialogues between the riparian countries, just as the ADB led political dialogue between governments in the Central Asian region. These dialogues have to be seen in a wider context than just the Amudarya basin, but rather address water issues in the entire Central Asian region. Monitoring data and information is playing in major role in this respect.

Also, the situation is increasingly reaching a stage of urgency. There seems to be an emerging understanding that issues need to be addressed from a transboundary perspective and that issues need to be looked at from regional perspective. Countries need to come to one table soon and jointly discuss the interests of the individual countries.

While coordination is crucial, donor-supported project should still be owned by the national governments. Projects need the buy-in by all relevant national agencies in order for them to be sustainable; still the transboundary aspect cannot be excluded from the considerations.

5.4 The impact of climate change

Faced with all these challenges, riparians need to agree on a common ground for cooperation and the combination of their interests. Climate change, according to the participants of the consultation, could be the factor that combines and unites the countries. Indicators of climate change taking place in the region do exist. Glaciers have lost 30 to 35% with this process speeding up. It influences river regimes; it has social consequences, it is impacting collaboration.

This pressure could potentially bring the countries to work together, but only if there is a gradual realization of their own situation from the point of view of climate change. At the same time one could be moving a very thin line, which could easily backfire and lead to a more isolationist behavior. There is the danger that countries not necessarily engage in this dialogue on climate change, but that they might try to secure their own positions.

Other participants voiced the opinion that while climate change might serve as a trigger towards more cooperation, it could only be tackled successfully if all states accepted ownership for the problem and addressed it as a transboundary issue.

5.5 Dimensions and implications of the water-energy nexus

There are two problems in the relationship between upstream and downstream countries, the first is water sharing, the second is energy, an aspect that was specifically emphasized by the Tajik participant. He furthermore pointed to fundamental issues related to international law and the degree to which it influences the strategies of the individual countries.

- There seems to be a core misunderstanding as to the area of influence of international law or national law respectively; with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan trying to change some the status of some of their rivers from transboundary to national, as for example the Vaksh in Tajikistan. These efforts are overlooking the fact, that whether the river obtains a national or

transboundary status, Uzbekistan will have an interest in the Vaksh as a tributary to the Amudarya and might object to any development planned upstream.

- International law does provide a starting point for negotiations, but for cooperation agreements there needs to be a common understanding between all parties involved. This understanding does currently not exist between the upstream and downstream countries. Even in cases, where agreements exist, e.g. the framework agreement between on the Syrdarya from 1998, these are often not functioning, due to ill-defined compensation mechanisms and lacking specification of benefit-sharing.
- In 1999 an agreement was signed between all countries, including Turkmenistan on a rare occasion, on the water-energy nexus in Central Asia. The agreement was based on the water managers' agreement and tailored so to include energy issues. To support this agreement, methodologies were developed in order to determine related costs and benefits. Through this the agreement was turned in a commercial deal and due to this fact, the agreement has worked during the last years. The agreement on Syrdarya was not supported by such mechanisms; instead there were several attempts to draft new agreements, however without any mentionable results.
- Currently, a concept on effective use of water resources is being elaborated. This is also a framework agreement. Instead of clear mechanisms though, a lot of time was spent negotiating the title of the agreement. The current title is "Conception on effective use of water and energy resources". Some suggested to name it "... of water, hydro and energy resources". By this though the countries would have been forced to work more on some transboundary issues instead of country to country.
- International banks and structures at the same time cannot imply any responsibility. Still, one of the conditions that are applied for example from World Bank, ADB and IDB is that a bank will not finance any project that can potentially cause conflict. ADB furthermore stated that there would be no financing at all until the countries come to some agreement, rendering the issue of cooperation so much more important.
- In developing new energy infrastructure, two possible scenarios are possible: a country builds its systems without attracting additional funding and thus remains independent from the interests of other countries (currently underway in Tajikistan). The second scenario is integration of regional interest.
- Financial issues, or to be more concrete lack of financial issues, is a critical issue with regards to transboundary water management issues. This, according to participants from Tajikistan, would not only include donor funding for support projects, but rather serious investments in water infrastructure.

5.6 Role of individuals and perceptions

It became clear from the discussions during the workshop that many issues and mechanism are still perceived very differently in the Amudarya countries, leading to different outcomes in the long run. This is also related to the perception of water as an environmental good, as something worthwhile to be protected through a coordinated mechanism as well as the notion of the Amudarya as a river basin, thus acknowledging the inextricable inter-connectedness of all the riparians.

Whether induced by international law or rather traditional notions of responsibility, the moment the Amu Darya is considered as an ecosystem as whole, as a basin, this would also mean that each party feels responsible for the river. This feeling is for obvious reasons not there at the moment. There are people in the international community always promoting that the issue of international water management can help alleviate other conflicts. I'm not sure, but I have the feeling that in the Amu Darya we are not likely to see this happen, but rather that efforts in water management are endangered by conflicts at other levels.

Just as perceptions are collectively held within the riparian countries and maintained among within different stakeholder groups, cooperation then boils down to relationships between individuals and trust between partners.

5.7 Challenges and strategies for adopting adaptive water management practices

An issue was raised concerning the applicability of the river basin approach. This internationally promoted water management approach is also widely supported throughout Central Asia. The Tajik participant pointed out however, that administrative borders within Tajikistan do not coincide with the borders of sub-basins. Just as for some European countries in implementing the Water Framework Directive, the question emerges on how to deal with this problem from the point of view of water management. The problems in dealing with this delineation issue are symptomatic of the entire situation. Thinking has mostly taken place in a simple linear way; adaptive management clearly needs to be introduced. However, the question was raised regarding the clear mechanism for doing so and how to control for existing uncertainties. Clear strategies and mechanisms for controlling these uncertainties are crucial in this context. The Central Asian countries are currently at varying stages in arriving at this understanding and also in developing such strategies.

Strategy development with view to adaptive water management is crucial at the national level. Following the position of UNDP throughout Central Asia, the development of a national water management strategy is at the core of transboundary cooperation. And again, supporting the idea, such as discussed by the international community or in international law is one side, implementing these approaches and paradigms at the national level with view of the neighboring countries the other.

6 Conclusions and Outlook

The feedback provided to the report presented by Ecologic echoed optimistic as well as pessimistic perceptions of the current situation with regards to transboundary water management in Central Asia, and specifically the Amudarya basin. Still a range of problems exist, particularly with regards to the water-energy nexus as well as water quality issues. The cooperation and collaboration between the riparian countries is still very problematic. Insufficient knowledge about water management in the individual countries is one component of the problem, the unwillingness as well as incapacity to share adequate data with neighboring countries is the other. There is a general lack of awareness that river basins are a shared environmental good. This awareness is only slowly emerging in the wake of the respective international discourses.

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