



ANNUAL REPORT

2019

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAI	Agency for Amelioration and Irrigation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BC	Basin Councils
BP	Basin Planning
CA	Central Asia
CACCC	Central Asia Climate Change Conference
CAIEF	Central Asian International Environmental Forum
CALP	Central Asian Leadership Programme
CAMP4ASB	Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program for Aral Sea Basin
CAREC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia
CCICED	China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development
CCSE	Climate Change and Sustainable Energy
CEP	Committee for Environmental Protection
CO	Country Office
DKU	German Kazakh University
EMP	Environmental Management Programme
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
IFAS	International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
MEWR	Ministry of Energy and Water Resources
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
NNO	Non-Government Non-Profit Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RDI	Research and Development Institute
SBC	Small Basin Councils
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIWI	Stockholm International Water Institute
TIAME	Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WIS	Water Initiatives Support
WRM	Water Resource Management
WWW	World Water Week

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS



Dear ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and partners:

In 2019, CAREC turned 18 years old. Since then, our organization has gone through key stages of its formation and development, in line with its unique mandate of being a region-wide platform for environmental cooperation to address the most pressing challenges in environment protection and sustainable development. CAREC has ultimately stored a mass of knowledge and positive experiences to disseminate amongst broad audiences. It is essential to share the results of our projects and initiatives, as this ensures their consistency and sustainability.

In the last six years, CAREC's operations were premised on strategic documents such as the development concept, the strategic development plan and the 2014-2020 concept of cooperation with NGOs. Now, the time has come to update our strategy, map out new thrust areas for development, and reach out to consider our national and regional priorities, as well as dynamic changes that occur within the region and on the global scale.

In 2019, CAREC extended and increased cooperation under its regional environmental processes, in close collaboration with environmental agencies, non-government organizations and international partners and donors. The 2019 Annual Report highlights key activities by CAREC in four areas: environmental management, transboundary water cooperation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and education for sustainable development. All activities carried out demonstrate the organization's continuous efforts to improve environment protection in Central Asia. The outcomes of the CAREC's current dialogue platforms are a vivid example of advancing a multilateral dialogue at all levels, and between all stakeholders.

On behalf of the Board of Governors, I would like to give credit to all of CAREC's partners for constructive cooperation and their contribution to environmental improvements in the region. The Board of Governors is willing to lend continued support, in every possible way, in the organization's development and implementation of its mandate.

Zulfukhar ZHOLDASOV,
Chairperson, CAREC Board of Governors

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear friends:

I would like to greet you as a new CAREC Executive Director! It is my privilege to lead the regional organization with a dynamic team of professionals working on the lofty mission of environment improvements and sustainable development of Central Asian countries.

For us, the year 2019 turned to be a successful start of new initiatives, and a year of ongoing work on the key projects region-wide. It was a year of furthering partnerships and strengthening trust between the countries in order to address common environmental problems.

Phase One of the regional EU-funded project “Central Asia Nexus Dialogue: Fostering Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus Dialogue and Multi-Sector Investment”, has been completed. The participating countries have endorsed eight project ideas aimed at addressing problems in transboundary water resource management, to include water distribution, dam security, technical upgrades, ecotourism, desertification control, as well as other environmental problems in the Aral Sea basin.

Over a period of several years, the region has had successful platforms such as the Central Asian International Environmental Forum (CAIEF), Central Asia Climate Change Conference (CACCC), Central Asian Leadership Programme (CALP), and meetings of the MFA representatives and parliamentarians. These help all stakeholders jointly coordinate their work on environmental problems in the region.

The April 2019 Central Asia Climate Change Conference brought together over 400 representatives of government and international organizations, academia, multilateral development banks and civil society. The participants’ call for action includes a number of recommendations for climate change adaptation and enhancement of multilateral cooperation in climate-related policies.

The role of the Central Asian Leadership Programme, which turned 10 years old in 2019, increases every year. This is demonstrated by the ever-growing number of applications and nominations for participation – not only from Central Asian countries but also from our next-door neighbor, Afghanistan.

Our team participated in the 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Madrid, in close coordination with delegations from the region’s countries.

Two strategic regional programs proved crucial in 2019 - the 4th Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP-4) and the Regional Environment Protection Programme for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (REPPSD).

Positively, in 2020, our main objective remains to be the facilitation of multilateral cooperation for the sake of environment and sustainable development in Central Asia. We are going to translate this into action through our programs and projects. Drawing on successful partnerships and relying upon human resources available, our organization will continue providing assistance to the Central Asian nations in addressing their current environmental challenges.

Zafar MAKHMUDOV,
Executive Director, CAREC

1. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

The year 2019 was marked by serious challenges in global ecopolitics, when political leaders, heads of international environmental organizations, big business leaders, communities and youth woke up to the importance of urgent decision making, and intensified their activities in environment protection and sustainable development.

The alarms were sounded by experts, too: the gap between the emission levels projected by 2030 and those stipulated by the Paris Agreement is widening quickly. In an attempt to bring the climatic disaster to a stop, the humankind undertakes but faint efforts. Opening the conference on December 2, 2019, the Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres sounded the keynote for stronger measures to alleviate global warming. *“If we don’t urgently change our way of life, we jeopardize life itself”, Guterres emphasized.*

The 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Madrid, Spain), the 14th session of Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (New Delhi, India), publication of the “Human health in dire straits if urgent actions are not made to protect the environment, warns landmark UN report”, the World Bank Annual report 2019: “Ending Poverty, Investing in Opportunity”, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report “FAO Challenges and Opportunities in a Global World” – this is but a non-exhaustive list of key milestones to be achieved by the world community starting from 2019.

The March 13, 2019, saw publication of the “Human health in dire straits if urgent actions are not made to protect the environment, warns landmark UN report”, which emphasized that *the projection of a future healthy planet with healthy people is based on a new way of thinking where the ‘grow now, clean up after’ model is changed to a near-zero-waste economy by 2050.*

The 2019 World Bank report “Ending Poverty, Investing in Opportunity” points to a unique role of the human capital: *“Human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives. It is a central driver of sustainable growth and poverty reduction”.*

By 2030, adverse effects of climate change may condemn 100 million more people to poverty and trigger migration: families and even whole communities will have to look for areas more appropriate for living and less unstable.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report “FAO Opportunities in a Global World” points out that population growth, climate change and environmental deterioration lead us to urgently prioritize implementation of SDGs.

The 6th international conference “European Union-Central Asia: Cooperation in Environment and Water Resources” (January 24-25, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) adopted the summary document which broadened the powers of the Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WGECC), determined ways of promoting investment in the infrastructure for climate change mitigation, pollution abatement and promotion of the “green economy”, as well as circular economy, throughout the region. Conference participants decided to continue cooperation under the European Union’s (EU) strategy for Central Asia (CA). They also stressed the need for a dialogue and closer cooperation between the EU and CA countries to address environmental and climate change problems.

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN CENTRAL ASIA

1.1. CAREC's Role in Achieving the UN SDGs

Since its establishment in 2001 as a regional and international organization, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC, or the Center) has implemented its mission of providing assistance to Central Asian countries in addressing both national and regional problems in the area of environment protection, in order to improve human well-being and protect the planet.

Sustainable Development Goals are a call for action coming from all nations of the world, irrespective of their development level. The nations recognize that measures to reduce poverty must be taken in conjunction with the economic growth efforts and addressing a number of issues in education, public health, social protection and employment, as well as environment protection and climate change commitments.

CAREC provided assistance in identifying regional priorities of the UN Sustainable Development Goals during the 2016 regional conference “Common Vision for the 2030 Agenda in Central Asia”, with support from UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In its work, CAREC has sensitized its activities to match the SDGs.

The Center's unique mandate, its five country offices throughout the region and a team of professionals and programs enable it to enter into cooperation at the local, national and regional levels with government institutions, NGOs, private sector and other stakeholders. CAREC is a reputed and experienced political actor, capable of building a dialogue to address environmental challenges not only in Central Asian countries but also in Afghanistan. The Center's persistent efforts in the USAID project “Smart Waters” in Afghanistan found receptive audience with the public and the government, and aroused their desire to join regional and international environmental initiatives and projects implemented by CAREC.

Based on the results of its implemented *2014-2019 Strategy* and successful activities under its four programs – Environmental Management Program (EMP), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Water Initiatives Support (WIS), and Climate Change and Sustainable Energy (CCSE) – CAREC is now seriously contemplating moving beyond the regional setting to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Center is now reconceptualizing its role in the region and its partnerships with stakeholders. It is also redefining contemporary problems in the region and in individual countries, as well as the needs and requirements of its target groups, including the younger generation, public organizations, academia, etc.

1.2. Regional Platforms

Currently, the Center uses three platforms, or the three pillars, to ensure a regular dialogue and knowledge-sharing between various stakeholder groups in Central Asian countries. Cooperation and coordination of activities between the Center's programs substantially contribute to the successful performance of the platforms. This helps prevent a segregated perception of the issues under targeted activities and in the context of sustainable development of CA countries and communities. Advocating and fostering a systemic approach to environmental cooperation, the three platforms – **Central Asian International Environmental Forum (CAIEF), Central Asia Climate Change Conference (CACCC), and Central Asian Leadership Programme of Education for Sustainable Development (CALP)** – are geared to harmonize national legislations, enhance political support for environment protection initiatives and work out a region-wide agenda. The Center's activities under these platforms and implementation of its *2014-2019 Strategy* rested on six flagship projects.

In an effort to catalyze regional processes in environment protection and implement the Sustainable Development Goals in the Aral Sea basin countries, the Center has forged close links with the IFAS Executive Committee. Through its Water Initiatives Support (WIS) program, the Center had supported meetings to facilitate information and knowledge sharing between various regional organizations working under the IFAS auspices. These included the Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC), the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD), the Regional Mountain Centre for Central Asia (RMCCA), the Regional Hydrology Center (RHC), and the Amudarya and Syrdarya Basin Water Organizations.

CAREC's Country Offices (CO) in the five CA states are key to striking partnerships with national stakeholders, in particular, with government organizations and cluster working groups, and to supporting implementation of national and regional project activities.

1.3. Initiatives and Dialogues

The CAREC's activities under the platforms mentioned above and implementation of its **2014-2019 Strategy** rested on the following six flagship projects:

- **“Central Asia Nexus Dialogue: Fostering Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus Dialogue and Multi-Sector Investment”** is aimed at creating a positive cross-sectoral environment to enable sustainable and climate-resilient investment, with the purpose of enhancing water, energy and food security, as well as ecosystems in CA. Phase One of the project was implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 2016-2019, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and financial support from the European Union.
- **“Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program for the Aral Sea Basin” (CAMP4ASB)** aims to provide key stakeholders in CA countries with regionally-coordinated access to enhanced climate change information services, scaled up investment and capacity building activities. As a whole, this will allow for a more effective response to common climate challenges. CAREC backs up the efforts made by the Executive Committee of International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS) in regional coordination of actions. The project implementation period is 2016 through 2021, and it is funded by the World Bank.
- **“Smart Waters” (2015-2020), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**, is aimed at enhancing water cooperation and using modern approaches to embed the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) principles through capacity building, an exchange of the best practices and interaction between water professionals in the region. Thanks to the project implementation, water specialists of CA countries and Afghanistan gained understanding and skills needed to utilize the sustainable water management principles, at the political and practical levels. Apart from that, the project enhanced networking and cooperation, built trust between water specialists in target countries, ensured use of the IWRM approach by national water ministries and their support for basin organizations, and improved planning procedures and methods in selected river basins.
- **“Raising Awareness and Partnership for Sustainable Water and Environment Development in Uzbekistan” (UzWaterAware)**, funded by the EU, aims to raise public awareness of water use, build partnerships between government and non-government organizations, and ensure sustainable water and environmental development in Uzbekistan. The project implementation period is 2016 through 2020.
- Since 2018, **CAREC has acted as the high-level dialogue platform secretariat for the initiative “Blue Peace Central Asia”, with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation**. This initiative provides new insights into the development of transboundary water cooperation in the region, as it is aimed at enhancing the cross-country dialogue. The initiative facilitates the turning of transboundary water management from a potential source of conflict into a means of peace-keeping and wider cooperation.
- **“Water Cooperation in Central Asia” (CAWECOOP), with support from the European Union, was implemented in 2015-2017**. The project objective was to increase transboundary trust and enhance transnational high-level political engagement in water cooperation throughout the region. CAREC has proved to be a non-aligned platform for reinforcing regional cooperation. The Center established this dialogue platform for meetings between parliamentarians and representatives of ministries of foreign affairs. The platform was heavily used in 2019, which demonstrates sustainable project results.

All of CAREC's country offices and programs are involved in the implementation of the six core projects, to a varying degree. This enables the organization to integrally carry out projects and utilize its expertise in all key areas – water cooperation, climate change, education and capacity building, gender equality, etc.

1.4. International Processes and Cooperation

In the last five years, CAREC has provided governments of CA countries with extensive support in their implementation of environmental conventions.

The region's voice was heard at the conference ECCA30 – “The New Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” (September 22, New York, USA), the Nexus Global Program Coordination Committee Meeting (June 5-6, Bonn, Germany), the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention (October 14-16, Iran), the 25th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (December 1-13, Madrid, Spain), and other events.

CAREC has an observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is an official member of the UNFCCC's Climate Technology Center and Network (CTCN), and a member of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA).

Cooperation with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which started in 2014, goes on, and CAREC was selected as an organization authorized to prepare reports on regional desertification processes and enable an exchange of specific knowledge and expertise.

The Center runs the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA) as the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (a.k.a. Ramsar Convention); this activity began in 2016.

In 2018-2019, CAREC took part in developing a new vision for implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) till 2030. The Center is also a member of the international UNESCO network of educators for ESD (INTEI).

Besides, as part of implementation of the UNECE Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, CAREC renders support to civil society organizations in CA and offers them regional platforms to share experience at CAIEF, CACCC and CALP.

Cooperation with the Aarhus Center in Bishkek has become a tradition: the bilateral agreement between the CAREC CO in Kyrgyzstan and the Aarhus Center serves as a basis for conducting joint workshops and roundtables.

This is a non-exhaustive list of the Center's involvement in international processes in the reporting year of 2019; it is just an outline suggesting the organization's rich experiences and expertise.

3. KEY EVENTS IN 2019

The year 2019 was the last one in CAREC's five-year-long strategy for 2014-2019, which aimed to support Central Asian countries in addressing national and regional environmental priorities.

Environmental projects and initiatives implemented by CAREC in the last year concurrently solve a number of problems in CA in the area of education, public health, social protection and employment, in addition to climate change mitigation and environment protection, thus helping to implement global SDGs. In this report, we tried to single out, though roughly, environmental problems and solutions, based on the global goals.

3.1. Clean and Accessible Water Resources for Everyone are the Linchpin of Lasting Peace

The USAID-funded Smart Waters project provided support in promoting water reforms to implement the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) principles. In 2019, one more Small Basin Council (SBC) was established on **the Lower Harirud River in Afghanistan** – the first one in that country.

An extended meeting and a series of study tours were held to share experiences and knowledge between the SBCs (**June 2019, Mary, Turkmenistan**). The project delivered a review of gender issues at the regional level, which included a number of recommendations on enhancing the gender policies of the project and the Center.



The Network of Academic Societies (NAS) regular meeting took place in **Tashkent, Uzbekistan**, while preparing for the CACCC-2019.

Two meetings of the regional working group on water quality were held under the Blue Peace project, and a bilateral meeting between **Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan** was supported. Jointly with the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the project supported participation of the CA and Afghanistan delegation in the World Water Week in Stockholm and the Budapest Water Summit.

Facts and Figures

- In **Kazakhstan**, in collaboration with the country office in Kazakhstan, the Executive Board of the IFAS supported educational reforms in the water sector. Two professional standards were updated for use by universities to develop academic programs; employers will use them to evaluate their potential employees' skills.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, the government approved an amendment to the Water law and the "Water Code" to enforce and utilize economic incentives in water use.
- In **Tajikistan**, the draft law on irrigation and amelioration was developed.
- In **Turkmenistan**, documents were drafted to regulate operations of basin councils and organizations and comply with the new "Water Code".
- In **Uzbekistan**, accounting, reporting and monitoring procedures are being developed for water use and consumption; also, the order *On Developing the Declaration of Safety of Hydraulic Facilities* is being drafted.
- In **Afghanistan**, the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources received expert support to develop an information exchange and data collection model for use by national water management facilities.

In 2019, cooperation with the German Kazakh University (DKU) continued. The project supported initiating of the "Foundation" program, which offered students an intensive language training and individual subject courses

in April through July. For instance, with support from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Water Resources, on June 10-22, the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME) hosted the second summer course for DKU students on *Basics of Water Management: Integration of Theory, Practice and Scientific Research*.



In April-June, a competition of research on sustainable management of natural resources in CA and Afghanistan was conducted for postgraduate students, students in the master's program and bachelors; its winners included 24 people. Grants from CAREC helped the competitors to carry out research on climate change and water management. The results will be presented in 2020.

The Kyrgyzstan CO became a partner of the Delegation of the EU to the Kyrgyz Republic in arranging and holding the workshops *Water Quality* and *Water, Ecosystems and Energy*, in the context of cooperation with the European Union-Central Asia Water Science and Technology Network.

The year 2019 became one of the busiest years in Uzbekistan in the number of activities carried out under the national project "UzWaterAware". A study tour to Germany took place for representatives of the government and public sectors and mass media in May.

3.2. Combating Climate Change

The 2nd Central Asia Climate Change Conference (CACCC) (April 3-4, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) pursued the aim of advancing regional cooperation and partnerships in climate change adaptation and mitigation. The report on the meeting results is available through [this link](#).



CAREC's project CAMP4ASB initiated a dialogue between representatives of the MFA and CA parliamentarians. A delegation from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹ (IPCC) took part in the dialogue.

¹ IPCC is a UN organization founded in 1988 to carry out regular assessment of climate change risks.



In 2019, ways to work together with academia, university priorities, and research opportunities in the region were identified. Also, participation in preparing the IPCC assessment reports was granted. In November, a meeting of the region's scientists was arranged to demonstrate results of studying hydrological processes in the pilot river areas, in the context of climate change and glacial melting. The curricula on forecasting and hydrological processes in CA universities were updated.

The meeting of specialists from the region's hydrometeorological centers identified an urgent need in improving the forecast quality. Different tools and methodologies were adapted and tested for that. Trainings by international experts were organized for hydrometeorological services.

Coverage of climate change in mass media and social networks progressed to a new level in 2019. A series of regional and national trainings by experts (including those from the IPCC) for the region's journalists sparked the interest in climate change and in the organization that works to address this problem in CA.

Well-coordinated access to information services on climate change and training materials at the regional level implies use of modern information and communication technology. Efficient response to common climate risks can be ensured by the Central Asia Climate Information Platform (CACIP), conceived in the second half of 2019.



Facts and Figures

- Lists of meteorological and monitoring equipment to upgrade services in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were finalized.
- In Kazakhstan, support was provided in organizing the discussion of the new Environmental Code by civil society leaders.
- A contract was awarded on procurement and installation of 50 automatic weather stations and 2 mobile laboratories for the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of Uzbekistan.
- The third CACCC was organized and held.

- Training events were held for government specialists on climate and hydrologic modelling and snow cover assessment to forecast seasonal water supply.
- Assistance was provided for regional academic development through promotion of student research and design of subject courses on climate change.
- About 200 representatives of mass media were trained under CAMP4ASB.
- A memorandum on establishing the Regional Network of Civil Society Organizations on Climate Change (RNCSSO) was signed during the CACCC-2019 in Tashkent.
- A total of 253 representatives participated in consultations to discuss the CA Information Platform concept.

According to the 2018-2019 monitoring results, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan run climate risks that affect the agricultural output. Adaptation measures are conditional on climate investment, which is a relatively novel activity for rural communities. In this regard, a series of trainings were offered in 2019 to build the capacity of the groups involved in climate investment. Such groups had been selected among participants of the investment project on use of the climate fund: specialists from banks that give loans, national project implementation teams, and farmers.

Collaboration with public environmental organizations and civil society networks continues to improve climate change actions in the region. Support was provided to national events by climate networks in Central Asia.



3.3. Preserving Ecosystems

In 2019, the EU/CAREC NEXUS project, jointly with its partners, began updating the Regional Environment Protection Program for Sustainable Development in CA (REPPSD) and preparations for the 4th Action Program to Assist the Countries of the Aral Sea Basin (ASBP-4). These programs complement each other, and hence their implementation will help improve water, energy, food and environmental security, and ensure sustainable development in the region.



Facts and Figures

- The FAO-GEF project “Sustainable Management of Mountain Forests and Land Resources of **Kyrgyzstan** in the Context of Climate Change” released a publication on implementation of the ecosystem service concept in Kyrgyzstan.
- UNECE projects “Use of the Environmental Impact Assessment System in the Transboundary Context in **Tajikistan**” and “Establishment of the National Strategic Environmental Assessment System in Tajikistan” were successfully completed.
- In **Uzbekistan**, a memorandum with UNECE was signed on implementation of two national projects to introduce modern strategic environmental assessment systems and environmental impact assessment systems in the country.
- In Ashgabat, **Turkmenistan**, the EU/CAREC project “Nexus Dialogues in Central Asia” held a conference for more than 80 representatives of regional inter-governmental and basin organizations,

national agencies, international financial institutions, academia and experts from CA and European countries.

As the secretariat of the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA), CAREC in 2019 continued its work on promoting efficient use of wetlands, understanding their role for local communities, preserving wildlife, and recognizing the international status of new wetlands. Official accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the RRI-CA was a major accomplishment in 2019.

The joint work between the IFAS and other government bodies of the region's countries resulted in drawing up a portfolio of eight regional investment projects. These cover transboundary management of natural resources in river basins of the Amudarya and the Syrdarya, as well as other environmental issues of the Aral Sea basin.

Two initiatives of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) were jointly developed with the UNCCD secretariat and national coordinators: a regional project on the drought risk management strategy, and an initiative to reduce sandstorms and dust storms. CAREC functions as the regional coordinator of both initiatives.

3.4. High-Quality Education

In 2019, Almaty successfully hosted the 10th Anniversary Central Asian Leadership Programme on Environment for Sustainable Development (CALP). Its agenda was devoted to the “green” economy and energy, water management, water diplomacy and gender issues. The event was supported by UNEP, OSCE Secretariat in Vienna, OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan, USAID, European Union, World Bank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Stockholm International Water Institute, and OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe.



Facts and Figures

- In 2019, a record number of applications for participation in CALP was received – 153. A total of 37 applications from CA and Afghanistan were selected.
- The Anniversary CALP participants included 70 international, regional and national partners and donors.
- Over 15 CALP speakers represented public organizations and blogger communities in CA.
- The April CACCC-2019 in Tashkent included a youth conference for winners of the research projects competition, CALP graduates, etc.
- The Ministry of Energy and Water Resources of Tajikistan, Tajik Agrarian University Shirinsho Shotemur (TAU) and CAREC signed a trilateral memorandum in March 2020 to establish the “Innovations and Scientific Research Cluster on Integrated Water Resources Management” at the TAU Irrigation and Reclamation Department.
- A research and practice workshop “The Earth Day” was held to involve the Committee for Environment Protection under the Government of Tajikistan, CAREC CO and public environmental organizations in Dushanbe.

- A dialogue with young leaders of Afghanistan is an important CAREC activity in environmental education. Currently, the National Agency for Environment Protection of Afghanistan is developing its first national environmental policy, and it is young leaders who provide it with every assistance.



A total of more than 280 leaders are CALP graduates. Today, they work for government agencies, other sectors of economy, environmental and public organizations, universities, mass media, etc., to promote values and advantages of regional cooperation. The CALP graduates include Deputy Director General of the National Agency for Environment Protection of Afghanistan, a member of Parliament of Uzbekistan, department and office heads of water and environmental agencies, leaders of public organizations, UN volunteers, etc.

3.5. Partnerships for Sustainable Development

In 2019, CAREC continued fostering regional cooperation through consistent efforts and interaction with representatives of ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) and parliamentarians of CA countries. The very first meetings of parliamentarians and MFAs of the region's countries had taken place in 2016 to discuss key issues of water management in CA. In August 2019, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program for the Aral Sea Basin (CAMP4ASB) hosted a regional meeting of the platform in Almaty, where main topics included climate change and enhancement of cross-sectoral cooperation. The IPCC delegation, on its first official visit to the region, took part in the meeting. Representatives from CA countries discussed the climate change adaptation and mitigation measures taken at national and regional levels.



In October 2019, CAREC held an Open House Day in Nur-Sultan. The event aimed to advance cooperation with national and international partners, CA civil society working on climate change and efficient energy, integrated water resource management and environment protection in line with the SDGs. The event also presented results of assessing the fuel efficiency of the code; its draft is now going through the discussion stage.

Development of a new Environmental Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan is critical for the country. CAREC had provided a number of recommendations to amend the document in development, and these were reviewed by the parliament of Kazakhstan in December 2019. On December 24, 2019, the government session chaired by Prime Minister Askar Mamin approved the [draft](#) of the new Environmental Code.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan, the CO in Kazakhstan took part in developing a comprehensive “green” indicator of the standard of living, and a ranking/differentiation system for people living in different regions of Kazakhstan, by the ecological well-being

degree. The CO in Kazakhstan also contributed to the component “Promoting the Development of Clean Transport in Kazakhstan” under the UNEP research project “Developing Cleaner and Efficient Vehicle Policies in Kazakhstan”.

Jointly with its national partners, the CO in Tajikistan held a series of workshops, meetings and consultations in implementation of the signed Road Map for 2018-2019. The UNECE project “Assisting Tajikistan’s Ratification of the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment”, the Earth Day under the auspices of the Committee for Environment Protection under the Government of Tajikistan, and the CAREC Open House Day in Tajikistan contributed to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, partnerships and human development in natural resource management.

In association with UNDP in Turkmenistan, support was provided to restore the *sardoba*, a traditional water reservoir in Esenaman, for Garagum livestock farm in Dashoguz Province, and equip the facility with alternative energy sources.

In November 2019, the CAREC team in Ashgabat reported on the results of the regional EU-funded project “Central Asia Nexus Dialogue: Fostering Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus Dialogue and Multi-Sector Investment”. The conference was instrumental in the development of multi-sectoral climate-resilient investment aimed to enhance water, energy and food security in CA.

4. FOUR WAYS – FOUR STRATEGIES FOR 2020

Being a regional organization, CAREC cannot but respond to global challenges, too. Their solution is based on implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Pursuing them for many years, and with varying success, at the regional and national levels, through projects and initiatives, cooperation and partnership, the Center has realized the urgent need to give a new impetus to the organization and revamp interaction with international partners and donors. This is a natural process of reforming the organization and redefining the CAREC's role both in the region and in the world.

Since 2019, CAREC has conducted a number of internal activities to reconceptualize its long-standing potential and expertise and research new or unoccupied niches in the region and in its countries, and also design a plan addressing the current problems alongside with the future ones. These efforts resulted in the 2020-2025 CAREC Strategy, which is now undergoing the discussion and finalization stage. It was presented at the Board of Governors meeting.

Another document, "The Concept of Interaction with Civil Society Organizations in the Region", is being developed alongside with the strategy. Both documents are open for comments and inputs by partners and government bodies of the region's countries. Transparency, willingness to dialogues and cooperation on a reciprocal basis with all partners and donors, both in CA and outside, top-notch expertise and growth potential, inflow of fresh human resources, the will and ability to respond to the needs and requirements of its target audience, including youth and civil society – all these make today's CAREC differ fundamentally from that of yesterday. Thuswise, in 2020 the Center will continue its activities in line with its new development strategy based on national and regional priorities for the next five years.

Over the last years, Central Asia has been on the rise on many fronts. Nowadays, economic and political solutions and innovations cannot be successfully implemented without the environmental component. It must be admitted, however, that the environmental aspect oftentimes falls astern lagging behind current innovations introduced both at the national and regional levels. Therefore, with the benefit of hindsight and in line with its new vision for 2020-2025, CAREC plans to focus more on providing support for national and regional stakeholders in order to enhance development of their capacity, address environmental problems and ensure sustainable development in CA. The Center's vision is based on the four strategic priorities allowing for taking full advantage of the unique potential of this international and regional organization.

Strategic Priority 1. Generation of knowledge, experience and evidential basis in support of making informed decisions.

As before, CAREC's program priorities focus on the core areas: Education for Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Sustainable Energy, Environmental Management, and Water Initiatives Support. Implementation of multiple-purpose and inter-disciplinary projects will increase the regional character of the CAREC's mandate, due to the ever-growing "foundation" of knowledge and information. The Center will therefore continue implementation of donor-funded projects and improve its project management techniques for efficient documenting and conveying the information on success or failures. A number of conclusions were drawn at the program level, which formed the backbone of sub-priorities in the CAREC's operations for the next five years.

Strategic Priority 2. Support of national governments, communities and other stakeholders in formulation of integrated policies, plans and strategies on climate change mitigation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Despite the regional nature of the CAREC's fundamental mandate, governments require process support at the country level. Their other requirements deal with capacity building and harmonization of regional and global efforts in addressing environmental issues, including the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028)", the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Regional activities will only be meaningful with efficient institutions and knowledge. The experience and lessons learned at the national level will be pivotal in demonstrating viable ideas and solutions supported at

the regional level. CAREC will be providing technical assistance to enhance the national input into regional and global efforts and operations.

Strategic Priority 3. Enforcement of regional dialogues with national and transboundary know-hows and experience to enhance information exchange, cooperation and partnerships.

Governments of CA nations entered a new era of regional cooperation and integration, backing away from historic animosity, rivalry and isolationist policies,² to reap the benefit of increasing traffic and investment flows in Europe and Asia.³ Regardless of the fact that cooperation is mainly geared towards transport, trade and energy, it is increasingly recognized that climate risks carry transboundary consequences for land and water systems. This jeopardizes regional security and incipient social and economic interactions. Special emphasis is laid on management and joint use of water resources by riparian upstream and downstream countries, and on reinforcing regional organizations such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS).

Strategic Priority 4. Strengthening of institutional mechanisms and management systems in CAREC to implement this Strategy.

Since its establishment, CAREC has covered a long way to substantially change its scope and activities, capabilities and expertise. As a result, the CAREC's mandate has been extended to ensure flexibility and adaptability to any changes in political, environmental and economic areas. A number of key institutional and operational adjustments are required for implementation of the aforesaid vision.

The priorities above are based on the CAREC's practical experience. On the one hand, the region is in need of a reliable evidential basis to ensure the actual practical and financial feasibility of environmental solutions (Strategic Priority 1). On the other hand, CAREC cannot perform its regional mandate unaided, without government support at the national level (Strategic Priority 2). In particular, for the regional dialogues to pay off, major knowledge and capacity gaps at the national level must be bridged. Fostering the regional exchange of the best practices and expertise (Strategic Priority 3), in turn, may also enhance the national-level activities.

It is important to stress that the new strategy highlights the shift in CAREC's operations towards those of a project-based organization. Regardless of the fact that an important role in implementation of the 2020-2025 Strategy will continue to be played by projects, Strategic Priority 4 strengthens institutional and operational mechanisms. These mechanisms make sure CAREC duly responds to the region's dynamics while staying committed to its mandate. To that end, the Center will have to keep deepening its partnerships with the international community, and pay more attention to diversification of its financial resources.

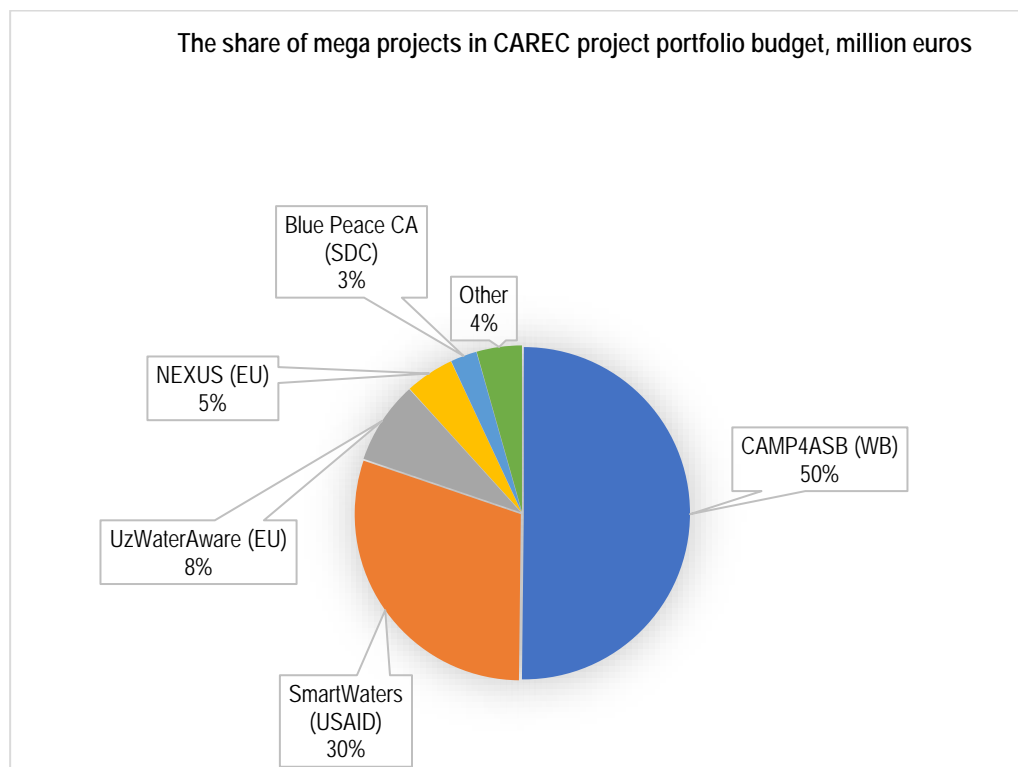
² Some of the recent positive events in the region, facilitating this top-level meeting, include border delineation and demarcation. First, the last year's agreement between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is worth mentioning, as it defines control points between the three countries, as well as the breakthrough in delimitation of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. Second, high-level visits and contacts have significantly improved opportunities to normalize the relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Third, despite its still low turnover, the intra-regional trade between some countries has grown by 70% on a year-on-year basis. Fourth, human interaction has increased, e.g., thanks to the return of direct service between Tashkent and Dushanbe, and liberalization of visa restrictions. And finally, the renewed optimism about the outlooks of establishing a unified power grid in Central Asia.

³ Due to fast economic expansion of the PRC ("One Belt and One Road") and Japan on the east, the Russian Federation on the north, and India and Pakistan on the south.

5. FUNDING AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

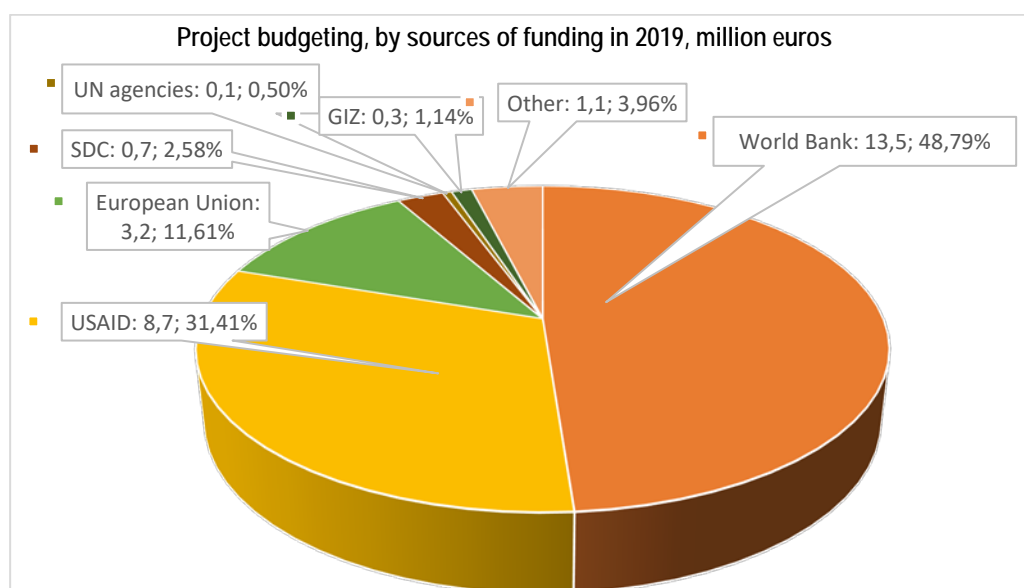
Current projects in 2019 (new and ongoing) – 18.

Total budget – 27.6 million euros.



2019 - 5 projects totaling 412 thousand euros.

2018 - 7 projects totaling 1.0 million euros.



6. CAREC TEAM



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