



# **Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia (TWMCA) – A Source of Peace**

Funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## *Mid-term Review Report Executive Summary and Recommendations*

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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ASBI	Aral-Syrdarya Basin Inspection
ASBP III	Aral Sea Basin Programme III
C/P	Cooperation Partner
CAS	Central Asian States
CB	Capacity Building
E/P	External Partner
HPS	Hydro Power Station
I	Internal Programme Staff
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
KG	Kyrgyzstan
KZ	Kazakhstan
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
N/P	National Partner
NPP	National Pilot Project(s)
P&E	GTZ Planning and Development Department
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
TA	Technical Assistance
TJ	Tajikistan
TM	Turkmenistan
TWMCA	Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia
UZ	Uzbekistan

# Introduction

## **Purpose and context of the Review**

The underlying mid-term review report is based on an assessment of the programme's status from the point of view of its perceived impacts. The review's approach was primarily learning oriented and designed to support reflection within the programme team.

The review did not only take a close look at the German contribution, but also at the activities occurring in partner organizations (like UNECE) and target groups. Although numerous national representatives and experts of partner organizations have been involved in the review, it still remains a self-assessment more than an external feedback as to its character.

The main purpose of this evaluation, hence, was to improve future programme activities through reflection of lessons learned. With this respect a lot of personal and group-learning occurred in the conduct of the four-day-review-workshop in Bishkek, which may not be fully reflected in this report.

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# Executive Summary

## Key Findings

Numerous programmes and projects have been or are being implemented on the issue of transboundary water management in Central Asia, most of them with limited success so far.

In relation to that, the TWMCA programme has achieved a lot within a short period of time. It is considered being the only truly regional water-related programme in the Central Asian region, which has gained a lead function for other programmes of regional character. The programme has both good international political support through the Berlin process and it has a critical financial volume. All Central Asian States have committed to support this process, which has already had visible impact. It is safe to suppose that the programme has considerably contributed to the good reputation of Germany, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and GTZ in Central Asia.

One of the success factors so far is the three-level strategic approach of the programme. Regional and institutional capacity building (component one), transboundary water management (component two) as well as national pro-poor pilot projects (component three) form the framework of the programme's efforts. All three components so far are successful. Within Component I, which to a large extent is subcontracted to UNECE a comprehensive reform proposal for the IFAS system has been elaborated. Component II is paving the way for transboundary river basin management in the Isfara and Khodza-Bakirgan (KG and TJ) region. And Component III comprises mostly two national pilot projects in each of the five CAS establishing best practices in the water sector.

Taking the high complexity and the difficult political context into consideration, the programme is cooperating very well on all three levels. The initiative is appreciated by all five CAS and enjoys the respect of the relevant partner community in the region.

But there have also been articulated certain concerns. One of them is the rather short time horizon of the TWMCA programme and linked to it the potential risk of low sustainability. The success of the programme has created a certain degree of expectation. The momentum gained ought to be translated into a long term support for Central Asia in the crucial aspect of transboundary water management as this issue is not only believed to be socially and economically beneficial, but plays a critical role in regional conflict prevention.

Considering the limited time-frame of the programme it has – although always water-related – a remarkable scope of different projects. In order to be effective in terms of regional conflict prevention, success in C3-projects has to be used to get ahead as far as possible in Component I and II. While all of the C3-projects are highly appreciated from national governments and have good prospects of sustainability, not all of them are equally beneficiary for the overall mission.

A further concern is the tremendous effort needed for steering the complex set of processes. All projects have their own different steering structure and the limited

possibility of transferring funds from one year to the next requires odd financial rules to be agreed on. That in turn makes it nearly impossible to delegate financial decisions and leads to extra coordination which is time consuming and inefficient.

The programme has realized that much more activities need to be focused on learning on all levels, from the personal level up to the level of the whole policy field. While a very good job is done in the technical implementation this aspect has not been fully exhausted so far.

### **Review Process**

The review basically followed a three step approach. First a questionnaire was circulated among key experts of the national partners, other external partner organizations and the TWMCA team itself. Then four days of intensive workshops with the core team of the TWMCA programme were organized to reflect on the progress and status of their activities. Finally approximately fifteen further experts from different stakeholder groups (e.g. UNECE, German MoFA, SDC, National Representatives EC IFAS, etc.) were interviewed personally.

### **Recommendations**

In the course of the review many suggestions have been made on how to go on or which activities to intensify. From all this feedback some general recommendations could be identified which shall be listed here in brief without further explanation (for details see the respective section):

- Strategic focusing to concentrate on the most important activities
- Use further forms of communication for enhanced partner coordination
- Increase presence at project sites or cooperate with on-site experts
- Organize internal & external meetings for exchange and learning
- Try to use high-level political support from Germany in certain questions
- Stabilize financial planning and clarify implications of cuts in the budget
- Use training and learning trips to Germany deliberately as incentive
- Choose from nationally priority list of projects with regard to visibility
- Stay open-minded and actively keep considering further cooperations
- Support desirable outcomes of the EC IFAS reform actively
- Organize feedback & consultation from partners more regularly
- Consider more active cooperation with UNECE in related activities

## Recommendations

### Strategy:

Although the so far strategy has proven to be very successful and also the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized its satisfaction with the approach activities and decisions of strategic focussing are recommended. This recommendation is based on two observations. Firstly the programme seems to be run without much buffer (time, resources, personal energy, etc.) on a very high level of efficiency. This high pace, however, conflicts with depth and creativity in the process and leads to a primarily operational logic. Secondly, there are numerous project activities in each of the three components being carried out without completely conveying the programme's overall objectives. It could be helpful to reflect on the core mission of the programme (rather than just looking at each of the impact indicators) at this stage and evaluate all activities with regard to the support of this mission. If the reinforcing powers within the programme could be used more consciously it should be able to focus a bit more and gain momentum for the most important processes of the programme.

### Communication:

As always in complex project structures communication is a major challenge for success. Although the programme tries very hard to make available good quality information to its stakeholders there are still some parties which would like to be informed in even more detail. They want to know more about all three components and learn more regularly about the progress of the activities, so that they can follow and coordinate their own activities better. Perhaps it is possible to satisfy this wish by using one or more of the following instruments:

- Set up a programme website with information on activities and events
- Set up a programme blog and/or discussion forum online
- Disseminate a programme newsletter regularly
- Conduct meetings of exchange (internal/external)
- Think about form of participation/involvement of certain partners

### Presence:

There have been some concerns about the presence of team-members at project-sites. Especially for projects running in locations far to the TWMCA offices (Batkent, Kzyl-Orda/Shimkent, Mary) the teams should intensify the search for ministerial/scientific personal living permanently at the project locations working as national experts. Some country teams (TJ, UZ) seem to demonstrate good practice.

### Meetings & Exchange:

It could be considered to emphasize communication a bit more especially regarding the need for tighter coordination and for learning within the whole programme team. There are probably at least two different levels of communication, internal and with partners. Perhaps the following communication structures could help to systematize exchange and learning:

- Internal team meetings on a regular basis where the whole programme team comes together for two or three days to discuss not only operational and technical issues, but also shares information about how the strategic coherence of the programme can be strengthened. Such meetings could be held three or four times a year. At least once or twice a year also UNECE representatives and people from GTZ headquarter should take part in such systematic exchange.
- Overlapping or additionally to that once or twice a year there could be a “TWMCA Open Day” where also the most important external partners are invited to take part in a joint discussion about the status and further plans of the programme and its components. The idea behind such an event would neither be an “EC IFAS Open Day” nor a “CA Water Conference” but a TWMCA-specific opportunity for exchange and learning with relation to the three components and the mission of the programme.

#### Neutrality and Intervention:

There have been numerous statements mentioning the requirement of stronger political influence of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in critical questions. There has also been the counter-argument of neutrality. In fact the neutral stance of the TWMCA programme is a tremendous success-factor and should not be put at risk. Then again there might be opportunities for high level interventions that have not been systematically evaluated so far. There are some challenges in particular, where only one country constrains all other four although reasonable suggestions for solutions have already been made. The question arises if high-level German representatives could support the process if they take a firm stand in certain matters more explicitly. Moreover it has been stated a couple of times that the Berlin process would need to be reinforced in its momentum.

#### Finance:

The actual situation of how the programme has to plan and steer in financial terms is not satisfactory. This shall not be misunderstood as criticism towards the donor. The respective representatives in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs have considerably contributed to a smooth implementation with regard to exceptions from usual financial rules. Nevertheless the financial logic of the donor and the financial requirements of the programme make it very hard for the programme management to keep balance. Restrictive financial rules within the programme make it hard to implement quickly on the project level and increase the steering efforts needed. The programme is advised to organize a dedicated meeting where challenges and possible solutions (or at least implications) can be openly discussed.

#### The Germany Factor:

It has been mentioned several times, that learning from real cases in Germany is very beneficiary and training results are outstanding. And perhaps it should even

be considered to organize a large-scale learning and study trip for a group of chosen stakeholders to use this two-level effect (learning & incentive).

#### National projects:

It has already been mentioned that some countries wish to bring the programme's attention to their national list of prioritized project proposals. While certainly only such projects should be funded at all which fit into the strategy of the programme this might be a resource of ideas how to achieve even more visibility and impact in a second phase of the programme. It is recommended however to do this with the principle of strategic focusing in mind.

#### Partner organizations:

There are a lot of players (donors, implementing organizations) active in the region and their interest in joining the TWMCA rather seems to be rising. The programme is advised to stay alert and open-minded concerning potential (new) partnerships or forms of cooperation/participation. Perhaps even new financial resources can be tapped in accordance with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### EC IFAS:

Reform proposals have been put on the table. Beyond the issue of rotation it is more important to achieve an agreement by all CAS to rotate only top-management functions and allow for the development of stable and highly qualified staff.

#### Partner Feedback:

Some statements in the course of the review conveyed the impression, that feedback and consultation of partners (especially some national partners, but perhaps also other external partner representatives) could be more regularly and intensively organized. Above all it should be monitored carefully whether the projects are on track not only from the point of view of the programme but also from the point of view of the partners involved.

#### Cooperation with UNECE:

There might be a chance for the TWMCA programme in a more active support of the UNECE activities. UNECE drives component I with sense and sensibility and has mentioned potential synergies with other activities (Regional Policy Dialogue). Perhaps these fields of activity are worth being more integrated and coordinated which would in turn further enhance overall coordination between UNECE and GTZ.