

# A Source of Cooperation - Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia

**Fostering regional institutional cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia**

## Context

Central Asia is a fascinating region of the world – a huge land-mass situated between the world's largest inland water body, the Caspian Sea, and the mountain ranges of the Tien Shan, Pamirs and the Hindukush. The region is shaped by two big rivers – the Amudarya (2540 km) and the Syrdarya (3019 km), which form the Aral Sea Basin – home to over 60 million people.

The Aral Sea Basin comprises southern Kazakhstan, most of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, practically the whole Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the northern part of Afghanistan and a small portion of Iran.

During the time of the Soviet Union, an extensive irrigation system was created to intensify agriculture with an emphasis on cotton and wheat monocultures. The Aral Sea started to vanish: since the 1960s water volume dropped by 90%.

After the independence of the five Central Asian countries, being confronted with international borders, water became scarce and an issue of transboundary contest. Limited resources, inappropriate management and disparate interests – all these factors weigh upon water distribution in Central Asia and gave already cause for political tensions. Effective water management and cross-border cooperation however, can contribute to stability and security and thus to sustainable economic development.

Commissioned by	German Federal Foreign Office European Union in Uzbekistan
Project region	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Main partners	National water management ministries, International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS)
Duration	January 2009 – March 2020

## The Berlin Process

The Central Asia Water Initiative (Berlin Process) was launched in April 2008 at the Berlin conference 'Water Unites'. The Berlin Process is an offer by the Federal Government of Germany to the countries of Central Asia to support them in water management and to make water a subject of intensified transboundary cooperation. This initiative is an important supplement to the EU Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership and implemented two EU grants and one EU delegation agreement in its framework. The 'Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia' programme (TWMCA) is commissioned by the Federal Foreign Office and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It represents the most extensive element of the Berlin Process with a budget of up-to-date 37 million Euro. Close coordination with the other partners of the Berlin Process, the Regional Research Network 'Central Asian Water' (CAWa) and the German-Kazakh University (DKU), is pivotal to the programme.



From left to right:

- 1) Ravatkhodja Headwork on Syrdarya river
  - 2) The Aral Sea basin, Central Asia
- (© Zoi Environment Network)



From left to right:

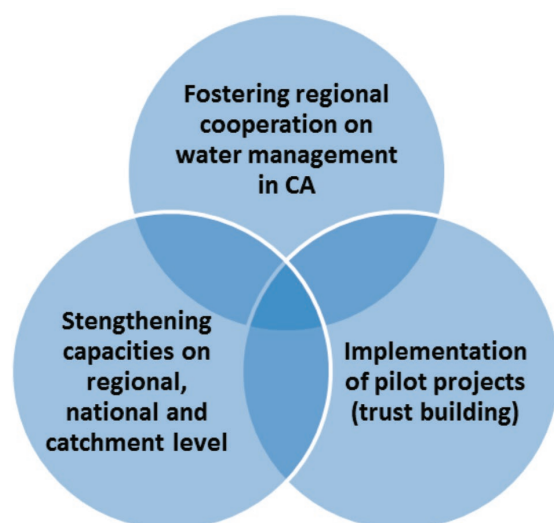
1) The hand-over of equipment to Guliston Office of BWO Syrdarya.

2) IT training course (Word, Excel and Access) held for 34 BWO Amudarya staff members in Urgench."

## Main Activities of the Programme

**Fostering regional cooperation** through support of institutional development

- The five Central Asian states are supported in analysing the reform needs of the overall institutional and legal setting for transboundary water cooperation, with a focus on EC IFAS



**Strengthening capacities** in sustainable water management at regional, national and catchment levels by means of

- Capacity building for improved data collection and management including reporting to the national level in order to have a proper base for informed decisions
- Development of basin-specific scenarios of climate change and its impacts in order to improve adaptation measures and disaster prevention
- Integrating all stakeholders in basin planning / implementation of basin plans inter alia by providing for public participation, establishment of Basin Councils as consultative bodies for water management authorities
- Establishment of a transboundary coordination and cooperation mechanism, etc.

**Pilot projects in selected basins**, including inter alia

- Rehabilitation of headworks for better control of water

distribution and reduction of water losses

- Rehabilitation of hydrological monitoring posts and equipment with electronic sensors for reliable data on water flow and withdrawal
- Construction of a mini hydropower station
- Rehabilitation of drainage canals to improve melioration and land management, etc.

## Cooperation with IFAS

The International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) is a regional organisation, established in 1993 by the decision of the presidents of the five Central Asian states to coordinate and finance joint actions for saving the Aral Sea and for ecological rehabilitation of the Aral Sea Basin.

The IFAS has a complex organisational structure, led by a rotating Executive Committee with a chairman, selected every three years. EC IFAS is the key to effective regional coordination of water management in Central Asia and is financially supported by the respective host country during the time of its presidency. EC IFAS is also responsible for coordinating all activities of its branches, special agencies and funds located in its member states on improving the social and environmental situation in the Aral Sea Basin, facilitating the work of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC – body of all Central Asian water ministers) and the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD – body of all Central Asian environment ministers) and extending the cooperation with international organisations, donor countries, environmental and other funds for environmental issues and rehabilitation of environmentally damaged territories.

The ICWC regulates matters of transboundary water management and interstate water allocation. The ICSD is responsible for coordination and management of regional cooperation on environment and sustainable development. The Basin Water Organisations (BWOs) "Amudarya" and "Syrdarya" are the key executive water management bodies within the structure of the IFAS. Main tasks of the BWO structure focus on optimal use and distribution of interstate and off-farm water resources to meet water demands of the local population and the agricultural sector, in accordance with limits approved by the ICWC, taking into account water availability and the environmental situation.



From left to right:

1) The hand-over of equipment to BWO Syrdarya in Andijan office.

2) IT training course (Word, Excel and Access) held for BWO Syrdarya staff members in Tashkent.

At two Board meetings (30 January and 23 August 2018) as well as at the IFAS Summit organised at Avaza/Turkmenistan on 24 August 2018, IFAS decided to focus on the following priorities:

1. Development of a new Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP-4) to assist the CA countries
2. Development of the Regional Environmental Program for Sustainable Development of Central Asia
3. Agreement on further discuss the following: Special UN Programme for the Aral Sea Basin, accession of all CA countries to Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia of 22 November 2006
4. Further improvement of the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS in order to create an effective and sustainable institutional mechanism
5. Agreement on the importance to jointly attract donors to automate the operation of gauging stations throughout the Syrdarya River Basin
6. Kazakh proposal to jointly elaborate a sustainable regional mechanism for the integrated use of water and energy resources; Uzbek proposal to jointly organise training and interdisciplinary research in the field of water resources and environmental protection

## Measures

Since 2009 within the scope of cooperation with IFAS and its subordinated bodies, the activities of the Programme include institutional and legal support, elaboration of the Aral Sea Basin Programme 3 (ASBP-3) which aimed to improve the ecological, social-economical situation/conditions in the basin, series of trainings and seminars, procurement of necessary IT and hydrometric equipment, public awareness raising, all of which contribute to improved working conditions for the regional water specialists and assure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to timely deliver quality results. Building capacities of IFAS and its bodies and improved efficiency of their activities aims at strengthening of regional water cooperation.

Key efforts were directed towards institutional support of the IFAS chairmanship in Kazakhstan (2009-2012), Uzbekistan (2014-2016) and Turkmenistan (2017-2019) and the development of capacities for improved cooperation among regional institutions. All actions were implemented considering the changing political scene and the trends of regional cooperation in Central Asia.

The Programme engages in strengthening cooperation and horizontal connections between existing regional organisations under the IFAS umbrella. With the support of the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC), the Programme worked on unifying EC IFAS, SIC ICWC, SIC ICSD, BWO Amudarya, BWO Syrdarya, Secretariats of ICWC and ICSD in a platform by organising coordination meetings and developing a road map for further development in communication. For Central Asia this is a totally new format of coordination and cooperation, which was initiated by the Programme back in 2015.

After a thorough technical assessment, support to the BWOs includes human capacity building to improve data collection, processing and reporting. Technical assistance was rendered in the form of water measuring devices, as well as computer and office equipment to allow proper processing of the data and further sharing between BWO branches. Delivery of the equipment was followed by especially designed training seminars for BWO staff. A joint working group helps to coordinate activities of the two BWOs, the ICWC Secretariat and SIC ICWC and elaborated draft reporting guidelines.

## Results to date

One important objective of the Programme is to up-scale its experiences from supporting improved management in smaller transboundary basins to regional institutions. In this context, the Programme conducted an extensive needs assessment throughout the region. Based on the findings of the assessment, Programme intervention areas were identified and the activities adjusted accordingly.

In close collaboration with EC IFAS a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was prepared and signed on 13 November 2017 between the Programme and EC IFAS. Through this MoU the Programme is supporting regional cooperation in the water sector in Central Asia as well as supporting activities in the framework of the Turkmen IFAS Chairmanship between 2017 and 2019.

The Programme renders support to drafting the Aral Sea Basin Programme 4 by organizing meetings and contributing with international expertise. The ASBP-4 concept was approved at the Summit in August 2018. In this context the Programme actively assists donor coordination. The programme also supports the regional working group on structural IFAS reform.





*“The Amudarya River Day”  
(from left to right):*

1) Cleaning of the Amudarya River bank - Uzbekistan

2) Handing over gifts to the drawing contest winners.

Up to now, both BWOs, despite implementing highly important work for the region, have been fully closed in terms of information sharing and did not have any basis for going public. Therefore, in close coordination with BWO Amudarya, the Programme supported the development of a website for the BWO. This is the very first experience for a closed and very conservative organisation in sharing information about its activities, and also of presenting key parameters of major hydro-technical facilities and data on water volumes and allocation for the Amudarya River.

Another novelty brought to Central Asia by the Programme was the organisation of the first ever international Amudarya River Day celebrated in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In a series of activities and events water managers together with the population celebrated the idea of one river – one responsibility. Painting and photo competitions as well as planting trees and cleaning the river banks showed the importance of taking care of the environment and using water responsibly.

A political statement was made during the River Day conference in Urgench/Uzbekistan in which delegates from all three riparian countries took part and joint celebrations underpinned the joy of working together on the common goal to manage water efficiently.

## Selected impacts

- Saving up to 2.74 million m<sup>3</sup> per year and assuring greater water security for over 10.000 ha and economic sustainability for around 30.000 people, living in Isfara River Basin (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)
- 136 households (about 1000 people) got improved access to electricity in Tajikistan
- 16.000 people working in agriculture benefitting from reliable irrigation water supply after rehabilitation of Bad Bad Canal in Samarkand Province, Uzbekistan
- Triggering unified approach to basin planning across the region by training more than 450 relevant people in the water sector
- Development of the first River Basin Plan in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan based on a methodology especially created for Central Asia
- Creation of the first Basin Council in Central Asia at the lower Syrdarya in Kazakhstan
- Lyakkan Valley/Tajikistan: rehabilitation of 11km drainage canal to help meliorate ca. 13.000 ha of arable land
- Fish saving project at the Kok Aral Dam (Northern Aral Sea) in Kazakhstan – saving 7 million ton of young fish every year

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