Drinking Water in Nakhchivan: Past, Present, Future

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is a landlocked exclave in Azerbaijan. Its capital - the city of Nakhchivan, in the foothills of the Zangezur Mountains and on the banks of the Nakhchivan River - is home to about 90,000 people. When Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991, Nakhchivan, like many cities in the post-Soviet region, inherited a long-neglected, obsolete water distribution and wastewater collection system of rusty, leaky pipes. Untreated wastewater was pumped into the Aras River. Many new houses relied on cesspools. Drinking water was contaminated.

But change is coming. A $228 million water distribution and wastewater collection system, financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) ($159 million) and the Azerbaijan government ($69 million), is about to deliver sanitation services and drinkable water - around the clock. Three reservoirs with total capacity of 25,000 cubic meter (m3), about 14 kilometers (km) of water pipelines, and a water purification system equipped with the latest nanofilters have been built. Although the new 222 km water distribution and 202 km sewer pipeline are still being constructed, water supply is no longer a problem and Nakhchivan now enjoys continuous water supply. Once the new system is in place in May–June 2014, homes will have purified drinking water that meets World Health Organization standards. Anand Chiplunkar, head of the Urban Development and Water Division, Central West Asia Department, ADB, says that “the state-of-the-art system will provide water sanitation and health benefits to about 90,000 people.”

Today, more than 400 people, organized into about 40 groups, are working on the streets to install a new water and sewerage connection in every house and every building. Since the project started, about 600 people have received permanent or temporary jobs. More than 20 people have been trained to maintain the water supply and sanitation system.

“I worked as a taxi driver before,” says resident Ganbar Imanov. “I had to work long hours to earn enough to feed my family. I even worked on Saturdays and Sundays. If I got sick or my car broke, it meant no money. Since I got the job with this project, I don’t have to worry about tomorrow because I have a steady monthly income.”
Clean water, good health

Wastewater used to spew into the streets, causing diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, and other waterborne diseases. Toilets without piped water at kindergartens, schools, hospitals, and other public places bred intestinal worm parasites and caused hepatitis A.

“As a doctor, I know that water and sanitation is not only about improving water supply and collecting wastewater. It’s about delivering drinkable water, which will improve health and reduce ailments. I’m happy I won’t see puddles of sewer water in the city streets anymore. I always have been and will be educating people about hygiene and sanitation,” says Maleyka Karimova, a doctor at a clinic.

Better water supply, better for women

Before the new water source was built in 2011, residents had water twice a day for 4 hours in total. Women traditionally spent about an hour a day collecting and storing their families’ water. But now that hour can be used to do other things and they no longer need water storage.

“I am a school teacher,” says Fatima Aliyeva. “I began to tutor an extra group of students after work thanks to the improved piped water supply. This is important for my family, as we have a tight budget.”

Water from the new source is still bacteriologically polluted and hard. Some families buy water for drinking and cooking, which costs $30–$60 a month depending on the season and family size. Households have to buy electrical pumps to bring water up to their apartments.

But people are optimistic. “We were told that the water will be drinkable and soft. It will not destroy our washing machines, taps, or water pumps. This is very good as it will save us time, effort, and money,” says housewife Ganira Mustafayeva.
Nakhchivan goes green

Collection and treatment of wastewater will help recycle scarce water and prevent further water pollution. After the project, all wastewater will be brought to a new treatment plant to be purified for industrial use and irrigation. Organic impurities will be turned into fertilizer.

“We have far-reaching ambitions,” says Ibrahim Mammadov, director of the project implementation unit under the State Committee for Amelioration and Water Management of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. “We bought and installed the latest water-purifying equipment. We are planning to build a wastewater treatment plant equipped with the most advanced technology. Our goal is to ensure that Nakhchivan city has a safe and sustainable water supply and sanitation system for the next 40 years.”

Progress has been excellent. About 20,000 water meters are being installed.

Once the work in the city is completed, Mr. Mammadov looks forward to bringing clean water to other towns and regions. “We highly value our cooperation with ADB and hope it continues. We look forward to delivering drinkable water, better health, a stronger economy, and a cleaner environment to every corner of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic together with ADB.”
AZRM News Brief

CAREC trade facilitation strategy presented in Azerbaijan

CAREC’s strategy for, achievements in, and plans for reducing border-crossing costs and time were presented by Olly Nororjo, AZRM Resident Representative, at the 6th International Forum on the Role of Customs Administrations in Promoting and Facilitating Trade among Silk Road Countries, on 14-15 November in Azerbaijan. Organized by Azerbaijan State Customs Committee, the event was attended by about 50 people from 11 countries and 5 international organizations.

ADB Vice President Bruce L. Davis visits Azerbaijan

Mr. Davis met with Minister of Finance and ADB Governor Samir Sharifov and project directors on 27-28 November 2013 to discuss national development priorities; ADB’s cooperation in and implementation of energy, transport, and water supply and sanitation projects; and preparations for the 2015 Annual Meeting in Baku. Mr. Davis also visited Zabrat Substation and met with AZRM staff and service providers.

Urban transport discussed in Baku

On 13 December 2013, the Ministry of Transport of Azerbaijan and ADB met with government agencies to discuss Baku’s urban transport as part of a technical assistance (TA) grant for preparing a sustainable urban transport investment program. Chaired by the deputy minister of transport, the meeting was attended by about 40 people. ADB transport specialist David Margounstern briefed the participants on sustainable transport principles and outlined the TA scope and timeline.

AZRM annual press conference held in Baku

On 16 December 2013, AZRM held its annual press conference for local and international media. AZRM Resident Representative Olly Nororjo summed up ADB’s activities in Azerbaijan during the year. Along with ADB urban development specialist Sanjay Joshi and AZRM economist Nail Valiyev, he fielded questions from journalists.

NEWS FROM
Azerbaijan

The quarterly newsletter of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Azerbaijan Resident Mission (AZRM) aims to enhance communication between ADB and its clients. News from Azerbaijan disseminates information on ADB activities and provides a forum on development issues in Azerbaijan. Articles in this newsletter, however, do not necessarily reflect the official ADB view. We welcome readers’ comments and suggestions.

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