

Transformative Futures for Water Security Initiative

Central Asia Regional Dialogue Harvest

The **Central Asian Regional Dialogue** is a participatory, multi-stakeholders dialogue organized by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Regional Steering Committee and co-designed and facilitated by Perspective.

More than 50 representatives from the major designated stakeholders' groups in the water industry attended the Central Asian Regional Dialogue, which brought together high-level knowledge from local state agencies, the public sector, civil society, academia, youth, and the commercial sector. The Central Asian Regional Dialogue was held on December 20-21, 2022, and brought together participants from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan who actively participated in an actively engaging, participatory, and dynamic working process inspired by "Future Search" conference methodology (which is a unique planning method that enables large, diverse groups to validate a common mission, take responsibility for actions, and collaborate on projects). All the participants of the Central Asian Regional Dialogue worked around one central question – "What are high-ambition, collective actions that will create strong alignment of knowledge and research, policy, business and on-the-ground implementation to deliver future water security?" and they worked on generating concrete regional input for the TFWS Global Conference that will be held in February 2023 in South Africa, and furthermore to the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York in March 2023.

This harvest document is a high-level overview of the regional dialogue's outstanding themes. The facilitation and hosting teams collaborated on its creation.

Process Overview

Central Asia Regional Dialogue was the first of eight regional dialogues organized in 2022-2023. The regional dialogue concentrated around the central question, and designed to be interactive and engaging process, where every participant had a voice and shared their views and ideas around the future of water security. The results of the regional dialogues will be used to finalize the design of the water security action plan at the TFWS Global Conference in South Africa (more information about this event can be found [here](#)). And all the results will contribute to the outcome of the UN 2023 Water conference, 22-24 March 2023 in New York (more information can be found by following this link [here](#)).

The Regional Dialogue process allowed the diverse and intersectoral stakeholders to explore the central question by working collectively on four progressive, engaging, and self-managed tasks.

In mixed stakeholders' groups, participants worked on key four tasks:

1. **Describing the Past** – what happened in the past and what were the factors that caused the current situation?
2. **Understanding the Past** – understanding the situation where we find ourselves now. The groups looked around the key factors that might have affected the present situation – social, economic, financial, political, scientific, ecological etc.

3. **The Future** – what is the desirable, motivating and the best possible scenario of the future?
4. **How to reach the future** – what do we need to keep and what do we need to let go to reach all the goals and create best solutions for the future water security.

Working platform

During these two days participants generated ideas, looked for solutions and created their vision of future in the uniquely create working platform in padlet. This platform allowed participants to express their views freely and engaged all the stakeholders from different age group and professional background. The working process and all the relevant documents can be found by following this link: <https://padlet.com/Perspectivity/padlet-5u71eyho45lrm3z3>

Youth representatives and co-hosts

Generally, there were good number of youth participants from all countries at the Central Asian Regional Dialogue. It was very inspiring to see the engagement and active participation of the youth, who shared their views about the current situation around the water security in the region, and provided their vision for the future, how it should look like and what should be the focus in ensuring the water security. The regional dialogue engaged two youth co-hosts, who actively engaged in the working process and voiced the youth's opinion and stand on the issues of water security in Central Asian region. The two leading youth co-hosts – Zhaniya Khaibullina and Orean Mekhroj.

Steering committee

The regional dialogue was organized and supported by Oytire Anabekov IWMI Country Manager Uzbekistan and Mohsin Hafeez IWMI Regional Representative - Central Asia with representation of all countries in the regional **steering committee**.

IWMI presence at the Central Asian Regional Dialogue

The regional dialogue was supported, co-hosted, and attended by IWMI representative – Dr. Mohsin Hafeez and Chiara Christina Colombo. Opening and closing remarks were delivered by Sulton Rahimzoda – Chairman of EC-IFAS and Mark Smith, Director General of IWMI.

Special guest

The regional dialogue was opened by Mr. Sulton Rahimzoda. Mr. Rahimzoda is the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS).

Facilitation and Harvesting

The Central Asian Regional Dialogue was designed and facilitated by Perspectivity team members – Lisette Gast and Azamat Shambilov. More information about Perspectivity can be found [here](#).

Working language

Central Asian Regional Dialogue was held in Russian language.

“Since the fall of Soviet Union water security issue was not in the main agenda of Central Asia governments, and today there are many challenging issues in this field.”

Regional dialogue participant

Central Asia Regional Dialogue – Stakeholders’ Group

The regional dialogue brought together stakeholders from eight groups and engaged in working process to generate ideas, solutions, and recommendations. The working process enabled the participants to share the knowledge from various sectors and helped to shape the recommendations based on all the information from different sources.

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|---|---|
| ⇒ Youth | ⇒ Funders and investors |
| ⇒ Policy makers | ⇒ Civil society organizations, NGOs working in the field of environmental issues and water resources. |
| ⇒ Local government and public water service providers | ⇒ Users group |
| ⇒ Knowledge generators (academia, research, indigenous knowledge, and solution providers, startups, entrepreneurs, thematic media outlet representatives) | ⇒ Private sector (multinational companies, SMEs, private water companies etc.) |

Regional Dialogue Highlights

When Central Asia countries were part of the Soviet Union, the water and food security, and all the strategic planning in the field were managed by the central government in Moscow. After 30 years of the independence all countries in Central Asia are still dealing with the Soviet legacy in around water security and effective management of water resources. The participants also stressed the fact that there are many good cross border initiatives in the region, but that the implementation of agreed regulations is often a big challenge.

The regional dialogue shaped the discussion around the next key thematic areas:

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| > Water (basin) management | > Data sharing and data management |
| > Transborder cooperation | > Old infrastructure and lack of professionals in the field |
| > Agricultural growth and monoculture | > The Aral Sea |
| > Management of small rivers and lakes | |

I. Participants listed number of issues that lead to the current situation “where we are now”:

Water and water basin management

- Transition to basin management of WRM
- Collective management of the region according to IWRM/basin management principles and through negotiations.
- Water accounting - paid water use

- Water management issues were introduced only in one way - water use, only in agriculture
- PPP in water sector - transfer to private hands

Water availability / effects of climate change

- Within 40-50 years the countries have seen the disappearance of the Aral Sea
- Low water availability and water scarcity
- Water depletion
- Land degradation, desertification processes, drought, resulting in additional water consumption
- Quality of water resources has declined
- Due to the drying up of the Aral Sea, the volume of water in the lakes has decreased and commercial fish have disappeared.
- Effects of climate change
- Intensive use of water for agriculture

Technology / infrastructure

- Limited and outdated water technology
- Obsolete infrastructure (Tajikistan)

Water management and knowledge institutions

- Creation of new IWRM institutions
- Science and water management - a gap and not up-to-date
- Establishment of research centres in regions
- Less and less money is available for research (which is fundamental)
- There is a strong emphasis on education, in particular in Uzbekistan TIAME, at Tar State University

Participation and involvement

- Involvement of youth and women in water sector
- Participation of civil society in water management and water security planning

Cross border cooperation

- Limited cross-border cooperation
- Joint regional instrument on the region
- Accession to global conventions
- Open exchange of information
- No coordinated action on water allocation
- No data exchange
- Establishment of a national body - it was agreed that a water and energy consortium should be established - SIC, ICWC have been entrusted with this task.

- Opening of the National Authority which regulated the situation, operational data exchange, automation issues in the beginning.
- Need to improve joint facilitation of IFAS structure.
- New structures have been created after independence, nationalisation has happened

Initiatives

- Lack of coordination / efficiency
- A lot of activity has been going on since independence
- A lot of initiatives are taking place, how much of an impact does this have on efficiency is the question?
- Introduction of new projects to address/ mitigate natural resource management;

Participation / involvement

- Formerly little attention paid to NGOs, civil society, youth, women in their participation in OIA
- Learn and participate in OIA with their experience
- Decision-makers willing to listen to young people

Nexus / cross sectoral

- Lack of nexus approach
- Previously not independent to sectors, now each sector works separately, but needs to work together
- No interdisciplinary approach to water studies
- Integrated energy solution

Funding

- Insufficient funding
- Irrigated land in Kazakhstan - (World Bank financial support projects)
- Some countries started investing in scientific projects

Water as sector

- Unattractive sector (low wages)
 - Outdated educational programs, lack of qualified teaching staff create obstacle in providing water sector with the well-trained professionals. Educational and laboratory bases of educational institutions need to be updated and modernized. Innovative and interactive learning tools are underused.
- Low interest of young people in the research
 - Water human resources - improved training

II. The groups worked around the key factors that have affected the present situation – social, economic, financial, political, scientific, ecological:

Socio-political factors

1. Countries are still very young (only started after Soviet Union era), the need for national decisions and regulations is felt strongly
2. Service privatizations or nationalizations have led to low / no maintenance of infrastructure
3. There is regional cooperation, but insufficient implementation of the agreements
4. Need for Afghanistan to be part of this regional conversation. Transborder sharing of water.
5. Outdated education curricula and shortage of qualified teaching staff hamper the supply of qualified personnel.
6. Raise gender awareness in the water sector and involve women in water management

Economic factors

1. Focus on social-economic factors without consideration of environmental aspects / costs.
2. The independence of countries influenced water distribution conditions and water usage regimes (for instance flooding of Aral Sea territories). Deterioration of agriculture due to lack of chemical fertilizers and reduced productivity.
3. Not sufficient incentives for the private sector to participate in water finance by developing and implementing viable PPP models in water and agricultural.
4. Opportunities to conserve water and foster new, evidence-based solutions are lacking.
5. Inadequate investor project coordination

Environmental factors

1. Disappearance of Aral Sea (salination of water)
2. Economic and social growth without consideration for environmental factors
3. Development of a plan for the long-term management of the Aral Sea basin's wetland ecosystems and coastal corridors, including the conservation of existing watercourses and strengthening their functional integrity, as well as the gradual restoration of biodiversity.
4. Holding into account the big multinational companies working in the field of natural resources (oil, gas, coal and gold mining etc.)

Scientific and technological factors

1. Missing data collection and cross regional data sharing
2. Increase in research institutes and increase involvement of youth.
3. Continue to accelerate efforts to implement water-saving technologies, including drip and sprinkler irrigation, as well as the policy of encouraging the use of such technologies in all Central Asian countries.
4. Countries should invest in youth-led science project.
5. Youth are more and more engaged in water industry, it is a momentum to create youth start-up projects on new technologies and scientific projects.

“We need to work together in Central Asia, as we share the borders, water and common issues in dealing with the water security”

Regional dialogue participant

III An overview of the best possible responses for a water secure future

- > Water resources must be handled in a nexus and inclusive way (equal representation in decision-making).
- > Technology is used for desalination and water saving
- > Agriculture is diverse and uses only minimum amounts of water
- > Artificial Intelligence is used to predict and manage water in an efficient way
- > Research institutes and education institutes are improved
- > Water sector has become attractive to work in
- > Cross regional cooperation is real. Beyond nationalism and egoism.
- > All people understand the value of the water. Education of children and use of mass media
- > Up-to-date infrastructure - especially for water basin management and including small rivers
- > Data management and sharing through platforms
- > IFAS has improved and implemented
- > Integrated Water Resource management approach over the whole region
- > Systemic change and future thinking

“In the future we will be able to restore the Aral Sea, and countries in Central Asia will have more scientific approach in water management, where new technologies will play a key role”

Regional dialogue participant

III. Main keeps and Let Go's per each stakeholders' group present

What we are keeping and letting to reach and take responsibility for the desired future:

Youth

Keep youth empowerment – maintain youth groups to influence decision-making. Keep the sensitivity and contact with the community.

Let go the fear of intervening in important spaces, with decision makers.

Let go toxic competitive attitude - we all work towards the same goals, encourage collaborative work.

Policy makers

Keep:

- Safeguard the regional mandate/institution
- Regulatory framework
- Improving the organisational structure to meet today's realities and the challenges and threats we face the participation of local governments together with communities and water users.
- ICWC agreements, IFAS
- Limits on irrigated land, all decisions related to IWRM

Let go of:

- the principles of territorial IWRM, moving towards IWRM.
- power imbalances. Involvement of all parties in decision making
- The principle of self-sufficiency to regional integration and shared benefits
- Obsolete and outdated infrastructure and technology for water use
- Water-intensive crops and grow less water-intensive and economically viable crops
- the 'industrialised mindset'. Because the expansion of cropland has had a negative impact on the fate of water resources

Local government and public water service providers

Keep:

- Coordinated work of water management organizations downstream of the Amu Darya River
- Maintaining inter-agency agreements
- Maintain water use limits, increase drip irrigation

Let go of:

- administrative-territorial water regulation and transition to the hydrographic principle
- from arable irrigation,
- not taking into account water quality

Knowledge generators

Keep:

- Exact sciences, technical sciences keep
- Scientific and academic institutions
- Unification of curricula, maintain disciplines (environmental protection)

- Integration of Research Institutes and CA Centre
- Political-Regional bodies: IBC, IBCR
- Civil society:
 - Best practices in water saving and scaling up across the region
 - Exchange of Experiences - Research Organisations in Central Asia

Let go of:

- Sectoral approach in education and sectoral thinking
- the unattractiveness of the water sector
- get rid of or revise transboundary agreements
- get rid of the policy of hydro-egoism, moving from a national to a common regional policy
- Technical barriers especially along inter-state rivers and canals, e.g., border crossings move towards regional water infrastructure
- Get rid of national approaches - each country has its own water allocation and not harmonized all aspects of water use
- Lack of good will and consolidation to sign regional and transboundary agreements
- Get rid of corruption in all areas

Civil Society / NGO's

Keep:

- experience of ICSD, ICWC establishment (satisfactory assessment)
- Creation of water systems (BWO Amudarya and Syrdarya)
- Transfer irrigation and drainage network to the balance of clusters, maintenance of technical condition of irrigation networks.

Let go of:

- Conditional food security
- Integrated management without taking environmental aspects into account
- Not including new consumers (especially Afghanistan)
- Many controversial issues in Siberia's waterways
- Lack of focus on achieving sustainable development and meeting SDG6: sustainable use for water and health

Private sector

Keep:

- maintain the inter-agreement on IWRM and river basin limits, and to strictly observe, fulfil responsibilities of each country.
- Strict implementation of agreed limits and commitments. Transparency in the exchange and communication of information on expenditure and flows. Strengthening cooperation.
- interstate cooperation in production of crops - wheat, potatoes, and others, with processing.
- the NPTs Vodavtomatika in Bishkek should be retained by statute and should carry out certification, unification of monitoring stations in the river basin and at monitoring stations in 5 countries.

Let go of:

- plastic
- unnecessary 'red tape' in the execution of inter-state agreements and their timely execution by entrusted organisations.
- the use of subsurface sowing of crops.

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“Governments in Central Asia should pay attention to the water industry professionals capacity building, increase the financial support and replace the old water management technologies”

Regional dialogue participant

About Perspective

Perspective builds inspiring collaborations for sustainable growth. We work with groups and individuals to address complex realities in organisations and communities. In current times of increasing complexity, blue prints have become obsolete. As Perspective, we dare to look at the world upside down. We bring a fresh perspective!

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