



**CONCEPT  
OF COOPERATION  
WITH NGOS  
IN CENTRAL ASIA**



**REGIONAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER  
FOR CENTRAL ASIA  
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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CA	- Central Asia
CA NGOs	-Central Asian non-governmental organizations
CAREC	- Regional environmental center for Central Asia
CAS	- Central Asian states
NAMA	- National Appropriate Action plans
NGO	- non-governmental organization
ICSD	- Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development
IFAS EC	- Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
Q&A	- Questions and answers
SD	- sustainable development

## **Introduction**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an essential role in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development by drawing attention of governments and societies to immediate and emerging environmental issues around the world.

Countries of the Central Asian Region are facing severe environmental challenges, in response to which state agencies, NGOs and citizens of the region join their efforts.

The Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC) was established as an independent, non-profit and non-political regional organization of international character to assist national and regional level cooperation among NGOs, state bodies, the private sector, local governments and any other stakeholders towards resolving environmental issues in Central Asia (CA) as well as to expand public engagement in decision-making and, thus, to push forward the role of civil society in Central Asia.

Since 2008, a number of changes in the operating conditions of environmental organizations based in the region took place – the essence and priorities of donor schemes underwent modifications and in response grant programs were reduced, hence limiting the opportunities for Central Asian NGOs. Although environmental issues are generally among the national priorities, Central Asia lacks a regional framework to coordinate environmental organizations' efforts, build their institutional capacities, support corresponding networks and promote their involvement in regional and global processes.

CAREC and CA NGO have to join their efforts and merge their resources in order to increase their competitiveness and opportunities to represent the interests of Central Asian states and of the whole region in national-and international platforms and fora.

This paper outlines the perspectives of CAREC and its partner NGOs to join their efforts towards a common goal. The document is a component of CAREC's Strategic Development Plan 2014-2020.

## **History of CAREC. Evolution of CAREC's cooperation with environmental NGOs in Central Asia.**

The Regional environmental center for Central Asia (CAREC) was founded based on the initiative of CAS and the resolution of the IV Pan-European Conference (Aarhus, Denmark, 1998). CAREC started its operation in 2001 after the decision of CAS governments to establish CAREC headquarters in Almaty (Issyk-Kul, 1999) and the ratification of the joint agreement between the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the European Commission (EC) on conditions for CAREC operation in the country (Astana, 2000) by the Republic of Kazakhstan.

CAREC implements its activities through its head office in Almaty (Kazakhstan) and country offices in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Environmental NGOs of Central Asia took an active part during CAREC development process. More specifically, they participated in negotiations on all practical issues related to the organization's creation, its physical location and the development of its by-laws.

For the first time in Central Asian history, representatives of NGO were involved in CAREC Board of Governors with the same rights and authority as the representatives of state agencies.

Two distinct periods of CAREC cooperation with NGOs can be identified:

### **Years 2001-2009**

CAREC was established thanks to the support of the European Commission (EC). CAREC - with the EC's financial support - contributed strongly in developing environmental organizations and movements in CAS as well as their thematic regional networks. CAREC Civil Society Initiative Support Program strengthened these links with NGOs. About 90 projects with a total budget of approximately €12 mln. were completed during 2001-2009 with assistance from various international donors. 90% of those projects supported the development of environmental NGOs. In particular, in order to achieve its chartered goals and objectives with regard to NGOs, CAREC has:

- *promoted multilateral cooperation* through the organization of numerous multilateral dialogues on key environmental topics, trainings and seminars, experience sharing activities, intersectorial and regional working groups, etc.;
- *increased civil society participation in decision-making* through:
  - o membership of NGO representatives from all Central Asian states in CAREC's Board of Governors and its former Advisory Council;
  - o support and assistance to NGO representatives during ministerial conferences and summits on environmental and sustainable development issues within the Environment for Europe Initiative;
  - o establishment and support of water users cooperatives, basin councils, working groups and experts networks on thematic issues.
- *supported NGOs and other interested parties* through:
  - o the provision of free office space and Internet access to NGOs at CAREC's head office;
  - o implementation of two grant programs for NGOs with an overall budget of about €1.5 mln.;

- training of NGO representatives on institutional and organizational development, networking, project development and implementation, interaction with donor and partner, etc.

### **Years 2010-2013**

At the end of 2009, EC institutional support to CAREC ended. This affected CAREC's ability to directly support NGO initiatives in Central Asia.

All CAREC projects address environmental issues, integration of international experience and best practices as well as the development of multilateral cooperation in the region. They also foster CAREC's establishment as a platform, catalyser and coordinator of environmentally oriented efforts in Central Asia.

Currently CAREC's main target audience in the non-governmental sector are community-based organizations, expert/teacher/water-users/farmer associations as well as other specialized NGOs and networks. Cooperation with skilled and professional NGOs contributing their expertise to CAREC projects continues on a partnership- or contract basis.

The following areas of CAREC and NGOs' cooperation during the period may be highlighted.

From CAREC's perspective:

- *Promotion of multilateral cooperation*: Organization of thematic consultations, working groups, experience sharing activities, dialogues, trainings and seminars and implementation of pilot projects, etc.;
- *Increasing civil society engagement in decision-making*: Extending support related to participation in ministerial conferences within the Environment for Europe and the Asian-Atlantic development frameworks (*EfE-7*, Astana 2010&2011); establishment and support of multilateral basin councils and river basin coordination commissions; membership in CAREC Board of Founders;
- *Support to NGOs and other stakeholders*: Engagement of NGO expertise in the implementation of CAREC thematic projects; allocation of €300,000 in grant support to implement pilot activities in small trans-border river basins within existing projects; establishment and training of basin- and community-based organizations.

From the NGOs' perspective:

- Involvement in CAREC work and development via membership in CAREC's Board, meetings and consultations;
- Expert participation in CAREC projects (via contracts);
- Activities within thematic networks and involvement in projects' working groups.

## **Goal of the Concept. Key areas for joint efforts. Cooperation principles.**

The analysis of CAREC's interaction with government bodies, donor community, business sector and non-governmental organizations was in the past years indicated as following:

- Recognition of CAREC's role in supporting Central Asian states participation in international environmental processes, emerging funding mechanisms in the area of climate change and biodiversity as well as promoting such regional management models as the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS EC) is growing;
- representatives of civil society are becoming more vocal on the need for structural strengthening of CAREC's catalyzing and coordination role.

Based on the aforementioned, interactions between CAREC and NGOs may and should be considerably expanded. In order to do so, it is necessary to review the basic principles and forms of joint cooperation.

### **The goals of this Concept**

The main objective of this paper is to identify potential areas of cooperation as well as to suggest a framework and scope for an active participation of CAREC partners in strategies and programs aimed at environmental protection and transition to sustainable development.

In order to identify key areas of joint efforts, CAREC conducted consultations with NGOs, environmental agencies and other stakeholders in Central Asia as well as analysed its own capacities and facilities.

As a result, two cooperation approaches have been identified: The first one - ***Cooperation-support*** - built on demands from NGOs, their national and regional networks, which require additional search of regular funding. The second one - ***Cooperation-partnership***- built on existing capacities of CAREC and NGOs and which does not require additional search of funding.

*Cooperation-support* – activities requested by NGOs from CAREC:

1. Active informational support of NGOs on the following issues:
  - funding opportunities for projects in the areas of environmental protection, sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity, desertification, environmental education, etc.;
  - conditions for participating in specific grant competitions and requirements for preparing documents to receive grant support;
  - accompanying NGOs during the process of receiving grants/project financial support: assistance in formulating project proposals, professional translation/proof-reading and editing of English-language documents submitted by NGOs;
  - legal support and assistance on issues related to grant and contract documents and procedures, interaction with environment management entities, etc.
  
2. Establishment of a permanent program to support development of CA NGOs, encompassing:
  - Joint development and implementation of activities in different thematic directions, such as the environmental education and education for sustainable development, in primary, secondary and higher education in Central Asian states;
  - A grant program for environmental NGOs;
  - Educational programs and trainings for NGOs to build their institutional and professional capacities;
  - Support of networking among organizations and movements in Central Asia;
  - Supporting participation of NGOs and ecological movements in international environmental and development platforms;
  - Organizing multilateral dialogues, thematic forums and seminars in concerned countries and in the region.
  
3. Active role of CAREC's country offices in coordinating the interactions between NGOs and environmental agencies in order to ensure information exchange and joint involvement in environmental programmes and projects.
  - Promoting the involvement of NGOs into environmental programmes, implemented in the countries of CAREC's country offices operation;
  - Promoting the development of cooperation between state, non-state and business structures via project activities implemented by CAREC;

Areas and activities described above are crucial for ensuring effective participation of NGOs in addressing environmental issues in the region, but their implementation requires additional and regular targeted funding. In order that cooperation to be possible, CAREC, its Board and CA NGOs have to join their efforts to identify funding sources and develop a specific, effective and transparent support programme for CA NGOs.

***Cooperation-partnership-*** built on existing capacities of CAREC and NGOs.

This cooperation field is mostly implemented through current CAREC activities. Being interested in and mandated for strengthening cooperation with CA NGOs, CAREC considers other opportunities which do not require big or additional investments. In particular, in the cooperation-partnership CAREC implements/proposes:

1. Providing CA NGOs with the opportunity to contribute into CAREC's development and planning activities through their work within the CAREC's Board, participation in CAREC's conferences and consultations;
2. Raising the issue of establishment of a regional foundation to support environment- and development-oriented NGOs in Central Asia before national governments and international development agencies. The foundation should be a part of CAREC, being a source of knowledge and financial means for CA NGOs, in order to give them a platform for interaction on national and regional levels and to support their participation in relevant international processes;
3. Using skills and capacities of CA NGOs for implementation of CAREC's projects;
4. Improve advertising of vacancies at CAREC and its projects on the website;
5. Involvement of NGOs acting as information networks in the region to ensure professional informational support of CAREC's projects and activities;
6. Involvement of thematic networks established by CAREC, such as the Central Asian expert network on education for sustainable development as well as those networks on environmental reporting, water management, climate change and adaptation, and local environmental management and planning networks, etc., in ongoing and planning activities of CAREC;
7. Support access to information about methods, technologies, best practices and local expertise to solve environmental problems. Access to knowledge;
8. Informational support of NGOs through CAREC's web resources ([www.carecorg.net](http://www.carecorg.net), [www.led-ca.net](http://www.led-ca.net)), its partners such as the Asia-Pacific Adaptation Network, APAN (<http://www.apan-gan.net>) and the Civil Society Organizations Support Network to manage drylands and alleviate poverty within the UNCCD development strategy context, Drynet (<http://dry-net.org>);
9. Involving CA NGOs in CAREC's events, such as consultation meetings, conferences, trainings and seminars which provide NGOs with opportunities to improve their skills

and knowledge as well as to promote themselves, showcase their professionalism, meet and talk with potential donors;

10. Partnership within the framework of competitions organized by international and regional donors such as the EC, USAID and other development organizations. Professionalism, experience in managing significant financial resources, organizational stability, transparency and institutional capacity, availability of English-translated registration and financial documents as well as good grant proposal writing skills will serve as a foundation of creating such partnerships.

The above mentioned activities provide NGOs-partners with great opportunities for their development and involvement into regional and global environment and development processes. However, the number and volume of projects and related events and needs in external expertise limit the number of involved NGOs.

Appendix 1. describes opportunities for NGOs to participate in certain CAREC long-term projects.

The role of NGOs in the cooperation-partnership can be presented as following:

1. Active participation in CAREC development and planning activities though their work within the CAREC's Board, the Public Advisory Council and thematic working groups;
2. Supporting and promoting the initiative to establish a Regional environmental trust fund for NGOs operational in the fields of environment and development in Central Asia. Existence of such a foundation would not only enhance NGOs' work but would also contribute to resolving pressing environmental issues and improving ecological situation in the Central Asian region;
3. Participation in CAREC's programmes, projects and events on national and regional levels;
4. Provision of information on problems revealed by NGOs in their respective areas of concern for further structuring and application in CAREC grant proposals. This information will also serve communications with state bodies and international donors in order to improve the correlation of their development programs with urgent regional needs;
5. Creating informal links with government/specialized organizations in environmental and educational spheres with the aim to identify directions and opportunities for potential engagement;
6. Promotion of best environmental practices, application of joint project results in their further activities as well as promotion of best practices and tools to address environmental challenges in CAS.

## Cooperation principles

Cooperation between CAREC and CA NGOs will strengthen capacities of all concerned parties to fulfill their respective missions and achieve strategic objectives, increase their competitiveness and allow them to become more active and professional in representing CAR interests in international negotiations.

Partner relations should be based on the following **principles**:

- *Equality*: any NGO whose activities correspond to CAREC project/program theme/objectives may become its partner;
- *Mutual respect*: partners seek to understand and support each other, do not allow disrespectful remarks and comments about each other in public events. Solutions to any disputes are discussed between partners in working process;
- *Harmony*: partners agree on their actions and statements if they work in alliance in negotiations, preparation and implementation of joint activities;
- *Independence*: partners should not put pressure on each other as well as interfere in internal decision-making;
- *Ethic behavior*: members of CAREC's Management Board, Public Advisory Council and thematic working groups can not promote interests of their organizations in the programmes, projects and activities of CAREC and its partners;
- *Mutually advantageous activities*: Cooperation agreements/contracts should reflect the involvement and efforts of each party and, likewise, be financially beneficial for parties thereof;
- *Complementarity*: Skills and institutional capacities of partners complement each other and meet demands of project/donors/partners. For example, if EU call, all partners have translated and notarized registration documents, financial and, preferably, audit reports, several kinds of certificates, registration in PADOR, project references, curriculum vitae if staff and experts e.t.c.
- *Responsibility*: partners should quickly react to changes in their mutual requirements as well as national governments' and donor stipulations regulating coordination, approval and execution of project activities and modify their actions accordingly.

## Ways and mechanisms for Concept implementation

To foster implementation of joint activities, the Concept proposes the following actions:

- To include issues on cooperation with and development of NGOs in CAREC strategic documents (CAREC Development Concept 2020, CAREC Change Concept and Action Plan);
- To strengthen CAREC cooperation with state agencies and donors in order to enhance opportunities for support and development of CA NGOs;
- To participate in development and promotion of a concept paper for establishing a Regional environmental trust fund for NGOs operational in the fields of environment and development in Central Asia and to discuss this idea with relevant national and international stakeholders in order to improve the concept and turn this idea into reality;
- To improve information exchange with NGOs on CAREC's initiatives, plans and opportunities for NGOs;
- To create conditions for regular and direct communications of CAREC with NGOs by launching a feedback (Q&A) section on CAREC website and through CAREC annual conference, consultations, etc.;
- To explore opportunities to support participation of CA NGOs in calls for proposals of different donors;
- To develop a CAREC internal system for monitoring interactions with NGOs and contribution of its project and programmes in developing the NGO sector;
- To create a Public Advisory Council of CAREC to provide additional opportunities for CA NGOs to meet, exchange ideas and initiate joint actions.

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1. Potential NGO scope in CAREC long-term projects*

- **The Central Asian Leadership Program** is an annual cross-program CAREC event involving a large number of international and national partners and experts. The program allows 5-6 participants from each CAS to go through an intensive 1-2 week training in CAREC and is aimed at developing and building capacity of CA NGOs working on various issues of environmental protection and sustainable development;
- **The Central Asian Green Pack** is an educational tool which CAREC has been promoting since 2009 in cooperation with REC (know-how owner). The Green Pack is constantly supplemented with additions and new versions (The Caspian Green Pack, The Green Pack – CA Glaciers). NGO experts and school teachers from CAS are directly involved in its development and integration into respective national systems of secondary education;
- **The Integrated Approach for the Development of Low Carbon Development Strategies in Central Asia (NAMA):** Central Asian NGOs actively participate in all key project activities. Specifically, their specialists are invited as subject-matter experts who help to facilitate productive discussions and share information on the results of other energy efficiency and renewable energy projects implemented at community and local government levels. In addition, NAMA activities, trainings and seminars present an opportunity to build expert capacity of participating NGOs;
- **The regional web platform for reduction of carbon emission** ([www.led-ca.net](http://www.led-ca.net)) is an open source platform which provides information on international practices on introducing national plans to mitigate the consequences of climate change as well as on “green economy” and RES/EE methods and opportunities in CAS. NGOs may also receive answers to their questions through the Q&A tools in “Technologies” and “Equipment/Services requirements” sections of the website;
- **“The Covenant of Mayors – East” Project:** CA NGOs may potentially become project partners and supporting structures and engage in its promotion in target countries;
- **The Central Asian Sustainable Energy Program (CASEP):** the program offers opportunities for thematic discussions and capacity building to improve power supply reliability and efficiency in Central Asian countries.