

# Scenario thinking to enhance water cooperation in the Aral Sea basin

Special Focused Event

at the

## High-Level International Conference on Water Cooperation *20-21 August 2013, Dushanbe, Tajikistan*

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**Convener: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

### Abstract

*Five key words: Scenario thinking, regional cooperation, policy dialogue, sustainable natural resources management, Aral Sea basin*

Management of the shared regional water resources in the Aral Sea basin is a highly complex process that involves numerous players across the socio-economic spectrum. This complexity is steadily rising because of economic development and demographic trends, rising demand for energy and food, environmental degradation, climate change, and increased pressure on the region's finite water resources. While discussions on joint water resources management regimes in Central Asia are ongoing, parties have very different views about the principles that govern water allocation. The absence of a shared vision leads to fragmented national and regional policies, with risks of increasing competition over water resources while worsening their degradation. The delayed progress towards development of the regional water resources potential is negatively affecting the performance of critical economic sectors such as agriculture and energy in Central Asia.

Analyzing the highly complex structure of the water-agriculture-energy nexus in Central Asia requires the adoption of innovative approaches such as 'scenario thinking'. 'Scenario thinking' encourages systematic thinking about the future, through a highly participatory multi-stakeholder process. It helps decision-makers to rethink their policies and strategies with a cross-sectoral perspective, taking into consideration the changing environment in which they are operating, and take better informed decisions in an uncertain world.

In 2012, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS) and the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) have jointly implemented the project "Mutually Acceptable Mechanisms on Integrated Use of Water Resources in Central Asia through the Application of the Scenario Approach" (phase 1) to contribute to water cooperation in the Aral Sea basin. The project introduced the scenario thinking approach with tangible results: at the end of the first phase of the

project, a plausible and relevant set of scenario logics was developed for the Aral Sea basin and has been adopted by all participating member-countries; this constitutes a joint tool for analyzing complex policy questions related to the water, agriculture, and energy sectors in the region in a systematic and multi-stakeholder setting; furthermore, new insights were gained, 'common ground' was expanded, views were aligned among the participants, and skills were enhanced on the use of the scenario approach. A total of 40 individuals from all Central Asian states and Afghanistan participated in the scenario development process. Participants originated from relevant government departments (e.g. agriculture, water, energy, and environment), and regional institutions, including SIC-ICWC, SIC-ICSD and CAREC. Active participation was also ensured from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the relevance of the scenario set for decision-making purposes.

During the Special Focused Event, the process, the preliminary results and the second phase of the application of the 'scenario thinking' approach in the Aral Sea basin will be shared with the participants for advancing water cooperation in Central Asia.

**Outputs :**

- **Innovative 'scenario thinking' approach advocated to a wide public audience**
- **Preliminary insights on water cooperation in the Aral sea basin shared**

**Target audience:**

Participants from Central Asian states and Afghanistan, including representatives of 1) Ministries of Water, Agriculture, Energy, Environment, and related sectors in the participating countries, 2) Ministries of Planning and Foreign Affairs in the participating countries, 3) river basin organizations, 4) civil society organizations, 5) education and academic institutions, 6) professional associations, and 7) the international donor community.

**Regional and international partners:**

Regional partner organizations include the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA), the Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS), the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (SIC-ICWC) and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC).

**Agenda:**

- Opening remarks
- Introduction of 'Scenario Thinking': a brief overview of the concept, its scope and potential applications (i.e. What is it? Why do we use it?)
- Presentation of the Central Asia scenario process, including video (i.e. a brief overview of the scenario development process in Central Asia, the major driving forces and uncertainties, and the adopted scenario frame)
- Explanation of the scenario set (i.e. four scenario logics that were previously developed by the participants from all countries) and presentation of the preliminary insights from Phase 1
- Presentation of Phase 2 of the project.
- Discussion and conclusion