

THE CONCEPT OF INTERACTION BETWEEN CAREC AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA FOR 2020-2025

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) was established in 2001 as an independent, non-profit and non-political regional organization of international character in order to promote cooperation in addressing environmental problems in Central Asia at the national and regional levels between NGOs, government agencies, entrepreneurs, local authorities, and any other stakeholders, to increase public participation in the decision-making process, and thus further sustainable development of the Central Asian region.

CAREC, based on its mandate and statutory objectives,

taking into account the regional specifics, global and regional trends, national priorities of countries, thematic focus of partners, financing opportunities for environmental projects in the region and the challenges identified in the Global Agenda to 2030, indicating the need:

- management of natural resources and cooperation to combat **climate change**, water depletion, desertification, dust storms, land degradation and drought;
- introduction and use of clean energy from renewable energy sources;
- promoting community resilience and disaster risk reduction;
- changes in unsustainable consumption and production patterns;
- modernization and planning of cities and towns so as to contribute to community cohesion and the personal safety of their members;
- reducing the negative impact of human activities and chemicals harmful to human health and the environment, including through environmentally sound management and safe use of chemicals, reduction and recycling of waste and more efficient use of water and energy resources;

and recognizing the important role of civil society organizations in achieving sustainable development goals, adopts the Concept of Engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) 2020-2025 developed in partnership with CSOs.

CAREC has been cooperating with CSOs since its inception. Cooperation schemes have changed over the years depending on existing capacities, donor priorities and the availability of projects supporting CSOs as a target group. Strengthening cooperation with partners in the region, including CSOs, is one of the strategic goals of CAREC's development, as reflected in its strategic documents.

Since the adoption of the "Concept of work with NGOs" for the period 2014-2019, CAREC's financial capacity to work with CSOs has remained practically unchanged. CAREC's cooperation with CSOs is built in the format of partnership and promotion of their role in regional platforms, processes and initiatives, such as the Central Asian International Environmental Forum (CAIEF), the Central Asian Conference on Climate Change (CACCC), the Central Asian Leadership Program (CALP), the updating of the Regional Program on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in Central Asia (REP4SD-CA), initiatives on environment in Central

Asia, etc., as well as involving CSOs in ongoing CAREC projects through subcontracts as consultants and experts. Due to the increased level of expertise of CSOs' members, the quality of cooperation in the partnership between CAREC and CSOs has also changed during this period - the transition from the role of trainees and event participants to that of facilitators, speakers and experts, using the increased level of expertise and experience of CSOs.

CAREC's Strategy for 2020-2025 focuses on cooperation with CSOs: *Sub-priority 2.4: Facilitating participation of civil society organizations and academic institutions in environmental processes and decisions taken at national and regional levels.*

Despite the fact that cooperation with civil society organizations, as with all other partners, will be based on CAREC's projects' capacity, and the main modality of NGO participation will not be changed in comparison with the previous Concept: 1) participation in CAREC's strategic development through the Board of Governors, 2) regular consultations and meetings on the basis of country offices, 3) experts' involvement in the projects, 4) implementation of service sub-contracts, 5) participation in events, including regional conferences, where development partners' initiatives are coordinated and decisions are made.

CAREC will do its best effort to mobilize resources to continue the initiatives and programmes launched earlier in which public organizations have played an active role, in particular the following: the Central Asian Leadership Programme on Environment for Sustainable Development (CALP), the Central Asian Academic Community Network + Afghanistan, the Central Asian Regional Network of Civil Society Organizations on Climate Change (RNCSO).

CAREC will strengthen practical cooperation with academic institutions to conduct joint research, assessments, development and implementation of thematic courses and programmes on environment protection, sustainable development, water resources and climate change in national education systems.

In the frames of the projects' activities, CAREC will continue its work with training and professional development centers in the countries of Central Asia to assist in the development of training modules and courses and their introduction into professional development systems and staff capacity building on innovative approaches to environmental protection, sustainable development, water resources and climate change.

CHALLENGES

- strengthening mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation between CAREC and Central Asian CSOs, as well as between civil society organizations,
- support capacity development of civil society organizations working in the field of environment protection and sustainable development,
- facilitating the dialogue of civil society organizations with the governments of Central Asian countries at national and regional levels,
- Supporting regional cooperation among civil society organizations in addressing environmental issues,
- Support the participation of civil society representatives in international and regional forums.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERACTION

Successful implementation of the Concept for the period of 2020-2025 can be achieved only if the efforts, expertise and financial capacities of CAREC, the CAREC Board and CA CSOs are combined. Implementation of this activities requires support and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including national partners, international and donor organizations, and private business.

CAREC's role is based on its unique regional status and political support from the governments of its founding countries, which provides an opportunity to promote intersectoral and regional cooperation.

Possession of practical experience, environmental expertise and knowledge enables CAREC to serve as a platform for their further integration, preservation and dissemination of the experience and knowledge gained by all partners, as well as enhanced cooperation with international partners and donors.

The role of civil society organizations is to be a facilitator of ideas, including CAREC, to solve environmental problems and achieve sustainable development goals, having the opportunity to interact directly with the wider society, especially local communities.

Having high expertise and understanding of the needs and requirements of local communities, civil society organizations can be effective partners in project development and implementation together with CAREC, in cooperation and with support of international partners.

CAREC's Board members, including representatives of CSOs of the region, will support the promotion of environmental protection and sustainable development issues on the national and international levels, attract financing to address them, in order to ensure the financial sustainability of CAREC and take into account the interests of all parties in CAREC's activity plans.

Periodic discussion of information and capacity-building needs, including online (Skype, phone, WhatsApp, etc.) will be used, as agreed upon by the parties, for more effective interaction of CAREC with CSO representatives.

THEMATIC AREAS

- ✓ Climate Change
- ✓ Integrated Water Resources Management
- ✓ Transboundary water cooperation
- ✓ Flood and other emergency prevention with respect to climate change adaptation
- ✓ Preserving biodiversity and ecosystems
- ✓ Efficient consumption and waste management
- ✓ Chemical safety
- ✓ Education, leadership and capacity building for CSO representatives
- ✓ Environment and health

- ✓ Clean energy
- ✓ Water-saving technologies

IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

1. Professional development and organizational capacity building of CSOs.

CAREC, including a civil society component in its projects, will organize training programmes and events in cooperation with international partners.

As a result of these actions, more sustainable and professional civil society organizations will be able to act as strategic partners and contribute to more effective implementation of CAREC's mission and addressing environmental and sustainable development issues.

An important mechanism is to support networking among civil society organizations at the national and regional levels. CAREC will continue supporting the thematic networks of CSOs working on environment and sustainable development within the framework of the ongoing CAREC thematic projects (e.g., CALP alumni network, RNSCO on climate change, academic community network, etc.), and also increase interaction with networks and encourage the involvement of new CSO representatives.

2. Assistance in disseminating knowledge and information on thematic areas to the public, local authorities, farmers and entrepreneurs.

CAREC has a rich amount of information, knowledge, tools and good practices, and can further accumulate the knowledge gained from both its ongoing projects and those implemented by partners and make it available to stakeholders.

CAREC can act as a regional hub of knowledge, initiating and coordinating information campaigns to disseminate knowledge and good practices among the population, local authorities, farmers and entrepreneurs, with the participation of CSOs.

Civil society organizations can act as a link between CAREC and the general public, or they can independently organize the dissemination of information and knowledge, relying on CAREC's knowledge system resources.

One of the new mechanisms for cooperation is to **inform CAREC and CSOs about new opportunities, achievements and challenges through social media** (WhatsApp, messenger Facebook, Telegram, etc.).

3. Promotion of best practices in solving environmental problems and experience in implementing environmental projects in the countries and widely in the Central Asian region.

CAREC can provide a synthesis of not only its own experience, but also the results of partners' projects.

The most effective mechanism is to organize, together with civil society organizations, demonstration sites to promote best practices.

4. Mutual lobbying of CSOs' interests - by CAREC and CAREC's interests - by CSOs in the donor community to raise funds for joint environmental programs and projects.

CAREC and CSOs during negotiations, meetings, international forums and donor conferences substantiate the importance and necessity of certain programmes and projects. At the same time, civil society organizations can delegate the right to represent their interests in the negotiations, or to participate in a joint dialogue with donors. Members of CAREC Board also take an active part speaking at such platforms, promoting the interests of CAREC and CSOs.

5. Development and implementation of projects in partnership with civil society organizations

A new mechanism for cooperation may be to follow up, inform and jointly develop project proposals, participate in tenders and calls for proposals to enhance funding opportunities for both CSOs and CAREC.

CAREC and CSOs jointly develop and implement projects on an equal partnership basis, with the support of international partners, forming consortia aimed at addressing both environmental and sustainable development issues, as well as at enhancing the capacity of all parties.

6. Facilitating the participation of representatives of civil society organizations in international and national dialogues, meetings of the parties to conventions, conferences and other decision-making forums, with the support of the international community.

The active role and country offices of CAREC is important in conducting regular dialogue with CSO representatives and developing social partnership of NGOs, government and business at the national level.