

Regional Cooperation in Protection of the Environment

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In December 1995, the member countries of the Tumen River Area Development Programme signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Environmental Principles. The MOU states that the five countries (China, DPRK, Mongolia, ROK and the Russian Federation) will coordinate:

- environmental data collection and analysis
- environmental assessments concerning development projects
- formation of a regional Environmental Management Plan
- adoption of necessary laws, regulations, and institutional arrangements for sustainable development.

Such cooperation is urgently needed. Industrial, urban, and other sources of pollution of the Tumen River area are very serious, resulting in heavy costs both locally and to areas shared by the riparian countries. Biodiversity loss is also a serious problem, and air pollution is yet another transborder issue.

To address these problems, a Working Group on the Environment has been established under the auspices of the Tumen Programme, including representatives from all five member countries. The Working Group first met in May 1997 in Vladivostok to discuss possible support of the Global Environmental Facility in developing a long-term action programme for protection of the environment. Pending approval of this support, the Working Group met again in September 1998 to develop an Interim Action Plan. The Interim Action Plan has four main elements:

- regional environmental monitoring and planning
- prevention and mitigation of trans-border environmental impacts
- training and capacity building
- resource mobilization.

For each of these main elements, the Working Group has identified a number of projects designed to address specific aspects of regional cooperation. For example, with respect to environmental monitoring and planning, in 1998 the Tumen Programme sponsored a survey of the tiger and leopard populations and their habitats in Jilin Province. Also related to environmental monitoring and planning, in October 1999, the Tumen Programme published a report titled *Pollution Abatement of the Tumen River: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Challenge*.

Another initiative currently under way is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Hunchun Border Economic Cooperation Zone, in Yanbian

Prefecture, Jilin Province. It is hoped that the resulting report can serve as a model for evaluating the impact of development zones in other parts of the region.

The most important aspect of the Tumen Programme's environmental effort is resource mobilization in partnership with donor agencies and the private sector. The focus of this activity is to identify projects relevant to private sector participation in environmental protection. Once identified, the Tumen Secretariat will then endeavor to structure the necessary financial arrangements so projects actually proceed. Member countries of the Tumen Programme are not interested in one-off studies that go nowhere. A good illustration of the approach to promotion of private sector participation in environmental protection is modernization of two pulp and paper mills on the Tumen River, which account for 90% of industrial pollution of the river from Chinese sources. It is anticipated that a European donor agency will finance the prefeasibility assessment as a first step in mobilizing resources for their modernization.

To date, regional cooperation activities under the Tumen Programme to protect the environment have been modest, reflecting the financial limitations of UNDP support. Fortunately, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has agreed to finance a two-year US\$5 million project for the Tumen Region. It will include the following activities:

- a trans-border diagnostic analysis
- preparation of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for protecting international waters and preventing biodiversity loss
- training and other forms of institutional strengthening designed to facilitate implementation of the SAP
- community awareness programmes.

The project will commence as soon as a suitable Chief Technical Adviser has been chosen.

The GEF/SAP project is very important. The report titled *Pollution Abatement of the Tumen River: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Challenge* provides a preview of why. The report addresses only one dimension of protection of the environment: pollution abatement of the Tumen watershed. Other dimensions, especially biodiversity loss, will need to be researched by the GEF/SAP team. The report is intended to help identify practical measures for pollution abatement of the Tumen River.