

## **Capacity building for cooperation on dam safety in Central Asia**

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In Central Asia, concern over the safety of more than 100 large dams and other water control facilities, located mostly on transboundary rivers, has grown significantly in recent years. Ageing dams and their sometimes inadequate maintenance, coupled with population growth in flood plains downstream from the dams, have resulted in increased risks to life, human health, property and the environment. Failure of a dam could have disastrous consequences in downstream regions and countries.

Effective national regulatory frameworks for dam safety and subregional collaboration on dam safety are therefore critical for Central Asia. This was also highlighted in the UNECE-UNESCAP SPECA report "Strengthening cooperation for rational and efficient use of water and energy resources in Central Asia".

Central Asian countries needed support to develop adequate institutional and legal frameworks for dam safety. Established procedures for notification of co-basin countries in case of accidents or emergency situations with dams are also in need for improvement. The UNECE project therefore aims to:

- Prompt the countries concerned to set up or revise national dam safety regulatory frameworks in order to achieve their harmonization, and
- Promote subregional cooperation for information exchange and notification in case of accidents or emergency situations with dams.

The project is implemented by UNECE in collaboration with the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and is part of the Environment and Security Initiative. Central Asian Government agencies dealing with the safety of dams and other large hydraulic structures as well as Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice participate in the project that is funded by Finland.

The UNECE publication "Dam Safety in Central Asia: Capacity-Building and Regional Cooperation" is the result of the first phase of the project in 2006-2007.

A second project phase 2008-2011 focuses on support to the introduction or revision of national legislation, the development of a regional cooperative framework and capacity development including the organization of training courses.

During the second phase the drafting/revision of national legislation in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has been supported as has development of a draft regional agreement for cooperation.

There are plans for a third phase of the project that would also focus on the development of safety of individual dams on transboundary rivers.