

Report on the second meeting of the Coordination Group on Regional Information Space on Water and Environment in Central Asia

18-19 February, 20016, Almaty

Executive Summary

The Coordination Group heard and discussed a report on replies to a questionnaire on the most important problems hindering the development of a regional space for water, energy, environmental and hydrological information. Discussions revealed significant imbalances in the accessibility of information in the above four areas. The Coordination Group adopted five recommendations designed to facilitate the development of a regional information space. A Working Group was established to support implementation of the recommendations and help plan further work of the Coordination Group.

Report

The meeting was attended by 27 participants representing organizations and institutions of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, the Coordination Dispatch Center “EnergO” as well as partner organizations, including the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC), UNEP, OCHA, GIZ, SDC and the World Bank. The annotated agenda of the meeting is found in Annex 1 and the List of participants in Annex 2.

In his opening statement Mr. Krasznai (UNECE) analyzed responses to a questionnaire on the problems that hinder the coordinated, effective and efficient management of information on water and environment in Central Asia. Responses to the questionnaire indicate that a) the lack of harmonized normative and legal basis for information exchange / management at the national and regional levels b) lack of sufficient and stable financing for information management at the regional level c) insufficient information flows between IFAS and other regional organizations and donors and d) lack of effective coordination among the water, energy and environment sectors constitute the most serious problems that hinder effective information management at the regional level. It was proposed that the Coordination Group discusses and adopts the recommendations that had earlier been circulated among participants.

Ms. Cassara (the World Bank) presented a report on the **meeting of the Regional Working Group of the CA-WaRM program** that had been held back to back with the meeting of the Coordination Group. The objective of the CA-WaRM project is to modernize the technical capacity and knowledge platform for improved water resources information management to support operations and investment in Central Asia. The Regional Working Group meeting had discussed, among others, its own terms of reference, the background to CA-WaRM regional set of activities and it also worked on designing the set of regional activities.

The Coordination Group then proceeded to discuss the progress towards **harmonized indicators, methodology and procedures** for information management and possibilities to improve information flows among key producers and users of data.

Mr. Libert (UNECE) spoke about work on agreed indicators undertaken in such frameworks as the FLERMONECA project, SEIS and the development of statistical indicators for measuring progress towards the SDG-s by the UNECE.

Ms. Alexeeva and Mr. Billot (UNEP) informed participants about plans to establish a link between the website “UNEP-Live” and the Ecoportal.

Ms. Ibragimova (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance) briefed participants on relevant activities of the Office.

Mr. Tereshkevich, speaking on behalf of the Kazakh Branch of SIC ICSD spoke about recent improvements in the Ecoportal and plans to present on it more information on the state of the environment in accordance with international indicators. He supported the proposal on closer integration between the Ecoportal and other portals dealing with water resources management and other relevant issues.

Mr. Kobzev (Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre) recalled that the Meeting of Regional Organizations of Central Asia held on May 25-26 last year supported improved exchange of information among regional organizations. CAREC is ready to participate in the implementation of recommendations proposed for adoption, including the establishment of a web page for the Coordination Group, introducing links among relevant websites and setting up a rolling calendar of activities in the field of water resources management, the environment, energy and hydro-meteorology.

Mr. Sokolov (Scientific and Information Centre of the Inter-state Commission on Water Coordination) presented a list of issues that need to be agreed upon by the Coordination Group: 1) The mandate and terms of reference of the Coordination Group; 2) Methodology of functioning of the unified information space 3) Harmonized requirements for the monitoring of water resources and their use; 4) Unified requirements for knowledge bases (analytical instruments, reports, publications, etc.) 5) Protection of intellectual property 6) Cooperation mechanisms with international agencies and projects; 7) Mechanisms for functioning and financing of the Working Group.

Ms. Shivareva (Regional Centre for Hydro-meteorology) informed participants on progress with the modernization of hydrological services, in particular in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, and on the limited availability of relevant hydro-meteorological information at the regional level.

Development of a **modern, harmonized normative and legal basis for information management** was considered as an important step towards the regional information space. The existing “legal basis” mostly consists of documents of declaratory character that are not legally

binding and lack an implementation mechanism and supporting budget. Some of these documents date back to the time of the Soviet Union. The group could, in the future, consider adopting recommendations to relevant decision-making bodies to develop a harmonized, modern legal basis for information management at the regional level.

Participants agreed that **sufficient and stable financing for information management** at the regional level is a key precondition for the development and operation of a regional information space. The example of CAREWIB was mentioned as a framework that was provided stable financing for a certain period of time. Development of cooperation between regional institutions and a regional space for information on water, environment, energy and hydrology would open up new possibilities for seeking donor support, as it would guarantee full transparency, openness, accessibility and an even and fair distribution of funds to all providers of information.

The Coordination Group discussed how to **improve information flows and coordination among the water, energy and environmental sectors**. It was agreed that a rolling calendar of events covering water, energy, hydrology and the environment, placed on the webpage of the Group, as well as links between the different active websites could be the first steps towards facilitating a more open and inclusive dialogue among experts and decision-makers in these areas.

The session on **the use of information to prepare meetings of EC IFAS, ICSD and ICWC** briefly reviewed existing practices.

Mr. Krasznai (UNECE) summarized the main tasks and objectives of the Coordination Group and it was agreed that the further process would include:

- Circulation of the summary of the second meeting of the Coordination Group among participants, including the adopted recommendations within two weeks;
- Circulation of a draft TOR for the Coordination Group including suggested instructions and membership for the Working Group;
- A letter by the Executive Secretary of the UNECE to the Chairpersons of EC IFAS, ICSD and ICWC and the Directors of CDC “Energó”, the Regional Centre of Hydrology and CAREC, presenting the recommendations of the group;
- Discussion on the implementation of relevant recommendations at the 11 March meeting of regional organizations organised by CAREC;
- Organisation of the first meeting of the Working Group (set up at the first meeting of the Coordination Group) back to back with the second meeting of the Regional Working Group of the CA-WaRM project of the World Bank;
- Consultation with donors on their participation in the work of the Coordination Group;

- Decision to organise the third meeting of the Coordination Group.

The Coordination Group then proceeded to the adoption of the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The Coordination Group is in favor of establishing a web page for its work that could be accessible through the websites of the UNECE, UNEP-Live, EC IFAS, SIC ICWC, ICSD (Ecoportal) and CAREC. It requests the UNECE to provide technical and other assistance in cooperation with other organizations to the development of the web page.

Recommendation 2

The Coordination group is in favor of establishing links between the websites of UNECE, UNEP-Live, EC IFAS, SIC ICWC, ICSD (Ecoportal) and CAREC and if possible other relevant websites in order to facilitate easy access to information that may be relevant for users of water, environmental, energy and hydro meteorological information in Central Asia;

Recommendation 3

The Coordination Group is in favor of establishing - on the web page of the Coordination Group with links from all active websites - a joint calendar of events, covering relevant regional events in the water, environmental, energy and hydro meteorological fields.

Recommendation 4

The Coordination Group requests the UNECE to provide support to the activities of the Working Group the tasks of which include helping organize the work of the Coordination Group, including preparation of its agenda, and supporting the implementation of its recommendations.

Recommendation 5

The Coordination Group requests the UNECE to provide assistance, in cooperation with other organizations and donors, to strengthening the institutional potential of national organizations of EC IFAS, SIC ICWC, SIC ICSD and other relevant regional organizations to provide relevant information on the situation in Central Asia.

The representative of UNECE agreed to convey these recommendations in a letter by the Executive Secretary of UNECE to the Chairman of EC IFAS, the Chairmanship of ICWC and ICSD, the Director of the Coordination Dispatch Centre "Energy", the Head of the Regional Centre of Hydrology and the Director of the Central Asian regional Environmental Centre.

Annex I.

Annotated agenda of the Second Meeting of the Coordination Group on a Regional Space for Water and Environmental Information

Almaty, 11-12 February 2016

11. February

10.00 Opening of the meeting

Opening statement by the UNECE and GIZ

The statements summarize the outcomes of the first meeting and outline the objectives of the second meeting of the Group

Opening statement by other participants (optional)

10.30 Presentation of the results of the questionnaire on challenges to the development of a regional space on water and environmental information

The questionnaire listed twenty challenges and problems that may complicate / hinder the development of the regional information space. Answers to the questions are expected to help focus the work of the Coordination Group on areas where progress would support the development of the information space in the most efficient manner.

Discussion

11.00 Agreed indicators, methodology and procedures

a) Presentation of existing practices

- SIC ICWC / BVO Amudarya / BVO Syrdarya
- SIC ICSD / CAREC
- Regional Centre of Hydrometeorology
- CDC "Energy"

The SIC-ICWC supported CAWATER-info.net provides key indicators and a knowledge base, including analyses. At the same time proposals to further improve the scope of agreed indicators and the financing

and stability of the service have been on the table in recent years. The ICSD's Ecoportal has significantly improved the scope and quantity of available environmental information but it needs to improve further, e.g. identify and use a greater number of reliable sources of information and present more substantive data / information on the state of the environment in Central Asia, using selected environmental indicators. Recent programmes to improve hydro meteorological services included among others infrastructure development and improved communication and IT but shortcomings remain, including lack of easy to find websites offering operative information on water resources and the energy sector besides meteorological forecasts. Websites offering substantive information on the energy sector are difficult to find at the country or at the regional levels.

11.30 Coffee break

11.45 Continuation of the discussion: developing recommendations for harmonized indicators, methodology and procedures

Introductory remarks by UNECE and CAREC

Participants of the first meeting of the Coordination Group emphasized that no single information system is able to provide the very broad range of complex data, analysis and forecast that is required by various stakeholders and various levels of decision makers working in different areas. Providers of information need to work together in a coordinated way to develop the unified information space.

Participants will discuss how to achieve the provision of sufficient quality and quantity of substantive information (data and analysis) in all areas covered by the information space, how to ensure complete, harmonised coverage and eliminate potential overlaps through the use of agreed, comprehensive sets of indicators in all relevant areas (water, energy, hydro meteorology and environment). It will also be discussed how to create a user friendly and easy to navigate space and avoid duplication by the introduction of a network of links among websites. The need for involving additional information providers (websites) to better cover such issues as soil degradation, desertification or climate change could also be discussed.

Need for capacity building (e.g. on methodology for analysis and modelling, etc.) could also be addressed by participants. Indicators identified by SEIS could be used to complement the presently used indicators and to achieve complementarity with other international websites.

13.00 Lunch break

15.00 Improving information flows

Review of existing practices: information flows among key producers and users of data

Introductory remarks by EC IFAS, ICWC and ICSD Secretariats

Participants of the first meeting pointed to insufficient information flows and coordination both among ministries and agencies at the national level (water, energy, environment, hydro meteorology) and

among regional organisations and institutions as well as international organisations and donors. Experience of collecting information from IFAS member states, donors and partners on implementation of projects contained in ASBP3, information flows between governments and BVO-s as well as among IFAS organisations and institutions, donors and international organisations will be discussed.

16.30 Coffee break

16.45 Continuation of the discussion

Proposals to develop recommendations on improving information flows will be discussed.

18.00 End of the meeting

19.00 Reception

12. February

10.00 Developing a modern, harmonized legal basis for information management

Introductory remarks by UNECE, the Regional Centre on Hydrometeorology and SIC ICWC

*A modern legal basis for information management (e.g. protocols or agreements) could cover harmonised monitoring requirements, agreements on data sharing and management as well as harmonisation of the scope, content and links among websites that constitute the information space. The session should start with a review of existing practices. **Participants are encouraged to circulate the legal documents (or links to websites where they are accessible) that regulate information management in their area of responsibility.***

Participants of the first meeting of the Coordination Group could discuss the following options:

a) Developing terms of reference for a comparative analysis of the existing legal basis and recommendations for its modernisation and harmonisation

b) Developing a model (or draft) data exchange protocol

c) Developing conceptual elements for a regional agreement on information exchange

11.15 Coffee break

11.30 Continuation of the discussion

13.00 Lunch

15.00 Defining the scope and format of information for decision support

Introductory remarks by ICWC and ICSD Secretariats and EC IFAS. Presentation of existing practices: use of information to prepare work plans, meetings, decisions of regional organisations and institutions

As a first step towards strengthening decision support through the provision of comprehensive, agreed, easy to interpret sets of information to decision making bodies, these bodies need to define their own information needs. The group will be invited to develop recommendations on decisions by these bodies on the scope and format of information that is used to prepare work plans, agendas, draft resolutions, etc. and for the monitoring of their implementation. The idea of regular consultations on cross-sector issues (e.g. IWRM) and long-term strategies, using a comprehensive set of data and analysis could also be discussed.

16.30 Continuation of the discussion

Participants will be invited to discuss the development of a long-term plan (road map) for regional cooperation on information management.

17.30 Summary by the Chair, next steps

18.00 end of the meeting

Annex II.

**List of participants in
the UNECE Environment Division for organizing the second meeting of the Coordination Group
for a Unified Space for Water and Environmental Information in Central Asia
Almaty, 18-19 February 2016**

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