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Water Management and Basin Organisations in Central Asia

Basin Planning for the Isfara River in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Context

The Isfara River and its catchment are located in the southwestern Ferghana valley. The river originates in Kyrgyzstan on the northern slopes of the Turkestan Range and flows northwards into the territory of Tajikistan through the Ferghana valley towards the Syr Darya River. The total catchment area is approximately 3,900 km²; the total area of irrigated land is ca. 265 km² (80 km² in Kyrgyzstan and 185 km² in Tajikistan).

The catchment belongs to Batken Oblast in Kyrgyzstan and to Sughd Oblast in Tajikistan and includes Uzbek territories at the tail-end of the basin. The population of Batken Oblast is mainly ethnic Kyrgyz, with a large Tajik and a smaller Uzbek minority. The cross-border relationship is a particular issue as the Isfara catchment includes the Tajik enclave of Vorukh inside Kyrgyz territory. Water resources in the transboundary basin are vital for all stakeholders as well as for the environment. Integrated and coordinated management of this transboundary resource benefits some 300,000 people living in the Isfara basin as well as the environment there.

Objective

Environmental protection and improved management of water resources are priority areas for European Union intervention in Central Asia. The project Water Management and Basin Organisations in Central Asia (WMBOCA) is a part of the European Union Regional Environment Programme for Central Asia (EURECA).

Project name	Water Management and Basin Organisations in Central Asia (WMBOCA)
Funded by	European Union Co-funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt)
Project region	The Isfara river basin in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan, and Sughd Oblast, Tajikistan
Main partner	Ministry of Amelioration and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan and Department of Water Management and Melioration of the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration of the Kyrgyz Republic, local water management organisations (Batken and Sughd Oblasts), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC)
Duration	January 2012 – July 2014

WMBOCA consists of two interrelated components:

- Support for water management and strengthening of transboundary river basin administrations in Central Asia
- Capacity building relating to river basin planning for water management organisations and joint river basin entities



L. to r.:

- 1) The Isfara River in Batken oblast, Kyrgyzstan
- 2) Isfara city headwork, Sughd oblast, Tajikistan



L.t.o r.:

- 1) *Training on basin planning for Tajik Working Group, Khujand*
- 2) *Training on basin planning for Kyrgyz Working Group, Batken*

The project cooperates closely with the water management organisations of the Kyrgyz and Tajik segments of the Isfara river basin and helps them to identify long-term priorities for basin planning in the Isfara river basin. To this end two working groups for the Kyrgyz and the Tajik sections of the basin were formed to develop and implement a basin plan. These working groups include the representatives of various local institutions concerned with water management, such as state water management, environmental protection, water purity, epidemiology, financing and financial management agencies, representatives of local administrations and water users.

The overall approach is to develop local capacities for basin planning so that the working groups will be able to elaborate basin plans independently in future.

Measures

Development of a basin plan requires broad expertise. General assessment of conditions within the basin and prioritisation of existing problems call for thorough knowledge and experience in all fields relating to water management. Thus WMBOCA builds local capacities as well as providing technical support. Since the project involves transboundary issues, it also supports regional cooperation in the Isfara river basin. WMBOCA acts in partnership with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) in implementing its activities in the two countries.

Capacity building

A series of training sessions on the stages of basin planning equipped the working groups with methodologies for the analysis and assessment of river basins, so that they could address existing problems. Topics covered during the training sessions included climate change adaptation, integration of IWRM principles, engagement with stakeholders and their role in basin planning, and the existing legal framework for IWRM implementation in light of the requisite reforms.

It is crucial that the ultimate basin plan be feasible. Thus particular focus was on a training session on financial and economic instruments. Project experts presented to the working groups a study on existing economic and financial instruments that would be required for implementation of the basin plan. Members of the working groups reviewed the existing processes for funding the water sector and identified measures needed for the improvement of financial processes.

Along with training sessions on basin planning, national experts presented the working groups with an analysis of existing legal parameters, water balance and water availability in the basin, land resources, biodiversity, water quality, natural hazards, and social and economic conditions. The analysis integrated information already at hand for the identification of further measures for the development of basin plans.

Based on the training sessions and expert presentations, the project distributed information on basin planning to the working group members and other stakeholders.

Technical support

Adequate technical capacities for maintenance and monitoring under present conditions are also essential.

The Isfara river basin is particularly vulnerable in terms of natural hazards, so that on-going monitoring at transboundary level is necessary. Tortgul reservoir in Batken region was identified as a priority infrastructure object within the Kyrgyz segment of the Isfara river basin plan. Accordingly, a motor boat was procured for the local office of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic for rescue operations in the reservoir.

Local experts made significant progress on geographic information system (GIS) mapping. With the support of experts from Wuerzburg University in Germany, they drafted three maps of the Isfara river basin that reflected topographic data, risk zones and land use information for both the Kyrgyz and Tajik sections of the basin (see page 4).

Support of regional cooperation

Since the Isfara river basin lies in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, bilateral cooperation between the two countries is pivotal to development and implementation of the basin plan. An inter-ministerial working group was established to bring together the heads of the national, provincial and district water agencies of both countries. In the course of several meetings, the inter-



L. to r.:

1) *Public hearing in Batken, Kyrgyzstan*

2) *Public hearing in Isfara, Tajikistan*

ministerial working group drafted a framework agreement on the joint use of water resources from international rivers. This agreement provides for the establishment of a joint water commission, a basin committee and two standing secretariats for the Kyrgyz and Tajik sides respectively. The project already supports the two existing interim secretariats.

Present preconditions for water management cooperation on the transboundary level could readily facilitate merging of the two basin plans. Such merging could result in a model for transboundary cooperation on river basin planning and implementation, one that could be replicated on other transboundary rivers in the region.

Results to date

Five training sessions and four expert meetings took place in the course of the project. Members of both working groups gained theoretical and practical knowledge for the development of river basin plans. As a result, the working groups came up with a feasible basin plan for the two segments of the Isfara river basin.

The plan describes current challenges in the basin environment and includes measures such as: improvement of access to drinking water, improvement of water management, better irrigation of farmland, opening of further land to irrigation, and a chapter on environment. The measures are prioritised based on timing and the availability of sufficient investment.

To ensure ownership of the result, the contents of the basin plans were developed solely by the members of the working groups, with guidance from regional and international experts.

To ensure broader public participation in the drafting of the basin plan, public hearings were held in both countries. At these hearings, the goals and objectives of the basin plan were presented, and the representatives from the general public were familiarised with their role in implementation of the basin plan. The hearings also gave stakeholders an opportunity to suggest improvements in the plan.

The basin plans were published in both Russian and local languages (Kyrgyz and Tajik) to assure practical use on local levels.

The Isfara River Basin Plan is to be handed over to the respective water management organisations in both countries for further implementation.

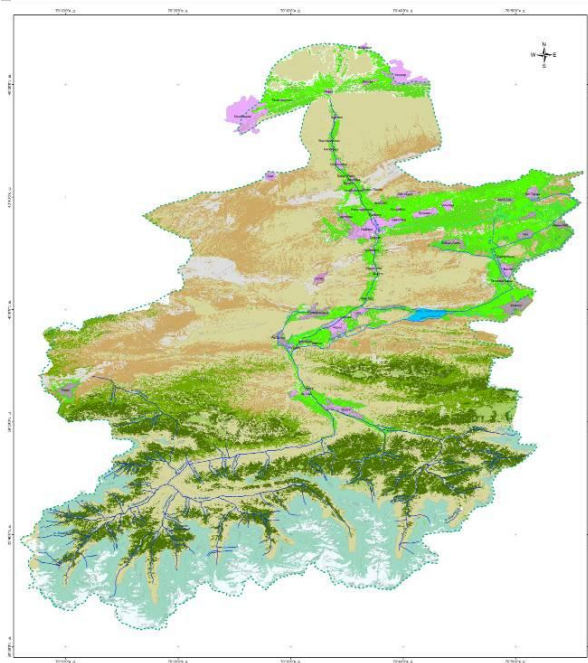
With the support of WMBOCA project, CAREC experts produced a number of printed materials to enable local experts to familiarise themselves with the basin planning process. These included a handbook on basin planning (in versions for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan respectively) and a training module.

The Basin Planning Handbook covers international experience on basin planning along with practical experience gained during development of the Aral-Syrdarya Basin Plan for Kazakhstan. It contains modern approaches to both theoretical aspects and practical tools for the development of basin plans. The Handbook presents a general methodology that can also be applied to other basins in the region.

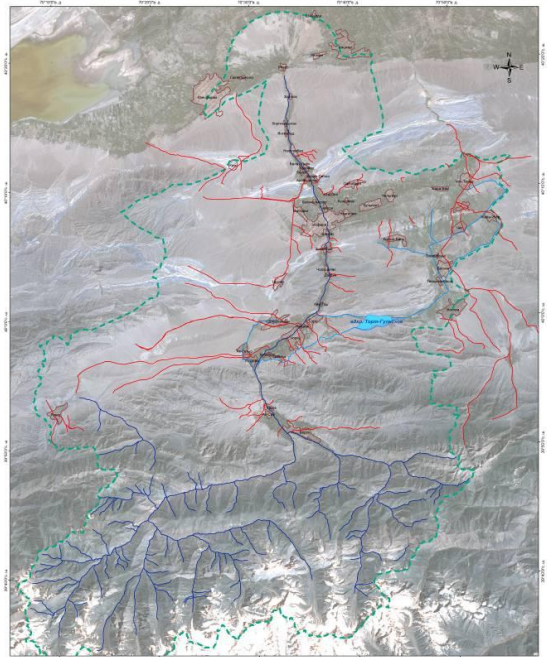
The Training Module contains instructions, suggestions and plans for training sessions. Its content is based on a series of training sessions for both of the working groups in the Isfara river basin.

GIS maps were created in English, Russian, Kyrgyz and Tajik and have been distributed to all of the relevant water management organisations of both countries.

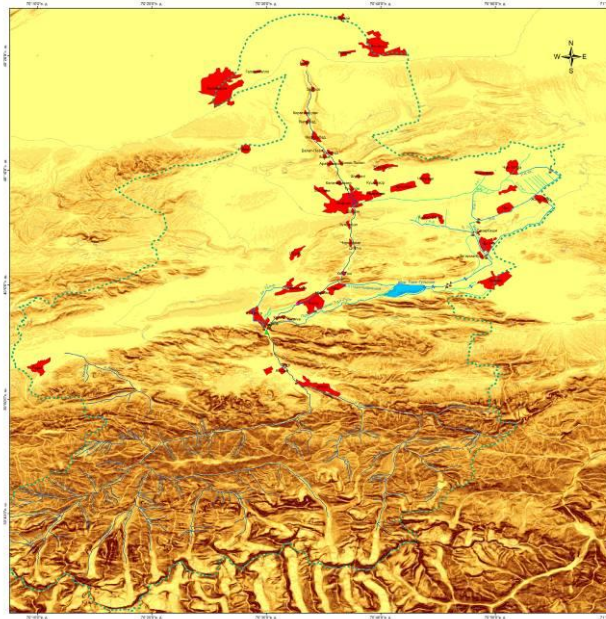
Preliminary topography map of the Isfara river basin



Preliminary land resources use map of the Isfara river basin



Preliminary mudflow risk zones map of the Isfara river basin



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