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## Water Governance Reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic

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### Abstract

Water scarcity is a problem facing all Central Asian republics, which are highly dependent on irrigation agriculture. It is calling for solutions in the form of changing old and developing new institutions at the international, national and local levels. This paper focuses on reforms and institutional changes in the Kyrgyz water governance. It is based on empirical data generated with the help of a country working group of the DIE post-graduate training course. The Kyrgyz agricultural sector is the most advanced among the Central Asian countries with regard to the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Despite the fact that IWRM is underlying many donor programmes in Kyrgyzstan and most reforms in the region, I argue that achievements are far from satisfactory. Preliminary results of the reform process suggest partial or no implementation. Regarding decentralisation progress has formally been made but the newly built organizations (e.g. Water User Associations) are still dominated by old organizations such as the Departments of Water Management (DWM). Old (informal) institutional and mental patterns also prevent progress with respect to participation. Moreover, many relevant policymakers and stakeholders are not aware of the IWRM concept. Accordingly, decentralisation and participation are underdeveloped. This means that Central Asian governments, donor organisations and researchers need to put more emphasis on the fields of sustainable institution and capacity building as well as on the distribution of information among all stakeholders. For only when water management problems at the local and national levels are solved can there be scope for achieving international solutions.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Integrated Water Resource Management, irrigation, IWRM, Kyrgyz Republic, water governance, water management