

Where water is everything. Where water is life.



Abdyjapar Turdumatov and Mukhtar Ismailov measure the quantity of water with advise of FAO expert Matraim Jusupov (in the centre)

Photo by Olga Grebennikova, FAO. 2012

Abdyjapar Turdumatov and Mukhtar Ismailov, staff members of the District Water Resources Department of Bazarkorgon district, in Jalalabad province of Kyrgyzstan, have important work to do every day: they measure the quantity of water passing through canals, and then to the fields of farmers.

Thanks to easy-to-use sluices and equipment provided with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to Nookan and Bazarkorgon districts, the five thousand residents of Kyzyl Oktyabr village can now get water at the same time through modern water allocation and distribution facilities and irrigation canals. This means that a further 100 hectares of fertile land can be cultivated. As part of a unique FAO programme in the two target areas, about 100 such infrastructure items have been upgraded.

“For us in the south water is everything, water is life,” says Abdyjapar Turdumatov, and the gathered villagers agree. “If there was no water, you and your family would starve even if you had a hundred acres of land,” the people say, wisely.

In its more than twenty years of independence Kyrgyzstan, an agrarian country, has remained heavily dependent on imports of basic food products. The irrigation system has seen almost no modernisation, and canals have gradually filled with silt and carried less water every year.

And while the settlements located close to the upper section of the main canal relatively regularly receive at least some water, those fields most distant from the main canal often do not get any water at all. This is thus becoming a serious source of conflict.

Senior government officials have publicly stated that in Kyrgyzstan – a mountainous country which is one of the largest suppliers of irrigation water in Central Asia and, particularly, in the Fergana Valley – more than half the water is lost because of the poor conditions of irrigation networks.

This is why the FAO project, which is being implemented in Jalalabad province with financial support from the Government of Austria, has proved itself very timely and relevant and is supported at all levels of society - from the Government of Kyrgyzstan to the immediate beneficiaries: farmers who are members of local Water Users’ Associations.

The project made it possible not just to demonstrate how we can and must make rational use of water in arid regions in the growing season. As part of the project water engineers from all regions of Kyrgyzstan have been taught, and Water Users’ Associations in two pilot districts of Jalalabad province have received valuable training.

“In these training events we have learned how to effectively plan for water consumption, and how to distribute water to farms competently and equitably. We have created water usage charts ourselves, and we ourselves monitor their implementation,” says Abdyjapar Turdumatov.

In addition to the fact that people no longer argue over water, the FAO has taught farmers efficient technologies for crop management. People also now know which seeds to use to obtain higher yields, how to align fields so that water is used efficiently and effectively, and many more things that a farmer cannot do without in everyday life.

As a result of the project, 14,500 hectares of fertile land have been returned to agricultural use. Its harvest will support 70,000 members of smallholder families.

One of the main achievements of the project has been the creation of Farmer Field Schools in the pilot districts. Created as part of the programme, the 25 field schools are now continuing their work completely independently. All the farmers need are a field to meet at and the ideas and experience they share with each other, including how to make better use of irrigation water. They are assisted by a coach who has had substantive training from the best specialists in the FAO.



Farmer Field School in action – no gender or ethnic stereotypes where is high interest and mutual benefit
Photo by Olga Grebennikova, FAO. 2012



Brand new tractors equipped with laser soil levellers working in Jalal-Abad province, Kyrgyzstan
Photo by Olga Grebennikova, FAO. 2012

The Federation of Water Users' Associations and farmers from the two districts are also proud of the field agricultural weather station, which provides data for farmers in real time, as well as their brand new tractors equipped with laser soil levellers. All of this was purchased in the framework of the FAO and Government of Austria project and officially handed over to the Federation of Water Users' Associations.

"We were waiting for twenty years for the FAO to come to us," say the farmers. "And we are grateful to the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the fact that the aid from the organisation came specifically to us. The knowledge and machinery that FAO is giving us is exactly what we need. No one has ever provided this kind of support to us before."

"The high level of partnership that FAO has established with the Government, non-governmental organisations, Water Users' Associations and farmers in the field, as well as the impressive results of the project, are encouraging and give us hope that such initiatives can be implemented in all provinces of Kyrgyzstan," said Dinara Rakhmanova, Executive Representative of FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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