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Overview of the outcomes and lessons learnt from the subregional workshops on sharing of experience on the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health

I. Introduction

1. A series of subregional workshops on sharing of experience on the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health was organized in accordance with the programme of work of the Protocol for 2011-2013, adopted by the second session of the Meeting of the Parties (Bucharest, 23-25 November 2010), and specifically under the programme area on target setting and reporting.
2. To this end, three workshops were held, for Eastern Europe (Minsk, 5-6 April 2011), Central Europe (Bratislava, 8-9 May 2012) and Nordic and Baltic countries (Oslo, 7-8 November 2012), while two additional subregional workshops are in the pipeline for 2013 – for the Caucasus and Central Asia. The workshops were planned and organized under the auspices of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting and with direct and in-kind contributions from Finland, Switzerland and host governments and organizations – the Government of Belarus for the Eastern European workshop, the Government of the Republic of Slovakia and the International Water Assessment Centre for the Central European workshop, and the Government of Norway and the Nordic Council of Ministers for the workshop for Nordic and Baltic countries.
3. The current paper was prepared by the UNECE secretariat following the discussions on the benefits of subregional workshops at the fifth session of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 11-12 October 2012) and the subsequent request by the Bureau of the Protocol to extract lessons learnt from the subregional workshops and the problems that were identified in each subregion to inform the process of elaboration of the next programme of work for 2014-2016.
4. The analysis of the outcomes of the workshops showed that the main advantage of cooperation on subregional level is the facilitation of discussions among countries that share similar backgrounds and conditions in contrast to approach at the pan-European level, which might not always allow replicating experience due to the wide diversity of countries.

II. Short overview of the conducted workshops

a) Eastern Europe

5. All countries in Eastern Europe are Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health, however while the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have already set targets and target dates under the Protocol, in Belarus and the Russian Federation the process is still not finalized. In the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine the process of target setting was supported through the country specific projects funded by the Governments of Switzerland and Norway, respectively.
6. The need to strengthen inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral cooperation was underscored as one the most important priorities in the countries of Eastern Europe. In this regard, the participants from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine noted that inter-sectoral cooperation between the water, environment and health sectors, which was established in the course of national projects under the Protocol, provided a good foundation for national discussions on the water and health issues in general, and specifically, those related to the implementation of targets set under the Protocol. It was also underlined that that the targets set under the Protocol and the plan of measures for their implementation may help to streamline both national investments into water and sanitation sector and assistance received through bilateral donors. Participants from Belarus and the Russian Federation highlighted that the implementation of the Protocol in their countries is currently linked to the existing and planned national programmes on improving water supply and sanitation.
7. Against this background, participants identified the following common challenges and priorities in the implementation of the Protocol that require further consideration:
 - High degree of deterioration of water and sanitation infrastructure and the deriving needs for investments and improved management
 - Access to water and sanitation, in particular in rural areas, where the management of small scale supplies is a key challenge
 - Need to perform cost-benefit analysis of targets and proposed measures, especially in light of the general lack of resources allocated to water and sanitation sector
 - Protection of water resources, in particular surface waters, used as sources of drinking water.

b) Central Europe

8. The current status of implementation of the Protocol varies across countries of Central Europe. To date, Hungary and the Slovak Republic have already set and revised their targets, Romania is currently working on the elaboration of targets, and Slovenia is not yet a Party to the Protocol. As for the countries that didn't attend the workshop, the Czech Republic is well advanced in the implementation of the Protocol while Poland is not a Party.
9. One of the main issues discussed at the subregional workshop was the relationship between the Protocol on Water and Health and the relevant legislation of the European Union (EU). In this regard, it was noted that while the main focus of the countries was on the implementation of the applicable EU directives, the work on the Protocol implementation builds around this as both processes are largely complementing each other. The availability of funding through the EU mechanisms helped to improve the situation with water and sanitation in the subregion. At the same time, it was mentioned that in some countries there

was not enough work performed beyond the provisions of the EU directives, thus, the added value of the cross-sectoral, holistic approach of the Protocol was lost. To this end, the workshop allowed to reinforce the understanding of opportunities and the added value provided by the Protocol, which included such areas of as the small scale water supplies and sanitation, equity aspects, and bathing waters, not addressed under EU legislation. Participants also strongly underlined the importance of involving non-governmental actors in promoting the Protocol in Central Europe, and specifically stressed the opportunity to cooperate with the Global Water Partnership in light of its strong presence in subregional countries.

10. Some common challenges and priorities identified by the workshop include:

- Access to water and sanitation in rural areas – small scale supplies and their financing, equitable access
- Need to effectively address emerging diseases/pathogens
- Need to address the impact of extreme weather events
- Political support to the Protocol and inter-sectoral cooperation in the process of target setting, their implementation and review.

c) Nordic and Baltic countries

11. Among Nordic and Baltic countries, Finland is positioned as the most advanced in the implementation of the Protocol; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Norway are Parties but still haven't adopted their targets officially; Iceland, Denmark and Sweden are signatories to the Protocol. Among the countries mentioned above, Denmark and Finland did not participate in the workshop.

12. As most of the Nordic and Baltic countries are EU members, special attention of the workshop was dedicated to discussions on building strong linkages between the Protocol and the EU legislation, focusing on the added value of the Protocol's provisions. In this regard, participants noted that due to specificity of countries, the issue of access to water and sanitation in rural and sparsely populated areas – small scale and individual supplies, covered by the Protocol – presents a good opportunity for cooperation. Additionally, participants highlighted the role that the Protocol could play in improving the water and health situation through setting targets and surveillance and reduction of water-related diseases. Acknowledging the need for a platform to share experience on water and health related issues among diverse stakeholders, which could be also linked to the programme of work of the Protocol, the countries decided to pursue necessary steps to establish a Nordic/Baltic network on drinking water and sanitation. It was also noted that the Protocol can serve as a vehicle to mobilize political will for investment into water and sanitation sector.

III. Main conclusions and lessons learnt from the subregional cooperation under the Protocol

13. Though the three subregions where the workshops were held so far differ from the economic, social and geographical points of view, a number of common challenges were identified in all of them, presenting possible themes for further work under the Protocol.

14. First of all, it was noted that setting of targets and target dates under the Protocol remains a key and demanding exercise for countries which can bring multiple benefits. Intersectoral

cooperation also continues to be a main challenge and should be strengthened in almost all countries. In addition, sanitation was underscored as a common issue, which is lagging behind compared with the situation with drinking water supply. Climate change impacts were generally highlighted as a challenge for reaching the objectives of the Protocol.

15. Some other common regional issues include:

- Access to water and sanitation in rural and sparsely populated areas – small scale and individual supplies
- Equitable access issues
- Public participation in Protocol matters
- Need but also challenges associated with performing cost-benefit analysis of targets and proposed measures
- Level of performance of water supply and sanitation systems.

16. The subregional workshops were extremely appreciated by participants; this was also clearly reflected in the evaluation forms completed at the end of the workshops which consistently rated the events very highly. In addition, it was acknowledged that subregional activities allow involving a broader number of experts, thus, increasing the impact at national level (compared to activities on pan-European level). Subregional workshops have fostered political support to the Protocol and have triggered progress in terms of improved intersectoral cooperation, involvement of the civil society, renewed attention and efforts devoted to it. They also provided the opportunity to share experience of countries with similar backgrounds and engage countries that are either not Parties or have not advanced a lot in the implementation of the Protocol.

17. Additionally, the workshops generated spin-off ideas, such as on the necessity to come up with multilateral subregional networks or other cooperation arrangements on water and health which could be linked to the programme of work under the Protocol and contribute to its implementation.

18. However, in order to further increase the impact of possible future subregional workshops, they could be further tailored to the needs of participating countries. In this respect, the host country plays a key role in liaising with neighbour countries for identifying the most relevant themes for a workshop.

19. Taking stock of the accumulated experience on holding subregional workshops on sharing of experience on the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health and in light of the ongoing work on elaboration of the draft programme of work under the Protocol for 2014-2016 to be submitted for adoption at the third session of the Meeting of the Parties (Oslo, 25-27 November 2013), the following issues may be considered in the upcoming discussions by the Bureau, Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting and the Working Group on Water and Health:

- Should subregional workshops be organized in the next programme of work, in particular in the subregions where there hasn't been any (e.g. South-Eastern Europe)
- If so, what should be done differently and what should be done in the same way?
- Could the issues highlighted in the first round be followed up by activities organized in the next programme of work?
