

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR SAVING THE ARAL SEA

Background paper

**THIRD ARAL SEA BASIN PROGRAMME:
BUILDING COOPERATION FOR THE FUTURE**

Donors' Coordination Meeting on the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme
Almaty, 21 May 2010

International Fund for saving the Aral Sea

The International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) is the main regional organization for transboundary water cooperation in Central Asia. Its President is elected from among the five Heads of State. Currently, the Presidency belongs to Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The most important decisions concerning the strategic directions for activities of the IFAS are adopted by the Council of Heads of State of Central Asia.

The regular decision-making body of IFAS is the Board at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister, supported by the Executive Committee (EC IFAS), a standing executive body of the Fund. The IFAS system also includes two regional commissions: the Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) and the Inter-State Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) and their supporting units.

The ASBP-3 process: important milestones

The Aral Sea Basin Programme is the main long-term action programme in the region in the field of sustainable development, including the management of water resources and environmental protection. Formulation of the Programme and monitoring of its implementation is the primary responsibility of EC IFAS. The Programme includes national and regional projects aimed at the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the Aral Sea region.

The Summit Meeting of the Presidents of the Central Asian States on 28 April 2009 in Almaty tasked the EC IFAS to elaborate the Third Aral Sea Basin Program (ASBP-3) for the period 2011-2015 in close cooperation with ICWC and ICSD, with the full involvement of the donors' community.

On 3 December 2009, the IFAS Board agreed on the four main directions of ASBP-3. A Working Group set up by EC IFAS for the elaboration of ASBP-3 on 10-11 December 2009 in Almaty discussed in detail the objectives, tasks, and main directions of the ASBP-3. Based on these discussions, in January 2010 EC IFAS developed a Framework Document on the Development of ASBP-3.¹ The document defines the objectives and structure of the Programme, as well as selection criteria for national and regional projects. It includes basic principles of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme. The Framework Document received broad support during national consultations in all five Central Asian countries in February and March 2010.

On 20-22 April 2010 EC IFAS, representatives of governments and regional commissions discussed in detail the objectives of each priority direction of the ASBP-3 and elaborated common platforms for each direction.

¹ http://www.ec-ifas.org/russian_version/publication/folder/Framework%20ASBP3%20_en.doc

ASBP-3: objectives and vision

The objective of ASBP-3 is to implement joint activities and programmes in order to address the Aral Sea crisis, and to strengthen cooperation by focused actions at national, regional and international levels with the aim to improve the environmental, social and economic situation, and facilitate progress towards sustainable development and well-being of the people in the Aral Sea Basin.

ASBP-3 aims to address the following tasks:

- 1) Improve the socio-economic and environmental situation in the Aral Sea basin by implementing projects based on the concept and principles of sustainable development and supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- 2) Facilitate coordinated action by the countries of the region to effectively protect the environment and improve the management of water and water-related resources;
- 3) Improve preparedness of the countries of the region to address new challenges, including climate change, and water use structure, and strengthen capacity to take joint adaptation actions;
- 4) Facilitate the strengthening of institutional and legal frameworks for integrated water resources management at national, river-basin and regional levels.
- 5) Facilitate the development and implementation of relevant international legal instruments in Central Asia;
- 6) Improve coordination and cooperation with the donor community in the achievement of these overall tasks.

The four priority directions of the ASBP-3 are:

1. Integrated water resources management with due account of the interests of all states in the region;
2. Environmental;
3. Socio-economic;
4. Strengthening institutional and legal frameworks.

ASBP-3: cooperation with donors

Cooperation with the donor community and international organizations during the development of ASBP-3 is seen as crucial precondition of success of the Programme. The countries of Central Asia have repeatedly reconfirmed their readiness to provide substantial resources for the implementation of ASBP-3; however this funding is expected to cover primarily national projects. Support from the donor community is needed, in particular, for regional projects involving 2 or more countries.

EC IFAS, having carefully studied lessons learned during the elaboration and implementation of the previous two Programmes aims to reform the ASBP process and turn this framework into a highly effective regional tool to achieve globally agreed development goals as well as key development objectives of IFAS member States.

ASBP-3 is intended to become a framework of choice for the achievement of strategic objectives of the donors' community at the regional level.

Strengthened through a GTZ-UNECE program, EC IFAS aims to provide institutional guarantees for the effective management of ASBP-3, starting from its inception and ending with its evaluation.

ASBP-3 is expected to become a broad coordination, implementation and monitoring framework which includes (i) on-going and planned national programs and projects; (ii) projects implemented or planned by donors and international organizations; and (iii) a series of new projects elaborated by IFAS member countries, regional organizations and donors that build on and complement on-going activities.

EC IFAS has established close coordination with the donors' community in developing ASBP-3. An informal meeting of donors and international organizations with EC IFAS on 17 November 2009 discussed the main directions of ASBP-3 and ways for closer involvement of the donors' community into the development of ASBP-3. On 4 February 2010, the Framework Document was presented to the donors for comments. On 18 March 2010, the workshop of the EC IFAS and representatives of donors and international organizations provided a forum for donors to share information with EC IFAS about their existing and planned activities and for EC IFAS to brief donors about the outcomes of national consultations in February-March 2010. Several donors provided experts to EC IFAS to assist with the preparation of documents and projects under the four main directions of ASBP-3. Donors that participate in the ASBP-3 development process have formed the Donors' Consultative Group to facilitate regular cooperation with EC IFAS, including monitoring and evaluation of project implementation.

Donors' Coordination Meeting: objectives and expected outcomes

The Donors' Coordination Meeting² on May 21, 2010 in Almaty aims to strengthen cooperation between EC IFAS, the community of donors and international organizations active in the region of Central Asia and/or active in the areas of environment and sustainable development and to encourage their participation in the development of ASBP-3.

In particular, the meeting objectives include:

- 1) Attract new donors and international organizations to the process of developing the ASBP-3;
- 2) Exchange views between the national governments, EC IFAS, the regional commissions on the one hand, and the donors community, on the other hand;
- 3) Allow donors and international organizations to share their priorities and vision of ASBP-3 as well as to communicate information on projects and planned activities for possible inclusion in ASBP-3 framework;

² The Donors' Coordination Meeting is supported by the project "Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management", implemented by the EC IFAS and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), with support by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH. See <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.htm>

- 4) Allow donors and international organizations to share their recommendations on selection process and criteria;
- 5) Agree on modalities for further cooperation and prepare for the International Donors Conference, tentatively scheduled to take place in October 2010;
- 6) Exchange view on the role of donors in monitoring ASBP-3 implementation, in particular through regular meetings and activities of Donors' Consultative Group.

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