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TAJKISTAN

Second Review Synopsis



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Preface

The second Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Tajikistan began in June 2010 with a preparatory mission. During the mission, the final structure of the report was discussed and established. A review mission took place from 27 September to 6 October 2010. The team of international experts taking part included experts from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Slovakia and Ukraine, as well as from the secretariats of the ECE and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The draft EPR report was submitted to Tajikistan for comments and to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance for consideration in May 2011. During its meeting on 3-4 May 2011, the Expert Group discussed the report in detail with expert representatives of the Government of Tajikistan, focusing in particular on the conclusions and recommendations made by the international experts.

The EPR recommendations, with suggested amendments from the Expert Group, were submitted for peer review to the Committee on Environmental Policy on 24 May 2011. A delegation from Tajikistan participated in the peer review. The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in this report.

The Committee on Environmental Policy and the ECE review team would like to thank the Government of Tajikistan and its experts who worked with the international experts and contributed their knowledge and assistance. ECE wishes the Government of Tajikistan further success in carrying out the tasks involved in meeting its environmental objectives, including the implementation of the recommendations contained in this second review.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe would also like to express its deep appreciation to the Governments of the Netherlands and Switzerland for their financial contributions; to the Governments of Germany, Italy and Portugal for having delegated their experts for the review; and to WHO and the United Nations Development Programme for their support of the EPR Programme and this review.

Executive summary

The first Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Tajikistan was carried out in 2004. This second review intends to measure the progress made by Tajikistan in managing its environment since the first EPR, and in addressing environmental challenges.

Since the last EPR Tajikistan has had a 17 per cent population increase. Tajikistan is not a densely populated country, but the population density varies significantly due to the mountainous geography, making the lowlands of northern and western Tajikistan the most densely populated areas. Apart from the growth of the total population, the demographic indicators have been stable during the past 10 years.

Lack of diversification and reliance on a few export products make Tajikistan vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices and terms of trade. Tajikistan's economy is based on cotton, aluminium and electricity, from which Tajikistan derives three quarters of its total export earnings. This figure has been almost constant for the past 10 years. Cotton alone, as the main agricultural export crop, contributes 90 per cent of agricultural export income, which in 2004, was 24 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Agriculture also provided 66 per cent of employment. The country's aluminium plant is one of the largest in the world, and accounts for about 40 per cent of Tajikistan's total industrial output.

The economy of Tajikistan has developed steadily since the last EPR and the country's economic situation has improved markedly. Careful fiscal management has kept the budget deficit low, and the exchange rate has been very stable. Foreign debt is at a reasonable, low level compared to the earlier period. Rising GDP since the first EPR has improved the living standards of the population, while the level of poverty has diminished notably. However, the international economic crisis that began in 2008 has had an effect on Tajikistan's economy, causing its GDP growth to drop from the previous 8.2 per cent per annum average to 3.4 per cent in 2009. The unemployment figure remains low because much of Tajikistan's labour force is living and working abroad.

By exporting cheap labour Tajikistan has been achieving a transition from a planned to a market economy with a considerably lower level of international official development assistance per capita than other post-communist countries. The migration of workers from Tajikistan and their consequent remittances are unprecedented in their magnitude and economic impact. They have played an important role as one of the drivers of Tajikistan's robust economic growth during the past several years; they have increased incomes and, as a result, have helped significantly reduce poverty.

Policy-making framework for environmental protection and sustainable development

The policy framework for environmental protection changed significantly during the reviewed period. A number of new policy documents on environmental protection and sustainable development have been adopted, as well as several sectoral policy documents that include environment-related provisions.

In general, Tajikistan has already developed an environmental legal framework and some new environment-related laws have been adopted since the first EPR. Several international environmental agreements ratified by Tajikistan have also been incorporated in its legal system.

Environmentally related provisions can also be found in several sectoral laws, including in energy, tourism, transport and urban planning and construction.

There have also been a number of institutional changes. In January 2004, the Ministry of Nature Protection was abolished and replaced by the Committee on Environmental Protection and Forestry. Following reorganization, the Ministry of Agriculture and Nature Protection was given functions of integrated environmental management until further reorganization. The functions of the national environmental authority were designated to the newly established Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government.

Although a great number of environmental protection and sustainable development strategies, programmes and plans have been adopted in Tajikistan, for many of them financing has not been secured, and therefore they have not been implemented. Providing sufficient State funding for environmental protection measures remains a key challenge for Tajikistan. Also, some programmes do not provide any indicators or measurable results and the accomplishment of planned actions is difficult to assess. Some actions are therefore duplicated in different programmes.

Compliance and enforcement

The sectoral monitoring of compliance of organizations and enterprises is carried out by a number of ministries and other public authorities. However, the scope of application of monitoring is shrinking due to the process of privatization. Economic legal entities are also required to undertake self-monitoring. Most enterprises may be inspected not more than once every two years, with the exception of the enterprises that are defined as entities with high risk.

The 2007 Rules on Conducting of Inspections of Economic Legal Entities defines a range of enforcement tools available to the environmental inspectors. The common range of enforcement tools available and used is similar to those in many other countries. However, there is no clear sequence of application of enforcement tools such as inspector's written directions, warnings and administrative fines. Monetary sanctions are the most important enforcement tool but, although very high for forest protection, in the case of industrial pollution Tajikistan avoids the application of high monetary sanctions on operators of industrial activities.

Data on inspections and enforcement of the legislation and standards in various environmental domains are not consolidated, analysed or published. Statistical information on inspections and law enforcement activities is kept separately by various units and agencies of the Committee on Environmental Protection. Also, it seems that this information is not considered at all in the planning of inspections.

There have not been any significant changes in emission standards since the first EPR. Most standards are still the same as were used in the Soviet era. They are one of the main bases for establishing emission level values and issuing environmental permits. In practice, emission limits for a given facility are calculated taking into account the background pollution and the ambient quality standards. The exceeding of limits results in administrative action, including financial sanctions.

Information, public participation and education

Compared with the situation during the first EPR of Tajikistan, the environmental monitoring set-up has not undergone the needed changes. The current monitoring system does not provide sufficient and reliable data on background ambient air and water pollution. There are, so far, no

significant investments for the restoration of the environmental monitoring system through expanding the existing network; for modernizing equipment for air and water monitoring, sampling and testing; or for communication equipment. Owing to insufficient funding, the surface water pollution monitoring network continues to shrink, the system of monitoring of background pollution of ambient air has been drastically reduced, and the hydrometeorological observation network has not been substantially improved.

A positive step towards dissemination of statistical information is the Statistical Agency's website, which provides access to some statistical data in various areas. However, the statistical yearbook on environmental protection does not contain statistical information on industrial waste, inspections and law enforcement on protection of the environment and natural resources. In particular, information on the use of water resources is excluded due to inconsistencies in the statistical data in that area.

The Aarhus Centres play an important role in terms of planned and regular work to improve access to environmental information. However, since the beginning of 2010, due to the lack of funding both the Aarhus Centre in Dushanbe and its website are not operational. The Aarhus Centres in Khujand and Qurghonteppa focus more on increasing the awareness of the local population on environmental matters, through the publication of booklets, brochures, videos on environmental topics, as well as posting information on bulletin boards in public areas. The adoption of the Law on Citizens' Appeals in 2006 has changed the legal framework for obtaining environmental information from public authorities upon written request.

The 2006 Procedure of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) sets the public participation requirements for decision-making on specific activities, which are subject to the EIA procedure. The EIA regulation is not fully consistent with the public participation requirements of the Aarhus Convention.

The 1996 State Programme on Environmental Education is not yet implemented. The Programme focused on environmental education in the formal education system, i.e. in kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities. However, its implementation was not effective due to lack of funding and recognition of environmental education as a priority area. Currently, a new programme on environmental education is under development. The most problematic area of environmental education is the lack of training and retraining for the staff of public authorities.

Implementation of international agreements and commitments

So far, Tajikistan has acceded to several international environmental agreements. However, out of the five UNECE environmental conventions, it is only Party to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation on Decision-making and Access to Justice. Because of Tajikistan's limited human and financial resources, the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements mostly depends on external cooperation and support. Foreign investments are also essential for allowing the country to face and deal with environmental challenges.

As a member of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, Tajikistan has taken the lead among Central Asia countries for addressing the issue of mountain ecosystems degradation. This is one of five priorities, which include water resources and water pollution; air pollution; land degradation; waste management; and degradation of mountain ecosystems.

Additionally, in 2007, a transboundary water agreement on the use of water and energy resource of the Syr Darya River basin was signed between riparian countries. Although Parties tried to

find a mutually beneficial solution, problems and disputes concerning the use of common basins remain unresolved. A major concern is the need for access to water and sharing of water use among the upstream and downstream countries.

Tajikistan is not yet a Party to the Basel Convention, the most comprehensive global environmental agreement on hazardous and other wastes. Given the large amount of accumulated hazardous waste in the country, and the lack of means to properly dispose of it, acceding to this Convention could be considered as a priority for the near future.

Economic instruments and expenditures for environmental protection

Tajikistan is facing major environmental problems, such as air and water pollution, and land erosion, with attendant severe adverse impacts on human health. Environmental damages are estimated to have a considerable economic cost, including the costs of adverse health impacts, corresponding to some 5 per cent of GDP.

In general, revenues from water supply and sanitation services are not sufficient to recover operational costs, let alone the preventive maintenance costs, of water companies. This is reflected in the progressive deterioration of the water sector infrastructure and a decline in the quantity and quality of water supply and sanitation services provided. The pervasive financial losses of water companies are owing to the basic tariffs, which are below unit production costs, but also the considerable volume of water revenue lost due to leakages in the infrastructure and inefficient billing mechanisms.

The existing energy sector infrastructure is very old and in poor condition, following two decades of low investment and considerable damage resulting from the civil war. While virtually all the urban and rural population has access to electricity, most of the rural population is faced with frequent power outages. One of the major priorities of the Government has therefore been the rehabilitation, modernization and expansion of the electricity generation facilities, as well as of the transmission lines and substations. Part of the energy sector development strategy is a reform of electricity tariffs and improvement of collection rates to ensure financial sustainability of energy utilities and thereby also attracting external investment funds.

The social affordability issue has become more acute in view of the more or less simultaneous increase in tariffs for water supply and sewerage, electricity and waste collection in recent years. The increased costs of these services fall disproportionately on low-income households, given that they account for a larger share of their income. Social assistance is considered to be insufficiently targeted at the poorest parts of the population, and the Government therefore intends to develop a new social targeting mechanism within the framework of a shift to a unified social benefit system, which will also integrate assistance needs for purposes other than electricity and gas bills.

Achieving sustained economic growth is the main preoccupation of the Government, given that it is an essential condition for making progress in creating jobs and reducing the still high levels of poverty. Environmental protection does not really figure among the main policy priorities. The very limited mobilization of financial resources for environmental protection in the State budget and in environmental (special) funds points to a clear marginalization of environmental protection in public sector spending.

There is a lack of transparency concerning the strategies, if any exist, and operations of environmental funds. Their number appears to be excessively large, amplifying management costs and diluting the already very limited resources available. In a more general way, this points to the

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