

United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA): Sub-regional cooperation to achieve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Building sub-regional cooperation among the landlocked countries of Central Asia to respond to the challenges of sustainable development

Challenge

SPECA countries declared their commitment to achieving the SDGs, yet the region faces serious sustainable development challenges. The exclusive focus of the countries' economies and exports on a limited number of commodities (primarily hydrocarbons) poses serious problems for sustainable development, creation of decent jobs and environmental protection. Over the years, SPECA has proved its comparative advantage as a sub-regional platform to tackle existing challenges to sustainable development, such as improving connectivity, transboundary management of natural resources and border management to facilitate trade and mainstreaming innovation into strategies and policy documents. The participating countries established it in order to address crucial issues of regional cooperation, drawing on international legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations offered by the two Regional Commissions.

Towards a Solution

The United Nations launched SPECA in 1998 at the countries' initiative to strengthen sub-regional cooperation in Central Asia and integrate it into the world economy. The Programme's activities combine technical assistance and capacity building with high-level, cross-sector, inter-ministerial policy discussions and regular dialogue among the policy, business and research communities. The SPECA participating countries consider the Programme to be very important and a unique instrument that brings them together to identify joint solutions. In 2018, the Government of Kazakhstan described SPECA as "the only entity that includes only the countries of Central Asia... providing solid possibilities for Central Asian countries to solve problems."

In 2015, after adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the SPECA Governing Council decided that the Programme would become a platform for sub-regional cooperation for implementation of the SDGs. In 2016, the six SPECA working groups mapped their interventions, priorities and needs of SPECA participant countries against the SDGs, which found as follows:

- Working Group on Water, Energy and the Environment contributes to SDG 6, 7 and 12;
- Working Group on Sustainable Transport contributes to SDGs 3, 9, and 11;
- Working Group on Trade contributes to SDG 17,
- Working Group on Knowledge-Based Development contributes to SDGs 8, 9, and 13;
- Working Group on Gender and Economy contributes to SDGs 5 and 8; and
- Working Group on Statistics to support SDG monitoring contributes to SDG 17.

The results of the SPECA Working Groups demonstrates SPECA's success as a sub-regional platform to support SDG implementation.



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The Working Group on Trade developed a set of principles for trade aligned to the SDGs and offered them to the governments of the SPECA countries for inclusion in their national sustainable development plans. Assessments of the readiness of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreements, which were used in both countries in their negotiations in the WTO (SDG 17.10), and the inclusion of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the UNCTAD global database on Non-Tariff-Measures (TRAINS), became best practices. The SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development has enabled the sharing of best practices and peer review of policy recommendations made to national authorities of countries that undertake innovation performance reviews¹. To build on the strong progress to date, it was decided at the 2017 SPECA Economic Forum and Governing Council (Dushanbe, 5-6 December 2017) to develop a regional strategy on innovation for achieving the SDGs.

The Working Group on Water, energy and environment, which focuses on developing national legal and institutional frameworks for dam safety in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, helped lead to the establishment of a new safety monitoring system on the Ortotokoy dam in Kyrgyzstan. At the sub-regional level, a model for national regulation for the establishment of a cadastre for hydro-technical installations was produced.

Thanks to successful transboundary cooperation in the Chu and Talas River Basins, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan share the waters of the Chu and Talas rivers for irrigation and hydropower generation. The facilities for regulating these rivers (dams, water reservoirs and canals) are located upstream in Kyrgyzstan, while Kazakhstan depends on their operation and proper maintenance. The Chu-Talas Water Commission (CTWC) aims to achieve equitable sharing and use of water

resources in the Chu and Talas River Basins in response to climate change, which affects water resources in the region. The two countries developed a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and a Strategic Action Programme (SAP), approved by both governments and supported by UNDP and UNECE under the GEF project, Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Chu and Talas River Basins (2015-2018). **CTWC activities benefited all of Central Asia by enabling successful bilateral cooperation on transboundary water resources. As a region-wide innovation, the collaborative approach with two Central Asian countries that exercise full local ownership of the TDA and SAP has obtained a commitment from the highest level** - the Intergovernmental Council of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, led by the prime ministers of the two countries. The successful implementation of the SAP in the Chu and Talas River Basins has generated interest in replicating it both within and outside the SPECA region.

The SPECA experience is replicable in other regions and river basins, where neighbouring or riparian countries recognize the benefits of transboundary cooperation and the shared need to establish rules for water management while also building political will for a joint programme and a legal tool to manage the water resources together.

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Project name: United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA): sub-regional cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Countries/Regions: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Nominated by: UNECE

Sustainable Development Goal target(s): 3.6, 3.9, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7a, 7b, 8.2, 8.3, 9.1, 9.4, 9.5, 9b, 9c, 11.2, 12.2, 12.3, 12a, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 17.10, 17.11, 17.18, 17.19

Supported by: UNECE and UNESCAP

Implementing entities: UNECE and UNESCAP

Project status: Ongoing

Project period: 1998 - 2019

URL of the practice: goo.gl/GFC8fa; goo.gl/tNbWq7