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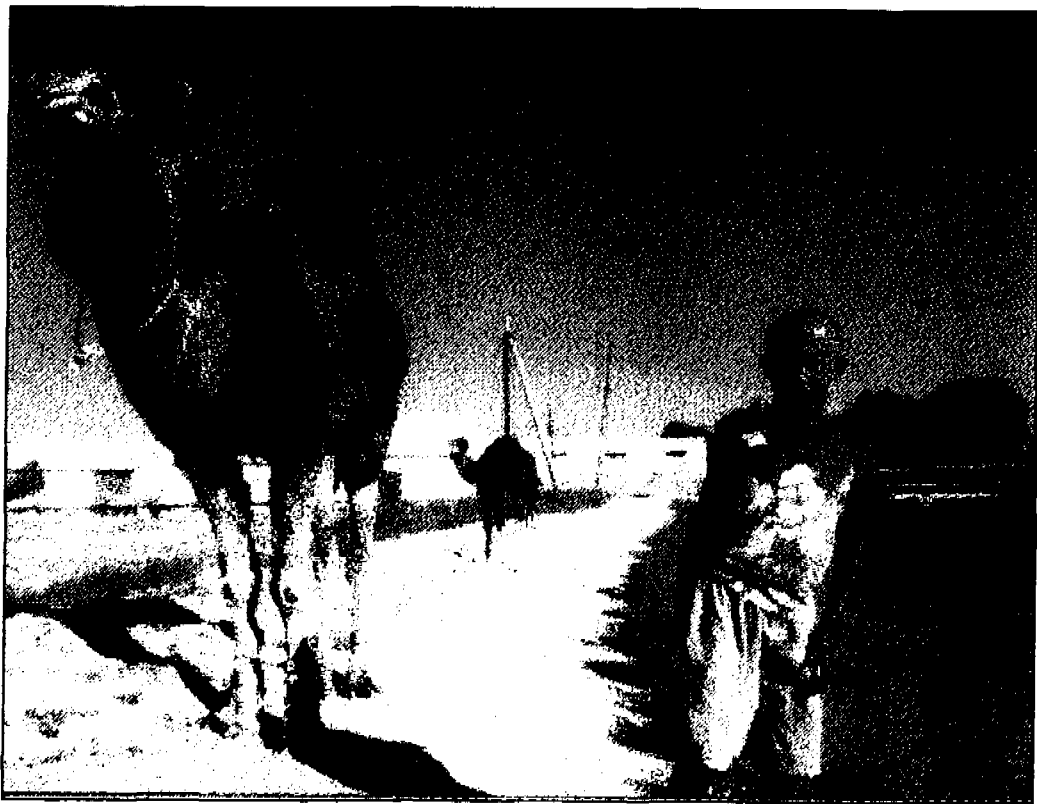


WORKSHOP

# SUSTAINABLE WATER

FOR THE

# Aral Sea Area



An NGO view on Development Policies  
in Central Asia

**WECF**

February 1999

Utrecht, the Netherlands

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To the participants in the Workshop  
"Sustainable Water for the Aral Sea Region"

Eveline

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Dear Participant,

Please find enclosed the report on the workshop held in the beginning of this year "Sustainable Water for the Aral Sea Region". Some of the participants have already received a copy, but in order not to forget anyone we are sending it to the full mailing list. The workshop was the second one in a series. For those of you who did not get a copy of the first report we are also enclosing that.

The discussion on the Dutch involvement in the Aralsea Programme and the policy of the World Bank in the region will be continued by WECF, hopefully the World water Forum will offer new opportunities. We will appreciate continued co-operation and exchange of views and information with all of you on this issue.

~~WECF's activities in the Aral Sea region continue with a medical~~  
Research project on the effects of agricultural chemicals, dioxines and PCB's on the health of women and children in the region.

The results of this project will probably be presented at the next UN Negotiations on the Elimination of Persistent Organic Pollutants which will take place in Bonn, in March 2000.

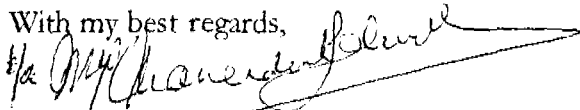
WECF in co-operation with its local partner is also carrying out a 2 year Project with 100 women in the town of Chimbay in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan..

The women grow organic vegetables which are fed to children in the kindergarten and to their families. This project includes an educational part on the links between health and environmental pollution, particularly the effects of agro-chemicals. It also trains the partner organisation and women in managing a self help project and in participatory methods and skill sharing..

For further information about our activities and projects don't hesitate to contact us in our office in Utrecht or to visit our web-site [www.antenna.nl/wecf/](http://www.antenna.nl/wecf/)

We hope that you will find the report interesting reading,

With my best regards,

  
Sascha Gabizon  
International Coordinator  
WECF

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Utrecht, February 1999  
Editor: Sascha Gabizon

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# International Aid for the Aral Sea Region

- an NGO analysis

*Mr. Oleg Tsaruk, Director of the Central Asia Office of Eurasia Law and Environment Partnership (LEEP),  
Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

## **International donor activities in the Aral Sea region**

The roots of the Aral sea crisis originate from the middle of the 1930 when the Soviet government started to develop cotton as a cash crop in Central Asia. In the early 1960's the Aral Sea started to shrink as a consequence of the squandering of water for irrigation and it became clear that the shrinking of the sea would lead to an humanitarian and environmental crisis. International activities to counter the crisis started only in the 1990's after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## **Activities of International Organisations**

The World Bank was the first to undertake activities in Central Asia.

### **The World Bank in Central Asia**

September 1992 - a mission from the Bank visited Central Asia.

Early 1993 - the Bank developed a "Proposed Framework of Activities." The main goals set out:

1. Stabilisation of Aral Sea levels in a sustainable range,
2. Rehabilitation and development of the Aral Sea disaster zone,
3. Strategic planning and comprehensive management of the water resources of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya,
4. Institution building to plan and implement the above programs

The overall program was to be carried out in three phases and required 15 to 20 years. The first phase was the so called Aral Sea Environment Assistance Plan (ASEAP) or Aral Sea programme phase 1. It's purpose was threefold.

1. address the urgent rehabilitation needs of the disaster zone around the sea
2. address the immediate needs of stabilising the Aral Sea (dropped from the plan as unattainable in the short to mid-term).

3. To build capacity of institutions for planning and implementation: the ICWC and BVOs

The second phase (7 years) would continue to build upon these initial emergency efforts and would strongly emphasise on policy reform and institutional development.

Phase three (5 – 10 years) would entail completion of the assistance effort. The Aral Sea basin republics would then be expected to carry out the development process independent from foreign donor support.

May 1993 – a second Bank mission (in collaboration with UNEP and UNDP) visited the region and identified 19 projects. The estimated costs for project preparation were US\$34 million and US\$220 million for project implementation.

The 8 fields of activity:

1. water management
2. hydrometeorological services and database and information management systems
3. water quality and agricultural water quality
4. wetlands restoration, restoration of the North Aral Sea and environmental studies
5. clean water, sanitation and health
6. integrated land and water management in the upper watersheds
7. automated control systems for the Amu Dar'ya and Syr Dar'ya
8. Capacity building for the Executive Committee of ICAS and IFAS

On June 23 and 24, 1994 – the World Bank, UNEP and UNDP sponsored a donors meeting in Paris to seek the endorsement of the international community (including NGOs) for the proposed programme and to obtain financial pledges of US\$41 million for support of pre-investment and feasibility studies. US\$31 million was pledged in Paris with additional, but unspecified, financial commitments made by donors who were unable to pledge funds at the time of the meeting. The phase 1 programme goals and projects have remained unchanged since 1993 by mid-1997, but the estimated costs of implementation have risen to US\$470 million. The main thrust of Bank activities in the Aral Sea Basin for the short term is to work with the regional bodies (IFAS and ICWC) and countries to develop and implement a regional water management strategy (codification of international water sharing agreements, water pricing with and among states, salt management, water quality and quantity management, public participation in decision making) and to implement a wetlands restoration project for lake Sudochoye in the Amu Darya Delta. The cost of these measures is estimated at US\$72 million with US\$42 million slated for regional water management activities and US\$29 million for the wetlands project. The Global Environment Facilities (GEF) fund is contributing US\$12 million. The remainder will be provided by the World Bank and local contributions as well as being sought from other donors.

Other international organisations which started activities in the Aral Sea region were United Nations agencies.

## **United Nations in Central Asia**

**January 1990** – signing of an agreement between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Soviet government to develop an "action plan" for the rehabilitation of the Aral Sea and the Aral Sea region

**November 1991** – Uzbekistan's foreign minister sent a request for help in the Aral Sea crisis to the UN General Secretary

**December 1991** – the written request was distributed as an official UN document at the 46th General Assembly

**1993** – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), initiated a research and monitoring programme on the near Aral region. The programme focussed on ecological research and monitoring in the Syr Darya and Amu Darya deltas. The project was managed by the Science sector of UNESCO and funded by the German Ministry of Research and Technology with a budget of US\$839,000 for 1993 till 1995. The programme was assessing and modelling the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of the study area in order to provide a scientific basis for the implementation of ecological sustainable development policies. The project relies mainly on the expertise of scientists and technicians from Central Asia and Russia with limited involvement of foreign experts.

**1995** – the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the Aral Sea Project for Environmental and Regional Assistance (ASPERA). It provides assistance to the disaster zone around the sea and focuses on health, nutrition, health education, water and environmental sanitation and support to NGOs.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is primarily focusing on two programs:

1. To strengthen the regional organisations that have been established to deal with the Aral Sea Crisis (formerly ICAS, IFAS and ICWC, currently IFAS and the ICWC)
2. The promotion of sustainable development (giving priority to poverty elimination, job creation, the advancement of women and environmental regeneration) particularly in the disaster zone around the Aral Sea. UNDP has initiated an Aral Shore Development Initiative, intended to improve conditions for the 2.5 million people in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan closest to the Sea.

In September 1995, UNDP organised in Nukus (Karakalpakstan) the International Conference on Sustainable Development of the Aral Sea Basin. As a result of the conference the five presidents of the Aral Sea Basin republics signed the Declaration of Central Asian States and International Organisations on Sustainable Development of the Aral Sea Basin. The document commits the five states to pursue sustainable development in the management of land, water, biological resources and human capital. UNEP, through assistance and funding has been instrumental in establishing a regional Sustainable Development Council and National Sustainable Development Commissions. The last are preparing country specific sustainable development plans.

Less known are the activities of the NATO in the Central Asian region.

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**

**May 1994** - an Advanced Research Workshop (ARW) titled "Critical Scientific Issues of the Aral Sea Basin; State of Knowledge and Future Research Needs" was held in Tashkent (Uzbekistan)

**January 1995** - a second NATO ARW with an Aral Sea theme took place in Wageningen (The Netherlands)

Since 1995 - the Division of Scientific and Environmental Affairs has been one of the sponsors (together with the German Remote Sensing Centre and the Department of Geography from Western Michigan University) of work to develop a comprehensive land and water GIS for the Amu Darya delta. This data and information management and analysis system is intended to serve as a key tool for future decisions on land and water management in the delta. The effort involves collaboration among scientists from Germany, the United States, Russia and the Republic of Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan. Part of the project involves co-operation with the government of Karakalpakstan to establish a centre or centres of GIS activity in the republic and to train selected personnel in GIS techniques.

Comment: recently, after its director got a position at the State Committee of Nature Protection, the Nukus GIS Centre, in fact, does not work. No experts from Central Asia were trained since opening.



## **Problem: no NGO involvement**

The World Bank involved representatives of the NGO community like Yusup Kemalov from UDASA – Union for the Defense of the Aral Sea – in its early missions. Nevertheless when the framework of the Aral Sea Basin programme was set NGO considerations were not taken into account, neither by the World Bank, nor by the different UN bodies.

The international organisations that developed initiatives in the region began to organise numerous amounts of workshops and conferences without real co-operation. Very few activities were developed at a practical level. The effectiveness of all these donor efforts turned out to be not very high – the Aral Sea could not be restored.

## **Small group profits from the situation**

The current situation is very lucrative for the governmental parties involved, both from the donor as the receiver countries.

A large part of the money entitled for the Aral Sea Basin programme is spent on foreign consultancies and returns directly to the donor countries. Substantial amounts of money are being spent on the bureaucratic structures of the donor organisations and the recipient countries. Corruption is often the case in the recipient countries. The affected population is the only party with a strong interest to reverse the situation but has so far not benefited from the donor activities.

No real partnerships originated from the international donor support. The region does need the help of foreign experts but it's of vital importance that local experts, that know and have studied their own region, are involved as well. The current projects rarely use local expertise.

International organisations (including the bigger NGO's) tend to split up the region whereas the region feels a strong need to co-operate. For example, even NOVIB and HIVOS, two NGO Donor organisations, divided the Central Asian countries. This is not good for the local NGOs who have difficulty getting support for regional cooperation projects.

A further problem is that none of the international organisations active in Central Asia take Afghanistan into account. Their argumentation is that it is very difficult to find the responsible bodies in Afghanistan. Both the Taliban, the UN and representatives of the Northern parts seem to qualify but none of these parties holds as yet ultimate responsibility. Nevertheless we can not ignore Afghanistan as it is using 10% of the Amu Darya water and currently busy in enlarging the area under irrigation.

## Channelling of the international financial aid

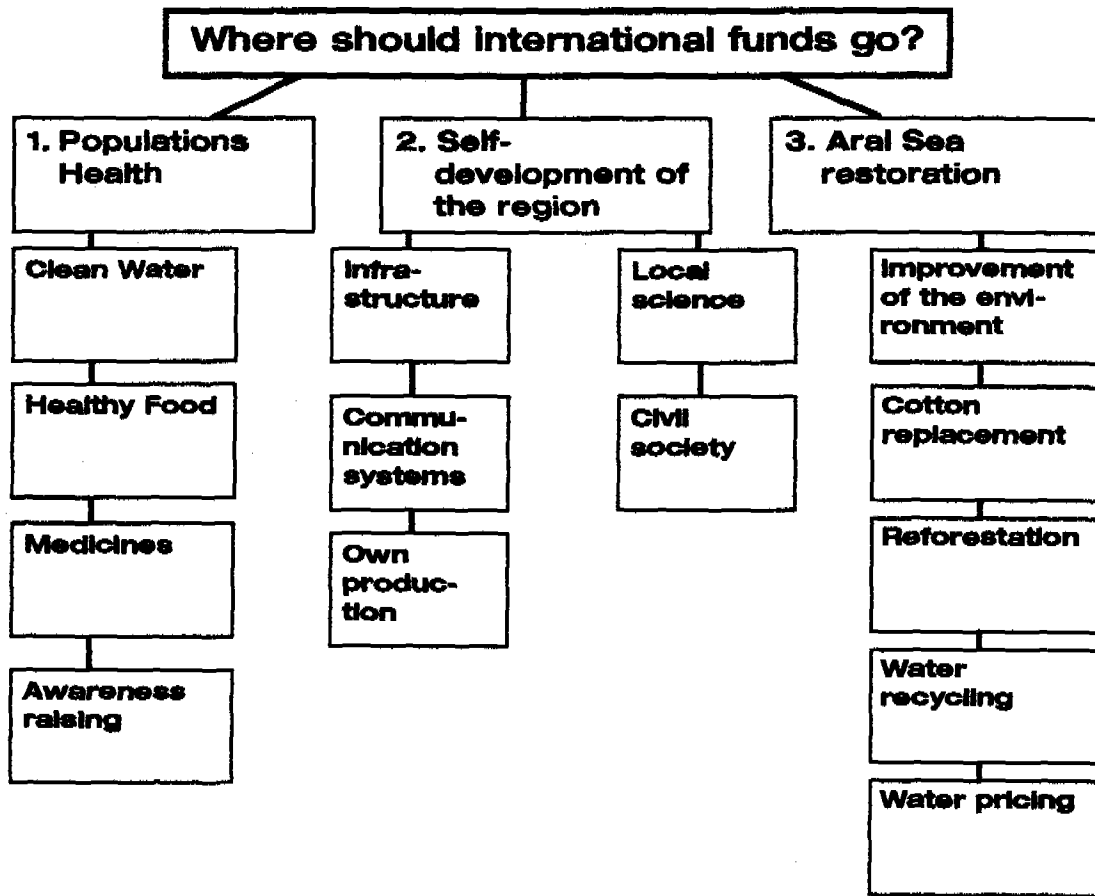
The table below gives an overview how the international donor funds are currently being used and how most Central Asian NGOs believe they should better be used:

EXTERNAL FINANCIAL AID	Invitations of foreign experts, mainly from donor countries	<i>Instead of support of local science</i>
	Conducting workshops and conferences	<i>Instead of support of concrete studies</i>
	Buying equipment only from donor countries	<i>Instead of development of local industry and infrastructure</i>
	Buying medicine only from donor countries	<i>Instead of elimination of causes</i>
	Support of bureaucratic structures (both international and local)	<i>Instead of support to structures that provide real actions</i>
	Short term improvement of living conditions of the local population in the most effected areas	<i>Instead of sustainable measures such as improving the economic situation</i>

This table shows that international aid currently is not being directed to solve the crisis but to prevent the situation from getting worse. It's patch-up work.

According to representatives from the World Bank the Aral Sea can no longer be restored, which is in contradiction to the aims of the WB program as created in 1994. Local experts and the local NGO community do not agree. They have good evidence that the Aral Sea could still be restored, but it would require a much bigger political effort. It would first of all require a different mindframe, sustainable long term view, from the Central Asian countries involved, but also from the donors and the donor organisations.

The next table shows where the international funds should go according to NGOs from the region:



### **Suggestions from the NGO community**

The local NGO community attentively follows the activities of the international organisations in the Aral Sea region. The local NGOs have prepared the following recommendations to improve the international funding programmes:

1. Change the philosophy behind the international financial aid from avoiding the results of the Aral Sea crisis to tackling the origins of the problem.
2. Increase the cost-effectiveness of international aid. A lot of money is being spent ineffectively. Small, local oriented projects with a common strategy would be much more effective.
3. Set up self-help programmes that give people tools to survive. Under the current economic situation even high educated people focus on mere survival.

Unfortunately however NGOs and scientist from the region are not involved in the decision making process. There has never been a tradition of involving NGOs and scientists and there's every reason to believe that will not be involved in the near future.

## **Activities of Central Asian NGOs**

Of course most Central Asian NGOs have only very limited resources. Most of the Central Asian NGOs are collecting information and data and do some monitoring work. Government monitoring shows some gaps that NGOs try to fill. The government is monitoring the sea level via satellite. Only once per year a special monitoring mission is organised. NGOs are trying to monitor the sea level on a regular basis. Currently the NGOs are developing a system of information exchange between themselves and between the government structures. There's a great need for such a system. Recently it has been easier to obtain information about the Aral Sea from Europe or the United States than from for example Kazakhstan or Kyrgystan.

# **Do the current aid programmes address the real problems of the Aral Sea crisis?**

*Sascha Gabizon, International coordinator WECF*

## **Video**

A video extract is shown of a Dutch television program with Mr. Timofeef visiting the Aral Sea, it shows the Aral Sea as it was 30 years ago, with many fishingboats and abundant catch, and then the Aral Sea as it is today with fishingboats in the sand and abandoned fishing villages.

## **Introduction**

That aid is needed in the Aral Sea region is very clear. But aid can have negative side-effects, or even be entirely counter-active. Tax-payers from donor countries are wary to hear how funds meant for development project have ended up in private bank accounts in Switzerland. Or how funds have helped to strengthen a non-democratic government rather than supporting the democratic groups in a country. Or how funds have lead to such environmental problems that it has meant further impoverisation instead of development for the people the funds were aimed at.

So how has the money which has been spent so far in the Aral Sea region effected the economy, the environment and the people's health, in the long term? That is the issue which will be covered in this presentation.

I would not want to suggest here that funds made available for the Aral Sea Basin program are all ending up in Swiss Bank accounts. What I would like to discuss is, is if the implementation of the Aral Sea programmes is addressing the causes and solutions for the major problems of the region.

*It is not easy to propose solutions, but we can already analyse why aid money for the Aral Sea region is up to now used in a mostly unsustainable way, and then look at recommendations how things could be done better.*

## **Picture of the Funding Situation**

For the first phases of the WB Aral Sea Basin Programme, from 1994 – 1997, altogether some 43 million were spent which were channelled through the World Bank and UNDP. Furthermore, there has also been a considerable amount of direct bi-lateral funding.

The first phase of the Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP) was a study phase; most of the funds have been spent on engineering studies, social assessments, agricultural studies and fees for foreign consultants. The World Bank was the coordinator of the ASBP but has recently handed over the coordinator role to IFAS, the International Fund of Aral Sea which is run by the 5 Aral Sea countries.

The implementation phase of the ASBP started in 1997. Up to 400 million USD are planned to be spent in the Aral Sea region. For the Aral Sea region of Karakalpakstan and Korezm a water project of 160 million dollars has been approved.

As far as we are informed the Netherlands has contributed 10 million Guilders so far to the ASAP.

The Dutch government money for the region is channelled through the World Bank and UNDP. The WB and UNDP need to 'sell' their services. They have to show their clients, the national governments, that if they borrow money to pay for consulting and infrastructure projects of the bank it will be 'efficient' and 'cost effective'. They want these governments to 'buy' their services. One reason for wanting this, is to assure their own job. This is of course no problem if the World Bank staff are all doing an excellent job and if it helps the receiving country to solve its problems. However, when the necessary changes are "painful" to the government in charge, this government might no longer be so interested in taking a loan with the World Bank. It might also happen that World Bank staff will sometimes propose solutions which are not too painful for the government elites but which then again don't get to the root causes.

### **World Bank activities in the Aral Sea region: Some examples**

I would like to give some examples of World Bank work in the Aral Sea. These are very concrete and small examples from our own experience at WECF, but nevertheless I believe they illustrate the limitations of the international funding efforts in the Aral Sea region.

In May and June 1998 I spent 10 days with a German TV crew doing interviews with World Bank and UNDP representatives in New York and Washington for a Documentary film. We spoke with 5 World Bank staff who had been in charge of the first phase of the ASAP.

The documentary wanted to find out a number of things:

- why has the WB recommended to let the Aral Sea die
- why has the WB not recommended a drastic reduction of water use of irrigation
- why has the WB said that there is no problem with chemical pollution
- why has the WB proposed a handpump project in a region where the groundwater is polluted

- why have 43 million been spent on studies by foreign experts during 4 years while the local population needs urgent help?

One of the interviews which we did was with the World Bank staff person in charge of public health aspects of the ASAP, Mrs. Godinho. She was sent to the region for a short mission on which a report was published. In this report the World Bank recommends to invest in sanitation improvement which will give a fast improvement in the area of children's morbidity and mortality due to diarrhea and has proven its effect in other World Bank funded projects. Unfortunately the World Bank report does not at all address the problem of chemical pollution of food and drinking water due to the defoliants and other pesticides used in the cotton monocultures. Local medical experts believe that this might well be an important cause of child morbidity and mortality. It mentions the chemical pollution problem solely with one sentence, where states that this does not seem to be a problem and referring to another study carried out by the Japanese International Development Agency (JICA).

During our interview with Mrs. Godinho I showed her her own report and the sentence which says that there is no problem with chemical pollution: "The JICA consultant surveys showed no evidence of contamination from agricultural chemicals". After which the issue is dismissed as needing no further attention. From discussions with Donor countries we understand that this approach by the World Bank is one of the reasons why donors no longer believe it is necessary to invest in any projects which deal with chemical pollution.

Cooperation Agency (JICA) consultants show that pathogenic bacteriological contamination is of most concern from a health perspective. Due to the high level of suspended solids in the piped water supplies (often at a much higher level than in hand pump and hand dug well samples) chlorination of this water is often ineffective, thus allowing the transmission of pathogenic bacteria. The hand pump survey also recorded pathogenic bacteria in samples from this source. The JICA consultant surveys showed no evidence of contamination from agricultural chemicals.

The majority of the respondents in Nukus and Urgench (90 percent in Nukus and 73

Extract of the World Bank report, page 22

We asked Mrs. Godinho how sure she was about this statement, had she done any studies, had she crosschecked the information. It appears that the World Bank did not commission any laboratory research. Nor had Mrs. Godinho been aware of the research carried out by the Stockholm Medical University, which had found very high levels of certain toxins like lindane in mothermilk and blood of women in the region and linked this potentially to the levels of child illness (Prof. Zetterstrom). Mrs. Godinho explained that the World Bank recommendation were based on laboratory research done by local Uzbek government laboratories for JICA and that this was a trustworthy source of

information. When we got a copy of the Jica study it turned out that there were no recommendations which say that the chemical contamination is not a problem. On the contrary, the JICA study states that in some cases a high level of lindane was found, that from there limited research the chemical contamination of water does not seem to be alarming, but that more research should be done in this area. Additionally the validity of the report is weakened by a major typo; it states that lindane was found in levels of several grams per liter. Pesticides like lindane are never measured in grams per liter, but rather in nanograms. If grams per liter had really been found it would mean an ecological catastrophe.

### (3) Evaluation of agricultural chemicals

Six quality indicators related to agricultural chemicals were detected, but only one sample taken in June at Kyzy-Ui, in the downstream end of the Amu Darya river exceeded the WHO guidelines ( $\gamma$ -BHC 2 g/l). Consequently, major problems are not anticipated. However, since such indicators were detected in the water, analysis and monitoring of agricultural chemicals should be continued.

Extract of the JICA report

Furthermore, when one looks at the detailed (non-aggregated) tables in the study of JICA, the tables of the 3 most effected regions (muynak, kungrad and chimbay) are missing. Despite several faxes to the organisation in Japan we have been unable to get these tables which would give a much better overview of local pollution.

When we asked Mrs. Godhino, why than the World Bank had used the data from the JICA report to say that chemical pollution was not a problem and that bacteriological water treatment and sanitary measures were the only necessary investment she responded that investments had to be cost-effective (here a video extract was shown of the interview with Mrs. Godhino, public health officer of the World Bank).

This example I believe shows how the World Bank staff thinks in banking terms. In itself there is nothing wrong with that except that the World Bank is not held responsible for when it gives bad advice. We asked Mrs. Godhino, what if you are wrong? What if bacteriological pollution is only part of the health problem and an important cause is chemical and salts pollution? Then you have spent millions on the wrong solution.

We then asked Mrs. Godhino, why would the World Bank not recommend to try to give the people in the Aral Sea region safe water, bacteriological and chemically safe. With low levels of heavy metals, dioxins, salts. It will be more complex, but it is possible.



It would mean among others changing agriculture methods to reduce contamination of drinking water with chemicals and salts (here a video extract was shown which shows how airplanes spray pesticides over the cotton fields in Central Asia, how mothers and children work in these cotton fields with babies sleeping in hammacs next to the field).

Mrs. Godinho's answer that she could have proposed a more expensive end-of-pipe solution, purification systems such as we have in the industrialized world, with membranes and active coal which take out part of the heavy metals and chemicals. Desalinization equipment also exists. However, the study of the World Bank showed that the people in the Aral Sea region are too poor to be able to afford such end-of-pipe solutions. Nothing much can be done apart from some poverty eradication projects.

This finding of the World Bank researchers has had another important effect on the local population. In a hand-pump project which has recently started in the region, the norms for allowable levels of pollutants in the drinking water have been lowered. When this was brought up at a panel discussion in the United Nations the Swedish UN Ambassador wondered if that meant that the poor do not need the same standards as the rich do.

The handpump project funded seems already to be suffering from lots of problems. Some might have been avoidable if local NGOs or scientists have not been involved. In this process. The local population is not aware of the choices made for them.

This is the example of one of the problems of channelling our aid money through the World Bank. It looks for cost-effective solutions, even if they are incomplete and possibly even worsen the situation.

The last aspect I would like to mention is the problem of channelling funding through local governments which are inefficient and lack control. It can not be expected that new government sin the NIS countries are immediately flawless. However, how much 'loss' should be acceptable for donor funds. And how can we control that donor funds do not agravate the situation by creating more disparities and corruption. Is it really better that Dutch government funds for the Aral Sea go in its majority to governments instead to NGOs. There is the example of the tree planting project of UNDP. UNDP develop a tree planting project for the town of Nukus. Reports on the Aral Sea had frequently mentioned the salt and dust storms which came from the dry bed of the former Aral Sea and swept over the surrounding towns, causing respiratory illnesses. The UNDP project was meant to grow a green buffer around the town to keep back the dust storms. Funds were then given to the local authorities to plant and care for a few thousand trees. A fraction of the funds were given to an NGO, UDASA, which was also asked to plant some trees and care for them. The trees planted by the government mostly died shortly so that finally there were almost more trees left planted by the NGO, with a fraction of the funds, than which had been planted by the local government. This is not an isolated example.

### **Conclusions and discussion points:**

- *more funding through NGOs*
- *more preconditions and control of government spending*
- *monitoring of projects by local NGOs, population*
- *information facilitation for local NGOs, population (now easier to get info via US than locally)*
- *smaller projects*
- *insist on NGO participation/observer status in body which coordinates funds IFAS*
- *insist on real water pricing policy, socially just, no exemption for the biggest wasters*
- *fund awareness raising and education of government and public on the issue of water use, pollution, health (example: pesticides used as paint, waste trucks from Chernobyl)*
- *invite NGO representative to donor meetings (if these meetings still exist)*
- *organise open dialogue session with Governments 5 countries, Donors*

# Recent impressions of an eyewitness of the situation in Karakalpakstan

*Johannes Odé, Journalist*

## **The taste of water**

It is probably the awful taste of drinking water which strikes a visitor to Uzbekistan first. The water in Tashkent, several hundreds of kilometers east of the Aral Sea, can still be considered drinkable although it tastes bad. However, the closer you get to the Aral Sea, like when one gets to the former fishing town of Muynak, Karakalpakstan, the saltier and undrinkable the water becomes. Schools often boil and filter their drinking water.

## **Irrational Irrigation**

I arrived in Uzbekistan in the middle of the cotton picking season and was shocked to see how moist the cotton fields were, even though there was absolutely no reason for irrigation in this season. A lot of the irrigation canals we saw were open and the water merely evaporating under the burning sun. In the Soviet times the majority of the water-managers in Uzbekistan were Russians. After Uzbekistan became independent they left, and along with them disappeared a lot of knowledge and expertise about the Soviet water-management system. The former age-old Central Asian water management system which was very sustainable, was destroyed under the Soviets. What is left seems a real mess, irrigation water is wasted and drinking water becomes scarce and polluted.

## **Child labour**

Although officially it is against the Uzbek law, we saw lots of children working on the cotton fields. The further we went from the capital, the more children we saw. Cotton picking in Uzbekistan is still very much labour intensive and a lot of the picking is done by hand. School children from the age of 14 till 16, spend 4 to 6 weeks every year on the cotton fields, picking for 8 hours per day on school-days. Most of the time the work is being done bare-handed and without protective clothing. During the picking season the harvesters are directly exposed to pesticides and defoliants. The harvesters are not removed from the fields when the defoliants are sprayed. Cotton-workers often use the (polluted) water from the irrigation canals to make tea or soup for lunch. The fields are too large to walk back to a pump or tap during lunch break. Most people know very little about the health effects of defoliants as criticism of anything having to do with the countries cotton economy is still tabu.

# Discussion

**Q:** Mr. Tsaruk, what should be done urgently where our government can assist?

**A:** One of the things which should be started immediately is to re-start monitoring the Aral Sea once or twice a year. Since a few years the governmental meteorological stations have only been ESTIMATING the sea level based on satellite photos.

**Current legislation does not promote public society**

Furthermore, the donor countries should use their position to pressure all 5 Central Asian governments to effectively work together. Best would be to include also cooperation with Afganistan, with whatever group which uses the Army Darya river water, so probably with both the Taliban as the opposition army in the North. Afganistan is rushing ahead with building irrigation channels and water reservoirs, with technical aid from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Also, it would be important to involve local scientists and NGOs more in the decision making process. Decisions are taken far away from local interests and people who are most effected. Current legislation in our region does not promote public society but rather prevents it. That's our legacy from the Soviet period where any non-governmental initiative was seen as anti-governmental. Unfortunately the World Bank decided to ask weaker Uzbek NGOs to come to project consultations, but not the ones which were known to be critical. What is needed is a network of NGOs in all five Aral Sea basin countries who can independently monitor the situation and the effects of international donor projects.

**Q:** Mr. Tsaruk, from your presentation do I understand correctly that there is no chance to restore the Aral Sea?

**NGOs want to restore the Aral Sea, the World Bank wants to replace it**

**A:** There is no ability in the current aid programmes to restore the Aral Sea. What the current programmes do is to fight the symptoms, not the root causes. What the World Bank and Central Asian governments are now aiming at is to 'replace the Aral Sea', by creating some wet-land areas where commercial fishing is possible. However, the Central Asian NGOs believe this is highly dangerous and that restoring the Aral Sea is necessary and possible, with a greater effort of water recycling, water pricing etc. Almost 90% of the river water is 'wasted' through inefficiency.

It was the proposal of the World Bank to let the Aral Sea die. They indicated the Central Asian governments that either they stop sinking funds into what they believe a hopeless restoration effort, or there will be no more money. So the 'let-die' decision was certainly not a self-decided decision of the Aral Sea basin countries. In Russia we have an idiom which says that "he who has the money, orders the music".

The current donor projects are also too large and expensive, and therefore their cost-efficiency is low. It would be better to have a greater number of small projects under a common strategy 'umbrella'. Especially more self-help and tool-providing programmes are needed, but that also needs a change in legislation.

***The cotton  
production target  
is stronger than  
the anti-child  
labour legislation***

**Q:** Mr. Tsaruk, I've worked for a consultant company, IVACO, in the Aral Sea region, and I agree that it seems that legislation in Uzbekistan hampers self-help and income-generation. For example, where we worked local fishermen wanted to fish but were prevented from doing so because they did not have the a licence.

**A:** That is true, they need a permit. But that is normal, in the Netherlands you also need a fishing licence. The problem is that they have no money to pay for getting such a licence.

**Q:** Mr. Tsaruk, from my experience of working on World Bank problems with NGOs at Both Ends, I believe that we should not overestimate ourselves and believe that we can bring the World Bank to give grants to NGOs. Our role as NGOs in the Netherlands is to get support for strenghtening such an NGO network in the region. If a stronger network of NGOs is needed in the Area than that should be done through funding from organisations like Novib and Hivos. However, we can do more to have NGO standpoints taken into account by the World Bank.

**A:** That is a delicate issue. We have gone a few times to the World Bank office in Tashkent but the only response we got was "we'll communicate your proposal to the WB office in Washington D.C." and not heard from them thereafter.

**Q:** Mr. Tsaruk, is the child labour situation really that serious?

**A:** Officially, by law, it is forbidden to have children work in the cotton fields. But there is another rule, which says that local authorities have to produce the planned amount of cotton, and if they don't the local authority had will probably be fired. Local authorities will not get fired for illigal child labour. The cotton production target is stronger than the anti-child labour legislation. If you drive through the cotton fields in a car during harvest time you will be stopped by the local police and will be ordered to pick three bags of cotton, and if you can not show any identification you will be kept 3 days to work in the fields.

**Q: Mr. Tsaruk, is there still areal spraying of DDT?**

**A: Officially, by law, DDT and other dangerous pesticides are now forbidden, but they are still used nevertheless as there are old stocks. The same is true for agricultural aviation, arial spraying is now forbidden but still done. And I can give many more examples, when people can earn or save money anything will go. We once went through our town of Nukus measuring radioactivity levels, not expecting to find much. And suddenly we hit upon a terrific level of radioactivity. It turned out that it was an old truck which had been brought from a nulcear site far away. Of course it is illigal to take any of the 'left-over' rubbish at that disused site, but unfortunately there is no control and little awareness.**

# Recommendations to the Dutch Government

## **Recommendations resulting from the workshop "Sustainable Water for the Aral Sea Region" At WECF, Utrecht 5 February 1999 for a sustainable international co-operation policy in the Aral Sea region**

Dutch international co-operation policy in the Aral Sea region is predominantly structured via the Aral Sea Basin Programme, initiated by the World Bank. The Dutch government is one of the major donors to the Aral Sea Basin Program that has been set up to find solutions to the Aral Sea crisis. It is laudable of the Dutch Government to want to help with a problem of such a large dimension and complexity. It is important that this support will be continued. However, the undersigned NGOs have some comments on the Dutch international co-operation policy in Central Asia and would like to make the following recommendations to insure that the Dutch funding becomes more sustainable.

The International Co-operation policy of the Dutch government regarding the Aral Sea crisis should focus on the root causes of the Aral Sea Crisis. The undersigned NGOs fear that the Aral Sea Basin Programme addresses only the effects (symptoms) of the Aral Sea Crisis and proposes short-term semi-solutions.

Focal areas are these areas that address the root causes of the Aral Sea crisis:

- Infrastructure and a legislative framework to ensure substantial water savings, first of all in agricultural use
- A strategy for substantial conversion of cotton and rice to less water and chemical intensive crops
- A legislative, economical and technical framework to replace cotton by other crops (horticulture, pasture areas) that are less water consuming and improve the populations health and local economy
- Better governance by creating a control mechanism on government spending of aid money
- Training for government employees on the link between environment and health
- Public awareness on the causes and results of the Aral Sea Crisis
- Liberalisation of the strict currency, banking and export regulations which make development of private economic activity impossible.
- Reforestation in mountains and protection and restoration of toughai forests

- As a major donor the Dutch government should advise to review the decision of the 5 basin countries to give up the aim of stabilising the Aral Sea. The consequences of a full-scale drying out of the Aral Sea are too little understood. Already climate changes are great. The long term economic effects could be far more expensive than the 'savings' obtained from adopting this short term strategy.

- The Dutch government should consider the possibilities of Afghanistan involvement into the discussions. Afghanistan uses about 10% of the water of the Amu Darya, which is important for the water level of the Aral Sea.

- The Dutch government should make its funding of programs in the Aral Sea region conditional on the introduction of basic legislation necessary to promote sustainable development and it should claim stronger control on the spending of funds by the recipient governments.

- The Dutch government should support UN efforts to label the Aral Sea region as an ecological disaster zone and to create a fund for urgent humanitarian needs. Clean and sufficient food, drinking water, medical care and medicines could be supplied through such fund. The United Nations have possibilities to develop instruments to avoid the devastation of one region's livelihoods by the pollution of others. The UN has a role here similar to its peace mediation task.

- The Dutch government should insist with IFAS that as part of the programs on Agricultural Water Improvement and Health and Sanitation, a project should be set up to create local capacity with independent NGOs to regularly monitor the environmental situation and to get access to all relevant data from governments and international research centres. So far, it has been difficult to obtain reliable data from government sources.

- The Dutch government should insist with IFAS that water pricing should be introduced for agricultural and industrial use together with a system of financial advantages for investments in water saving equipment (the carrot and stick approach). For home consumption of up to a certain number of liters per person a day, water should be free. Access to safe water is a basic human right.

- The Dutch government should insist with IFAS that the environmental health effects of chemical pollutants on the local population in the Aral Sea Crisis area are addressed. This issue has so far been almost entirely neglected.

- The Dutch government should reconsider its contribution to ineffective large scale Aral Sea programmes. Funds should also be made available to allow more effective small scale sustainable community projects and improvement of the health and environment conditions in the most affected regions of the Aral Sea basin. Such projects should help



to analyse and set up practical solutions to reduce the exposure of the population to pollutants. At the same time support should be given to development of small scale sustainable economic activities at local level for improving their income generating capacity from sustainable activities.

- The Dutch government should insist with IFAS that information about the Aral Sea Basin project and in general about the environment and health situation in the country should be easy accessible to the population. So far for NGOs in the region it has been easier to obtain information about this from the US or Europe than in their own countries.

- The Dutch government should propose that NGO representative from the region should get observer status with the co-ordinating body, IFAS.

- The Dutch government should propose that a yearly open dialogue session is organised which brings together all parties working in the Aral Sea region, the governments, the donor countries, the implementing agencies and NGOs. This could also be organised on the Dutch level with all parties involved working from the Netherlands.

- The Dutch government should propose to invite NGO representatives to donor co-ordination meetings (if these still exist)

- The Dutch government should propose to create an education and awareness raising program on the links between health and environment and the effects of and solutions for the Aral Sea basin crisis. This program should have two axes, one should be addressed at government representatives of the 5 countries and one on the general population.

# ANNEX 1

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# **ANNEX 2**

## **Workshop programme**



**WECF**

Women in Europe for a Common Future

## PROGRAMME

### WORKSHOP "SUSTAINABLE WATER FOR THE ARAL SEA AREA" Dutch development policy in Central Asia

Date: Friday February 5  
Time: 13.00 till 17.30  
Place: Oude Gracht 312, Utrecht

13.00 - 13.15 Introduction Marie Kranendonk Schwartz, chair WECF.

13.15 – 13.45 *International aid to the Aral Sea region, an NGO analysis* Mr. Oleg Tsaruk, director of the Central Asia office of Eurasia Law and Environment Partnership, representative of RIOD, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

13.45 – 14.05 *Dutch international co-operation policy in Central Asia*, Mr. Harry van Schooten, Directorate General International Cooperation, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

14.05 – 14.25 Tea Break

14.25 – 14.50 *Do the current aid programmes address the real problems of the Aral Sea crisis?* Sascha Gabizon, WECF.

14.50 – 15.15 *Recent impressions of an eyewitness of the situation in Karakalpakstan*, Johannes Odé, journalist.

15.15 – 16.30 Discussion

16.30 – 17.30 Informal reception

the workshop is sponsored by the NCDO

# **ANNEX 3**

## **Publication in Prospekt**

# Duurzaam water voor Karakalpakstan nog lang niet in zicht

In Centraal-Azië is een milieuramp gaande die in het Westen tot de verbeelding spreekt. Lang voordat de rivieren Amoedarja en Syrdarja de monding aan het Aralmeer bereiken is bijna al hun water reeds gebruikt voor de waterverslindende katoenbouw waar de economieën van Oezbekistan en – in mindere mate – Toerkmenistan op draaien. Het Aralmeer is daardoor in amper twee generaties gereduceerd tot 25 procent van zijn oorspronkelijke volume en de helft van zijn oorspronkelijke oppervlakte.

door Greetje van der Wert

Sinds het uiteenvallen van de Sovjet-Unie hebben ongeveer 400 buitenlandse commissies en delegaties het Aralmeer bezocht. Honderden artikelen, rapporten, studies en conferenties zijn er aan gewijd. Duizenden foto's van roestende vissersschepen op het zand zijn de wereld over gegaan. Maar voor de 35 miljoen mensen die lijden onder de gevolgen van de Aralcrisis is de situatie intussen nauwelijks verbeterd, eerder nog slechter geworden.

De Aralcrisis betreft meer dan alleen het opdrogen van het Aralmeer. Het klimaat in de regio is continenter geworden (waardoor het groeiseizoen met bijna een maand is bekort), er is een enorm verlies van biodiversiteit, en de visserij en aanverwante takken van industrie gingen te gronde. Naar schatting 40.000 tot 60.000 mensen verloren hun middelen van bestaan. Het zwaarst getroffen is de semi-autonome Oezbeekse deelrepubliek Karakalpakstan, een gebied vier maal zo groot als Nederland rond de zuidelijke oevers van het Aralmeer.

Een ander aspect van de Aralcrisis is de teloorgang van landbouwgronden door verzilting. Als gevolg van de overvloedige irrigatie worden de zouten die van nature in de bodem voorkomen los gespoeld en naar de oppervlakte gebracht. Om verzilte gronden opnieuw geschikt te maken voor de landbouw dienen deze opnieuw geïrrigeerd te worden. Verzilting in het ene deel van Oezbekistan gaat samen met woestijnvorming in een ander deel. Door het opdrogen van het Aralmeer werd een oppervlakte van 34.000 km<sup>2</sup> zeebodem blootgelegd. Harde droge woestijnwinden blazen per jaar 75 tot honderd miljoen ton zout zand de atmosfeer in. Weidegronden, natuurlijke vegetatie en landbouwgewassen gaan er door verloren.

Bij de bevolking van Karakalpakstan leidt het zout in de lucht tot aandoeningen aan de luchtwegen. Helaas is dit niet het enige probleem waar de Karakalpakken mee kampen. Het drinkwater in de regio rond het Aralmeer is

schaars en bijzonder slecht van kwaliteit. Zowel het oppervlaktewater als het grondwater zijn door de landbouw zwaar vervuild met chemicaliën, zouten en zware metalen. De levensverwachting van de mensen die in de onmiddellijke nabijheid van het Aralmeer wonen is gedaald tot onder de 40 jaar. De armoede is schrikbarend. Een studie uit 1996 van de Wereldbank wees uit dat in Karakalpakstan 93 tot 98 procent van het gezinsinkomen aan voedsel besteed wordt.

## Na de onafhankelijkheid

Het was Stalins wens dat de Sovjet-Unie zelfvoorzienend zou zijn in de productie van katoen. In de jaren dertig werd de katoenbouw als monocultuur in Oezbekistan afgedwongen. Monocultuur was bovendien een middel om de republiek - die zich tot in de jaren dertig hevig verzet had tegen de komst van de sovjetmacht - onder de duim te houden. In ruil voor katoen kreeg Oezbekistan voedsel en kleding (van katoen!) uit andere delen van de Sovjet-Unie.

Toch verklaart het sovjetsysteem van geforceerde economische afhankelijkheid niet het hele probleem van het opdrogen van het Aralmeer. Acht jaar na de onafhankelijkheid is het landbouwbeleid van Oezbekistan nog hetzelfde als ten tijde van de planeconomie. Van privatisering van de landbouw is geen sprake. Van terugdringen van de monocultuur van katoen al evenmin. De export van katoen is goed voor 60 procent van de buitenlandse deviezen van Oezbekistan. Na de sovjetmachthebbers is nu ook de Oezbeekse overheid bereid gebleken het Aralmeer en de bevolking van Karakalpakstan op te offeren aan 'het witte goud'. In zekere zin bracht de opoffering van het Aralmeer nog een voordeel met zich mee: sinds een aantal jaren bieden internationale hulporganisaties voor miljoenen dollars aan technische en financiële hulp.

Op 4 januari 1993 staken de leiders van de vijf Centraal-Aziatische staten voor het eerst de koppen bij elkaar om de praten over de Aralcrisis. Zij richtten gezamenlijk het IFAS, het Internationaal Fonds voor de Redding van het Aralmeer op. Het initiatief voor het Fonds werd genomen door de president van Kazachstan Noelsoeltan Nazarbajev. Het voorzitterschap rouleert en is op dit moment in handen van de Oezbeekse president Islam Karimov. Na 1993 volgden nog een aantal jaarlijkse topontmoetingen, waarbij voornamelijk werd gepraat.

Het belangrijkste resultaat van het IFAS tot nu toe is wellicht het feit dat de vijf Centraal-Aziatische staten een eigen organisatie van de grond tilden en dat deze de aandacht wist te trekken van internationale organisaties als de VN, de EU en de Wereldbank. Die doen alleen zaken met vertegenwoordigers van de betreffende landen die perma-

ment bevoegd zijn om zelfstandig te handelen en besluiten te nemen, en daar bovendien zelf de verantwoording voor dragen. Dat wil zeggen dat de vijf landen gedwongen werden om juist die kwaliteiten naar voren te brengen die in de sovjetperiode consequent ontmoedigd werden en waardoor een catastrofe als de Aralcrisis kon ontstaan.

#### Aralmeerprogramma

In september 1992 bezocht een delegatie van de Wereldbank voor het eerst het Aralmeer. Een jaar later lanceerde de bank een plan dat beoogde het niveau van het Aralmeer te stabiliseren op het toenmalige niveau van 35 meter diepte. In januari 1994 werd de wereld verrast met *Het Aralmeerprogramma*, dat gezamenlijk door de Wereldbank en het IFAS was opgesteld. De belangrijkste doelstellingen waren: stabilisering van het milieu in de regio rond het Aralmeer; rehabilitatie van het rampgebied in de directe omgeving; verbetering van het waterbeheer; opbouw van regionale organen voor de planning en implementatie van bovenstaande doelen. Het was de eerste keer dat de vijf Centraal-Aziatische staten onafhankelijk van Moskou een internationale samenwerking waren aangegaan. Dit gaf aanleiding tot veel optimisme bij de betrokkenen maar critici wezen er toen al op dat nergens sprake was van *het herstel* van het Aralmeer.

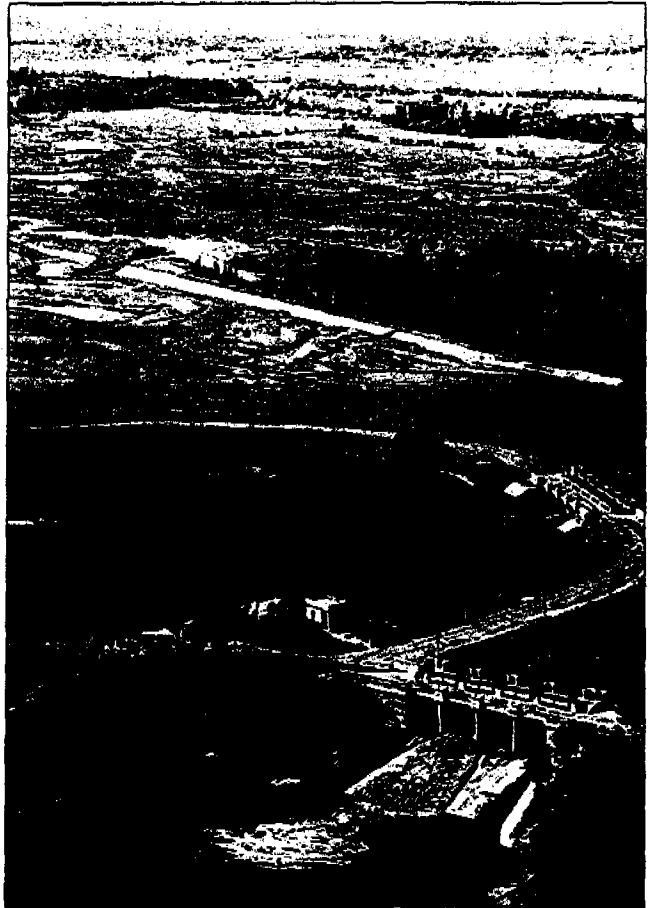
Het Aralmeerprogramma was verdeeld in drie fases, te beginnen met een voorbereidende fase (1994-1997) bestemd voor onderzoek naar de uitvoerbaarheid ervan. Op de Aralmeer-conferentie van juni 1994 in Parijs besloten een aantal donorlanden 30 miljoen dollar voor de financiering van dit vooronderzoek (totale kosten: 80 miljoen dollar) via de Wereldbank te structureren. De Europese Unie schonk 5,5 miljoen dollar voor technische hulp.

De implementatie van het Aralmeerprogramma startte in 1997. De geschatte kosten hiervan (400 miljoen dollar) zullen eveneens via de Wereldbank door donorlanden betaald worden. Tot die landen behoren de Verenigde Staten, Japan, Koeweit, Duitsland, Israël en Nederland. Nederland heeft via de Wereldbank een bedrag van tien miljoen dollar toegezegd, voornamelijk ten behoeve van het herstel van de *wetlands* in Karakalpakstan. Het geld is afkomstig van het Ministerie van VROM en zal dus altijd het milieu als doel hebben en niet direct de gezondheid van de Karakalpakken. Ook andere donorlanden hebben dit 'probleem'. Het verklaart voor een deel waarom er tot nu toe zo weinig humanitaire hulp werd verleend.

In februari 1997 kwamen de vijf Centraal-Aziatische staatshoofden bijeen in de Kazachse hoofdstad Almaty. Tijdens deze topontmoeting spraken zij af dat, ondanks de economische problemen waarmee iedere lidstaat kampt, de noodzaak van 'ecologische veiligheid in het bassin van het Aralmeer' dermate dringend is dat zij jaarlijks 0,3 procent van het staatsbudget in de kas van het IFAS zullen storten. "Maar", schreef de *Kazachstanskaja Pravda* na afloop van de topontmoeting, "het werk van het IFAS wordt bemoeilijkt door de steeds slechter wordende situatie rond het meer zelf. Het zeeniveau daalt nog ieder jaar. Voor miljoenen mensen ter plaatse wordt de extreem slechte ecologische situatie voorlopig niet beter."

In de herfst van 1997 kwamen de vijf staatshoof-

den nogmaals bijeen. In navolging van aanbevelingen door de Wereldbank werd toen besloten om de oorspronkelijke doelstelling ('stabilisering van het Aralmeer op het niveau van 1990') los te laten. Stabilisering zou te grote economische offers vragen. Katoen is nog steeds de belangrijkste bron van inkomsten voor Oezbekistan, het zuiden van Kazachstan en Toerkmenistan, en deze landen waren niet in staat - en misschien ook wel niet bereid - om op korte termijn economische hervormingen door te voeren. Met andere woorden: het IFAS en de Wereldbank hadden het Aralmeer opgegeven. Het besluit was genomen zonder enige inspraak van de bevolking in de getroffen regio. Bovendien was er geen onderzoek gedaan naar de gevolgen op lange termijn van het volledig opdrogen van het



*De ontginning van de 'maagdelijke gronden' hebben tot grote ingrepen in het landschap geleid.*

Aralmeer. Er is een gerede kans dat de economische kosten van het verdwijnen van het meer vele malen hoger zullen uitvallen dan de besparing die dit besluit op de korte termijn oplevert.

#### Kritiek op de Wereldbank

De centrale rol die de Wereldbank speelt als coördinator van praktisch alle internationale hulp voor het bestrijden van de Aralcrisis is niet onomstreden. De Wereldbank verstrekt haar leningen in nauwe samenwerking met het IFAS. Hierdoor bestaat het gevaar dat de autoritaire regimes van de Centraal-Aziatische republieken versterkt worden ten koste van het democratiseringproces. De bevolking van Centraal-Azië heeft geen enkele invloed op de wijze waarop het geld besteed wordt. Dit geldt overigens ook voor



bevolking in de donorlanden. Daar staat bovendien het optreden van het IMF in Rusland, waar grote sommen geld zomaar kwijtraakten, nog vers in het geheugen.

Het grootste gevaar van structurering van financiële hulp via de Wereldbank is dat gemakkelijk vergeten wordt dat de Wereldbank ondanks alle goede bedoelingen gewoon een *bank* is die producten verkoopt aan de nationale regeringen. Omdat de bank graag wil verkopen zal zij geneigd zijn oplossingen aan te dragen die voor de nationale regeringen niet al te pijnlijk zijn. In dit licht dient ook het gemak waarmee de Wereldbank 'stabilisering van het Aralmeer' als doelstelling uit het programma schrapte gezien te worden.

De Wereldbank wil geld uitlenen voor investerin-



Jongen uit Karakalpakstan verkoopt op straat thee. Drinkwater blijft een schaars produkt, FOTO: GVDW

gen, bij voorkeur in concrete projecten met een zeker economisch rendement, zoals de aanleg van nieuwe dammen en zuiveringsinstallaties, het herstel van de wetlands (visgronden) en agrarische programma's die de opbrengsten van de katoenvelden verhogen. Helaas zijn dit vaak oplossingen 'aan het einde van de pijplijn', die de oorzaak van de Aralcrisis niet structureel aanpakken. Met andere woorden, de hulp die de Wereldbank biedt is niet altijd duurzaam. Ongeveer negentig procent van het water uit de Amoedarja en Syrdarja wordt gebruikt voor irrigatie van de landbouw. Van dat water wordt slechts een op de twintig liter effectief gebruikt. Een kleine investering in het waterbeheer is dan veel effectiever dan de zoveelste investering in het irrigatiestelsel.

Men kan zich afvragen waarom de Wereldbank

bepert van het watergebruik door de landbouw niet als voorwaarde stelt voor het verstrekken van leningen. De Wereldbank zou er bovendien op kunnen aandringen dat rationeel gebruik van het water een wettelijke basis krijgt (met sancties op verspilling) en dat het water een prijs krijgt die correspondeert met het gebruik ervan. Door het uitblijven van dergelijke maatregelen gaat voor de bevolking van Karakalpakstan veel kostbare tijd verloren.

De Karakalpakken hebben nog nauwelijks profijt gehad van de miljoenen dollars aan buitenlandse hulp die sinds 1992 verstrekt zijn. Het ontbreekt de Karakalpakken nog steeds aan de meest elementaire voorwaarden voor een menswaardig bestaan: schoon drinkwater en medische hulp. In antwoord op deze kritiek besteedde de Wereldbank niet lang geleden twee miljoen dollar aan de leniging van de allerergste nood: een aantal ambulances, watertankwagens en waterzuiveringsinstallaties en medisch instrumentarium. Dat was de eerste concrete steun die de plaatselijke bevolking kreeg.

Daar komt bij dat nog steeds geen onderzoek gedaan is naar een mogelijk verband tussen de chemische vervuiling door de landbouw en de gezondheidsklachten van de inwoners van Karakalpakstan.

Een fundamenteel punt van kritiek op de rol van de Wereldbank in Oezbekistan is dat zij weinig aandacht heeft voor alternatieven voor de katoenbouw. Een waterverslindend gewas als katoen hoort eigenlijk niet thuis in Oezbekistan, dat voor 65 procent uit woestijn en semiwoestijn bestaat. Het klimaat en de bodemgesteldheid van Oezbekistan zijn daarentegen uitstekend geschikt voor vee- teelt. De landbouw zou beter afgestemd zijn op de natuurlijke condities als overgeschakeld wordt op de veel kleinschaliger tuinbouw (groenten, fruit en bloemen). Maar dat zou betekenen dat de collectieve landbouw wordt losgelaten en zover is de Oezbeekse overheid nog lang niet.

De Wereldbank zou intussen kunnen helpen bij het scheppen van de juridische, economische en technische voorwaarden die alternatieven voor de katoenteelt mogelijk maken, bijvoorbeeld door kredieten voor fabrieken die machines voor kleinschalige landbouw willen produceren, door een goed verzekeringsstelsel en wettelijke bescherming van privé-eigendom. Kortom: die voorwaarden die de bevolking in staat stellen zelfstandig een inkomen te verwerven.

#### NGO's

Hier ligt ook een taak voor de lokale NGO's. Oleg Tsaruk is zoöloog en directeur van de afdeling Centraal-Azië van de NGO *Law and Environment Eurasia Partnership*, een Amerikaans-Aziatische samenwerking op het gebied van milieuwetgeving in Centraal-Azië. Tsaruk werkt vanuit Tasjkent aan de wettelijke versterking van plaatselijke onafhankelijke milieugroepen. "Het valt niet mee", zegt hij "om in Oezbekistan NGO's van de grond te krijgen. De bevolking is generaties lang geconditioneerd om juist geen initiatieven te nemen en de overheid is niet gewend aan democratische controle. Toch zijn de NGO's dikwijls de enige organisaties waar de bevolking vertrouwen in heeft".

Om de lokale NGO's te versterken zou de Wereldbank veel meer met hen moeten samenwerken. Op dit moment besteedt zij slechts een fractie van haar midde



len (0,25 procent) via lokale NGO's. "De autoriteiten kunnen op den duur niet om de NGO's heen als ze merken dat deze door de internationale hulporganisaties als serieuze partners worden beschouwd. Daarom moeten vertegenwoordigers van de NGO's ook betrokken worden in het besluitvormingsproces over het Aralmeer", aldus Tsaruk.

Oleg Tsaruk was in Nederland op uitnodiging van het WECF in Utrecht (*Women in Europe for a Common Future*) dat zich inzet voor hulp aan vrouwen en kinderen in ecologische rampgebieden in de voormalige Sovjet-Unie. WECF helpt lokale NGO's op het gebied van volksgezondheid en milieu met, bijvoorbeeld, het werven van fondsen en het doordringen tot internationale platforms als de Verenigde Naties.

Eén van de lokale NGO's die door WECF gesteund worden is *Perzent*, Centrum voor Reproductieve Gezondheid en Milieu, in Noekoes, de hoofdstad van Karakalpakstan. *Perzent* werd in 1992 opgericht met het doel vrouwen in de Aralregio voorlichting te geven over de gevolgen van de Aralcrisis op hun reproductieve gezondheid en de gezondheid van hun kinderen (*Perzent* betekent 'nageslacht'). Daarnaast verricht het centrum onderzoek naar het verband tussen milieuvervuiling en volksgezondheid en biedt het ondersteuning aan plaatselijke zelfhulp-projecten. Een voorbeeld hiervan is een kleinschalig landbouwproject in Tsjimbej, in de directe omgeving van het Aralmeer, dat de lokale bevolking in staat stelt om biologische groente en fruit te verbouwen.

Directeur en oprichtster van *Perzent* is de gynaecologe Oral Atanijazova. Zij werd 41 jaar geleden in Moejnak geboren en zwom als kind in het water van het Aralmeer. Atanijazova heeft van dichtbij meegemaakt hoe de gezondheid van de vrouwen en kinderen in Karakalpakstan geruïneerd werd door het opdrogen van het Aralmeer en de vervuiling van het milieu met zware metalen, zouten en pesticiden.

Tien jaar lang, van 1982 tot 1992, volgde zij de gezondheid van 5000 vrouwen in de vruchtbare leeftijd. In die periode nam het aantal gevallen van kanker, huidziekten en lever- en nierziekten sterk toe. Zij vond hoge doses kwik, lood en cadmium in het bloed van de onderzochte vrouwen en constateerde veel afwijkingen aan het immuunsysteem. Veel aandoeningen hebben betrekking op de reproductieve gezondheid (bloedingen, miskramen, complicaties). Sterfte door aan zwangerschap gerelateerde aandoeningen is in Karakalpakstan veel hoger dan elders. Bijna alle vrouwen en kinderen lijden aan ernstige bloedarmoede. (De mannen zijn niet onderzocht.) Bovendien constateerde zij een toename van het aantal aangeboren afwijkingen en een extreem hoge kindersterfte.

Bij *Perzent* zijn 58 plaatselijke organisaties aangesloten. De Oezbeekse autoriteiten gedogen hun activiteiten maar traineren keer op keer het verstrekken van uitreisvisa aan mensen als Atanijazova, die internationaal zeer actief zijn om aandacht te vragen voor de gezondheidsproblemen van de bevolking van Karakalpakstan. Op haar agenda staan de Europese Conferentie over Milieu en Gezondheid in Londen en het Internationaal Water Forum in Den Haag volgend jaar. Bij beide gelegenheden zal de Aralcrisis ongetwijfeld weer uitgebreid aandacht krijgen.

In 1998, vijf jaar na de oprichting van het IFAS, ging de eerste fase van het Aralmeerprogramma daadwerkelijk van start. Voor deze fase heeft Nederland voorlopig een bedrag van 2,25 miljoen dollar toegezegd, bestemd voor training en opleiding, de verbetering van het waterbeheer en voor het herstel van de *wetlands*. De tweede fase van het Aralmeerprogramma wordt op dit moment door het IFAS en de Wereldbank voorbereid. Het is de bedoeling dat deze tweede fase over enkele jaren daadwerkelijk zal leiden tot duurzaam water voor Karakalpakstan.

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