

Advancing Transboundary Water Cooperation Through Interactive Simulations WE-ACT Workshop

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Introduction

The WE-ACT workshop, held on November 15, 2024, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, marked a significant milestone in fostering collaboration and shared understanding in transboundary water resource management. Organized by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) under the Water Efficient Allocation in a Central Asian Transboundary River Basin ([WE-ACT project](#)), this event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government officials, researchers, and practitioners, to participate in an innovative interactive simulation exercise. Focused on addressing the complexities of water allocation in shared river basins, the workshop emphasized experiential learning, mutual understanding, and actionable collaboration. Against the backdrop of Central Asia's unique water challenges, the event showcased projects commitment to leveraging cutting-edge tools and participatory methods to advance sustainable and equitable resource management.

Transforming Water Governance with the WE-ACT Project

The WE-ACT project is reshaping water resource governance in transboundary river basins through the development of cutting-edge tools and participatory approaches. At the heart of its mission is the creation of a Decision Support System (DSS) that integrates scientific care with stakeholder collaboration to optimize water allocation. Tailored to the socio-economic and environmental contexts of Central Asia, the project addresses critical issues such as climate variability, competing resource demands, and institutional barriers.

The WE-ACT project emphasizes:

- **Innovative Decision-Making Tools:** Leveraging data, modeling, and participatory methods to create actionable solutions.
- **Stakeholder-Centered Design:** Ensuring that the voices and priorities of all stakeholders are reflected in decision-making processes.
- **Regional Relevance:** Adapting strategies to the unique political, environmental, and cultural dynamics of the region.
- **Knowledge Dissemination:** Promoting learning and capacity-building through interactive and experiential approaches.

This workshop exemplified projects dedication to inclusive and transformative water governance, empowering participants to engage actively in crafting sustainable solutions.



Together We Flow: Exploring Shared Values in Transboundary Water Allocation

At the heart of the workshop was the simulation activity, *"Together We Flow: Shared Values in Transboundary River Basin Allocation."* This innovative game was designed by **Meadow Poplawsky** with support from **Dr. Robert-Jan den Haan, Dr. ir. Markus Berger, Dr. ir. Rick Hogeboom, and Dr. Lara Woehler** from the University of Twente. The simulation provided an engaging platform for participants to explore the complexities of transboundary water allocation while balancing competing priorities and fostering collaboration.



- **Purpose and Design:** The simulation allowed participants to navigate a fictional transboundary river basin, making decisions that balanced economic, environmental, and socio-cultural priorities. The game was tailored to the specific challenges of Central Asia, with facilitators adapting scenarios to reflect the realities of the region.
- **Interactive Engagement:** Participants engaged in breakout sessions and group discussions, debating trade-offs and negotiating solutions. Facilitators encouraged dialogue, clarified regional challenges, and incorporated participant feedback to enhance the relevance of the simulation. This adaptive approach deepened the learning experience and fostered meaningful engagement.
- **Acknowledgment of Developers:** The success of the simulation was made possible by the collaborative efforts of its designers and contributors at the University of Twente, whose expertise and creativity ensured that the activity was both impactful and regionally adapted.

Handing Over the Simulation Tool

As a step toward sustaining the impact of the workshop, the simulation tool "Together We Flow" was handed over to participants for further use in their professional and educational contexts. The game, along with detailed instructions and guidance materials, will empower participants to:

- Train local water management experts, fostering capacity building at the grassroots level.
- Engage students and young researchers in experiential learning to understand the complexities of transboundary water governance.
- Promote interdisciplinary teaching and learning by incorporating economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions into decision-making scenarios.
- Build institutional knowledge by integrating the simulation into ongoing training and professional development programs.

The objective is that the workshop's impact extends beyond the event, equipping participants to contribute actively to the development of a new generation of water management professionals.



A Diverse and Engaged Cohort

The workshop attracted over 30 participants from various backgrounds, reflecting the multifaceted nature of transboundary water governance. Attendees included policymakers, researchers, and water management experts from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, representing institutions such as the Institute of Water Problems, Syrdarya Basin Water Organization, and Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME). This diversity fostered rich dialogue and knowledge exchange, with participants contributing unique perspectives based on their professional expertise and regional experiences. The interactive nature of the workshop allowed for cross-disciplinary learning, creating an inclusive space where all voices were valued. The event also highlighted the critical role of young professionals and women leaders in shaping the future of water governance. Their active participation underscored the importance of diverse representation in addressing shared challenges in the region.



Outcomes and Impact

The WE-ACT workshop achieved several noteworthy outcomes, underscoring the excellence and collaborative spirit fostered by the project:

- **Strengthened Collaboration:** By fostering trust and mutual understanding, the workshop laid the foundation for cohesive strategies in transboundary water governance.
- **Enhanced Learning:** Participants gained practical insights into the complexities of water allocation and the importance of prioritizing shared values.
- **Acknowledgment of Excellence:** The simulation highlighted the innovative work of the University of Twente team, whose efforts exemplified the importance of tailored, region-specific tools for sustainable management.
- **Cross-Sectoral Engagement:** The workshop encouraged dialogue between diverse stakeholders, enabling the exchange of best practices and innovative ideas.
- **Sustained Impact:** The handover of the simulation tool ensures its continued use in training and capacity-building efforts, amplifying the workshop's long-term impact.
- **Empowered Networks:** The workshop strengthened professional networks, fostering ongoing collaboration and a shared commitment to equitable water resource management.

Conclusion

The WE-ACT workshop, organized by IWMI, demonstrated the transformative potential of interactive, participatory approaches in addressing the challenges of transboundary water governance. By fostering dialogue, adapting tools to regional realities, and promoting inclusive engagement, the event contributed significantly to advancing sustainable and equitable water resource management in Central Asia. With its focus on collaboration, innovation, and shared learning, the workshop represents a key step forward in realizing the goals of the WE-ACT project.



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