

**„Serving the People of Central Asia – from the Glaciers to the Deltas“
Aral Sea Basin Program 3 – Blue Peace and Blue Diplomacy**

**Dr. Alfred Diebold,
Technical Director, EC-IFAS**

What is true for the Middle East and many other countries is also true for Central Asia:

Water is vital for life and for development. All sectors of the economy use water, directly or indirectly, as an input, a sink for wastewater, and also as part of the social and cultural fabric of communities and nations. The water resource management sector has to face the new global changes that are taking place around the world, and in particular in Central Asia, at a faster rate than ever experienced before: population growth, migration, urbanization, climate change, land-use changes and economic alterations. These factors impact directly on water resources, water services and ecosystems services.

The growing scarcity of water, implications for food security and indeed human security explain why, increasingly, water protection and its optimal use are critically shaping the foreign policy of the Central Asian countries and international affairs. In the future, the key geopolitical resource in Central Asia will be water, much more so than oil.

The issue of access to water resources, particularly in lean seasons, will impact the way political relations and alliances are framed in the future, even more significantly than it already does. The costs of failing to manage water are counted in terms of poverty, conflict, impaired growth and lost biodiversity. New political behavioral norms and processes are emerging. What was common sense and vision in the past is no longer the case. What can be agreed upon today and tomorrow is not the same as before. The conditions have changed in a way that the solutions of the past are not effective anymore. The rules of the game are evolving at an unprecedented speed. It is all about fostering a new diplomacy, the “blue diplomacy” with the objective of fostering the blue peace.

It is known that Central Asia has enough water but it is not managed properly. It is easy to build scenarios of acute water stress in the future due to population pressures, economic growth, pollution, drought and climate change. It is also possible to anticipate conflict between countries due to disagreements over shared water resources. Indeed, conventional thinking about water in Central Asia tends to be pessimistic and alarmist. The challenge is to rethink water in Central Asia to treat it as an opportunity for peace and development.

This challenge was taken up by the Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea and the Aral Sea Basin Program 3 was developed.