



New approaches to solve old water problems: community based organizations in Central Asia

Kanysh Nurymgereyev

International Secretariat, Central Asian Countries Initiative on Land Management (CACILM), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
(knurymgereyev@cacilm.kg)

The dry summer of 2009 has once again shown unsteadiness of economy of the Central-Asian countries, first of all, in agricultural sector and serious dependence of the region on water resources. For example, decreasing of water level in Toktogul reservoir forces the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the country where the largest rivers of the Central Asia originate, to the systematic switching-off of the electricity in three regions.

Already in the spring of 2009, the experts predicted decreasing of gross production of agriculture in region, especially for the main cultures of cotton and rice. Coupled by natural cataclysms, the problems with water resources management have seriously aggravated conditions that are directly reflected on the livelihood of the rural population of Central Asia. This demands a search for new approaches and methods of solution of the main problems of water resources management.

Despite the fact that the main issues of water distribution are solved at a level of the governments of the countries of Central Asia, a serious role in this process is associated directly to local water users. In recent years in some countries of the region, a process of creation of new community based Institutes of water resources management like Water Users Associations of (WUA) has started. The main idea for creation of these organizations is the necessity to involve the local water users like farmers to the process of water resources management and distribution. However, activity of the WUAs in the region has shown certain weaknesses both regarding the legal status of these organizations and institutional development. The main weakness of many WUAs is a lack of opportunities and mechanisms of involving of associations in decision-making processes.

Members of WUAs have an opportunity to participate in distribution of water only within the borders of the associations while the main requirement of efficient water resources management is the principle of the integrated water management. The essence of this principle is that issues of water use and water distribution should be solved in coordination and in view of interests of all partners from other countries of the region.

The next important issue is the necessity to strengthen the institutional capacity of WUAs. First of all, it is related to providing new approaches in training of members of associations in organizational management, fundraising, and modern technologies of natural resources management. It would be useful as well to strengthen cooperation between WUAs of neighboring countries in order to create information exchange and distribution of best practices between them. Hence, cooperation between the WUAs of the Central Asia countries could become an example for local governments for an integrated solution of problems of distribution and water resources management in the region.