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News

IWMI promotes Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Fergana Valley

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Local level cooperation team from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Photo by Sardor Musaev)

Within the Fergana Valley, which is shared between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, there are about 30 small transboundary tributaries (STTs) as well as an abundance of pertinent transboundary water management infrastructure. Each of these STTs has a rich history of local and meso level cooperation. To improve institutional mechanisms for transboundary water management in STTs, the Integrated Water Resources Management in Fergana Valley (IWRM-Fergana) project has been implemented by [International Water Management Institute \(IWMI\)](#) since 2001. Being implemented in partnership with the Scientific-Information Centre of Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination (SIC ICWC) and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the project aimed at institutionalizing and up-scaling of bottom-up cooperation mechanisms (from Water Users Associations (WUAs) to canal and basin scale) on two STTs – Shakhimardansai shared between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and Khojabakirgansai shared between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

On 5 June 2012, in the Hotel “La Grand Plaza”, Tashkent, [IWMI](#) organized and facilitated 2 workshops with over 35 participants attending the events. The first workshop was dedicated to National Level consultations to discuss institutional options of joint water governance in the STT Shakhimardansai River. The workshop was attended by the National Coordination and Support Groups (NCSG) of the IWRM-Fergana project from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The NCSGs, representing various ministries and national level departments (finance, economy, emergency situations, justice, environment, education, energy and water resources) of their respective countries, were established in all the three project countries sharing the Fergana Valley.

Key speakers from various government agencies pointed out that both Kyrgyz and Uzbek sides developed warm working relationships and are eager to further improve effectiveness of joint cooperation in managing the water resources. Participants mentioned the important role of SDC-funded IWRM-Fergana project, especially the STT component implemented by [IWMI](#), which started addressing the issues of joint transboundary water cooperation in the selected STTs of the Fergana Valley by establishing the bottom up and participatory institutions in ground.

In the process of consultation, [IWMI](#) presented the main project outcomes and results of the previous local level discussions on the Shakhimardansai River. It was well noted that on both sides of the Shakhimardansai modern water management institutions are established and operate based on the IWRM principles, including hydrological approach and participation in water management of not only water managers, but also water users, local authorities and local governments, as well as other key stakeholders. Combined with an appropriate legal framework at the interstate level,

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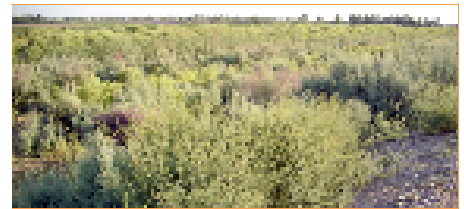
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these institutions are ready to formalize their bilateral transboundary relations in the form of a joint river commission. This is thereby making the existing water cooperation between Kyrgyz and Uzbek riparian sides more regular, predictable and systematic. It was also noted that participants of local consultations proposed the model of River Commission (RC) consisting of a joint Council, as the governing body and decisions of which can be implemented by the riparian maintenance units and stating that council of River commission consists of an equal number of members representing the relevant Sub-basin Water Committees on both sides of the river. IWMI presented the matrix of the four generalized main issues such as border crossing, infrastructure, communication and legal issues to be addressed. Later the participants were asked to split into two groups – Kyrgyz and Uzbek, where local stakeholders and national level ministries could jointly discuss the solutions for these issues.

Outcomes of the work of both group discussions resulted in almost identical solutions, which highlighted the need in establishing special working groups consisting of representatives of relevant ministries such as border services, foreign affairs and others. The ministries of agriculture and water resources should play a leading role in this initiative, which would study the issues thoroughly and draft a joint bilateral framework agreement based on the main principles of cooperation and mutual benefit sharing with appropriate proposal to the governments of both sides.

At the end participants agreed on decision points, which recognized the existing transboundary water cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which at present is ad-hoc, informal and complicated by border crossing. Also the participants noticed that local cooperation must continue to run until the adoption of a framework agreement.

The second workshop was informal and was mainly attended by the members of the sub-basin water committees established earlier by the project. The aim of the workshop was to operationalize the existing joint river-wide arrangements through developing specific joint short- to mid-term action plans. The following aspects of cooperation were discussed during this workshop:

- Joint discussion of the water distribution (during water deficiency periods March-April and September-October);
- Maintenance of transboundary structures and facilities;
- Communication and necessary actions before and after the emergency events (floods, mud flows);
- Information exchange.

On the matter of institutionalization of transboundary water cooperation in Khojabakirgansai, the previous joint national level consultations held in Bishkek early this year between the representatives of different ministries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, concluded that the existing local level cooperation should be continued and improved until a formal intergovernmental agreement establishing joint river-wide structure will be signed. It was agreed that the project would start helping with the operationalization of the joint river-wide arrangements through facilitation of joint meetings to uphold the working relations in a more systematic form, mode of cooperation and trust building. Thus, on 22 May 2012 the first joint meeting was organized on the Tajik side of the river in the place called "Plotina" of Bobojon Gafurov district of Sogd Province, Tajikistan. The meeting was attended by the members of water committees from both Kyrgyz and Tajik sides of the River.

The joint meeting was organized in an informal manner, where the stakeholders discussed and agreed on the action plan, which envisages further institutionalization of their bilateral cooperation. The parties decided to continue having joint meetings. The meetings will be held two times per month during water stress periods (March-May and September-October) and once a month during the high flow period (June-August). It was further agreed on alternating the location of the meetings between the riparian sides. Joint meetings are supposed to address information exchange on flow data, water sharing and distribution. Other issue discussed was cooperation before (early warning), during and post emergency events, sharing information on the possibility of occurrence of mudflows or floods as well as intensity of rainfall upstream. Both parties appointed one responsible person for each side and agreed to establish a secretariat to perform organizational and operational tasks for joint cooperation.

To implement the joint decisions made during the previous meeting, on 12 June 2012 parties met on Kyrgyz side where heads of water committees, union of water users and maintenance units presented the current water management situation in upstream and downstream. During this meeting parties also discussed the exchange of flow data, where participants acknowledged an issue of different readings of the water flow information in key points – water intake in upstream, downstream and remaining flow in the river stream – discharge to the Syrdarya. It was agreed that riparians will exchange the current tables of ordinates (relationship between water level and discharge) and unify it for the purpose single format readings and sharing the flow data. It was also

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agreed that sides will organize joint occasional/surprise check/test measurements in the key points upon request of either side.