

A Source of Peace - Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia

Context

Central Asia comprises a region with scarce water resources and is particularly vulnerable to the effects of global climate change and the chronic overuse of reserves. At the same time, the economies of the five Central Asian states are highly interconnected as a consequence of their joint use of water from the two major rivers – the Syr Darya and Amu Darya – as well as other transboundary rivers. In the absence of alternatives, the water-rich countries on the upper reaches of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya Rivers (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) rely heavily on hydropower for energy production in winter, while those downstream (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) mainly use the water to irrigate agricultural land. Inappropriate management of water resources has particularly exacerbated the situation. The environmental disaster of the Aral Sea is symptomatic of the precarious situation in the region.

Scarcity of resources, inappropriate management and disparate interests are all factors that turn the distribution of water in Central Asia into a major source of potential tensions. Effective water management and cross-border cooperation, in contrast, can contribute to sustainable economic development and thus to stability and security in Central Asia.

The Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia Programme implemented by GIZ is the most extensive element of the German Federal Foreign Office’s Central Asia Water Initiative (the “Berlin Process”). The Berlin Process is conceived of as a component of the EU strategy for a new partnership with Central Asia and is open to all players. The Water Initiative supports Central Asian states in water management and aims to set in train

a process of political rapprochement leading to closer cooperation in the use of water resources and may result in joint water management in the long-term.

Project name	Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia
Commissioned by	German Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt)
Project region	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Main partners	National ministries, related state agencies and water management organisations of Central Asian countries, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS)
Duration	April 2009 – December 2014, Current phase: January 2012 – December 2014

The GIZ programme also implements two EU Actions as part of the EU Regional Environmental Programme for Central Asia (EURECA).

Objectives

The programme aims to foster regional institutional cooperation. In particular institutions that regulate matters of water distribution in Central Asia, such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), have been strengthened and are better positioned in the political system.



L. to r.: Toktogul Reservoir, Kyrgyzstan.
Drip irrigation field in pilot project area, Uzbekistan.

The principles of river basin management are introduced and applied in selected transboundary river basins in Central Asia. The capacities of national and provincial water management organisations are improved at institutional and individual levels and newly established institutions, which operate on a transboundary level, are supported.

Measures

The programme supports capacity development and provides technical assistance. The relevant regional, national and local institutions are supported in their joint development of practical approaches for sustainable water management and are advised on various topics, such as the formulation of legal provisions and guidelines for water management. Furthermore, the personnel of water management organisations in selected transboundary river basins receive training on river basin planning and management. To ensure all sides are involved, stakeholder dialogues and policy meetings are held on a regular basis. Information materials on basin planning are developed and disseminated in the region. Further networking between European and Central Asian water management organisations ensures the exchange of best practices among water specialists from both regions.

These capacity building activities are complemented by selected pilot projects, which range from the rehabilitation of safety systems for smaller dams to the introduction of water saving technologies and the reconstruction of traditional water supply systems.

Close coordination with the donor community at large, as well as with the other projects under way as a part of the Berlin Process is pivotal to the programme.

Results to date

In cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations (UNECE) and representatives from all five Central Asian states, proposals for strengthening the institutional capacity of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS) have been elaborated. In an inclusive and comprehensive project, EC IFAS and the five states, as well as GIZ, UNECE and other representatives of the international donor community collectively devised a scheme to improve water management across the Aral Sea Basin – the Third Aral Sea Basin

Programme – which has been approved by all five states. Against the background of this success, the reform process has advanced further in order to consolidate the institutional capacities.



Programme Focus Basins

Since 2009, the programme has supported the development of a framework agreement between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on cooperation on their transboundary rivers. The framework agreement will set the basis for regulating the establishment of joint transboundary river basin institutions that allow for integrated river basin management.

Successfully completed pilot projects in all five countries optimise water use and contribute to the improvement of living conditions in the region.

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