

**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE EXPERT MEETINGS ON PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE
EECCA ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN PART OF
EECCA, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

organised
in Moscow, Russia 18 May 2005
in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 17 June 2005
in Tbilisi, Georgia, 24 June 2005

1. As a follow-up to the Conference of EECCA Environment Ministers and their Partners the OECD/EAP Task Force Secretariat in co-operation with the EECCA Regional Environmental Centers (REC Russia, Moldova, Central Asia and Caucasus) organised in May-June 2005 series of Sub-regional Expert Meetings on Progress in Implementing the EECCA Environment Strategy.
2. The purpose of the meetings was 1) to discuss how Environment Ministries and other stakeholders could work more efficiently together to make progress in implementing the EECCA Environment Strategy, and 2) to discuss how Environment Ministries and other stakeholders could work together with the EAP Task Force Secretariat to provide an accurate Assessment of Progress in Implementing the EECCA Environment Strategy that needs to be prepared for the 2007 Belgrade Ministerial Conference.
3. The sub-regional meetings were targeted to the national EECCA Strategy Contact Persons as well as officials responsible for environmental policy planning and environmental information in the Ministries of Environment. In order to incorporate perspectives from the rest of the Government, experts from the health sector were invited to the Almaty and Tbilisi meetings. In addition, selected representatives from non-governmental organizations were also invited to attend the meetings. The lists of participants of each sub-regional meeting are attached (Annex 1, 2 and 3).
4. The discussions at the three workshops are summarized below. This report brings together the conclusions of the three meetings. It does not include all the issues discussed during the meetings, as it focuses only on the issues relevant to the topics of the meeting.

Making Progress in Implementing the EECCA Environment Strategy

5. The participants agreed that there were not many additional actions beyond “business as usual” that have happened thanks to the Strategy. They emphasized, however, the important potential that the EECCA Environment Strategy represents for their countries. A couple of countries mentioned that the Strategy had been useful in developing their national plans. The participants noted several characteristics of the Strategy that could bring about positive impacts that the Strategy could have. In particular the Strategy:
 - a) brings international and national **attention** on the environmental problems of EECCA countries;
 - b) identifies the major environmental problems as well as the actions needed to confront those problems, thus providing a basis for further **prioritization** of actions at the national level;
 - c) provides a basis for development of **partnerships**, thus stimulating national actions by different partners and sectors including the private sector and NGOs; and

- d) provides a framework for improved co-operation and **co-ordination of actions** by donors and International Organisations, thus helping to reduce overlaps and duplication of efforts.

6. The participants noted that the EECCA Environment Strategy has not received as much attention as other similar or relevant international processes or instruments (e.g. UNSCD, Conventions, CAR Initiative). They identified several problems undermining the effective implementation of the Strategy; Some of them refer to the Strategy itself; others refer to the overall situation of environmental management in the region:

- a) **Inadequate Strategy coordination arrangements.** It is not always clear who in the Ministry of Environment is responsible for coordinating implementation of the Strategy, and what her role should be. The staff assigned with Strategy coordination is mandated with many other responsibilities. Frequent restructuring and changes of staff contribute to the unclear distribution of responsibilities and unawareness among new top management team. Although formal national Strategy implementation plans are not required by the Strategy itself, the lack of any coordinating plan does not allow having a proper picture of actions taken in achieving the objectives of the EECCA Environment Strategy in EECCA countries.
- b) **Few built-in incentives.** The absence built-in incentives, such as an explicit implementation mechanism linked to the Strategy, a requirement for formal national implementation plans, or concrete targets and indicators to assess the progress in implementing the Strategy, militate against higher priority being given to Strategy implementation.
- c) **Low overall capacity in Environment Ministries.** This systemic problem affects their capacity to implement and coordinate Strategy implementation, including through the launching of dedicated partnerships and the preparation of dedicated projects. The unstable financial situation of Environment Ministries (e.g. in most cases the budgets of the EECCA Governments do not include a specific section targeted on environmental protection) is a major barrier to improved environmental management overall.
- d) **Low level of inter-ministerial coordination.** Participants highlighted that Ministries of Environment by themselves cannot deliver on full implementation of the Strategy. Many actions would be responsibility of other Ministries. But those Ministries have not been involved in the Strategy process and the general low level of inter-ministerial coordination remains a major obstacle.
- e) **Inadequate involvement of stakeholders.** Insufficient support for the NGOs initiatives and involving them and other partners in the implementation of the Strategy was voiced in some meetings.

7. The participants suggested focusing on strengthening **sectoral integration** and **financing** to improve Strategy implementation. They highlighted the need to raise the profile of the EECCA Environment Strategy among the other sectors in the EECCA Governments. They proposed, in particular, to:

- a) **clarify** further the authority, role and **responsibilities** of those involved in the implementation of different Strategy objectives at all levels, and in particular nominating an official responsible for coordinating EECCA Environment Strategy implementation with sufficient allocation of time for that purpose;
- b) improve **dissemination of information** (wider and more frequent) related to the EECCA Environment Strategy within the environment ministries and other relevant ministries;
- c) prepare and provide regular information on **positive results and challenges** in implementing the Strategy to all partners (e.g. through newsletter or web-site);
- d) identify the **priority actions** contributing to the EECCA Environment Strategy that are included in the national environmental action plan (NEAP) or other planning documents, or to prepare a more operational national implementation/coordination plan for achieving the Strategy objectives;

- e) focus on **quality of partnerships** (rather than quantity) developed to contribute to the Strategy implementation;
- f) **broaden participation**, involving other sectoral ministries, NGOs and private sector in consultation processes related to the implementation of the Strategy or its specific objectives;
- g) **use the framework** of the EECCA Environment Strategy to provide **arguments** for the environment ministries to promote integration of environmental aspects into the wider economic policies in EECCA countries and raise the “**environmental literacy**” of their colleagues in other ministries (for example by organizing specific seminars discussing the challenges in implementing different Strategy objectives);
- h) establish **inter-ministerial coordination groups** or coordinate the implementation of the Strategy through existing inter-ministerial coordination committees; and
- i) integrate more effectively the Strategy objectives into **existing international processes/tools**, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies and processes related to the Millennium Development Goals.

Assessing Progress in Implementing the EECCA Environment Strategy

8. The participants took note of the presentations by the EAP Task Force Secretariat on (i) the findings of the Stocktaking Report, and (ii) the plans for the focus and the preparatory process of the 2007 EECCA Strategy Progress Assessment. They agreed to provide more detailed written comments by two weeks after the last sub-regional workshop in the end of June. More specifically, they:

- a) recommended to improve the **Russian translation** of the Stocktaking Report and to distribute the report widely in EECCA;
- b) welcomed the idea of developing the 2007 EECCA Strategy Progress Assessment Report as an **inter-agency report** that could carry more weight on policy-makers in EECCA;
- c) recommended to prepare the 2007 Progress Assessment Report **forward looking** report with proper facts, serious arguments and focused recommendations for specific priority actions;
- d) suggested to include **Prime Ministers’ Offices** as a key target audience for the report;
- e) expressed their interest in being **actively involved** in the preparation of the 2007 EECCA Strategy Progress Assessment Report; and agreed to collect of information/data for the report (the EECCA Regional Environmental Centers promised to assist the environment ministries of their regions in these efforts);
- f) recommended to focus the Assessment on reporting on country **actions taken** as well as sharing lessons learned and best practices, and noted that information on actions that happen on the ground does not always reach international organizations preparing assessment reports;
- g) supported the proposal to include results of **case studies** addressing common regional environmental problems and using ecosystems approach (the EECCA RECs agreed to take the lead in preparing such case studies);
- h) recommended to focus the report on **priority areas** (policy integration, financing) and to be opportunistic in using available information, not necessarily striving for a fully-balanced report across objectives;
- i) recommended to use the report to highlight the links between environmental degradation and **socio-economic processes**, such as poverty reduction and trade liberalization;
- j) highlighted the importance of prepare a **matrix/questionnaire** for reporting on actions taken to implement the EECCA Strategy;

- k) noted the importance on working together with different partners to develop indicators, other **analytical tools and targets** for assessing progress in implementing the Strategy in EECCA countries; and
- l) emphasized the importance of taking advantage of the 2007 Progress Assessment process for developing **mechanisms** that would enhance the **inter-ministerial co-operation** and involvement of different **stakeholders**.

Next Concrete Actions

9. Based on the discussions the following concrete actions were identified:

- a) EECCA Environment Ministries to confirm their National EECCA Environment Strategy **Contact Persons** to the EAP Task Force Secretariat by 29 of July 2005;
- b) EECCA Environment Ministries to provide **mailing lists** to the EAP TF Secretariat for further dissemination of the Russian translation of the Stocktaking Report in EECCA countries by mid September 2005;
- c) EAP Task Force Secretariat in co-operation with EECCA Environment Ministries, NGOs, EECCA RECs and other Facilitating Organisations to strengthen efforts to **disseminate information** on activities and partnerships related to the EECCA Environment Strategy (for example by developing and updating specific web- pages related to specific Strategy objectives; updating the information provided through the Partnerships Database, and issuing an EECCA Environment Strategy Newsletter);
- d) EAP Task Force Secretariat to establish more **frequent contact** with the EECCA Strategy Contact Persons in EECCA Environment Ministries in order to provide more focused and direct support;
- e) EECCA Environment Ministries to **identify priority actions** to address urgent issues to be carried under the EECCA Environment Strategy;
- f) EECCA Environment Ministries to organize **national seminars** to discuss topics related to the EECCA Environment Strategy, such as the findings of the Stocktaking Report, the progress in achieving selected Strategy Objectives, or the preparations of the 2007 Progress Assessment Report (in order to increase the interest of sectoral ministries, EAP Task Force and other Facilitating Organisations could be invited to participate in these seminars);
- g) EECCA RECs, in collaboration with EAP Task Force Secretariat, to prepare a **format** for reporting on actions taken to implement the Strategy Objective on **Public Participation** (REC Moldova to take the lead)
- h) REC Russia to identify selected actions to promote the EECCA Environment Strategy implementation at the **oblast level** in Russia;
- i) REC Caucasus and REC Central Asia to use the **REC convening role** to facilitate sub-regional and inter-sectoral co-operation on specific EECCA Environment Strategy Objectives (for instance by organizing workshops to discuss the need for mechanisms to deal with sectoral integration, or how to arrive at common sub-regional standards on transboundary issues)
- j) EAP Task Force Secretariat to propose an enhanced **questionnaire** for reporting on actions taken, EECCA Environment Ministers to provide feedback on questionnaire design and to fill the questionnaire; and
- k) EAP Task Force Secretariat to organise a **regional meeting** in 2006 to discuss outlines of contributions to the 2007 Progress Assessment.