

# Belgrade 2007: Central Asian Initiative on SD

## Concept of the document “Partnership Agreement on Implementation of the Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development”

### Background

Central Asian countries are facing the serious challenge of increasingly urgent problems. Economic, social, environmental and geopolitical issues, as well as globalization, require the development of strong policies at the sub-regional and regional levels, as well as joint efforts. All five countries have pressing problems in the areas of employment, health and environment. After more than fifteen years experience, Central Asian countries have set up the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Interstate Coordination Water Commission. In addition they have ratified multilateral agreements, implemented many programs on health, environment and poverty eradication. However, these efforts of both countries and international organizations have not resulted in the anticipated outcomes. The Aral Sea devastation is continuing. Annual floods still cause serious damage from uncoordinated actions: the increasing degradation of mountain ecosystems, the decreasing areas and yields of productive land, and the continuing loss of water to agriculture and industry.

The development of irrigation agriculture in the Aral Sea basin, on a scale unprecedented in modern history, has overstrained the ecosystem and led to its ruin. Intensive water uptake has caused the level of the Aral Sea to drop by 19 metres and its capacity to decrease by 75%. By the end of the 1980s the sea had virtually ceased to exist, and a catalogue of woes became apparent: a drastic deterioration in water quality and human health; large-scale desertification; soil salinity and swamping; decreased biodiversity; and an increase in adverse climatic effects. According to the expert estimations the damage from the Aral Sea devastation caused by the lowering of the sea level and water pollution only in Kazakhstan is more than 45 billion USD. The resource-based approach that evolved during the arms race still dominates water management systems in Central Asia. Despite the compelling example of the Aral disaster, water is primarily considered in terms of agricultural use and power generation, with little regard for its other functions. Consequently, drinking water quality, human health, soil fertility and crop yields are deteriorating, and poverty, unemployment and migration are on the increase

The degradation of forests also continues. Forested areas of Central Asia have shrunk to less than one quarter of their original extent since the middle of the last century. Saxaul and flood plain forests have been hit particularly hard by human activity. In the flood plain of the river Amu-Darya alone, the area under forestation has already decreased from 150,000 to 22,000 hectares in the past decade. This ecosystem deterioration has led to a marked reduction in biodiversity. The number of extinct or endangered animal species and plant varieties is growing. In some cases, these processes are already irreversible. Overregulated river water flow and pollution have reduced fish reserves. The overall catch from the natural reservoirs of Central Asia has decreased by over 60% since 1990.

More than half of Central Asia is prone to desertification. The land area affected by this degradation in Kazakhstan is 179.9 million hectares or 66% of the country, with as much as 80% affected in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. If current salination trends persist, most agricultural land in river basins will become unsuitable for irrigation farming within a few decades, and the salination of rivers will preclude their provision of drinking water.

Counties themselves, international organizations and experts are unanimous in their assessment of the recent past in terms of the root causes of program failures:

### **Lack of common goals**

- Lack of clear, common and measurable goals, conflicts between sectoral and national interests;

### **Lack of coordination mechanisms**

- Immaturity of legal, economic and institutional mechanisms to achieve consensus and coordinate activities between sectors, countries, different groups and for private investments to attract sustainable development;

### **Lack of capacities**

- Inadequate experience and capacities of public, local and non-governmental organizations.

### **What is being done?**

For strengthening cooperation between sectors and countries, CA ministers of economy, finance and environmental protection at the meeting (Almaty, 2001) suggested setting up sub-regional partnerships for sustainable development (“Central-Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development”).

It is worth mentioning that the conflicts between sector and national interests are common not only in Central Asian countries, but also in other developing countries, as well as countries with transition economies. At the Millennium Summit (2000) and WSSD (2002) common programs and commitments have been adopted for their implementation to resolve the aforementioned problems. Developed countries, international organizations and financial institutions (WTO, IMF, WB) have also committed themselves among other things to assist developing countries and countries in transition<sup>1</sup> in solving development problems, and have appealed to them to take action for cooperation strengthening and priorities definition.

In the preparatory process to WSSD the Initiative of Central Asian countries - CA Initiative (CAI)<sup>2</sup> has been supported at the regional ministerial meetings in Europe (UNECE meeting, Geneva, 2001) and Asia Pacific (ESCAP meeting, Cambodia, 2001). At the WSSD the CA countries have declared the sub regional priorities and CA Initiative on Sustainable development has been supported. CAI declared goals include protection of vitally important ecosystems, water supply improvement, poverty decrease, education development and other MDGs.

CAI has been included into the WSSD final official documents – JPOI (item 74) and partnership initiatives and today is the basis for CA cooperation with the international community in this area.

After the WSSD at the 5<sup>th</sup> UNECE conference (Kiev, 2003) CA countries with the support of CAREC<sup>3</sup> have devised and submitted the Document «Invitation to Partnership for CAI implementation” in which there have been specified CA **commitments, main goals and priorities**<sup>4</sup>. These goals do not cover all the MDGs but reflect the consensus achieved by CA countries on many of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Doha Declaration, Monterrey Consensus

<sup>2</sup> <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/partnerships/924.html>

<sup>3</sup> Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (International organizations, Established by the CA governments, European Commission and UNDP in 2000)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unece.org/env/proceedings/html/Item7b.e.html>

**Extract from the “Invitation to Partnership”:**

**Goal 1.** Ensure the sustainability of water basin ecosystems of vital importance for human life

1.1. Drawdowns for ecosystem needs. Perform controlled releases to flush out water ecosystems. Maintain inflow into the southern part of the Aral region to support the system of wetlands (5.5-8.0 km<sup>3</sup>/year) and for the Syr Darya delta (for the system of wetlands) and the Males Sea - 5.0 km<sup>3</sup>/year. The allocation of 20 km<sup>3</sup>/year by 2015 for the environmental needs of the Aral Sea basin is recognized to be a feasible and politically acceptable objective to be achieved through water-saving initiatives applicable to all types of water consumption.

1.2. Stabilize irrigated land salinization processes and the transport of salts from irrigated areas to rivers. This necessitates the application of water-saving technologies in irrigation farming, the rehabilitation and development of drainage systems and return flow recycling. Toxic salts accumulation processes could be stabilized in 20% of the total irrigated area in the region. The proportion of reused drainage water and run-off could be increased to 15% by 2010-2015.

The final Declaration of the Conference proposed to prepare the international legal document “Partnership Agreement” on consolidation efforts of all parties for sustainable development goals implementation in CA<sup>6</sup>. It was recognized that such an Agreement will strengthen the legal basis for cooperation of the countries, international organizations, businesses, and the wider public for environmental problem-solving and development in Central Asia, as well as creating conditions for investments for sustainable development goals. The Agreement will strengthen the mechanisms of implementation of the existing multilateral environmental agreements.

### **Why we need a new approach**

The need of new mechanisms for co-operation is caused by the high interdependency of power, water, agriculture, transportation and other sectors in Central Asian countries. However, the solution of problems in above-mentioned sectors is determined by the fragmentary responsibilities, narrow sectoral approach and limited framework of the current governance system. Obvious and multiple additional benefits of cooperation between countries or, for example, between energy and agricultural sectors are limited by the narrow policy framework, which does not allow participation of all stakeholders as equal partners in nature resources management nor does it take into consideration the interests of all parties. In the existing management system there is no stimulus for cooperation, gaining additional profit by more effective resources use based on mutual benefits and long-term interests. There is no mechanism for the fair redistribution of benefits gained from cooperation between sectors and different parties, which prevents the development of inter sectoral programs, economically effective and protecting the interests of environment and local communities at the same time. The efforts, undertaken on the level of heads of CA states for setting up transboundary water-energy, agricultural international consortiums confirm the importance of creating new economic mechanisms for integration of policy and economy.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.carec.kz>;

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2003/ece/cep/ece.cep.94.rev.1.e.pdf>

The necessity to create new governance system in CA is also determined by the increasing environmental problems. Environmental conflicts and financing deficits are in many instances determined by the discrepancies between economic and environmental goals. Mention should be made that this mismatch is of a short-term nature. Regardless of the obvious importance of environmental protection for human life and for a long-term economic development, current management mechanisms (pin-pointed by the legislation in force, administrative, economic and other instruments) hinder the resolution of ecological problems. For example, goals of ecosystem conservation, although obvious and repeatedly stated at a high level, are in reality not supported by the existing administrative and economic nature of managerial systems.

The existing management system creates obstacles also for investment in sustainable nature use. The possibilities for attracting real investment into agriculture and organic farming, hydropower and energy efficiency, eco-tourism, fisheries and other potentially inviting sectors are hindered by numerous barriers in legislation, customs, tax policy, and an underdeveloped system of investment insurance.

One of the important reasons for the new frames of management is insufficient capacity of CA countries. It is known that goals and programs do not implement themselves. Much is determined by the level of development of a civil society, by the organizational and technical capacity of organizations involved in these programs, and by their skills and experience. Institutional and organizational capacity of the countries, governmental, local and non-governmental organizations, their own experience, preparedness for cooperation and partnership are vital conditions for implementing socially oriented and environmental programs. To enhance the capacity of local organizations involved in the achievement of set goals special and long-term programs and time. That is why involvement and use of the International positive experiences, experience of other countries and that of international organizations could considerably help CA countries. However participation of external partners very often is limited to fragmentary or short-term activities, to the role of an observer who passes his entire responsibility and resources to hired consultants. Wider framework and long-term programs with international organizations, as well as private sector and donors will make it possible to enhance their efficiency and responsibility for the results of the projects implemented in CA, to better use their potential and possibilities, to help sharing international experience and investments transfer.

There are many other reasons predetermining the necessity of widening and creation of a new system of the regional governing<sup>7</sup>, regional and financial mechanisms.

Partnership agreement of CA countries with international, countries and private sectors could help put together such a legal foundation for more effective regional management in the interests of sustainable development to use the strengths of all stakeholders and to achieve common and priority development goals.

### **The Partnership Agreement Goal**

The goal of the Agreement is creation of a legal base for integration of CA states efforts, international organizations, businesses and civil sector for achievement of SD goals, strengthening of the regional mechanisms of coordination and creation of auspicious conditions for investments, including from private sector.

### **Agreement Parties**

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<sup>7</sup> there are lot of researches in the international sources with substantiation of management crisis and necessity to transferring to the new methods of management (called in different sources as integrated, ecosystem, environmental management).

It is expected that this Partnership Agreement will be based on capacities and advantages of each of the Agreement party and will lead to more effective use of internal and external resources for the achievement of common goals. The following Agreement Parties are expected:

- Central Asian states: Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Republic of Uzbekistan
- International organizations: European Commission, World Bank, IMF, WTO, UNECE, ESCAP, CAREC, IFAS, others
- Neighboring and other states: Russia, China, USA, Japan, Afghanistan
- Non-governmental organizations: IUCN, WWF, others
- Private sector

### **Agreement Status**

The Agreement should have a status of International Agreement between all stakeholders, have the priority over national laws and legal normative acts.

### **Agreement Content**

- Quantitatively defined commitments of CA states on SD goals
- Legal regulations, creating the auspicious conditions in Central Asia for SD goal achievement, including a tax and benefits system.
- The basic regulation on coordination mechanisms with participation of EC, UN, other international partners.
- The commitments of international organizations, private sector and donors for implementation of SD goal in CA countries, including their participation in regional governance system.
- Sub-regional finance mechanisms, including regulations of the sub-regional fund for SD of CA and mechanisms of insurance of environmental investments.
- Commitments of civil organizations, including participation in the regional governance, public monitoring of the programs and projects.
- Other necessary regulations for the SD goals

**Central Asian States** could commit themselves to strengthen the conditions for the stability and prevention of the conflicts, decrease political risks for the investments into MDGs, to elimination of customs, tax and other barriers for cooperation, ensuring auspicious conditions for the activity of all the stakeholders and sectors in the interests of sustainable development, including development of such fields as eco-tourism, organic agriculture, development of renewable energy and etc.

**International organizations** and foreign states could concretize their investments and provide their capacity, including international experience, technical and financial assistance as well as the neutral cooperation platform for cooperation, and also step up as international guarantors for private investments and for the implementation of the commitments of all parties.

**Private sector** could support investments into organic agricultural development, sustainable energy, eco-tourism, fishery and other areas of sustainable business relevant not only for environment and health, but also for the economics and new working places creation as well.

**Civil society organizations** could contribute to wide population involvement, participation of population groups in programs and projects, including informational and educational

programs, support of actions at the local level, development of social monitoring and encouragement of public dialog.

### **Expected outcomes**

As a result of this Partnership Agreement the following goals may be achieved:

- Consensus between all the Agreement parties, long-term and mutually beneficial programs;
- Political base and stimulation of economic activity in the interests of long-term goals and future generations;
- Substantial coordination mechanism and necessary infrastructure to support sub-regional and multi-sectoral cooperation;
- Private investments for sustainable business;
- Rational use of natural resources, protection and rehabilitation of ecosystems;
- Bringing up the effectiveness of the use of the global experience and potential, enhancement of the national capacities of CA countries.

The new level of partnership in Central Asia for sustainable development goal may be the some kind of example for development of a new governance models in the interests of sustainable development and future generations. Such partnership will give multiple advantages, including contribution of Central Asia into political stability and safety of the Eurasian region; strengthen its geopolitical role as a neutral platform for cooperation between West and East, Europe and Asia.

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