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Finland's water management programme in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan promotes security in the region

Finland's four-year water management programme in Central Asia, South Caucasus and Eastern Europe will be continued next year. This programme will focus on two countries: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The four-year FinWaterWEI water management programme administered by the Finnish Environment Institute will continue in the years 2014–2017 in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The programme has a total budget of eight million euros.



Information on the state of water bodies was collected during the first phase of the water management programme supported by Finland Sound knowledge provides a better base for dialogue. This photo was taken in Georgia. Photo: Karri Eloheimo

reduce the amount of water in another country that needs water for agricultural purposes.

"The countries are also mountainous and the highest areas are covered by glaciers. Climate change poses the threat of glacial melting, for which there is already strong evidence, so the countries have a growing need to prepare for the changing situation," Törnroos continues.



The Lower Artša River in Kyrgyzstan gets its water from glaciers and melting snow. This picture shows an aqueduct conveying river water to the required location. Photo: Ari Mäkelä

The programme aims to support the countries so that they would be able to deal with politically sensitive transboundary water issues and to plan the use of water resources as a regional entity. The objective is also to mobilize the actors to seek new solutions to increase the availability of clean water.

"Water issues must be examined comprehensively. Water is a natural resource that affects the production of food as well as energy. The strategic importance of water is emphasized in Central Asia, where almost all major rivers cross national boundaries," says **Tea Törnroos**, Division Manager of the International Affairs Unit at the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are both upper-reach countries that have much water.

"They can be called the water towers of Central Asia. Water flows from these countries along rivers to neighbouring countries," Törnroos explains.

Water use can easily lead to conflicts

Transboundary water issues have been a focal point of the programme from the beginning, because the use of water can easily cause conflicts between countries. For example, one country's use of water for energy production can

"So far, water has been used ineffectively and wastefully. There is now a need for much more functional technological solutions, wide involvement and steering systems: policies, laws, strategies and programme. Cooperation between States should also be intensified."

Törnroos states that both of the former Soviet republics are implementing a national water reform in connection with land reforms and the more extensive privatization of the economy. In many places the infrastructure – such as irrigation systems and pipelines – has decayed and needs to be repaired or rebuilt.

Information on the state of water bodies and the actors managing them was collected during the first phase of the water management programme. Sound knowledge provides better possibilities for neutral discussions and agreements. The work has also made use of the UNECE Water Convention.

Törnroos raises integrated management of water resources as one of the most important components of the continuation programme. The departure point for integrated management of water resources is that water bodies and their use are planned and managed holistically for the entire river basin.



Receiving water samples in a laboratory in Kyrgyzstan. Photo: Ari Mäkelä

More money for water sector projects

Water expert **Antti Rautavaara** of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs explains that Ministry funds for water sector projects have increased almost five-fold in the past five years.

"The sum was 13 million euros in 2009 while this year it is nearly 60 million euros," he says.

"In one way or another, water is a prerequisite for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals. Water is linked with many other important issues, such as climate change, food security and energy. The main objective of Finland's water sector projects is the promotion of water security at all levels; between countries, within countries as well as in households."

Riitta Saarinen

The writer is a freelance journalist familiar with development issues.



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