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**MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON
THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY
WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES**

Fourth meeting
Bonn (Germany), 20–22 November 2006
Item 6 (f) of the provisional agenda

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

**Activities of the UNECE regional adviser on environment and their contribution to the
work programme of the Convention**

Note by the secretariat

Direction of work

1. It is the task of the Regional Adviser on Environment to develop and implement operational activities and assistance projects. All activities are related to the core programmes and expertise of UNECE and are implemented in close cooperation with the Conventions' secretariats. The main objective is to facilitate the development of environmental cooperation between countries. The work is in line with the ongoing process of reforming UNECE to increase policy implementation efforts, in particular in countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE).
2. While the Regional Adviser supports all the UNECE Conventions, water projects form a large proportion of the work due to the high political relevance of transboundary water cooperation in the region.

3. The main aim of the water-related activities is to support the implementation of the different provisions of the Water Convention. Projects are designed to mobilize political action and achieve results such the adoption of bilateral agreements and other legal documents and the development of action plans for policy implementation at the national or transboundary level.
4. Most of the activities are developed and implemented in cooperation with other international organizations. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) is of particular importance (see document ECE/MP WAT/2006/18).
5. It has been relatively straightforward to raise funding for projects, as the needed funding is relatively restricted and the projects usually address issues of high political importance. The main donors are Norway, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and United Nations foundations. Frequently, funds are raised in cooperation with other organizations such as OSCE and UNDP.

Overview of projects in the water sector

Dam safety in Central Asia

6. To prevent major dam accidents in Central Asia, UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific have launched a project to improve dam safety in the region. Central Asia has around 300 major dams and other water control facilities, mostly on transboundary rivers. The dams are aging and are not adequately maintained. At the same time, the number of people living downstream from dams is growing. For example, the Fergana valley, which is divided among Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, has 9 million inhabitants. If a dam upstream this valley were to break, the consequences could be disastrous.
7. One goal of the project is to help countries ensure that relevant safety principles are reflected in national legislation. The second goal is to promote cooperation between countries so that information about the risk of accidents can be shared quickly and countries can effectively warn and help each other in case of accident. The project is politically important and is one of the few directions of cooperation in which all five countries in Central Asia participate actively. More information is available at http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety_doc.htm.

Establishment of a river basin commission between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the Chu and Talas rivers

8. The project has assisted Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in establishing a transboundary water commission on the Chu and Talas rivers. The Chu-Talas Rivers Commission represents a mutually beneficial way for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to share the responsibility for water infrastructures used by both countries. As part of the cooperation, Kazakhstan has agreed to pay part of the operating and maintenance expenses for a number of Kyrgyz dams and reservoirs supplying water to both countries. This project, which was successfully concluded in July 2006,

constitutes a significant step forward in water cooperation in Central Asia. More information is available at <http://www.talaschu.org/>.

Promotion of cooperation on the Dniester River

9. The project “Transboundary Cooperation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River” was carried out in cooperation with OSCE in 2004–2006. The project reviewed and assessed cooperation on the Dniester between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Its main conclusion was that cooperation between the two countries needed to be revised and strengthened. On the basis of the project’s recommendations, Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities signed a Protocol of Understanding as a basis for future work, and a follow-up project started in late summer 2006. The second project aims to broaden the scope of water cooperation, involve more institutions and the public, and improve access to and exchange of information on the river. More information is available at <http://dniester.org/>.

Capacity for Water Cooperation

10. The Capacity for Water Cooperation (CWC) project aims to strengthen the capacity for transboundary water management in EECCA. The objective is to create a framework for cross-fertilization and exchange of experience between river basins and countries regarding regulatory, institutional, methodological and other aspects of integrated management of transboundary waters, and at the same time to bring in valuable experience from other parts of the UNECE region (see document ECE/MP.WAT/2006/10). The Regional Adviser on Environment has assisted the Convention’s secretariat in the design and implementation of the project. More information is available at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cwc.htm>.

CAREWIB

11. The establishment of the Central Asian Regional Water Information Base (CAREWIB) was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and implemented in cooperation with UNEP and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination for Central Asia (see www.cawater-info.net/index_e.htm). The project’s objective is to support more efficient use of water resource in Central Asia by making information available to governmental, intergovernmental and international bodies, water users and the general public. The project will be finalized in 2007. A follow-up project is under preparation.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the transboundary context

12. A project supporting the implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan started in January 2006. Under this project, the EIA procedure is applied to objects in Kyrgyzstan with the involvement of Kazakh downstream authorities and the public according to the provisions of the Espoo Convention. The Government of Norway funds the project. . More information is available at http://www.unece.org/env/eia/central_asia.htm.

Transboundary water cooperation in South-Eastern Europe

13. A project to support the development of transboundary water cooperation in SEE is under preparation. Its main objectives are to raise awareness among stakeholders and donors of the needs and obstacles involved in the establishment of transboundary water cooperation in SEE, and to support the development of transboundary water cooperation in selected water basins.

Conclusions and opportunities for future work

14. The general response to the increased role of UNECE in general, and of the Regional Adviser in particular, in the development and implementation of technical assistance projects is positive. Greater policy implementation efforts are also part of the recent UNECE reform.

15. The limited availability of resources has necessitated selectivity in choosing projects, and a focus on projects that can achieve a qualitative improvement in transboundary water cooperation. Experience shows that if the riparian countries are prepared to develop their cooperation, relatively small and focused projects (50,000–150,000 USD) can be quite efficient in facilitating positive development. Direct involvement by a neutral institution (UNECE) has also been a positive factor in the negotiations within the projects. Under current conditions it has been impossible to engage in larger and longer-term projects. Also, participation in large projects financed by major institutions, such as the Global Environmental Fund and the World Bank, has proven difficult.

16. Given the resources currently available in UNECE (salary and travel funds for the Regional Adviser), it is not possible to increase the volume of work. If the future workplan of the Convention were to focus more on project work, these resources would need to be increased. There are several possible options for this, such as secondment of staff and closer cooperation with international organizations and donors involving division of labour to support project implementation.