

Plenary Session II - OSCE experiences in promoting transboundary co-operation on water management

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Public Participation in Chu and Talas Rivers

In January 2000 governments of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and of the neighboring Republic of Kazakhstan signed an intergovernmental agreement on the use of shared water management infrastructure on Rivers Chu and Talas. The agreement was ratified by parliaments of both countries and came into forth in February 2002.

To implement the bilateral agreement, the Parties already developed arrangements for sharing costs of exploitation, maintenance of the water management infrastructure; carry out other activities aimed at ensuring proportional distribution and use of the water resources. According to the agreement, a permanent commission is to be established that should develop an agreement on a regime of work of the water management infrastructure defining costs for the infrastructure exploitation and maintenance. Such Commission had inauguration ceremony on 26th July 2006 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The water management measures decided on by the bilateral Commission to be implemented by the riparian parties will directly affect the interests of the population living in the regions adjacent to the Chu and Talas rivers. A mechanism needs to be established to ensure a two-way communication between the Commission and the stakeholders.

The needs to ensure relevant communication and to develop mechanisms for public participation is the reason for a specific component “Public participation in transboundary water management of Chu and Talas rivers” in the OSCE/UN ECE-supported project «Creation of a commission between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the Chu and Talas rivers».

This component was built on the results of a study¹ on transboundary water commissions in Europe that showed that most of these commissions are rather technical/expert commissions that are not taking into account the socio-economic connotation of water management decisions and the need to involve local stakeholders into discussions of water management measures.

To overcome this and to ensure involvement of stakeholders into the preparation and implementation of water management measures in transboundary water basins, it is necessary to establish formal procedures for the involvement of stakeholders in the management of transboundary waters. One approach is to set special working groups for stakeholder participation under or advisory bodies to the Water Commissions. These organs could function as channels or/and forums for regular consultations between the water authorities and local stakeholders. It is also important to inform the stakeholders about the water management issues and work of joint bodies, such as water commissions on transboundary waters.

The public participation component was actively discussed since early 2003 by numerous stakeholders and the activities started in 2004 under the OSCE-funded project with the overall

¹ The study “**REVIEW OF EXISTING STRUCTURES, MODELS AND PRACTICES FOR TRANSBOUNDARY WATER MANAGEMENT**” was conducted within EU FP5 MANTRA East project, www.mantraeast.org

goal to promote public participation in the decision making on issues of management of transboundary waters of Rivers Chu and Talas. In this project, Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation together with Zhalgas – Counterpart:

- Identified major stakeholders for the transboundary water management of Talas and Chu rivers;
- Developed the awareness of the Commission and water authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan of interests and needs of the local stakeholders;
- Organized regular consultations with the relevant authorities for establishing procedures for the involvement of stakeholders in the water management process;
- Developed proposals for public participation in management of the transboundary waters in the longer-term future, and
- Disseminated information on the project and the Commission activities in the region and internationally.

The main outputs of the project are:

- Operational project web-site <http://talaschu.org/>
- Directory of stakeholders in English, Russian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz is compiled and available at <http://talaschu.org/db/index.php?IDLang=2&link=search>
- Focus groups interviews aiming to assess local training needs and expectations carried out in both Kazakh and Kyrgyz parts of the river basins with the report available at http://www.talaschu.org/upload_files/Focus_groups_in_Talas_Ch_u.pdf
- Capacity Building Plans for both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan
- Several meetings/seminars were held to inform about the project and discuss possible follow up measures, as well as present available experience in the water management and public participation field
- Established network for joint actions including relevant organizations and stakeholders.

The main conclusions from the implementation of the project are:

On Public Awareness and Environmental Education

The broad public cannot participate in the work of the Commission due to the narrow technical orientation of the latter and a lack of public interest in the Commission's activities. The lack of funds of the authorities and the new River Basin Commission is also a bottleneck to expand the work with the population. In this context, the most efficient approach is to increase public awareness through regular information in mass media (radio, print media, and television) on such issues as protection and rational use of the regional water resources and the activity of the Commission and other water management authorities. Such regular public information on decisions and their results in the sphere of transboundary water management, protection and use could contribute to ensure openness and transparency of water management issues. The information delivered via mass media must be translated into a simple language and must be comprehensible for the local population.

It is necessary to involve professional journalists in public awareness activities. Simultaneously, some part of this work can be handed over to research institutions, educational establishments and NGOs. Since the problems of establishing the Commission and developing a water management system are equally new to the above-mentioned organizations and journalists, additional training activities are necessary, such as a training-for-trainers program for representatives of these organizations, who further will be able to organize public awareness and environmental education programs independently.

In the long run, further capacity building can also include pilot projects on environmental education, such as information days, development of training materials and manuals for school teachers, or a small grants program for local schools on the protection and rational use of water resources in the Chu and Talas basins.

On Involvement of Stakeholders and Experts through the Establishment of a Water Council

Though public awareness is very important, there is also a circle of stakeholders that have direct economic, environmental, research or other interests connected with the protection and use of the Chu and Talas water resources. Such stakeholders include executive bodies and local self-governments, research institutions, NGOs, agricultural producers, entrepreneurs, etc.

In order to develop a sustainable water management system in the region, these diverse and very often contradictory interests have to be taken into consideration, and the stakeholder groups should be involved in the Commission's work on a regular institutional basis, for example, through the establishment of a Basin Council under the Commission. The Basin Council should include representatives of basin administrations and their territorial bodies, authorities and local self-governments, water users' associations (unions, organizations, societies) and NGOs, as well as representatives of other stakeholders and experts. The number of representatives of executive authorities (including basin administrations and their territorial bodies) in the Basin Council should not exceed 1/3 of the total membership. The statute of the Council and its membership should be decided on by the Commission. The statute must also include procedures for consultations between the Commission and the Council and discussions by the Commission of the Council's proposals. It is important for the Council's members to see that their recommendations are taken seriously by the Commission.

On the Promotion of the Research and Development Potential in the Region

European experience in transboundary water management projects has clearly demonstrated that the establishment of transboundary water commissions and further work on the development of joint water management programs require a large volume of reliable environmental, social and economic data. Therefore, the necessary prerequisite for such work is the involvement of Kazakh and Kyrgyz researchers (including students, would-be specialists and Commission members) in the development of these programs. Interdisciplinary research is particularly important. However, the involvement of research is often insignificant due to financial restraints. This is typical of all the countries in transition.

On Long-term Fund-raising for the Commission Capacity Building and Public Participation

Public participation in water management is a long-term process that cannot be realized within one campaign or a short-term project. It requires considerable and long-term financial resources. In this regard, it is important to continue the search for funds from international foundations in order to support the Commission to develop public participation in the river basins.

Initially, information about the Commission and the project should be provided in English and on the Internet. This is why the project included the development of the web-site of the Commission in both Russian and English, publication and dissemination of brochures and the organization of an international seminar in Estonia, where the members of the Commission made presentations.

It is essential to develop a plan for further project proposals to continue the process launched by this project.

Work also continued in years 2005 and 2006, using the financing support from the Government of Estonia and Estonian Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, under the cooperation project "Public participation in transboundary water management of Chu and Talas rivers". The project aims to continue public activities in the region and to raise awareness on transboundary issues and the need for bilateral cooperation in the Chu-Talas water basin. Under this project, a seminar "Public participation in transboundary water management of Chu and Talas rivers" was held in Almaty

on 10-11 February 2006 to discuss the main problems in the field of transboundary water management and possibilities to improve the situation via planning and carrying out joint actions, problems associated with awareness raising and capacity building and communication on water management issues. Concrete activities in this field were also proposed, based on the experience of the Estonian-Russian cooperation on transboundary waters established in the Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe region, its history and development, existing arrangements and challenges. The seminar was successful in terms of bringing together different stakeholders from both countries and international experts, as well as discussing the major problems and finding solutions together. For example, the Action Plan facilitating cooperation and joint measures was actively discussed and further on elaborated in the working groups. Recommendations of the workshop are available at:

http://www.talaschu.org/upload_files/TalasChu_Feb2006_seminar_recommendations_eng.pdf

During projects activities, the need for better information dissemination was experienced which led to a follow up OSCE project to train journalists on the transboundary waters information dissemination.

In the future it could be recommended to

- implement major activities from the developed Action Plan
- elaborate more concrete mechanisms under the Joint Commission for public involvement and oversight
- continue bilateral cooperation in the border sense in the river basins.