



Stakeholders' Needs in Managing Transboundary Talas and Chu River Basins in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Focus Groups Study Report

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Introduction

In the 21st century access to and usability of water resources has become a key question in the sustainable human development. Rational water management taking into account the stakeholders needs is of great help in preserving the living environment and its limited resources. Up to now the water management has largely depended on the judicial and environmental scientific knowledge (Gooch et al. 2002). Though, due to anthropogenic pressure on nature and at the same time via socio-economic implications of natural events, environmental problems are indeed social problems.

Therefore, for solving water management problems in addition to the natural processes and judicial mechanisms, understanding local economic, political, cultural and social peculiarities, financial and administrative capacity is of utmost importance. So far there have been only few sociological studies that would cover the stakeholders' needs and possibilities to be taken into account in the water management decision-making and their awareness on these issues.

Current report will give an overview of the results of the focus groups conducted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in order to identify different stakeholder's views and enhance their involvement in the water management decisions in Talas and Chu Rivers basins (Figure 1).

The aim of the study was:

- (1) to identify local stakeholders views and awareness on the status of the water resources in their home region;
- (2) to determine the stakeholders views on technical experts, administrative institutions, media and public actions in the water management;
- (3) to clarify the effectiveness of the focus groups method in enhancing public involvement in decision-making concerning the water resources.

The data is gathered in the frames of the project **"Support for the creation of a transboundary water commission on Chu and Talas Rivers between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan"**, aiming to assist Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in making the Agreement on Utilization of the Water Facilities of Interstate Use on the Chu and

Talas Rivers between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of 21 January 2000 operational. The project is being implemented by the Water Resources Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture in Kazakhstan, the Water Management Department of the Ministry of Water Management, Agriculture and Processing Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation in Estonia. Governments of Sweden, the United Kingdom and Estonia provided financial support to the project.

Focus group interview is a planned group discussion on a certain topic enabling participants to express their views with the help of joint elaboration. Focus groups facilitate the awareness building and civic competence of the participants. This flexible research method allows getting an overview of the understanding, beliefs and values of certain groups in a field not studied before.

Focus groups were conducted by Counterpart: Civil Society Support Initiative in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan Sherkitesh' and Zhalgas' research teams under the methodological guidance of Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation. Focus groups were carried out during October 2004 among local water users, rural government bodies, and water facilities management bodies in Talas and Chu River basins in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.



Figure 1. Talas and Chu Rivers flowing from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan.

Public involvement and focus groups methodology

In current world situation the decision-making and implementation diffuses from the state affairs more towards the larger societal ground. Public participation in the water management is based on the institutional information exchange based on understanding social processes, different worldviews and interests Woodhill (2004: 45). Public participation may increase public awareness and acceptance of the problems that the water manager faces and of the measures that need to be taken to solve these problems (Kickert et.al., 1997). Secondly, participation enhances the environmental sustainability, social consideration as well as cost-effectiveness of the decisions. Participation enriches the decision-making process with relevant viewpoints, interests and information about the water issue that could not have been generated otherwise. Thirdly, the legitimacy of the decisions may increase as stakeholders are drawn into the deliberation about the problems that need to be solved and become co-responsible for the decisions that are made and actions that are taken.

Management decisions are affected also by the nature of the institutional arrangements and its social contexts. The experts and researchers Kuhn (1970) like politicians bear their affiliation groups value orientations and truths. Decentralised decision-making diminishes the effects of the biased interest based decisions. Though, heading away from the centralised decision-making, enhancing cooperation on different spatial and institutional dimensions requires new means and techniques for communication. Focus groups is an innovative method enhancing the stakeholder communication and enabling socially more considerate and reasonable management decisions. Also in this study the focus groups methodology was used in order to identify the stakeholders need, determine their awareness on the water resources and willingness to participate in the decision-making.

Focus Groups Method

Focus Groups is an innovative research tool within environmental science. Focus Groups are widely defined as groups that have been designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interests in a permissive, non-threatening environment. In a relaxed atmosphere a group of six to eight people share their ideas and perceptions. The group members enhance each other's contribution by leading each other to new ideas to express. This chapter aims to provide a short description of how the method was applied to the context of studying Talas and Chu transboundary river basin management. Focus Groups were chosen as it enables to provide a brief understanding of an area not previously covered. In the transboundary context of Talas and Chu rivers the knowledge on different stakeholders' ideas has been scarce. Furthermore, as the participants themselves are largely guiding the discussion, they might come up with a completely new approach to an issue, and doing so become a very insightful source of information for the research (Kangur ed., 2004).

Preparation, and early consideration of possible problems, is a precondition for successfully completing focus groups (Kangur ed., 2004). Also in preparation of this study the planning and preparation of the methodological approach to be used was chosen several months before the focus groups meetings. Also the water management experts were involved in the planning and the recruiting process prior the focus groups. This bears the validation aims and also gives certainty that the focus groups results will be taken into account by the current decision-makers.

As appropriate to the unstructured focus groups, the moderator slightly controls the discussion and leaves the development of the discussion to the participants and. Moderator leads participants deeper into the field of interest through the opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions and finishing questions (Annex I). This order of questions follows the logical thinking of participants (Krueger, 1993). The questions in the interview guide were given sufficient consideration and reconsideration in the progress of conducting focus groups.

Most articles and books claim that the number of participants in the focus groups should be 4-10 (Krueger 1994, Morgan 1997, Wibeck 2000). In recruiting the focus groups, the project purpose was borne in mind and therefore local water users, rural government bodies, and water facilities management bodies were approached

and groups of 5 to 8 were formed. In smaller groups participants have larger influence on the development of discussion. Local contact points were used for recruiting the focus groups as the participants are likely to show up if somebody they personally know asks them. In case of the local government representatives, the akims (local government heads) were contacted; water users were approached through their associations and professionals from the water supply management bodies were selected from these organizations.

Safe and relaxed surroundings are a precondition for natural conversation and focus groups discussions (Kangur ed. 2004). The participants were placed so that the moderator and the assistant could avoid giving the group the impression that they will lead the discussion. After welcoming the participants, in the beginning of the focus groups the moderator briefly explained the procedure of the focus group and the role of the moderator and assistant. In order to facilitate the relaxed atmosphere, before the moderator started off the discussion, the participants got to introduce themselves and explain their connection to the water resources. The moderator should be there to help the focus group participants through the discussion on the chosen topic. The assistant's helped with making notes from the discussion, for example, on group dynamics and their body language.

In order to cover diverse viewpoints from all the geographical locations and stakeholders 13 focus groups were conducted both in Kazakhstan and 8 in Kyrgyzstan side of the Talas and Chu River Basins (ANNEX II). The tape-recorded material was transcribed. The written material was coded and categorised to get an overview of the data and find trends and patterns. Four things that helped to decide on how much weight or emphasis to give comments or themes are their frequency, specificity, emotion and extensiveness. Citations used are examples of the conclusions that are made. Following report tries to give an accurate picture over how the research team came to their conclusions.

Kasakh focus groups results: problems and views on development in the Talas and Chu River basins

There is answer in the water (Kazakh old-saying)

Summary of the Stakeholders' Needs

For the participants of the Kazakh focus groups the water insufficiency is the most essential problem in the region. The main reason behind the lack of water appears to be the condition of the water supply system. Due to the leakages from the poor quality water distribution systems the water quantities that actually reach the users are substantially more expensive. Nowadays, the different households and different cultures that need watering at dispersed times cause additional water losses. Though, the water quantities and leakages are not under surveillance due to lack of measurement system. It was emphasized that in order to control the water management it is urgently necessary to assess the water quantities of the Talas and Chu River Basin. There is a dire need to systematise the data on how the water is used and how much and where the water is necessary for the irrigation purposes. Although the water quality is not considered problematic, poor condition of the water supply and water treatment systems, the point pollution from the industrial plants was pointed out as causing poor unusable waters.

Insufficiency of information on water issues was stressed by all focus groups. This is especially problematic as there is no specialised, scientific knowledge on the water quantity, quality, and means of management of the waters. Partially because of that, there is also little to no information available in public. Focus groups revealed that the problem lies in people having no access to information on the water issues, laws on water resources and new technological means of water supply. Moreover, the whole structure of the water management institutions remains unclear for the majority of the focus groups. One of the particular reasons for the lack of information on the water management appeared to be institutional inability to produce, disseminate and build awareness on the water issues. The small number and low capacity of the water specialists was attributed to the low image and pay of the position. People's knowledge on the water issues should be enhanced was a common assumption of all

the focus groups participants. Most commonly the idea of the raising the awareness among the children from their early age is mentioned in the focus groups.

In most of the focus groups the water management is defined in rather vague terms. In many focus groups the irrational compartmentalisation in organisation and water management planning was stressed. Participants of the focus groups are seeking for more clarity in the management of the valuable water. In the regions there are three types of water institutions and all of them want to earn money on the water supply. In the end, the water users have to pay unacceptably higher pay for the water. The ineffective bureaucracy in the water management hinders the stakeholder-considerate development of the use of water resources. Focus groups suggest that more professionalism and proper acknowledgement of the water managers would reduce the corruption among those. For ensuring clarity in the chain of command the participants endeavour the establishment of rule of law: timely water supply and the proper accounting on how much water is supplied and how much is demanded. Therefore proper scientific assessments and prognosis needs to be carried out. On the other hand, people are discontent with the situation whereas the decisions are made and actions are taken in the inviolable political spheres.

Water Quantity

The water insufficiency is mentioned as the most essential problem in the region. The main reason behind the lack of water appears to be the condition of the water supply system. Due to the inappropriate status of the water systems, in current condition the water leakages are assessed by the focus groups up to 40% (60 % in Sarykemer village) of the water that enters the water supply systems. In all the focus groups also the water cost due to its relative scarcity was mentioned: water is getting substantially more expensive as only small amount of the paid quantity actually reaches the users. Though, the water quantities and leakages are not under surveillance due to lack of measurement system.

Not all places suffer from lack of water; it is not an issue for example in the Korday village. But the problem still remains with the untidy water channels. In Korday region, the Governmental communal enterprises (Jambyl oblast) representatives admit, that they have no problems with the water quantity. The problem is still how to carry these water resources forward. Korday Governmental

communal enterprises emphasised “We have many good ideas and projects. But we have no means to carry them out.”

It is emphasized that in order to control the water management it is urgently necessary to assess the water quantities of the Talas and Chu River Basin. There is a dire need to systematise the data on how the water is used and how much and where the water is necessary for the irrigation purposes.

Irrigation water

Water quantity is crucial in the agricultural regions (Korday) of the Talas and Chu rivers' basins for growing vegetables and cereals. In rainy years also the crop is good. In ten years, the situation concerning the water resources and their management has gone worse - this is a common assumption among the focus groups. In Soviet time, the channels were built and they were under proper surveillance every year, and therefore also got repaired when necessary. Water supply systems had to be restructured after the collapse of Soviet kolkhozes and huge water divisions.

Nowadays, the water need is divided between different households and different cultures. This means additional water losses while water is divided between numerous channels. In previous times, there was no problem to water hundreds of hectares, but now these huge fields have disappeared and different cultures need watering at dispersed times. “Without watering the people are unable to work in the field. We have lost the agriculture that was once a major source of income. But now the people are sitting without anything to do, without any employment opportunities,” Bostanbyk people express their anger. They go in details: “10 years ago we even grew corn and Lucerne, but this needs irrigation already in the early months of the year – in April. But today the rain comes in May and this is too late to get a good crop.”

There are also conflicts among the water users to get the first hand help in transporting the water.

Water Quality

Water quantity and quality are very interrelated problems from the point of view of Kazakh focus groups. In several focus groups the dissatisfaction on the water quality appeared. The main reasons for poor water quality are bad condition of the water supply and water treatment systems and technology, the point pollution from the

industrial plants, and the lack of means and institutional arrangements for the measurement of the waters. Though, throughout the focus groups, it did not provoke so much discussion as the water quantity did. Korday region representatives suggest that people are not aware of the water quality as it is neither at public agenda nor under official surveillance, whereas the water quantity is measured regularly. The problems of salty and otherwise spoiled drinking water and the lack of wastewater treatment were mentioned as the most impairing problems concerning the water quality. In regions, salty water cannot be properly used and can be even harmful for the health of the drinkers (e.g. Talap village). Even though, the dire water quality is tangible and can be seen in the in regions, but in fact there is no scientific assessment of the water quality going on. One of the reasons behind the bad water quality as indicated by the communal governmental enterprise “Janatas-su-Julguy” members: the water quality is poor due to the bad status of the water supplying technology. They were put already 30-40 years ago. From that time they have not been repaired.” It is commonly mentioned in the focus groups that there are no means to neither clean nor repair the water supply channels.

In rare cases the water quality is assessed as good. For example in the Janatas region’s case, even though the pipes are quite old the water quality is very good as the wells take the water from very deep ground. The problems might occur if the water is used amount-wise unequally in time. Governmental communal water management organisation emphasizes that the water quality has improved to a large extent due to the cessation of the point pollution from the soviet time extensive industrial activities.

Environmental NGOs appeared to be very cognizant of the water quality issues when compared to the other groups. In addition to the water saltiness and its detrimental health effects, they bring out the hazardousness of the dirty water channels. The problem of point pollution to the rivers from the industrial plants was mentioned. The environmental NGOs of Taras bring out the problem of the wastewater that is not treated appropriately by the industrial companies: “used water is poured without cleaning to the ground spoiling not only the drinking water but also the ground water.” Furthermore they emphasize that also the Taras towns’ wastewaters will be directly poured to the Asa River: “They just fall to the river. The situation there is described as awful. The problem is global and affects the whole population. You even cannot get closer to the river - it smells so bad.” Environmental

NGOs even bring out that the inhabitants' worsening health and the death rate can all be attributed to the bad condition of water!

Though, the environmental organisations admit that the quality of water has never been measured. Nevertheless, the official data show that everything should be under the control. The chemical and bacteriological analysis – all of them show that the quality remains in the frames of standards. To their understanding, the reason for the deceptive information is that there is no means, no appropriate technology in order to carry out trustworthy analysis. There is even no infrastructure, no laboratories to carry out the analysis, the environmentalists stress. The downside of the poor condition of the water supply system is hazardous to the ecological situation of the surroundings. Also as the members of the Janatas-su-Julguy indicated insufficient pipelines are harmful for the environmental conditions of the surroundings.

Awareness on the Water Issues

Water is the strategic element of the Kazakh economy and therefore also information concerning these resources and their management is considered of utmost importance. Insufficiency of information on water issues was stressed by all focus groups. This is especially problematic as there is no specialised, scientific knowledge on the water quantity, quality, and means of management of the waters. Partially because of that, there is also little to no information available in public.

On the other hand it appears from some focus groups, that those who really look for it can reach the information on the water issues. For example a water user from Korday stressed: “I do not know about the information deficit. I read newspapers and I get all the information. Therefore, I assume that who wants to find information will find it!”

Access to information

Focus groups revealed that the problem lies in people having no access to information. The magazines do not reach the inhabitants due to their expensiveness, not everybody has the television. On the other hand, organising the community meetings where all the people would have an equal say has never really worked out. The traditional community meetings that have taken place throughout the century's to

take joint decisions on the strategic issues do not function anymore as it has no real power in today's management systems.

Topics related to water occur in the media mainly related to some extraordinary occasions such as widespread illnesses due to poor water quality or it mainly occurs as coverage of some other catastrophic event. Therefore, focus groups participants suggest that the water issues should be treated as major concern in the local affairs. Promotion of the wise use of water resources should appear more frequently in media channels is the common conviction of the focus groups participants.

Information need topic-wise

Besides water quantity and quality issues, in all the focus groups on the Kasakh side there came up a significant need for more information on the water issues, laws on water resources and new technological means of water supply. Moreover, the whole structure of the water management institutions remains unclear for the majority of the focus groups. Ironically, focus groups reveal that there is a plenty of information on the prices of water.

Participants of the focus groups stressed that they would highly appreciate timely information the water quantity, quality, also on the water supply system management practices in other regions (also behind the state borders), as well as on the judicial questions of water management. Governmental Communal enterprises of Korday, stressed that there should be more information on the practices in other districts of the Kazakhstan, particularly on how they have approached the water management problems in order to take over the best practices. Saudakent local government emphasizes the importance of the knowledge on the judicial affairs of the water management. Particularly, more information is needed on the water users' and water suppliers' rights and responsibilities in the judicial sense. Korday communal governmental enterprises members emphasise that there should be more extensive information exchange between the Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan water management institutions and subsequently supplied to the water users as well.

Lack of scientific knowledge

One of the particular reasons for the lack of information on the water management appeared to be institutional inability to produce, disseminate and build awareness on

the water issues. In several focus groups the problem of lack of specialists in the water field was raised. Especially the issue of low image of the water specialists' position was drawn attention to throughout the focus groups. For example, member of governmental communal enterprises of Korday region in Jambyl oblast focus groups stated that the "Young generation does not value the water specialist's profession. Therefore, they are not enthusiastic about choosing neither water specialist education nor career." Korday water users attribute the low image of the water specialist's profession to the state inactiveness. "Young people do not want to study it because there is no demand in hydro-technological sphere, and intelligent people look for positions where the payment is appropriate to their qualification" as a representative of the Korday water users explains.

As a result of low prioritisation of the water profession in public little resources have been allocated to scientific assessment of the water conditions. "All the nation should know how is the situation with water resources," was expressed in the private water supply organisation of the Sarõsu Su. Communal governmental enterprises of Jambyl oblast in Korday indicate that the lack of scientific interest in the water management issues has a caused the decline in water management in general. "For 25 years no kind of scientists has asked about our problems or needs!" The water management know-how is an urgent problem in the region, though. In various focus groups the understanding that the water issues cannot be properly approached due to the general incognizance on the issue and how to improve the situation. It is necessary to introduce new technology and put them to work with specially trained people. Furthermore, as water users of Korday village suggest, the studies on the water management would supply a feasible ground for any water management developments and lessen the corruption in the field, as they would know what and why they are actually doing.

Importance of primary water education

People's knowledge on the water issues should be enhanced was a common assumption of all the focus groups participants. Most commonly the idea of the raising the awareness among the children from their early age is mentioned in the focus groups. Therefore, the thematic of rational use of water resources should be introduced to the primary schools curricula. It was indicated in few focus groups that in the awareness on the water issues was better organised in the soviet era. Hands-on

activities that were used at that time would promote the idea of sustainable use of water resources. One participant stressed, “At the when we studied at school, we learnt about the water issues – how to save it, how to use rationally, how to clean the ditches. But today at schools there is no such kind of programmes. Today’s children do not know how hard it is to get the water. For them it is easy to get the water just from the tap and that is all they know about the hard work to get the water!”

Value of Water

The concept of rational water management has many interpretations among groups focused during the study. Three aspects of the value of water were mentioned: the cost of water in its pragmatic sense and water resources’ ecological value and also the equity principle. Water cost appeared to definitely a more vital problem to the focus groups participants.

Water cost

Focus groups participants showed their discontent with the formulation of the water price. The main problem appeared to be compartmentalised water management planning and institutional organisation. In the regions there are three types of water institutions and all of them want to earn money on the water supply. In the end, the water users have to pay three times higher pay for the water, as the Sarykemer water users indicated.

Technical and financial resources as well as know-how are lacking to improve the water supply technology – this was a common conviction of the focus groups. For many years “the improvement works and repairing are done manually” as there is no means to buy or rent the tractors or excavators (Water users of Bostanbyk village). In the case of the water users of the Bostanbyk village, it is incomprehensible for the people that there is a water scarcity to the extent that they have to pay for the water, whereas there is actually so much water in the Talas River.

The 60 per cent subsidiary to the water cost from the Kasakh government was brought out several times throughout the focus groups and is very much appreciated by the participants. Water users pay twice for the water: there is tax on quantity of water they use and there the tax on using natural resources adds up to. This is injustice according to the governmental communal enterprises.

Rational use of water

Important way of interpreting the water management is the equality principle. The ecological aspect and wise use of water has been stressed by various focus groups. Furthermore, the awareness on the water scarcity issues was described poor. People's knowledge on the water issues should be enhanced. Most commonly the idea of the raising the awareness among the children from their early age was mentioned in the focus groups. Also the global aspect of limited water resources was brought into discussions. Communal governmental enterprise "Janatas-su-Julguy" suggested the water counters would be of help stimulating more rational use of water resources. Ecology of the water resources has to be valued "We have to use the quantities of water wisely because the fresh water resources on the Earth are limited," as indicated by Communal governmental enterprise "Janatas-su-Julguy". Therefore, the water management has to deal with the questions of ecology in the first place.

Better planning on the water management and effective prognosis on the weather and rain seasons would benefit effective water use. Sarykemer water users emphasized that "now we plan to buy the water, but on the next day there will be rain and the water is not necessary."

Water Management Institutions

The focus groups indicated doubts on the institutional capacity of the water management organisations. Also from the point of view of the majority of focus groups participants, the ineffective bureaucracy in the water management hinders the stakeholder-considerate development of the use of water resources. Focus groups suggest that more professionalism and proper acknowledgement of the water managers would reduce the corruption among those.

Currently the management of water supply to the end users is not clear to most of the local stakeholders, as the focus groups show. The treaties between the water suppliers and users are one-sided: the suppliers set the conditions in the contracts and are in the power position in enforcing the contract. At the same time, the user has no means to protect its own rights. Therefore, the water users of Saudakent village suggested to build the awareness and through that activate the households for articulating and winning support for their rights and needs. Furthermore, as a coherent interest group organising common action to ask for the techniques from the akims or other would be

easier. For the protection of water users in problems concerning the irrigation, water losses, water delay and other caused by the water users there needs to be established a special institution (Saudakent).

In many focus groups the **irrational division of work** in the water management field was stressed. Communal governmental enterprises administer the water channels. The relationship between local governments and the organisations such as the communal governmental enterprises is interdependent. As Saudakent village local government people indicated that the water management have given out uncovered promises and in a sense have lost reliability. It was also considered unfair that private entities are using the water resources to get governmental subsidies up to 60 per cent, whereas the private water supply organisations do not receive any additional help.

Environmental organisations

Few organisations were mentioned aiming at protection of water resources. In Jambyl oblast there are few structures working in the field of water under the goals of environmental protection. Institute of KazNII VodHos carries out studies on the exploitation of the natural resources and give the technical recommendations and give suggestions for the projects.

Before there was a problem that NGOs did not know the governmental organisations. Now they have got to know each other well through several seminars. But as the environmental problems are not prioritised yet we are concentrating more on the societal problems. (This is more like a reactive accomplishment that needs to be changed to a more proactive.

Intergovernmental Joint Commission

The transboundary issue of the management was raised in several focus groups. The regional water authorities stress that on the Kazakhstan and Kyrgyztan border area there is a conflict situation concerning the irrigation water “Kazakhstan closes the water ways that irrigate the Kyrgyz lands, and Kyrgyzstan does the same with the waters that go to Kazakhstan.” Commercial Water Supply organisation of Sarõsu Su stresses that one of the first questions that should be decided by the joint commission of the Talas and Chu Rivers is the status of the gold mining industry that has potential for the contamination.

Views on the Organisation of Water Management

In most of the focus groups the water management is defined in rather vague terms. Participants of the focus groups are seeking for more clarity in the management of the valuable water. The paradox situation according to the environmental NGOs is “How can you manage water resources, when you have no control over the resources.” The Most concerns of the focus groups are related to the unidentifiable chain of command and establishment of rule of law. Professional water managers would be a good basis for carrying out real analysis on the different aspects of the water and its management. Representatives of local governments endeavour the centralisation of the water management into the hands of government that would bring more transparency in water management. One of the reasons for endeavouring the centralisation of the water management is as commercial water supply organisation Sarōsu Su put it: “Water is the richness of the state like the land is.” From most of the focus groups it appears that the central ruling of the water management brings along more certainty and clarity as well as openness to the issues. Central power in the water management seems to be the answer for the timely water supply and the proper accounting on how much water is supplied and how much is demanded. More decent control over the rule of law in spheres of water is necessary. The organisations that would deal with the water management are unknown. Already now some water problems are decided without the permission of the governmental organisations and carried out with the other institutions’ financial support.

At the same time, focus groups members protest against that the local stakeholders have been left out from the information cycle and decision-making spheres.

Importance of deliberation

Focus groups participants are discontent with the situation whereas the decisions are made and actions are taken in the inviolable political spheres.

The importance of deliberation was brought out several times. As Communal governmental enterprise “Janatas-su-Julguy“ put it “The most important thing is that there are still parties interested in water questions that still make us think about it. In a normal everyday life we do not think about water so much. I think this is the most

important thing that there are such kind of projects going (referring to the research project) on and the issues needs to be brought to the public as well.”

On the other hand the representatives of the local governments were not content about the research endeavours at all, suggesting research team going directly to the government and asking about the water management issues from them. Bostanbyk village people see, that the water resources management is decided between two governments and also on the akims level – no information really reaches village inhabitants, the water users. There is definitely a dire need to listen more to the common people and it is important to take their opinions into consideration for more sustainable decisions in the sphere.

Most of the water management communal governmental enterprises (Korday) indicate their passive approach of influencing the water management. They mostly define themselves as passive exploiters of the water resources. Furthermore, the water resources communal governmental enterprises are mostly following the orders coming from their superior institutions.

The ancient paternalistic traditions prevail when gathering together with the elderly village members to discuss the water issues. Though, these discussions are not very fruitful as they do not reach the water management institutions and have no power in influencing them. “We sometimes come together as the older people tell us to, and we talk about water, but nothing happens after this. We should be more proactive and influence - we should write down what are our needs and deliver a concrete message to the water administrations on where is the water and why is it not given to us?” expresses the Talap village.

Current water administration should learn about the needs of the households and should work towards the solutions. Up to now there is no planning: no calculations on the water needs are there presently, stressed the Sarykemer and Talap village water users. Talap village water users add, “We have never seen the main specialists or the heads of the water supplying institutions. These people should meet with the people and ask their opinion.”

Pragmatic views

Proper planning and clarity in the management is important for effective agricultural activities – this idea was crosscutting throughout the focus groups. **Proper planning** of the water resources would mean that the water would reach the households at

times when it is needed. Therefore proper scientific prognosis and assessments need to be carried out.

In the Bostanbyk village, water users stress that the water system is vital that the irrigation water reaches the households at the right time. “If water comes too late, the sowing will take place on inappropriate time and that means harvesting will be late as well!” There should be more adequate planning for the water use more information exchange on the needs of the households. But up to now, the authorities are not interested in the opinion of the water users. There is almost no information on the water issues, and therefore, people even feel kind of insulted and left aside.

Korday communal governmental enterprises emphasize that there needs to be a more concrete plans for the water resources management. “Water management in the regions needs a proper bookkeeping: marking down how much water is used etc. This chaotic situation has to stop!” deliberated one member of Korday region’s communal governmental enterprises.

Bostanbyk and Sarykemer people are looking for more **clarity** on the water resources management. One village inhabitant expresses: “If we ask for the check on how much water we have used – they will not give them to us. Water accounting is not clean and clear – therefore also they cannot provide any information on whom, how much and for what got the water”

Therefore, the participants suggest that there should be more control on the water users, Sarykemer water users. Currently the water management institutions are in the monopoly status. But such kind of strategic resources cannot be privately owned, stressed the Talap village water users. According to the Environmental NGO-s of Taras, irrational use of water resources stems from the fact that the water resources were once managed by the collective farms. After their demolition the individual farmers without any knowledge neither on techniques nor watering regimes started to manage the water resources according to their own minimal capacity.

Participants on the Focus Groups

Participants were presented a questionnaire where they could comment on their expectations before the meeting and their fulfilment as well as on the gain of new information from the focus groups discussions. Also their alignment to take part in the focus groups discussions again was asked from the participants. This questionnaire

aimed at assessing the successfulness of the discussions from the point of view of the participants. Two types of questions were presented to the participants: the answers were coded and categorised and analysed using the statistical package SPSS.

As for the first reaction of the participants it appeared, that quite mixed feelings had been over them. Though it appeared, that up to 90 per cent of the participants was positively interested and wanted to attend to get new information (44%), to come to a solution on the water problems (6%), just to have a joint discussion on the issue striking the lives of the local people (25%). Only a few people were surprised for someone else being interested in their problems except for themselves. Some people explained that they had appeared, as it was their duty.

As for the expectations for the meeting, people had hoped for a solution from the focus group for example had a hope that the research team would come and help them out of the difficult situation therefore they found it important to be present to utter their opinion. People who were interested to hear more information on the water issues did not expect that they would have to contribute anything themselves. Reaching a solution was mentioned as the main endeavour of most of the focus groups participants: their aim was to reach a conclusion on how to improve the water supply. It appeared that expectations are not so much connected with the discussion itself, but instead with the future effects of the discussions and decisions taken. Dire need for improvements appeared. Due to some political incognizance and exclusiveness, some participants showed their dissatisfaction but they cannot see that it takes time and a lot of work. People seem to be discontent with the endless talks. Though, they seem to be unaware of the procedures and managerial affairs etc. Therefore, on the one hand participants were flattered that their opinion was heard, but on the other hand stayed on the ground and hoped to get to know what the other organisations are doing to find a joint solution.

They explained their hope that the results of the discussions would also reach the higher and decisive institutions for practical help such as lower water taxes, to repair the water supply system for timely water supply. Participants assessed their fulfilment with the participation on the five rank scales. 75 per cent of the participants showed their content with the results of the focus groups, whereas up to twenty per cent of the participants assessed their experience from average to poor.

Participants considered their information gain on the five-point scale – from the abundance of new information to no information gain. Over half of the participants gained a lot of new and useful information. At the same time little less than half of the participants did not get much new information. As for the type of the information gained people most often mentioned the intergovernmental commission establishment for the better management of the shared water resources. Discussions enhanced the knowledge of the water management in general. It also appeared, that such kind of discussions are important in order to organise cooperative work in the water supply and irrigation systems. All in all it was emphasized by numerous participants that the exchange of ideas on the water cost and timely supply are important for those who do not have direct influence on the decision-making. „It is good that there are people who look for us and whom our problems intrigue – this is the most important information gained through the focus groups.“

Participants got to assess in the five-point scale how much they could have a say during the discussions. It appeared that over two thirds of the participants got to say everything they wanted. The same amount of people found that everything concerning the issues was already discussed. The other got to express them to a lesser extent. The questions that they would have wanted to touch upon mainly concerned the solution for the current problems. Specifically the focus groups participants appeared to be discontent that the focus group did not suggest any solution for systematic and coordinated management of waters and the renovation technical facilities as well as the judicial rights for water resources.

Vast majority of the participants had a very positive general impression about the meeting and therefore also would like to participate again in the focus groups type of discussions. Though, participants showed some scepticism towards the fruitfulness of the focus groups: “we can really assess the results when the water question is solved.” On the other hand there appeared a need for more often appearing focus group type of meetings, as the water management question touches every citizen, who in fact may not have much influence on the decision-making. In many filled questionnaires the gratefulness for giving a chance to say out ones opinion in a friendly and open discussion was expressed. More frequent discussions attract also more media attention and acknowledgement on a larger scale.

As the innovative approach of focus groups and the public participation in general are yet not widely recognised, the discussions were not maybe that fruitful as

they could have been. Few participants suggested better preparation for the future discussions would be as basis for more open discussions and richer contribution.

Argumentation given for participating again in the focus groups was to get information on the changes in the water management issues. But most importantly the participants would like to contribute in future discussions in order to come up with solutions and reach solid decisions on the management of the strategic water resources. Focus groups offer an open forum for channelling ones opinion to trigger improvements in the water management - this was the major drive for participating. Participants also expect the focus groups in future serve as a means of communicating new ideas and searching for partners to implement those in real life.

Give more say to the common citizens so that it would win more appreciation also in the governmental and decision-making level. One representative example: "Water - is the source of living, hope for the life and every citizen has to be able to participate."

Atmosphere during the Focus Groups

In order to get general overview on the participants' feelings and attitudes while discussing the focus groups topics discussions group dynamics, atmosphere was observed by the assistant and as well as the moderator of the project. In sense of **group dynamics** it appeared that in the beginning of the focus groups people appeared to be more reserved, whereas they opened more towards the end of the meeting. In several focus groups younger people were quieter and listened what the older people had to say, and specialists talked after the akims had a say.

There appeared some groupings and the contradictions of opinions especially in the diverse groups. For example, water users and the officials' contradiction. All focus groups needed some moderation in sense of giving a say to some of politely giving a word to the more modest contributors. Though, the clarifying the moderator's function in the beginning of the focus groups was successful and the discussants understood their role properly.

The discussions stayed in the focus of the topics in all cases of the focus groups, as this was found most important and relevant to everybody's lives.

Atmosphere wise in general the focus groups discussions went in an emotional and relaxed atmosphere. In free discussions where participants were on the

equal footing, the discussions were emotional also intensive. In cases of local government official and the regional water management authorities, the participants got irritated as they did not find themselves to be appropriate persons to answer particular questions. Therefore, they also need to be prompted to answer the questions and the discussion was not intensive. In cases of water reservoir the atmosphere was tense as the participants had to control themselves in the presence of their head. They only joined the discussion after the head had had its say.

In most cases, next to quiet participants there also appeared more lively participants. Older and in the status hierarchy higher people were given more say by the people lower in the status. In all cases, the people that had shown up at the discussions were also very much interested in the water management and showed to their willingness to participate in the water management decision-making as well as carrying these decisions.

Results of the focus groups in Kyrgyzstan: views on today's situation and future development of water management

Without water there's no living (Farmer from Birdik)

Summary of the Stakeholders' Needs:

The most significant problem raised by the Kazakh focus groups' participants was the decrease in the irrigation water resources and diminishing of territory suitable for agriculture. In regions the agricultural land cannot be used due to the excess of water in lower areas on high water seasons. It appears from the focus groups that the reason behind the water scarcity and water abundance seems to be the same: water distribution as well as drainage channels are outdated and leaking, impenetrable due to the siltation. Change from Soviet time large mono-cultural towards more diverse horticulture with different watering needs has increased to large extent wasteful water consumption.

Focus groups discussions reveal that there is no clear knowledge on how much water is actually lost on the way by absorbing into the soft and often overgrown sides of the channels. It was pointed out in all the focus groups that modernised water management techniques, cementing the channels, appropriate canal locks would help to regulate the water supply, and would enhance the reliability of the assessment of the water resources as well as avoid the water losses. Focus groups revealed that neither private people nor water management authorities have any real informational or operational means to improve the current situation.

The participants of most of the focus groups regret that the control on water resources has gone underway: there are no responsible persons on the water management objects. Current dispersed power relations and financial means are unable to administer the waters successfully. Participants of the focus groups endeavour more systematised control over the water use and timely water supply. Water specialist's Job is paid low and therefore young people are not interested in getting involved with that profession.

In many cases it was drawn out that empowerment of the farmers would encourage them to forward their needs to the authorities. Small possibilities of the

water users to satisfy their needs in the water management can be attributed to lack of social capital to influence the decision-making; but also and foremost the shortage of finances to acquire appropriate water care. More effective work of the WUA would make local inhabitants more confident in endeavouring more say on the water management decision-making.

Though, almost all the parties in the water management that more coordination is needed between the work of the WUA and Regional Water Authorities not to drag it to different directions in competition for the funds. Water users suspect that taxing the water users centralises the means into institutions that actually do not have the capacity to support any real action with these resources but cover their own administrative costs. Due to the poor capacity, the image of the WUA is low and resistance to their activities hinders any useful actions. They look for the help of state officials and international donors to improve the current situation. Farmers are discontent with the unclear situation in the water management, most often ineffective bureaucracy and lack of public participation in the decision-making is addressed.

In most of the focus groups it was addressed that the state media allocates too little airtime or newspaper space to the water management issues. Many participants admitted that their own experiences with pertinent institutions are the main source of water management info. They need more information on the funding possibilities as well as modern and efficient water management techniques and judicial regulations. Representatives of the WUAs would like to know more about their rights and responsibilities in order to protect themselves as the water users. People that have relevant experiences consider public forums and information days as a good means for the knowledge exchange and social capital establishing for future joint actions. The need for a system of hydrological assessment of water resources was stressed by many focus groups. Scientific knowledge base would be a reliable basis also for the everyday management of water resources and for addressing the irrigation needs.

Relations between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan concerning water management are considered critical as Kyrgyz people find it rightful that Kazakhs would also contribute to the management of the waterways that bring the water from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan.

Water quantity

Water quantity appears to be the most burning issue in the water management in Kyrgyz as well as Kasakh side of the Talas and Chu rivers basin. Huge amounts of waters are used yearly for the irrigation purposes. Mostly arid soil needs watering to become fertile for growing vegetables and cereals. The decrease in the irrigation water resources as a reason for the diminishing of territory suitable for agriculture was brought up in all the focus groups. On the other hand, the agricultural land cannot be used due to the excess of water in lower areas on high water seasons. It appears from the focus groups that the reason behind the water scarcity and water abundance seems to be the same: water distribution as well as drainage channels are outdated and leaking, impenetrable due to the siltation.

In a topographically diverse landscape the water regimes are seasonally in flux. **Water over abundance** is a problem for several lower areas of the Talas and Chu River basins. Many of the reasons are determined environmentally (e.g. morphology of the landscape). On the other hand, the quantity is also distorted due to the anthropogenic impact. As for example Water User's Association of Kenesh address, the building of roads has hindered normal flow of waters. But in most of the cases the problem lies in the impenetrable water channels.

Due to the risen groundwater level the conditions for agriculture as well as for living turn into inappropriate. Following floods and growing ground water level cause real destructions to the farmed lands. Once very fertile black soil has now turned into a watery unusable soil (e.g. Uchkorgon region). Homes, cellars and gardens are flooded due to the rise of ground water level.

Especially in seasons of melting snow and heavy rains, the water systems do not cope with the water flow and massive floodwaters destroy the channels threatening the whole region (e.g. Chu region). Representatives of these villages Tokmak, Bystrovka explain: "These channels were technically meant to bear 10 cubic metres, now 40 floods in those. There is a dire need for more drainage systems." It was indicated that the water level Kirov reservoir has raised in recent years up to 5,5 million cubic metres: water pressure seeks the way out and floods the soil.

At the same time there is water scarcity in some regions of the country, whereas in some Kazakhstan regions the water is used inappropriately, accuse the Pokrovka farmers. Why is that so that in Djambyl, there is water even in the most

peripheral streets, but rural people do not get water? As a transboundary aspect also clarifications are necessary in how much waters go from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. All the farmers and water users groups addressed the problem of timely water supply. In some cases, inhabitants simply do not have the finances for the timely irrigation.

Water quality

The issues of the water quantity shadowed the water quality problems and were not raised as the major concern for the focus groups' participants. Though, in various focus groups poor quality of water was drawn attention to. Poor water quality was attributed mainly to lack of institutional arrangements and technical means. Also unsatisfactory condition of agricultural sector affects the condition of water resources with diffused pollution.

Lack of up-to-date information on the water quality sets the issue out of public agenda and contributes to the modest public perception of the risks related to water quality. On the other hand, as admitted throughout the focus groups, knowledge on the water conditions is essential for planning and management of agricultural activities.

Control on the use of water

Huge water losses appear due to the inappropriate condition of the water channels. According to the focus groups water does not reach the demand due to the leakages from outdated and silted channels. The waters that are measured for the users in the stations will get lost by the time they should reach the buyers' land. Current water distribution system is considered too wasteful and out of control in most of the cases.

Focus groups discussions reveal that there is no clear knowledge on how much water is actually lost on the way. Huge masses of water will be absorbed to the soft sides of the channels. Representatives of the local government of Karabuur district "In the Soviet time the channels were cleaned periodically, but now the water losses to the ground are 50%." All in all it was emphasised that it is important to have control and systematised information on the condition of rivers, channels and waterways. It was also addressed that there exists no qualification of the waters: "No one knows about their quality or quantity." Furthermore, focus groups participants endeavour more information on how to improve the conditions, how to clean the channels.

It was pointed out in all the focus groups that modernised water management techniques, cementing the channels, appropriate canal locks would help to regulate the water supply, and would enhance the reliability of the assessment of the water resources, and also avoids the water losses in absorbing channels. As Pokrovka farmers see that the solution for water over abundance the old drainages need to be cleaned and additional channels need to be built to lead the water away.

On the other hand the focus groups bring out clear evidence that people have no real informational or operational means to improve the current situation. It appeared to be a general problem, highlighted by several focus groups that the Water Users' Associations do not have good material basis or technical capacity to improve the situation. It was stressed that the know-how on the possibilities of repairing the channels and the management situation in general is insufficient.

Temporal changes

In majority of focus groups, the degradation of water management was stressed. It was emphasized that during the Soviet Union time, the water management was highly prioritised on the state level and had big governmental support. It was emphasized in many focus groups that the water quality has improved a lot due to the decline of extensive production after the collapse of Soviet Union and decrease of the nutrient inflow.

The participants of most of the focus groups regret that the control on water resources has gone underway: there are no responsible persons on the objects. Most of the focus groups participants share convincement that centralised operation was more effective when compared to the current dispersed power relations and financial means that are unable to administer the waters successfully. One of the farmers of Birdik village put it very lively: "In 10 years time, the water conditions have gone worse. In soviet time, there was the system of collective farms, but after that the land went to the private hands. Irrigation and drainage systems were left in government's budget that is still unable to support the water supply." Kemin Regional Water management authorities drew attention to the problem that in Soviet time any raised problems were easier to solve as people knew who would be responsible to provide help and whom to turn to. They emphasize: "Nowadays, nobody is responsible for anything."

Another big change that has appeared was the transition from Soviet time large mono-cultural fields that need one type of irrigation towards a more diverse

horticulture with different watering needs. In case of poor condition of the water distribution channels, the water has to be delivered to every species at different times. That has increased (to a large extent wasteful) water consumption.

Views on Water Management

It appears from the focus groups that the term water management remains rather abstract to most of the participants. Largely it was defined as ensuring water supply in certain quantities to those who need it at particular moment. On the other hand participants seemed to be rather reluctant to explain what the term “water management” means as they have never thought about it in their everyday lives. The capacity, cooperativeness, and age of the workers in the water management field were emphasized.

Capacity

Regional water management officials are concerned that mostly elderly people are employed in the water management authorities. Job is paid low and therefore young people are not interested in getting involved with that profession. Also especially the regional water authorities emphasized that there is currently no systematic capacity building for the water authorities

Public involvement

Community actions in repairing the distribution system have been successful for example in case of WUA of Krasnaya Rechka. In many cases it was drawn out that the passiveness of the farmers brings troubles to themselves: actively forwarding their needs to the public will help them to get water when they need it and as much as they need it. Farmers of Ivanovka say an active involvement succeeds with influence, as by raising it to the public agenda, also the political efforts need to turn there.

There are several success stories of activeness of the local people that have succeeded in fundraising or community actions. Milyanfan water user’s association is a good example of the successful fundraising for the water techniques improvements. WUA got funding from World Bank by 686000 soms to improve technical condition of the channels.

Furthermore, it was pointed out by the experience of Ivanovka Water Users' Association, that more effective work of the WUA would encourage confidence in local inhabitants to gain more say on the water management decision-making in the region. On the other hand local government officials address that there is few possibilities to influence the current water management as the development of WUA goes very slowly. There needs to be developed a system for more public inclusiveness on WUA decision-making.

Privatisation or centralisation of the water management

Participants of the focus groups endeavour more systematised control over the water use and timely water supply. The views on reaching this controlled system are differing. Privatisation oriented people see that private-owned channels and water locks would lead to the better supply of waters. On the other hand, more centralised control over the management of the water resources would bring more certainty to the water supply.

It appears that mostly representatives of the water users are reluctant to the privatisation. They are afraid that the privatisation of the channels would bring along major increase in the cost of water. They consider of utmost importance that the water resources are shared equally without losses.

Cooperation of institutions

One of the implications of the malfunctioning of the water management is competition between different water management institutions. Competition is targeted to the funding resources gathered from the households. The situation is also triggered by the **lack of regulation between the different institutions** functioning in the management of water resources.

It was pointed out by several WUA as well as Regional Water Management authorities, the regional water management authorities and Water Users Associations are basically competing for resources and power in the water management. Though, it is stressed by almost all the parties in the water management that **more coordination is needed** between the work of the WUA and Regional Water Authorities for all the associated (Karabuur and Kenesh WUA). Furthermore, as Uchkorgon Water Users Associations draw attention to the fact that the WUA and Regional Water Management Authorities have no common understanding on what needs to be done,

regulations on WUA and Regional Water users' set duties in inter-household and in household levels of water supply.

It was pointed out, that for the better regulation of the work, the rule of law and centralised control needs to be established. Uchkorgon Water Users suggest "There has to be centralisation of the water resources not to drag it to different directions like crab, perch and swan." As a result, the cost of water is too high for the farmers and they will suffer from the scarce irrigation water. WUA should deal with the channels inside the household land, but the district level channels should be kept in order by local government finances.

Value of Water Resources

In all the focus groups, it is brought out that the channels in and between the households are in a very poor condition. At the same time the tax on these quantities that really reach the water is too high. On the other hand, repairing the water channels needs a lot of finances and technique that are mostly lacking. Throughout the focus groups, people uttered their discontent with high cost of water and unclear money allocation and questionable taxation system.

The question raised in several focus groups was how exactly the price of the water is formulated? Uchkorgon local government members emphasized: "There is a mess now with the water taxation!" The payment of the WUA members depends on the water taxes and every Water Users' Association can form its own tax. The frustrating uncertainty in the cost of water is unacceptable for the inhabitants of local areas. The Uchkorgon Local government officials find it unfair to raise the taxes in order to increase the payment for the officials that appear to be rather ineffective in meeting the local inhabitants' water needs.

The allocation of the gathered taxes is questionable to most of the focus groups participants. In many cases, poor and uncontrollable water supply was attributed to the passive system for gathering the finances to improve the quality of technical supplies and personnel to administer the water channels. Taxing the water users centralises the means into institutions that actually do not have the capacity to support any real action with these resources but cover their own administrative costs. On the other hand, representatives of WUA are discontent with the situation whereas out of three *tyiyna* water taxes two goes to regional water management authorities and

only one for Water Users' Associations. WUAs see that these finances are too small to conduct any repairing work or improvements of the water distribution system but only cover the administrative costs.

Governmental Communal Enterprises see unfairness in that the water users pay for the water two times: tax on using the natural resources and tax on the water.

The representatives of the local government of Manas Region address that there should be a better system for addressing the problem that missing care of water distribution channels causes: "The farmers that do not clean the channels should also pay for the water losses that they cause by their careless passiveness!" Karabuur region Water Users' Associations and NGOs draw attention to the fact that the irrigation water does not reach small farmer's fields. It can be attributed to lack of social capital and possibilities to influence the decision-making. But also and foremost the shortage of finances to acquire appropriate water care. Kemin Region is one of the poorest in the Oblast and therefore the people are not able to pay for the water i.e. also for the proper care of the water distribution system and well-functioning management institutions. Situation among the households that are unable to pay for the water is worsening, as there is no means to improve the water supply conditions.

Regional water users associations propose that there should be more **active fundraising** for the regional water management authorities. Information on the funding possibilities as well as modern and efficient water management techniques is missing.

Information Needs

The focus groups revealed a division of the people who have access to the information channels and who really are interested in acquiring knowledge, and the ones that do not have this access. From the focus groups participants' point of view, the information on the water management issues is the basis for better coping with the related problems.

Almost half of the focus groups that said that state newspapers give news from the other regions and sometimes some issues are covered on TV. The rest of the participants admitted that their own experiences with pertinent institutions are the source of their knowledge on the water management issues. Though, people assess

their awareness on the functioning of the water management or on the means to improve the situation in the water distribution rather poor.

In most of the focus groups it was addressed that the state media allocates too little airtime or newspaper space to the water management issues. It was addressed by water users and representatives of administrative bodies that even if there are programmes on the water management issues, they are aired on bad timing. As officials from local Government of Ken Bulun complain: “They appear at daytime when most of the farmers are working on the fields.” Though, it is believed that addressing the water issues would be beneficial to raise public awareness on the long-term weather predictions, water conditions. Water Users’ Association of Kenesh, address that in fact there is information available in the form of brochures and information bulletins at the Country offices. But still there should be more info available from NGOs and international organisations on the local level. Farmers of Pokrovka address, that there is information available to those that are interested in the water issues. Periodically, there is news on the watering resources. “Dykan” is a free of charge Bulletin on the water problems and suggestions concerning watering. The problem concerning these is that they do not reach farmers. Also Ivanovka farmers address that the information does not reach the institutions that need it the most – the WUAs. Addition to these - Agricultural Consultation Agency issues a journal on water management. WUA of Milyanfan gets information from “Agricultural Magazine”. Kemin Regional water management authorities on the contrary to other focus groups address that public information dissemination is working well in the field of water resources through newspapers and television programme “Earth. People. Water”. Though, they address that inside the water management the information dissemination should be organised better in order to make the decision-making and implementation more effective.

Public forums on the water issues were stressed as a possible means for the information exchange between the water administrations and the people. The ones that have acquired knowledge from these meetings consider it a good means of awareness building and social capital establishing for future joint actions in the water management. Farmers and water users associations told about the success stories on the seminars that concentrated on techniques for public to participating in the water management decision-making, state financial support for the development of the WUA and repairing the irrigation systems. Of the opinion of Ivanovka farmers such

kind of practical trainings and seminars would be even more useful than the passive information supply through the media.

Information need topic wise

People would like to get to know more about available financing programmes; as well as technological means for improving the water supply, and judicial regulations in the water management.

Representatives of the WUAs would like to know more about their rights and responsibilities in order to protect themselves as the water users. Especially in case where there is no clear system for paying for water. Also they would like to get to know more on how to influence people's opinions and how to have specific negotiations with them. Also the awareness and know-how on successful project writing, and how to conduct bookkeeping of the WUA would be interesting topics to get acquainted with.

Focus groups participants accentuated also that there should be more coverage on the operational means that have been used in other regions for more effective water distribution and economical utilisation. Need for information on the financing possibilities for the improvement was pointed out by all the focus groups. At the same time, farmers and other water users would like to get more acquainted with the functioning of the WUA.

Scientific Knowledge Base

The need for a system of hydrological assessment of water resources was stressed by many focus groups. Scientific knowledge base would be a reliable basis also for the everyday management of water resources. Systematised data on how the water is used and how much and where the water would be a proper basis for addressing the irrigation needs.

It was stressed in many focus groups that it is necessary to urgently assess the water quantities of the Talas and Chu River Basin. In case of lack of confidential information on the predicted water levels, the work of Regional Water Management authorities is hindered. Farmers as well as regional water authorities would require more appropriate prognosis of the water level. More effective work and establishment of additional water assessment posts would benefit all Regional Water authorities in

order to be able to plan the water distribution and satisfy the needs of the local inhabitants. Karabuur region's WUA and NGOs see that public information on the water losses would make the work of WUA and Regional Governmental Enterprises easier as well as more efficient.

Water management authorities highlight that the ground waters are not used appropriately. Water Users' Association of Manas region address that the most important problems are rational use of water resources; and to get water from Kirov water reservoir.

Institutions Dealing With the Water Management

The role of WUA

From the point of view of Regional Water Management Authorities, the water associations are simply passive organisation that does not raise any socio-economic benefits for the local inhabitants. From the point of view of some Regional Water Management Authorities, they are putting efforts to the reconstruction of the irrigation systems, whereas the WUA is simply a passive user of the water channels and systems. The capacity of the WUA is doubted and they are even accused for being amateurs in any management affairs lacking knowledge in bookkeeping, mending the water systems. Being still in formation, the WUA would need governmental support.

Furthermore the work of WUA is lagging behind, as there is lack of machinery and specially qualified personnel for the work of WUA. WUA seems to farmers functioning as only the tax gathering institution whereas farmers themselves still have to work on the field. Due to the poor capacity, the image of the WUA is low. Also in places, the WUA admits self-critically, that there is deep resistance against their activities and there is hard to do anything useful for people. They look for the help of state officials and international donors to improve the current situation. A farmer describes the situation in WUA „People in the WUA are like schoolchildren - no schoolbag, no pencils, and so on. It means they have neither machinery nor money!“ Local people and officials of the local governments expect WUA to be able to write the projects, buy techniques, be a transactor of the people's needs.“ Interested side – i.e. farmers themselves should take actions.

The role of Regional Water Management Authorities

WUA stress that Regional Water Management Authorities is unnecessary organisation that needs to be reorganised so that all the money for repairing would stay WUA repairing the irrigation channels and other. Also some groups of farmers addressed that the only institutions that is really dealing with water problems is WUA. Though, they believe that competent people from water reservoir, regional water management authorities and WUA, coordinate watering resources. Local inhabitants see that “Why do we pay for the Regional Water Management Authorities, if they even cannot supply appropriate machinery. It would be better to give money directly to WUA.”

Logically, the farmers of (Uchkorgon) are the most critical towards the water authorities. Furthermore, they see, that regional water management authorities and WUA needs to carry the responsibilities that people have given them. There is no order among the specialists in water management field.

Government's support

WUA endeavour the support of the governmental institutions. On the other hand Representatives of the water management authorities appear to be pessimistic on the Kyrgyz Republic's know-how and capacity to deal with water management issues.

Farmers see that state cannot support WUA technically or financially. They reflect on the Ministries experiment on uniting regional WUAs into one “Koktom” that would have the technical capacity and finances, but have not been really successful, though. Their experience shows that departing Kotkom and now decentralised WUA are functioning well. “Only way is to trust one and only hope on you. And the Koktom reorganised and now the separate WUA are functioning well.”

State institutions - akimats or state government are not put much expectations either. For example Chu regional water management authorities compare their situation with the water management institutions in other that receive from state's support to.

They emphasize that it is a state-wide problem that people are not able to pay for the irrigation water. The issue should be dealt on the governmental level - is a convincement of the most of the focus groups participants. On the other hand, local people see little awareness and poor capacity is hindering their participation in the water management.

The role of households

Farmers are **discontent** with the unclear situation in the water management. Most often they address the ineffective bureaucracy and lack of public participation in the decision-making.

Birdik farmers appear to be for the decrease in the bureaucracy of the water management field - they aim at decrease in the personnel of the water users' associations. On the other hand they emphasize that the issues in the countryside are decided without the citizens' opinions. Self-critically they blame farmers or household representatives being too passive to decide on their own faith and well-being. Akims do not acknowledge their people if they are not making them public. People themselves are passive: do not show up at the discussions and afterwards complain. The members of the WUA should be exchanged in a joint meeting. But on the other hand the election is not successful either as all the campaign promises will stay in the community gathering room. Representatives of the local government of Karabuur district emphasize that the active project writing of NGOs has brought money to repair the channels and do other necessary work. Farmers of Ivanovka see a lot of hope in the local NGOs as the means to help for better fundraising from the external and international funds.

International relations

Relations between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan concerning water management are considered critical in the focus groups. Water user's associations and NGOs emphasise that water is the common richness and has to be protected. In many focus groups the issue of where does the money go that Kazakhs pay for water. It was raised by all the focus groups that the Kazakhs should also contribute to the management of the waterways that bring the water from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. It was also accentuated that the Talas River waters go to Kazakhstan without any counting, but local Kyrgyz people have to pay for that.

Furthermore, Kyrgyz people are afraid of the poor situation of the dams (Kurkuroo) on the Talas and Chu Rivers. If something should happen with these, it will cause a major disaster bringing along in places draughts and floods. Therefore,

the Kyrgyz people suggest that if Kazakh people would pay also for the water it would be possible to reconstruct the dams. For several WUA it was questionable “If Kazakhs pay for the water - where does the money go? Why is it not used for repairing the transboundary channels?” Communal governmental enterprise sees that between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the conflict lies also in Kazakhstan closes the waterways that irrigate the Kyrgyz lands, and Kyrgyzstan does the same with the waters that got to Kazakhstan. Local governmental officials of Karabuur summarise the reason for conflict: Kyrgyz do not want to give water to Kazakhs because it is not enough for them either, they do not agree even to sell it.

Participants on the focus groups

At the end of the focus groups discussion, participants were presented the questionnaire in order to identify their impressions about the focus groups and to assess the successfulness of the focus groups from their point of view.

Participants indicated that their first reactions when they were invited to the focus group meetings were in most cases (75%) positive, as they were interested to acquire more information and also to express ones views on the vital water resources. On the other hand, several people did not know what to think before the focus groups, as they had no idea what would be talked about. Few participants were at first sceptical on the fruitfulness of the focus groups, as they had doubts whether mere talking can bring any solution from the discussion. It appeared that several people expected solution for their problems and that something will be decided for example upon the water supply technique repairing or on the joint commission.

People expected to have solid discussions and get useful information from the other parties and on the financial and judicial help in order to give the news further. They anticipated getting to know on the Kazakh and Kyrgyz officials joint efforts in the management of the water resources. Also they anticipated a democratic discussion offering participants to get acquainted with new people and different points of view.

Participants assessed the amount of information gained form the focus group discussions in five-point scale. It appeared that up to half of the participants gained a lot of information, whereas 35% got hardly anything new to know. Participants found that water management and related organisations as well as relations between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and activities of the joint commission on sharing the

transboundary waters. But several people also valued practical information gain on how are the water supply systems' repairings going as well as on the water cost formulation. Few participants also brought out the importance of deliberation that so far has been muted by bureaucracy. Farmers of Birdik indicate that focus groups did not provide any new information on the water management law.

As for the participants' own contributions to the discussions, it came out that almost everybody got to say out everything that they aimed to (in five point scale almost 80 % of the participants assessed their contribution maximum).

Participants' **general impressions about the meeting** were unexceptionally positive. Most often the participants supported their positive impressions with that they had an opportunity to listen to other opinions, and that everybody could contribute "their heart and best vision" as one expressed. Participants praised the possibility to raise problems they found important and had a possibility to find a joint solution for those. Participants also expressed that is not the common practice yet in most of the meetings where a joint solution of the people from different fields of life and from different geographical regions should be reached.

The main reason for taking part in the focus groups also next time would be to get more information and also identify solutions for the found problems. Also the learning effect and new information gain was emphasized as important. Future meetings are necessary as a lot of questions remained open and in order to reach next level of joint actions to actually implement all the ideas to do something beneficial to the community as well as in order to be aware on the events in the water management field.

Process observation

In order to assess the focus groups as a means to get going a joint discussion where participants are on equal footing. Therefore, aspects of participants' interaction, atmosphere and group dynamics were observed.

Several similarities in the groups appeared. Recruited participants were all on **equal footing and could have a say in the discussions**. Though some participants were more dominant and the others mostly agreed with the one. To the end of the focus groups discussions, the participants became more emotional in their expressions. The participants were very interested in the water management topics and would like to be

more involved in the decision-making in the water management affairs. They are **longing for more consideration** from the water management officials and government side.

In the water managers group the presence of the head of their department did not let them to express them free. Also there tended to be more reserved discussion in the beginning of the focus groups. Afterwards, as participants got used to their situation, they also opened up more. The groups worked as homogenous teams only to a certain extent. Moderation was especially necessary in cases of when participants were not eager to talk and also winsome participants tended to dominate the discussions.

Conclusion

Focus groups provided knowledge on needs of the stakeholders not covered before in the studies concerning the water management in transboundary Talas and Chu River Basins. The research process appeared to have mutual learning effect. First, study succeeded in identifying stakeholders' needs to be taken into account in future management decisions. Secondly, in most cases, the focus groups appeared to be awareness-building and empowering for the participants.

Kazakh and Kyrgyz focus groups showed that the problems in the transboundary area of Talas and Chu River basin are quite similar in two countries.

Focus groups revealed most significant following needs:

- Impenetrable and leaking water distribution systems are not able to satisfy the intensive irrigation farming, the main source of income for the local inhabitants.
- Systematic scientific surveillance would provide better assessment and prognosis of the water conditions for choosing most appropriate management measures.
- Among all the stakeholders awareness is needed on the water management institutional functioning, judicial regulations as well as best practises and technological solutions for the appropriate water supply.
- Proper acknowledgement and capacity building of the water specialists would enhance their productiveness and lessen the corruption and race for the limited finances gathered from the water users.
- Stakeholder-considerate development of water management would ensure proper water supply; enhance the acceptability and legitimacy of the decisions made and actions taken.
- Public forums and information days are suitable means for exchange of information and best water management practices on enhancing the situation, providing participants means to improve their own situation.
- Awareness on the stakeholders' rights and responsibilities in the region as well as in the transboundary affairs would fund a basis for the protection of the interest groups.
- Focus group discussions were approved by the participants as a good means of elaborating and communicating new ideas, and searching for partners to implement those in real life.

Focus groups provided a platform where local inhabitants could utter their needs, expressing their hope that these will be taken into consideration in the decision-making. Focus group discussions offered local people to learn from each other's experiences and to get acquainted with different needs and viewpoints on the water management development. On equal footing the participants could have their say and probably evened out each-others differences in world-views.

The study revealed that focus groups can contribute in involving the public to a higher degree in water management by increasing awareness on the water issues, and by providing a forum where the participants feel that they can freely voice their opinions. There is definitely a need to continue the introduction of the public involvement practices in order to reach a wider understanding of the sense of the problem, its solution and the means to gain it. Involving public will enhance the legitimacy of the decisions as well as the economic, socially and ecologically sustainability of those.

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ANNEX I

Focus groups questionnaire

Opening questions:

What kinds of water problems are there in your regions?

Have there been any changes concerning the water resources throughout the past ten years?

What kind of organisations are dealing with water management problems in your region? What are their roles?

When you hear the term “water management”, what comes to your mind?

Have you got any information on the water resources through the radio? How useful was the information for you? How to improve the information?

Key questions

How are the water management problems solved without the local government’s contributions? Give examples of successful solutions?

What would you do if you would be responsible for the water management in your region?

Do you think you have enough possibilities to influence the water management decision-making?

Conclusion

What would you like to know on the water management issues?

What was the most important question we discussed?

What kinds of questions were not considered in our discussion?

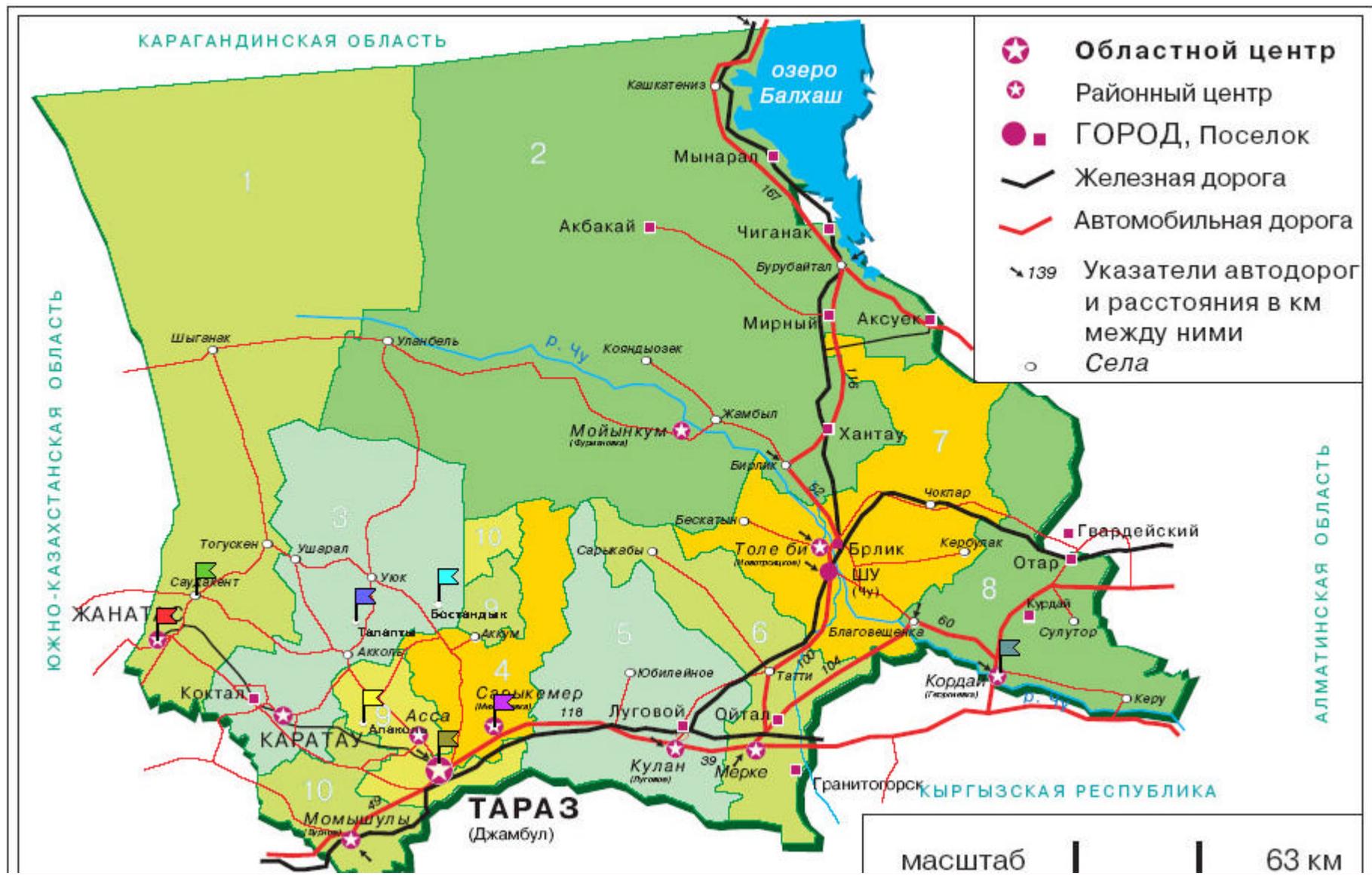
ANNEX II

Focus groups conducted in Talas and Chu River Basins in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan



Focus groups in Kyrgyzstan

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Focus groups in Kazakhstan

	Village Saudakent, Sarysuysky Rayon	CGP (Communal Local Water Management Organizations) RGP (Regional State Water Management Organization) Akims of rural constituencies Rural Water Users - Farmers
	Town of Zhanatas, Sarysuysky Rayon	City Water Management Organization
	Bostandyk, Talasskyi Rayon	Rural Water Users - Farmers
	Akkol, Talassky Rayon	RGP (Regional State Water Management Organization)
	Sarykemer, Baizaksky rayon	Water Users Associations Akims of rural constituencies
	City of Taraz	NGOs and Initiative Groups
	Village Talapty, Talasskyi Rayon	Akims of rural constituencies
	Village Kordai, Kordaiskyi Rayon	CGP (Communal Local Water Management Organizations) RGP (Regional State Water Management Organizations) Akims of rural constituencies Rural Water Users - Farmers

ANNEX III

Water management institutions

Institutional structure of water management in Kazakhstan

By Ulzhan Kanzhygalina

The structure for water management in Kazakhstan is multi-level and is represented by management structures on the intergovernmental, national and regional-basin, and territorial (local) levels.

According to the **Water Code** 2003 the central government ensures state management of water resources through the authorized national management body - the **Committee for Water Resources (CWR)** under the **Ministry of Agriculture (MA)**. The Committee has territorial branches in the 8 river basins- the **River Basin Organization (RBO)**.

The Water Code has granted sufficient powers and management functions to CWR and RBOs. The following agencies also maintain state control of water resources use and protection within their competence:

- The Ministry for Environmental Protection (**MEP**)
- The Ministry for Economics and Budget Planning (**MEBP**)
- The Ministry for Energy and Mineral Resources (**MEMR**) (Committee for Geology and Subsurface Use)
- The Ministry for Emergency (**ME**)
- The Ministry for Health (**MH**) (Committee for Sanitary and Epidemiological Control)
- The Ministry for Finances (**MF**)

At the regional local level local Representative Bodies-**maslikhats** and Executive Bodies – **Akimats** provide implementation and control of the national water management programs and plans. They manage utilization and maintenance of the local water facilities and coordination of the water management activities within their territories.

Regional State Water Management (RSWM) organizations provide maintenance of the general state-owned national and regional water facilities. Local private **Communal Water Management Organizations (CWMO)** take care of the local community water facilities providing water delivery services to the population.

In 2003 According to the Law “**On Rural Cooperatives of Water Users**” new grass root level organizations of Water Users (RCWU) started operating with support from the government.

Institutional structure of water management in Kyrgyzstan

By Aziz Kudaibergenov

Department of water industry (DWI) of the Kyrgyz Republic belongs under the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Processing industry with office organization of state entity.

Activities of DWI are aimed at management and regulation of national water resources with development and implementation of water policy in the fields of planning, construction and exploiting of water industry systems. **The structure of DWI is multilevel: 7 regional branches, 40 district branches and support organizations such as scientific research institutes, state water inspections and 3 water reservoir departments.**

The legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic provides opportunity to establish public entities such as **water users' associations** (WUAs) as a result of privatisation of irrigation system at the grass-root level. There are 348 water users' associations across the country united in National Water Users' Association. This organization also has 7 regional and 26 district branches promoting the interests of farmers who are the members of WUAs at the grass-root level. Local WUAs coordinate their activities with district water industry departments and self-government bodies.

