

Condition of the drinking water supply sector in Central Asian countries and its development prospects

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Water is an integral part of life and economic activity of people. Nevertheless, most of population and enterprises in many regions of the world do not have access to safe drinking water and appropriate sanitation systems.

In the Central Asian countries, the problem related to the access to water supply services goes back into the history of the region. Grandiose programs of the Soviet period brought to the building of large-scale network infrastructure of water utilities in urban and rural areas. However, the quality of the network and structure design and construction was often low and maintenance of those did not meet relevant requirements. As a result, the infrastructure of water supply and sanitation (WSS) seriously deteriorated in many countries of the region and even collapsed in some places; this has potentially harmful consequences for the human health, economic activity, and environment.

In September 2000, Leaders of 192 countries signed the Millennium Declaration assuming a commitment to reduce global poverty by half by 2015 and, at the same time, to reduce the number of population without access to safe drinking water. In September 2002 in Johannesburg that commitment was extended by including access to basic sanitation.

At the conference in Almaty (Kazakhstan) held on 16-17 October 2000, the ministers of finance/economy and environmental protection of the EECCA countries, as well as ministers from several OECD countries approved the “Guidelines on reforming of the urban water sector in EECCA countries” with the purpose to reverse the current alarming situation.

Five years later, in November 2005, the ministers again met in Yerevan. It was acknowledged then that the ratio of urban population that had access to centralized water supply services was still high, but the *quality* of those services deteriorated. Irregular water supply, breaks in the pipelines, unaccounted water consumption – all these negative factors were gradually worsening in recent years. Also, there is no improvement seen in the key financial indicators. Considering the above-mentioned tendencies, achievement of MDGs related to water supply and sanitation by 2015 seems unlikely. The consequences of WSS infrastructure deterioration in the region are very grave: these affect the public health, environmental conditions, and economic development.

The tendencies mentioned are more or less common for the region. Some good results were achieved in capitals and other big cities. At the same time, the situation in small and mid-sized cities is by far worse, and in most rural areas water supply systems completely degraded.

Analysis of the most important institutional and legal reforms in the countries has shown that their governments undertook certain measures aimed to improve the WSS related situation. In particular, with respect to tariff setting sectoral laws are adopted, drinking water supply programs are implemented.

The “Drinking Water” Program planned for 2002-2010 is completed in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Government of Kazakhstan adopted a new program “Ak bulak” on improvement of water supply for 2011-2020.

With the end to improve water supply to population and develop water infrastructure, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted in 2006 the *Program on the Improvement of Safe Drinking Water Supply for Population in Tajikistan for 2007-2020*. The Law on Drinking Water and its Supply is in the enactment stage in the Republic of Tajikistan.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan adopted the General Program on the supply of human settlements of Turkmenistan with safe drinking water. The Law on Drinking Water was adopted in the republic as well.

In Kyrgyzstan, supply of the population with drinking water is the main objective of the “Taza Suu” Program, which is financed by a number of international organizations and the Government of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan.

In Uzbekistan, drinking water supply improvement actions are carried out within the framework of the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers “On additional measures for achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals in Uzbekistan”.