

Strengthening cooperation in the field of combating desertification and land degradation in Central Asia

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Environmental protection and integrated natural resources management in drought-prone and salt-affected agriculture production landscapes are key factors for socio-economic development and political stability of Central Asia. Action in the environmental field in the region can also bring significant economic and social benefits in terms of poverty reduction and the attainment of some of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The land degradation challenge is seen as one of the main transboundary issues affecting Central Asian ecosystems that know no borders. According to FAO, nearly 13% of pasture area in the region are degraded. No one government can face the challenge alone; it must be a concerted effort. Due to common legacy in agricultural practices, the threads in land management in five republics are still comparable to a great extent. Despite the growing differences in agricultural land tenure and market conditions the technical on-the-field solutions and approaches could be exchangeable among the countries. Thus, coordination and collaboration across the Central Asia are important in facing land degradation and drought for lesson-learning and information-sharing.

Currently, national governments of Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and international agencies are making substantial contributions to land degradation prevention through regional and national programs. However, land degradation is a growing threat and it is expected that the way forward will require more instead of less funding.

The current study reviews experience of Central Asian countries with policies and institutions for managing natural resources for agriculture, highlights options for improvement, and suggest areas where stakeholders – countries, national, regional and international agencies, the private sector – can work together to develop pathways to improved performance. Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia is one of the existing platforms that can be used for regional collaboration, exchange of knowledge and share information on land degradation in the region.

Despite certain achievements obtained during the implementation of international programs to combat desertification and land degradation in Central Asia, there is a need to further strengthen cooperation among countries of the region and among donors as well. This applies, above all, to increasing attention of countries to such programs and harmonization of donor's common goals.