



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR SAVING THE ARAL SEA
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



SUMMARY REPORT

on the activities of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea
for 2020-2023

the period of chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan

Dushanbe – 2023

PRESIDENT OF IFAS



“ *Tajikistan being the home of 60% of water resources in Central Asia during its presidency in the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea will increase its efforts to further strengthen water cooperation in Central Asia.* ”

**H.E. Emomali Rahmon,
President of the Republic of Tajikistan,
President of IFAS
22.03.2023**

INTRODUCTION

The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was established in 1993 to address ecological and socio-economic problems in the Aral Sea basin. The founding states of the Fund are five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

IFAS is an intergovernmental organization with a broad mandate and functions, including regulation of interstate relations on water resources management and environmental protection, financing and crediting of joint interstate programs and projects aimed at saving the Aral Sea and improving the socio-ecological situation in its basin.

Throughout its activity since 1993, IFAS has achieved significant success in a number of important areas, including:

Creation and maintenance of a unique high-level platform for uniting Central Asian countries, aimed not only at solving the Aral Sea crisis, but also increasing the importance of effective and sustainable management of natural and water resources as a basis for regional cooperation. Issues of the Aral Sea crisis are under constant control and attention of the Heads of State of Central Asia, as evidenced by holding of 12 IFAS Summits over 30 years, including the meeting of the Heads of States on 15 September 2023 in Dushanbe.

Providing an effective mechanism for managing transboundary waters of the Amudarya and Syrdarya, including through operational management and monitoring of water resources of interstate sources, supported by scientific instruments and decision support tools.

Significantly increased awareness of the Aral Sea problem and the state of the environment in this area, recognized as an ecological disaster, attracting the attention of scientists, journalists and development partners around the world. IFAS received observer status in the UN General Assembly in 2008, and since then the UN General Assembly has adopted a number of resolutions on IFAS and issues related to the Aral Sea basin.

Development and implementation of the four Aral Sea basin programs (ASBP), promoting improvement of the ecological and socio-economic situation in the interests of 60 million inhabitants of the basin. Within the framework of these programs, dozens of regional and national projects aimed at improving water resource management, improving drinking water supply, sanitation and health care, increasing productivity and efficiency of irrigation, strengthening hydrometeorological services and generally increasing the ecological sustainability of the countries of the Aral Sea basin were implemented.

Preservation and restoration of part of the Aral Sea - the Northern (Small) Aral Sea. As a result of the implementation of water management projects, the flows reaching the Northern Aral increased from 350 m³/s to 700 m³/s, the sea surface area increased from 2414 km² to 3288 km², the volume of water increased from 15.6 km³ to 27.1 km³, water salinity decreased from 23 to 17 g/l.

Assisting in solving ecological problems of the Aral Sea, including large-scale afforestation on the territory of more than 1.7 million hectares of the drained bottom of the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan and 337 thousand hectares in Kazakhstan, which reduces the amount of wind-borne harmful substances and the rate of land degradation.

Restoring the biodiversity of the Northern Aral Sea and the Aral Sea region. With the implementation of water management and environmental measures, the volume of fish caught increased from 0.4 to 8.0 thousand tons per year. In addition, 8 nature reserves, 2 national natural parks, 1 state biosphere reserve have been created and operate in the Aral Sea region, including the Jeyran Ecological Center, Barsakelmes State Nature Reserve.

Even today, the Fund plays an important role in maintaining dialogue, cooperation and relations between the countries of the region, as well as between the countries of the region and the international community, to address existing problems and to counteract current and future challenges.

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TAJIKISTAN'S PRESIDENCY IN IFAS

Tajikistan accepted the presidency of IFAS in 2020. During its chairmanship, Tajikistan focused on the following key areas:

Strengthening regional cooperation: Tajikistan has worked to promote closer cooperation and coordination among IFAS founding states in the areas of water resources management, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Approval and Implementation of the Action program for assistance to the countries of the Aral Sea Basin (ASBP-4): ASBP-4 is a comprehensive program aimed at solving ecological and socio-economic problems of the Aral Sea basin. The Tajik side made every effort to ensure the implementation of ASBP-4 projects. Within the framework of this program, a number of national and regional projects with a total budget of more than 900 million US dollars are at the execution stage.

Improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS: The work of the Regional Working Group to improve the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS has been resumed and a lot of work has been done to promote this issue, including two stages out of five have been completed, and the third and fourth stages are currently in progress.

Representing the voice of the Central Asian region within the framework of international and global water-energy, ecological and climate processes. Under the chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan, IFAS and the Central Asian region were adequately represented within the framework of international and global water, ecological and climate processes, including the 9th World Water Forum, the 4th Asia-Pacific Water Summit, the UN 2023 Water Conference, the 26th, 27th and 28th sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and others, within the framework of which various events dedicated to the region were organized.

During the period of the Republic of Tajikistan chairmanship in IFAS, one meeting of the Heads of Central Asian states, four IFAS Board meetings, three Coordination meetings of the Executive Committee with development partners, three high-level Conferences, workshops, round tables and other meetings were held, where the problems of the Aral Sea basin and mitigation of the Aral Sea crisis were discussed at different levels.

In general, the Tajik side has made a lot of efforts to make IFAS work effective, to present the Fund on the international arena as a unique regional institution for solving complex water and ecological problems, to attract the attention of the international community to the region, to strengthen partnership with the UN and other international organizations, and to enhance the regional cooperation.



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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF HEADS OF FOUNDING STATES OF IFAS

The Dushanbe meeting of the Council of Heads of Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea was held in a landmark year for the countries of the region when the 30th anniversary of the Fund was celebrated. The summit was held on 15 September 2023 under the chairmanship of the President of IFAS, President of the Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Emomali Rahmon.

The meeting of the Council of Heads of the IFAS Founding States was a positive step forward in solving the problems faced by the Aral Sea Basin countries. The meeting confirmed the commitment of the IFAS founding states to work together and with international partners to achieve the Fund's goals.

As a result of the IFAS Summit, four important documents were signed, including:

- Dushanbe Statement by the Heads of Founding States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea;
- Resolution of the Heads of State on the results of Tajikistan's chairmanship in IFAS, by which the parties approved the activities of the Fund and its President during the chairmanship of Tajikistan.
- Resolution on activities to improve the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS, by which the Heads of State instructed the Board of the Fund to take measures to speed up this process.
- Resolution to elect the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan H.E. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as President of the IFAS for a period of three years from 1 January 2024.

It is believed that the decisions taken by the Heads of State and the tasks set by them will give an additional impetus to the development of the Fund's activities and solving of water, energy and ecological problems in the region.

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IFAS BOARD MEETING

During the period of the chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan in IFAS in 2020-2023, 4 meetings of the IFAS Board were held, at which about 30 decisions were made.

Regular meetings of the IFAS Board are an important tool to fulfil the Fund's mission. The Board meetings provide an opportunity for the Member States to discuss current problems in the Aral Sea basin and develop joint solutions. They also contribute to strengthening cooperation between the Member States and drawing the attention of the international community to the Aral Sea Basin problems.

The meetings were very productive and led to a number of important results. The decisions taken were mainly aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and relationships, as well as strengthening coordination of actions in order to improve the water, energy and ecological situation in the region, including through the implementation of numerous projects.

Among the most significant documents approved by decisions of the Board are:

- Action program for assistance to the countries of the Aral Sea Basin (ASBP-4);
- Regional Environmental Program for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (REP4SD-CA);
- Position paper "9th World Water Forum: Central Asia for peace and development. Priorities, actions and tasks for the future»;
- Plan for organizing and conducting anniversary events dedicated to the 30th anniversary of IFAS;
- Report on progress achieved in improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS;
- Joint Statement of Central Asian States at the UN 2023 Water Conference.

In general, the IFAS Board meetings during the chairmanship of Tajikistan turned out to be successful in fulfilling the mission of the Fund. They reaffirmed the commitment of member states to work together to achieve the goals of the Fund.



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IMPROVING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF IFAS

During the chairmanship of the Republic of Tajikistan, taking into account the importance of the issue, a special focus was placed on improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS. For these purposes, 8 meetings of the Working Group were held, during which two of the 5 agreed upon stages were fully completed, and the main task and subtasks of the updated Fund were determined. An updated structure has been prepared for Stage 3 and is being reviewed by the parties. In parallel, the 4th stage is being carried out, concerning issues of financial support for the Fund's activities. An important point in this process was the active participation of the Kyrgyz Republic in the activities of the Working Group.

During Stage 1 of the IFAS improvement process WG agreed on the geographical scope, areas of cooperation, as well as the main goal, main and general tasks, and subtasks.

- Geographical scope of IFAS: Aral Sea basin.
- Four areas of cooperation: water resources, energy, environment, socio-economic development.
- Main goal: "Strengthening and developing regional cooperation in the Aral Sea basin in the water, energy, ecological and socio-economic spheres for the sustainable development of the countries of the basin."

For each individual area, a main task and subtasks are formulated, which are based on existing agreements and mandates, and also contribute to their development to solve new regional problems, taking into account modern realities, climate change and the development of comprehensive and inclusive cooperation in the region. In addition, the WG formulated and agreed upon the general tasks of IFAS.

In order to develop recommendations on improvement of financing mechanisms and sustainability of IFAS organizational structure and to initiate discussion within Stage 4, at the request of the WG, the international group of experts provided general information on the international practice of financing of joint mechanisms/basin water management organizations and mapping of baseline data of financial flows of IFAS institutions.



It is obvious that the process of improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS is complex and requires more time, resources and a willingness to compromise. However, the progress made to date has been significant.

The successful completion of the process of improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, this will allow IFAS to more effectively fulfill its mandate to solve ecological, water-energy and socio-economic problems of the Aral Sea basin. Secondly, it will strengthen the institutional structure of the Fund and make it more accountable to the founding states. Thirdly, it will help attract new resources to the Fund and support its long-term sustainability.

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IFAS: 30 YEARS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023. During this period, IFAS and its structural divisions were able to provide a platform for dialogue and cooperation to solve the most pressing regional problems related to water and the environment. The Fund's activities contribute to the development of qualitatively new interstate relations in the region, strengthening partnerships, and conflict-free resolution of complex water management issues.

One of the main anniversary events was the International Conference «Central Asia: Towards Sustainable Future through Strong Regional Institution», which was held in Dushanbe on 6-7 June 2023.

The conference was attended by high-level delegations from the region's countries and development partners, as well as representatives of science, academia, civil society and other stakeholders.

The conference discussed IFAS achievements over the past 30 years, as well as the tasks and opportunities for the Fund in the future. The participants also adopted a resolution confirming their commitment to joint work on solving ecological, water-energy and socio-economic problems in the Aral Sea basin.

At the Conference, veterans and staff of the Fund, as well as those who contributed to the establishment of IFAS and development of regional cooperation were awarded commemorative medals.

One of the most substantial directions of activity in this context was the preparation and holding of national and regional events in IFAS founding states dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Fund. Numerous contests and competitions were organized among children, adolescents and youth in the IFAS founding countries with the involvement of local public authorities, and awards were presented to winners and prize-winners.

An important direction of the IFAS 30th anniversary celebration was informing the society about the Aral Sea tragedy, and measures taken by the countries of the region to overcome this crisis and improve the ecological and socio-economic situation in the Aral Sea basin. To this end, a virtual photo exhibition was also organized, various videos were created, and collections of articles, posters, calendars, booklets, etc. dedicated to the anniversary were published.

The Summit of the Heads of the IFAS Founding States, which took place on 15 September 2023 in Dushanbe, was the culmination of the anniversary events dedicated to the 30th anniversary of IFAS.

The anniversary events provided a valuable opportunity to celebrate IFAS achievements and draw more attention to the Aral Sea Basin issues.



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ACTION PROGRAM FOR ASSISTANCE TO THE COUNTRIES OF THE ARAL SEA BASIN (ASBP-4)

«Action Program for Assistance to the Countries of the Aral Sea Basin» (ASBP-4) was approved by the IFAS Board Resolution on 29 June 2021. It is aimed at improving the welfare of the population living in the Aral Sea basin, further strengthening of cooperation of Central Asian countries on water, ecological and socio-economic issues, effective measures for rational use of water resources and adaptation to climate change.

According to the presented data, as of the end of 2023, regional projects implemented by international development partners with a total budget of USD 175.5 million and EUR 54.135 million; national projects in IFAS founding states with a total budget of more than USD 700 million are under implementation in all areas of activities within ASBP-4.

It should be noted that the presented information does not reflect the whole range of works under various national and regional projects and programs aimed at improving the ecological and socio-economic situation in the Aral Sea Basin countries. The scope of work carried out by the countries of the region and

development partners in such areas as water resources, climate, energy, agriculture, environmental protection, etc., which are covered in ASBP-4 as separate goals and objectives, is many times larger than the presented data.

The Executive Committee of IFAS sought through the creation of a coordination mechanism, providing for regular meetings with international development partners, to establish coordination and interaction between the countries of the region, IFAS structural subdivisions and development partners on the implementation of projects and programs corresponding to the goals and objectives of ASBP-4. In this context, three meetings with donors, and numerous bilateral and multilateral meetings were held, which gave some results.

Nevertheless, to achieve the desired result, strong cooperation and mobilization of the efforts of all parties involved, their willingness to provide comprehensive data, as well as the necessary capacity for processing, analysis and preparation of reports and recommendations are required.

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

One of the priority areas of IFAS activity during Tajikistan presidency was to expand international cooperation, caused by the need to attract the attention of the world community to the problems of the Aral Sea basin and involve stakeholders in solving them, including through the implementation of regional projects and programs, including ASBP-4.

Within the frame of this process, numerous online and offline meetings were held with the development partners including donor countries, UN system agencies, and financial institutions.

In addition, close cooperation was carried out with international and regional organizations leading the preparation and implementation process, as well as state organizers of regional, international and global water events to represent the voice and vision of the Central Asian region within the framework of these events.

During Tajikistan's chairmanship in IFAS, the UN General Assembly adopted a new resolution «On cooperation between the UN and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea». This resolution notes the need for further improvement of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea to strengthen regional cooperation.

Within the framework of international activity EC IFAS held a series of Coordination meetings with international development partners. These meetings were aimed at presentation and ensuring implementation of ASBP-4, establishing communications, strengthening and expanding cooperation with development partners for mutual information about the ongoing activities and plans for the future, ensuring synergy and joint implementation of projects and programs in the region.

In order to strengthen and expand international cooperation, the Executive Committee of IFAS signed Memorandums of Understanding with the German Agency for International Cooperation and the Secretariat of the 9th World Water Forum.

The Executive Committee of IFAS has done a great work on informing the international community about the Aral Sea crisis, its scale as a global ecological catastrophe, measures taken by the Central Asian countries to mitigate the impact of this crisis and solve complex water and ecological problems of the region, as well as participation and support of international partners in this process.



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For these purposes, the Executive Committee IFAS organized the following regional and international events:

- Central Asian Subregional Preparatory Conference towards the 9th World Water Forum «Water Security for Peace and Development», 19-20 October 2021, Dushanbe;
- Regional Workshop «Central Asia towards the UN 2023 Water Conference «20 September 2022, Tashkent»;
- International Conference «Central Asia: Towards Sustainable Future through Strong Regional Institution», 6-7 June 2023, Dushanbe.

The Executive Committee of IFAS also actively participated and worthily represented the Central Asian region and IFAS in other important international and global events related to water resources, ecology and climate change, within the framework of which various sessions, exhibitions and meetings were organized. These included:

- 9th World Water Forum, 21-26 March 2022, Dakar, Republic of Senegal;
- 4th Asia-Pacific Water Summit, 23-24 April 2022, Kumamoto, Japan;
- 2nd High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action «Water for

Sustainable Development», 2018-2028, 6-9 June 2022, Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan;

- United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, 22-24 March 2023, New York, USA;
- 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26), 31 October - 12 November 2021, Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom;
- COP27, 6 - 18 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, and COP28, 30 November - 12 December 2023 in Dubai, UAE;
- World Water Week in 2022 and 2023, 29 August - 1 September 2022, 20-24 August 2023, Stockholm, Sweden.

In addition, in order to improve the knowledge and capacity of the region’s specialists and IFAS staff, sharing information and best practices, as well as to acquire new knowledge, the Executive Committee of IFAS organized study tours to the Senegal (23-30 March 2023) and Mekong (1-7 April 2023) river basins, as well as an advanced training course at the University of Delft (January-June 2023).

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PUBLIC AWARENESS

In order to form a positive image in the external environment, to establish and maintain cooperation with all stakeholders, to raise the awareness of the world community about various activities the official website of the Executive Committee of IFAS, special pages of the Executive Committee of IFAS in social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Youtube were widely used.

In addition, for this purpose, the Executive Committee of IFAS and other divisions of the Fund also organized publications, presentations and speeches in mass media, at various conferences, thematic sessions and other events at the national, regional and international levels, which allowed to more widely cover and discuss the existing problems and develop recommendations for further actions. This activity became especially active in 2023 in connection with the celebration of the 30th anniversary of IFAS.

In this context, the Executive Committee of IFAS website <https://ecifas-tj.org/> and the Fund's pages in social networks - Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/ec.ifas?locale=ru_RU), X/Twitter (https://twitter.com/EC_IFAS) and YouTube (@user-tg6hh7qh5d), which were constantly updated with new materials, including photos and videos, and the latest news in Russian and English.

The Executive Committee of IFAS website also hosts a virtual photo exhibition entitled, «IFAS: 30 Years at Service to the People of Central Asia», which showcases the 30-years history of the Fund as a platform for regional cooperation and an institution addressing regional problems and countering contemporary challenges.



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EXPEDITIONS

In order to promote regional cooperation by familiarizing young scientists and specialists of relevant agencies of Central Asian countries with the ecological, social and water management situation, as well as the consequences of the negative impact of the drying up of the Aral Sea and climate change on glaciers and water resources in the region, in 2022 and 2023, the Executive Committee of IFAS together with development partners organized two-week expeditions to the Syr Darya and Amu Darya river basins.

The expeditions were attended by young scientists and specialists from water, energy, and ecological sectors of Central Asian countries, representatives of the Executive Committee of IFAS, as well as photographers and journalists, who will create interesting media products with the obtained materials.

PUBLICATIONS

Many publications including books, brochures, collections, booklets, press releases, and newsletters have been prepared and distributed by the Executive Committee of IFAS and its branches during the period of 2020-2023. Articles and reports have also been published in various national, regional and international publications.

Of particular note is the photo album «International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea: 30 years at the service of the people of Central Asia» published in English and Russian on the eve of the IFAS Summit in Dushanbe.



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CONCLUSION

During Tajikistan's chairmanship in IFAS, the Fund managed to achieve important results in developing and strengthening regional and international cooperation, mitigating the consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea and improving the socio-economic situation in the region, as well as enhancing the image of IFAS as an important regional institution.

Tajikistan paid special attention to strengthening cooperation between the founding states of IFAS. An important moment in this context was the meeting of the Council of Heads of the IFAS founding states held on 15 September 2023 in Dushanbe. The Dushanbe Statement adopted within the framework of the Summit noted the achieved results of IFAS, existing problems and challenges and threats, which the region is facing, as well as defined the main priorities and directions of the Fund's activities for the future. Regular IFAS Board meetings at the level of Deputy Prime Ministers of Central Asian countries, where the most urgent issues of the region were discussed and relevant decisions were made, also made a significant contribution to this process.

Tajikistan also paid great attention to raising awareness of the international community about the problems of the Aral Sea basin and the need to address them. As part of these activities, a number of regional and international events were held to draw the attention of international partners to solving the problems of the region and to demonstrate the cohesion and unity of the Central Asian States in overcoming the challenges and threats faced.

In addition, during this period it was possible to increase the attention of international organizations, financial institutions and donor countries to the Fund's activities and attract significant financial resources for

the implementation of regional projects and programs to improve the ecological and socio-economic situation in the region. In particular, additional financing of the Central Asia Hydrometeorology Modernization Project (CAHMP) in the amount of US\$11.5 million was launched, as well as additional financing of the Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program for the Aral Sea Basin in amount of US\$19 million. In addition, Phase 2 of the CAHMP project is being developed with a total funding of approximately US\$50 million.

Tajikistan also made a significant contribution to the process of improving the organizational structure and legal framework of IFAS. During the chairmanship of Tajikistan in IFAS, 8 meetings of the Regional Working Group on improvement of the Fund were held, as a result of which significant progress was achieved in this direction.

Significant assistance and support in this process have been provided by international development partners. In this context, it is especially worth noting the support of the European Union, the World Bank, GIZ and USAID. The IFAS Executive Committee sincerely thanks all donors and development partners who have been providing all possible assistance to the countries of the region all these years!

In general, Tajikistan made every effort to make the Fund's work as effective as possible and to contribute to further development of the Fund's activity and increase its role in solving the Aral Sea basin problems.

The country intends to further actively participate in IFAS activities and make its worthy contribution to solving water, energy, ecological and socio-economic problems in the region.





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