

ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR SAVING THE ARAL SEA (IFAS) IN KARAKALPAKSTAN

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Summary: In this article, the author, as a part of the series of events related to the international cooperation with different international organizations in Karakalpakstan, discusses the historical events conducted by the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. The author indicates that the IFAS's activities in the Aral Sea region began with the adoption of a program of concrete measures in 1994 to improve the environmental and socio-economic situation in the Aral Sea basin. It is noted that the Nukus branch of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea was established in February 1996 and its main purpose was to develop and implement specific projects and programs to improve the environment and social situation of the population affected by the ecological crisis of the Aral Sea. International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea according to the available materials has played a very important role in mitigating the negative consequences caused by the water deficiency in the Aral Sea region, it states that created by the Central Asian countries, this organization is better aware of the seriousness of the ecological situation compared to organizations from the overseas countries, as local countries experience its effect in everyday life.

Keywords: International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), Central Asia, Aral Sea region, Muynak, agriculture, Aral Sea Basin Program, low-income families, Saxaul and Kandym

Kalit soʻzlar: Orolni qutqarish xalqaro jamgʻarmasi (OQXJ), Markaziy Osiyo, Orol dengizi mintaqasi, Moʻynoq, qishloq xoʻjaligi, Orol dengizi havzasi dasturi, kam taʼminlangan oilalar, saksovul va Qandim

Ключевые слова: Международный фонд спасения Арала (МФСА), Центральная Азия, регион Аральского моря, Муйнак, сельское хозяйство, программа по бассейну Аральского моря, малообеспеченные семьи, саксаул и Кандым

Created by the governments of the Central Asian countries, the IFAS's main areas of activity were implementation of projects aimed at providing social support to the population exposed to the environmental disaster, the improvement of the material and technical base and the re-equipment of medical institutions, conduct research activities, improvement of land reclamation in agriculture, and the financing of socially significant environmental activities. In 1996-97, IFAS implemented the project "Emergency assistance to the population", which was funded by the World Bank. The main objective of the project was to provide urgent social assistance to the population of the Aral Sea region.

In 1998, the Nukus branch of IFAS, with the assistance of the Government of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, launched the project "Organization of social assistance to the population of the Aral Sea region in adapting to market conditions in the zone of environmental crisis." The project provided practical assistance to the population of the Aral Sea region who lost their job and income due to the consequences of the Aral Sea environmental crisis. They received financial and advisory support in organizing private business activities aimed at creating new jobs and improving living standards through additional income. In addition, the project supported activities in establishing of the micro-crediting process for the low-income and unemployed, through conducting trainings on the basics of entrepreneurship, development of business plans, the preparation of documents for obtaining micro-loans, helping to form mutual liability partnerships by providing IFAS grant loans at preferential interest rates. During 1998 to 2004, the number of social assistance projects reached 2,909. In total, 4,567 new jobs were created and the financial and economic situation of about 30,000 members and their families improved.

In 1999, IFAS launched project "Organization of diagnosis and treatment of urolithiasis and cholelithiasis in Nukus", and due to the use of the financial sources from the provided services to the population, urological center in Nukus was equipped with modern medical equipment for the non-surgical treatment of urolithiasis, prostate adenoma, as well as magnetic resonance imaging to detect pathologic changes in the brain, spine and cervical vertebrae. For the entire period of operation of the equipment, the volume of medical services in the self-supporting urological center amounted to 27103.8 thousand soums. In 2001, at the expense of a contribution from the Republic of Uzbekistan, IFAS provided financial support to ensure the commissioning of a "35-bed treatment and prevention Center in Takhtakupyr district" for 93 million soums and a "60-bed maternity hospital in Karauzyak district" for 100.0 million soums.

In 2001, the project "Major repairs of rural pumping stations and improvement of water supply to the rural population" was implemented. Under this project, repair and restoration work was carried out at 8 head water intake facilities, which installed pumping equipment in 28 wells and 5 ecosystems for 69349.1 thousand soums. As a result, the drinking water supply of 56,241 rural residents of Karauzyak, Bozatau, Takhtakupyr, Chimbay, Kanlykul, Khodjeyli and Nukus districts, as well as desert areas of Turtkul, Ellikala and Beruniy districts, has been improved.

For the scientific study of the entire range of issues, the Nukus branch of the IFAS funded scientific research projects such as "Conducting experimental research on testing new effective methods of irrigation and irrigation on various soils and introducing them into agricultural production."

Socially significant activities of the Nukus branch of IFAS consisted in carrying out environmental events, for example, in 1999, with the financial support of this organization, the International Children's Conference "The Aral Crisis through the Eyes of Children" was held in Nukus, which was the first experience in Central Asian countries when children were given the opportunity to express their opinions and views on environmental issues in the Aral Sea basin. In addition, the branch has been holding an annual publication contest in

the national media on the topic "Water is the key to life and the future of Central Asia". The purpose of this competition was to draw the attention of the general public and the population to unproductive water consumption, pollution and poor water quality of the Amu Darya, the causes of their occurrence, as well as to warn the population about the need to change of behavior and attitudes towards better use of water resources. In addition to the competition on the topic "Water is the key to life", in 2003 there was a competition for artistic and musical works on painting, graphics and sculpture under the general theme "Problems of the Aral Sea - problems of the country".

In addition to the above events, there was conducted a project "Realization of due measures for the reproduction and conservation of wild animals in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya." In 2001, jointly with the Karakalpak Center for Health Preservation Culture, calendar posters "Knowledge of health preservation culture is the key to a healthy generation" were released, which were donated to general education and specialized educational institutions, as well as medical institutions. The aim of the project was to teach schoolchildren and youth how to live disease-free, and patients how to recover independently by providing knowledge and methodology of a culture of health preservation in close relationship with the cleanliness of the environment, thereby helping to improve the general health of the population of Karakalpakstan. In 2003, gratuitous assistance was provided to the I.V. Savitsky State Museum of Art. In 2004, due to paid services provided by the employees of the branch, the public received gratuitous assistance to the people's teacher of the Republic of Uzbekistan, knight of the Order of Shukhrat, Hero of Uzbekistan A.Uteniyazov in the amount of 225 thousand soums for the purchase of fruit tree seedlings for the expansion of the Sakhauat garden.

In 2001, the branch started implementation of the project "Creation of small local reservoirs along the coastline of the sea in the Amu Darya delta", which, after public, technical, environmental and state expertise, was approved by the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on May 14, 2001. The project provided for ways of rational use of sanitary and flood drains of the Amu Darya and collector and drainage waters of the

northern part of the irrigated lands of Karakalpakstan, the phased implementation of a set of priority measures for engineering regulation of the water regime and increasing the capacity of the Mezhdurechensk reservoir for the restoration and reconstruction of the water infrastructure of the lake system of the Muynak district with subsequent rehabilitation of the entire central zone of the Amu Darya delta. Such a phased construction strategy took into account the implementation of design solutions as soon as possible in order to avoid the negative consequences of catastrophic low water levels, as happened in 2000-2001. In June 2001, the Nukus branch of the IFAS provided gratuitous aid in the form of flour for 28 tons to residents of 5 village council of citizens of Muynak, Bozatau, Karauzyak, Takhtakupyr and Ellikala districts located in the lower part of irrigation canals and the most affected by water shortage.

As a result of the implementation of the irrigation water project, engineering-regulated reservoirs with a water surface area of 69.79 thousand hectares and a total capacity of 810.0 million cubic meters were created. Rehabilitation of the water infrastructure of the Muynak district within the framework of this project provided an additional increase in fish catches by 1,200 tons. In addition, guaranteed growth of agricultural, livestock, and animal husbandry products was ensured, favorable conditions were created for breeding and recreation of marsh and waterfowl, the development of forest and tugai woods, and the overall ecological situation was significantly improved.

In 2002, a new program for the activities of the Nukus branch of the IFAS was adopted, where, in addition to the goals of the projects previously implemented, new ones were identified, such as the creation of artificial lakes in the Amu Darya delta, planting trees on the dried-up part of the Aral Sea, etc.

Upon completion of the first stage of the project "Creation of small local reservoirs along the coastline of the sea in the Amu Darya Delta", the implementation of its second stage was launched, as a result of which artificially regulated reservoirs with a total water surface area of 208.69 thousand were created with a capacity of 2501.0 million cubic meters, 64.2 km of landslide dams, spillway structures and reconstruction of the on-board

spillway were reconstructed and built. By April, 2004, construction and installation works were carried out. In total, 6 structures from 10 to 44 cubic meters/sec and dams were put into operation, and a regulator was built from the Mezhdurechensk reservoir with a capacity of 360 cubic meters/sec.

The implementation of the project as a whole ensured reliable management of the volumes of water resources entering the Aral Sea region, including, in addition to river runoff and collector and drainage discharges, with the possibility of a wide range of their distribution across the territory of the project area and consumers.

In 2002, the pilot project "Creation of protective forest plantations on the drained bottom of the Aral Sea" was implemented, which provided for the identification of the most acceptable types of desert plants, as well as effective methods and technologies for creating forest plantations on the drained bottom of the Aral Sea to reduce the removal of toxic dust to agricultural land and consolidate sands. As a result of the work, seedlings of Saxaul and Kandym were planted on the drained seabed on an area of 85 hectares as a mechanical protection that counteracts the movement of dunes over 1.8 km.

To coordinate the activities under the program, a Project Implementation Group (PIU) was organized, which worked in close cooperation with the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. IFAS's most significant projects, for example, to supply drinking water to the population, preserve the environment, and provide humanitarian assistance to residents of the border regions of the Aral Sea, had a huge impact on solving the problems of socio-economic development in the region.

Recommendations

- The activities of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea has to be thoroughly researched and a separate publication needs to be developed in order to publicize the real scales of the works that have been done by this organization from the very beginning of its existence.

- Jointly with the IFAS representatives to arrange field visits for the assurance of the sustainability of the implemented projects and discuss with the project beneficiaries their attitude to the IFAS projects.
- Coming out from the huge experience of IFAS, jointly with other international stakeholders to conduct a round table on the field level to discuss further possibilities of cooperating and coordinating the aid projects to the region.
- From the point of view of new (current) situation, it is recommended to consider additional mechanisms of collaboration which along with humanitarian aid would include investment projects in different spheres that meets tangible needs of the population.

Conclusion

The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea has been one of the key government partners in implementing a wide range of activities in addressing the socio-economic, environmental, health challenges in the Aral Sea region, particularly in the northern districts of Karakalpakstan. As this article aimed at historical review of IFAS activities during the first and second decades from achieving of the Independence of Uzbekistan, it cannot fully discover all the outcomes from the implemented by IFAS projects. However, notwithstanding to the scarcity of the available literature, it is already possible to imagine the huge impact of the conducted activities to the well-being of local communities. In the times of change of the ecological, socio-economic environment, the IFAS has been a stable implementation partner to the government in realization of the State programs aimed at alleviating hardships caused by draining up of the Aral Sea. It is considered to be appropriate to replicate the best practices gained by the IFAS in the Aral Sea region.

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