



Central Asia Water and Land Nexus (CAWLN)

for ecosystem restoration, improved natural
resource management and increased resilience

The Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) share ecologically important river and wetland systems, extensive grasslands, semi-deserts, and high mountain ranges which support some of the most unique species and habitats on earth. These ecosystems also provide essential services to people, including water, food and livelihoods, and are critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The natural environment in Central Asia, however, is faced with increasing pressures of degradation and loss. This is largely due to increasing (and competing) demands for natural resources, unsustainable economic development and demographic trends. The effects of all these factors are being exacerbated by changing climate patterns. Demand for water is a particular concern for Central Asia due to its largely arid nature, limited water resources and generally fragile vegetation cover. In addition, almost half of the region suffers from land degradation with an associated economic loss of around USD 6 billion per year.

The “**Water-Land Nexus in Central Asia program**” has been designed as a response to address these challenges and assist Central Asian countries with improving the health of agricultural land and watersheds, reducing deforestation, and promoting rural economies through collaborative, science-based approaches to managing natural landscapes.

The CAWLN program supports a transformative approach to managing shared water sources on a regional level, as well as transforming national practices for the management of water and land for agriculture and biodiversity to support the SDGs. It will develop a coherent framework to coordinate all interventions supporting the strengthening of water security and improving the status and conditions of land, such as the support of and collaboration with water and natural resources management sectors, including those involved in ecosystems restoration and biodiversity protection, agriculture, and climate change planning.

The program consists of five components, addressing the barriers in the above-mentioned areas, which will deliver the following key outcomes (transformations):

- 1. Strengthened transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation** within the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins and an established framework for advancing a harmonized approach to integrated watershed management (IWM), as well as exchange of relevant knowledge and best practices and standards across sectors and countries;
- 2. Enhanced national and regional governance frameworks and mechanisms** supporting integrated watershed management and improved stakeholder capacities to apply integrated and gender-responsive land-water-biodiversity management in support of national commitments/priorities;
- 3. Improved tools and capacity for earth observation and evidence-based decision-making**, particularly satellite imagery-based Monitoring and Decision Support Systems, for planning of water, land, agriculture, and ecosystems/biodiversity management, including early warning systems for disaster risk reduction and establishment of a system for river basin and national monitoring systems;
- 4. Increased uptake and application of gender-responsive approaches and best practices** for sustainable land management in agriculture and ecosystems restoration, including multi-stakeholder mechanisms and incentives, particularly to contribute to Land Degradation Neutrality; and
- 5. Restoration of key aquatic and terrestrial habitats and ecosystems services**, protecting and promoting native biodiversity while improving livelihoods and other ecosystem service benefits for rural communities in Central Asia.

A programmatic approach is required to overcome the current scenario of weak coordination of policy, regulations, and decision-making in water and land management, both within and between countries. Consequently, sub-regional (by basin) and national activities will take place under the umbrella of a regional programmatic approach.

The program will have the following list of projects running in coordination, with funding from the Global Environmental Facility:

- 1. Coordinated Approach for Land Restoration in Vulnerable Ecosystems of Central Asia** – all 5 Central Asian Countries
- 2. Strengthening Integrated Water Management in Amu Darya, Zarafshon and Panj River Basins** – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan
- 3. Strengthening Integrated Water Management in Syr Darya and Narin River Basins** – Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
- 4. Sustainable Land Management and Restoration of Degraded Lands Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Services** – southern region of Kazakhstan
- 5. Integrated Water Resources Management for the Restoration of Agro-Woodlands in the Syr Darya River Basin** – Kyrgyzstan
- 6. Catalysing the Nature-Positive Transformation of the Agricultural Sector in Turkmenistan Towards Enhanced Resilience to Climate Change**
- 7. Integrated Natural Resources Management for Improved Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity Preservation** – Uzbekistan

