



Land Degradation and Desertification in Central Asia: Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management

Analysis of the current state and recommendation for the future

A final report for the Swiss GEF Council Member



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1. Acronyms

ACG	Advisory and Coordination Groups in CACILM (previously National Coordination Councils)
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CACILM	Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management
CAREWIB	Central Asia water resource information system
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFAS	International Foundation for Saving the Aral Sea
FAO	United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation
FOEN	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
GTZ	German Technical Assistance (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit)
MSEC	Multi-country CACILM secretariat (based in Bishkek)
NSEC	National Secretariats
NPF	National Programming Framework
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SLM	Sustainable land management
UNCBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
UNCCD	United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WB	World Bank

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily express the views of CACILM partners or the Swiss GEF Council Member. The review is not intended to replace the regular or special evaluations, reviews and assessments by the GEF, its implementing agencies or other players.

2. Background

Serious land degradation problems prompted all Central Asian countries to ratify the UN Convention on Desertification, develop national action plans (NAPs) to combat this problem and seek resources for NAPs implementation. Difficulties in implementing action plans and fulfilling international obligations under UNCCD led to the formation of a regional initiative.

The CACILM – Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management – is a partnership between Central Asian countries and international donor community that started in 2006 to combat land degradation and improve rural livelihoods in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. CACILM was originally conceived as a multi-country framework 10-year (2006-2016) programme of activities and a follow-up of the Country Pilot Partnership promoted by the GEF-3 Operational Program-15 and the UNCCD Strategic Partnership.

Given the importance of land degradation issue in Central Asia, the GEF focal points and their representatives have, on several occasions, underlined the need in an independent overview of the CACILM activities, outputs and impacts on the ground and requested the GEF Constituency to facilitate information exchange and promote GEF funding prospects.

In June 2010, FOEN (Swiss Federal Office for the Environment) on behalf of Swiss constituency for Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan in the Global Environment Facility has requested *Zoï Environment Network*, Swiss non-profit civil society environmental organization associated with the Constituency as an observer to look into CACILM activities, interactions, awareness of relevant players, progress and trends vis-à-vis pledged funding and (changing) objectives.

The purpose of this assessment is to provide information and recommendations for the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment and other members of the GEF Constituency group for consideration in the second phase of the CACILM partnership. The overall objective is to assess the extent to which the first phase of the partnership has contributed to reduction of combating land degradation and improving rural livelihoods and to identify the emerging trends and opportunities for CACILM promotion as an example of the regional GEF multi-purpose dynamic partnership.

Under this assignment in the period June-October 2010, *Zoï Environment Network* (Mr. Otto Simonett and Mr. Viktor Novikov) interviewed over twenty local and international stakeholders by phone, email and in person, reviewed strategic decisions and the GEF project documents and reports, analyzed trends and interactions inside and outside CACILM, the role of the GEF and implementing agencies, management structures and CACILM achievements and end-users.

3. CACILM partnership overview

3.1. Goals, evolution and focus areas

The total funding originally envisaged for the CACILM implementation was equal to more than US\$1,300 million (US\$1.3 billion), including US\$100 million of the GEF financing.

The original goal of CACILM is to restore, maintain, and enhance the productive functions of land in Central Asia, leading to improved economic and social well-being of those who depend on these resources while preserving the ecological functions of the land.

CACILM implementation was divided into three phases:

Phase-1 (Inception)¹: July 2006 - December 2008;

Phase-2 (Implementation): January 2009 (2010) - December 2013 (2014);

Phase-3 (Consolidation): January 2014 - June 2016.

Originally, the national priority areas set for CACILM envisaged project activities in the following themes:

¹ Upon request of the CACILM Multi-country secretariat, the CACILM Phase-1 was extended till 31 December 2009. As of June 2010, the effective start of CACILM Phase-2 had been still postponed due to GEF funding/donor co-financing uncertainties and institutional changes in some countries

- capacity building for integrated land-use planning and management
- sustainable irrigated agriculture
- sustainable forest and woodland management
- sustainable pastureland management
- protected area management and biodiversity conservation
- remediation of the Aral Sea affected zone (mainly Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan)

It can be recalled that the CACILM Phase-1 (Inception) scope of activities included:

- capacity building for key institutions responsible for planning and implementing land management interventions;
- initiation of measures to strengthen the policy, legislative, and institutional frameworks in each country to create conditions conducive for sustainable land management;
- design, development, and operation of information systems for evaluation of changes in land degradation;
- establishment of land degradation baselines, using specific land degradation indicators;
- sustainable land management research program, with initiation of research activities;
- initiation of specific land management improvements through demonstration and pilot projects;
- establishment of CACILM coordination and management units, finance, administration and project monitoring

CACILM Phase-2 (Implementation) was intended to focus on investments in sustainable land management:

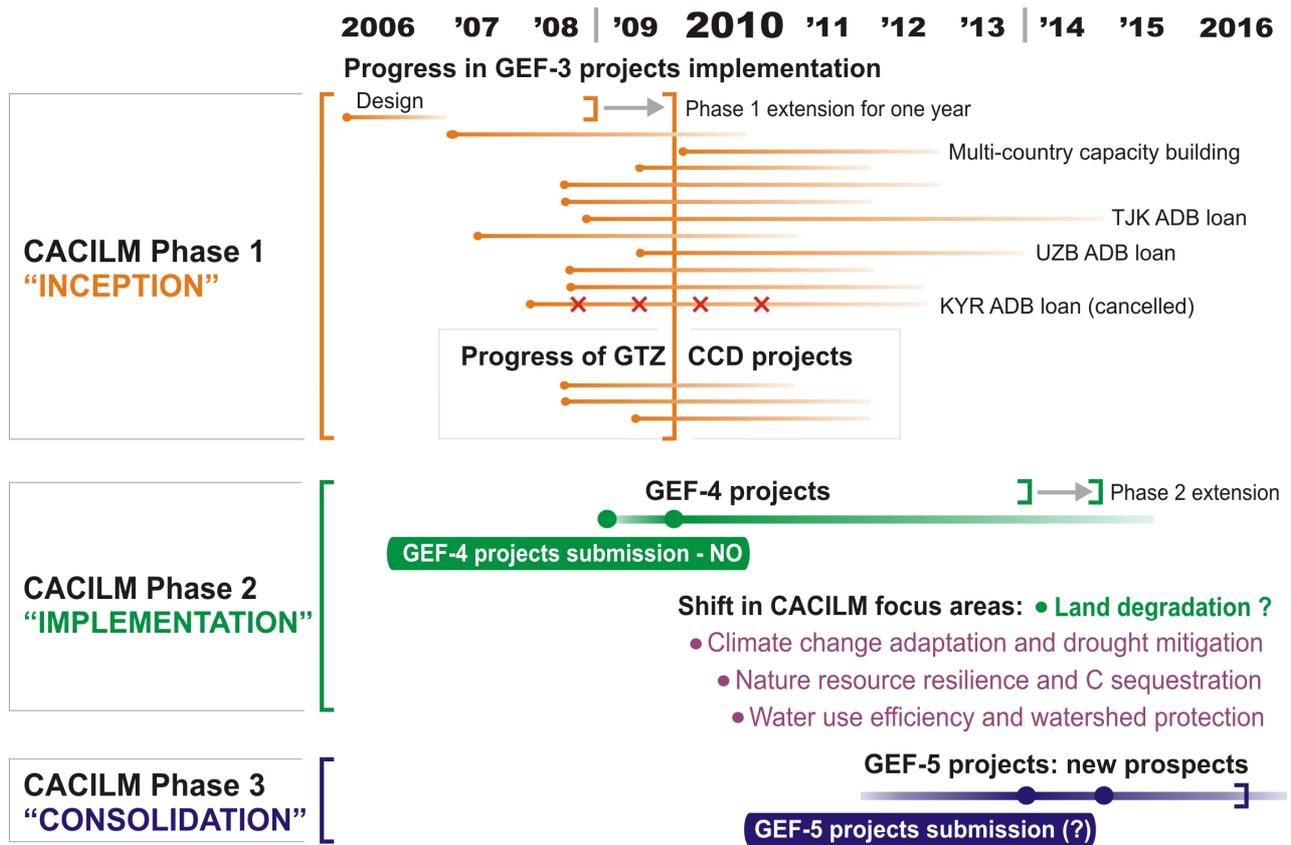
- ongoing implementation of existing on-the-ground investments and initiation of new projects;
- continued efforts to strengthen the policy, legal and institutional frameworks and capacity building
- monitoring and reporting of changes in the status of land degradation;
- sustainable land management research and reporting of results;
- enhancing CACILM coordination and management and promote dissemination of CACILM results.

CACILM Phase-3 (Consolidation) was intended to focus on finalization of institutional arrangements for integration of sustainable land management in national and local planning and budgeting processes and dissemination of results.

Original plan: CACILM phases and GEF replenishment periods



Current situation and scenarios: CACILM phases and GEF replenishment periods



In spite of various speeds in the effective project start-up and realities on the ground, the CACILM GEF-3 projects performance was generally on track. Following the CACILM Phase-1 evaluation in 2009, it was deemed necessary to re-consider the main directions, focus areas and operating modalities of the CACILM to guide its activities in the Phase-2 (2010-2014). Despite the re-configuration of the Initiative's focus and mission for the new Phase-2, it was decided that the Initiative will retain the name and acronym CACILM that has gained wide acceptance in the region and internationally. Two graphics below visually demonstrate the originally planned and effective CACILM implementation.

Various factors have contributed to the shift in CACILM Phase-2:

- The Initiative's evolving structure and players
- Funding availability, especially in the GEF
- Changing environmental situation
- New policy frameworks and developments

The new CACILM mission approved in the end 2009 is to counter threats to the production and ecosystem bases of Central Asia countries caused by climate change, underinvestment in, and inadequate management and protection of, natural resources and associated man-made assets. Therefore, CACILM is widening its focus beyond land degradation that underpinned the Phase-1 to embrace climate, food security, biodiversity and water dimensions.

The new CACILM Phase-2 will build on the direction set during the CACILM Phase-1 but will widen the scope of activities in the following new areas:

- institutional and human capacity building in the field of climate change impacts and drought mitigation
- climate change adaptation strategies, especially in agricultural sector, and a variety of vulnerability-reducing measures and continued attention to the enabling policy, legislative and institutional environment
- measures to increase the resilience of the countries' natural resource base (land, water, ecosystems) and associated man-made assets (e.g. irrigation or drainage infrastructure) in the face of climate change
- activities to enhance carbon sequestration by biomass and soils; adaptive agro-technologies

- activities to cope with water scarcity and contribute to water use efficiency and watershed protection through integrated water resources management
- information sharing, awareness creation, research, and selected aspects of transboundary water management

Preliminarily, prospective CACILM Phase-2 project activities envisage:

- Sustainable rainwater harvesting in sloping lands
- Landscape restructuring and sustainable land and water use in the irrigated lowlands of the Amu Darya basin
- Adaptive drought mitigation strategy and water management in selected river basins of the Ferghana Valley
- Renewable energy production in the degraded drylands of the Amu Darya river basin
- Sustainable pasture management
- Integration of sustainable land use and biodiversity protection into strategic/spatial planning

3.2. Structures

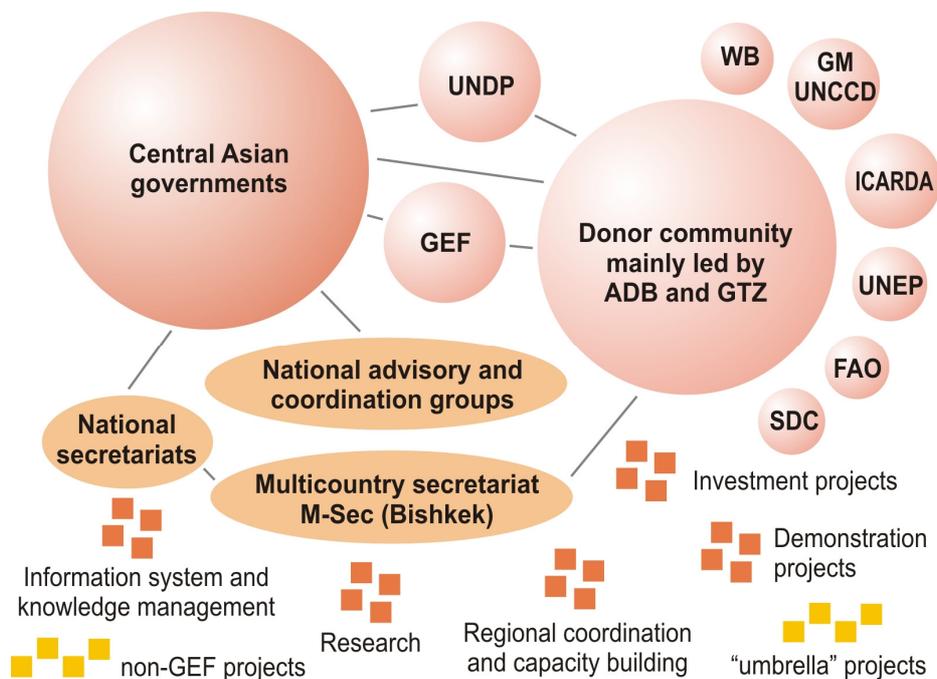
CACILM's lead implementing agency for the GEF is the Asian Development Bank with responsibility of overall coordination and administration, operation of multi-country and national secretariats. GTZ is another major donor and active partner in project implementation under the CACILM and increasingly important player in the management of multi-country and national structures. GTZ support for the new CACILM Phase-2 is growing and includes: (i) technical-financial support for projects; (ii) support to CACILM structures via expert secondments and co-financing; (iii) support of research projects. Finally, UNDP is the GEF implementing agency in the region and carry out most of CACILM demonstration projects. These and other partner institutions are well rooted into their networks of country focal points and regional institutions through which they are in permanent consultations with the countries and implement relevant project components.

CACILM partners include:

- a) governmental agencies of Central Asian countries
- b) international financial institutions and bilateral development agencies, jointly referred to as "donors"
- c) international, regional or local NGOs and specialized international organizations representing a pool of potential implementation contractors

CACILM organizational structures are composed of:

- 1) the Steering Committee: (i) Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, (ii) development cooperation partners/Strategic Partnership donor agencies, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), GTZ (German Agency for Technical Assistance), the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank (WB).
- 2) Advisory and Coordination Groups (ACG) in each country (previously known as National Coordination Councils)
- 3) Multi-country secretariat (MSEC) based in Bishkek and National Secretariats (NSECs) in each country
- 4) Project teams



The Steering Committee responsibilities are:

- (i) strategic development at a regional level with consideration of existing regional cooperation and experience
- (ii) policy dialogue with the international development community
- (iii) approval and endorsement of multi-country projects for submission to development and co-financing partners
- (iv) review and approval of multi-country projects and activities
- (v) oversight of National Programming Frameworks (NPFs) of individual Central Asian countries
- (vi) reporting to CA governments and the donor partners on all projects and activities under the CACILM

The Multi-country Secretariat safeguards the Initiative's regional dimension and has the following functions:

- (i) development of regional approaches to CACILM's focal areas including policy reviews, formulation and examination of technical approaches, and collaboration with other regional programs and organizations
- (ii) promoting exchanges of ideas on regional approaches towards addressing climate change adaptation, ecosystem and land degradation, food and water security
- (iii) administration of multi-country activities, in particular capacity-building projects, management of information systems on climate adaptation, land degradation, and sustainable land management, information dissemination
- (iv) operation of the project monitoring and evaluation system, which includes financial administration, progress reporting, environmental and social safeguards, and performance indicators under CACILM focal areas
- (v) reporting to donors and country members on implementation of multi-country projects and activities
- (vi) logistic and other support for all CACILM Steering Committee meetings
- (vii) training, advisory services, and support to the National Secretariats
- (viii) regular dialogue with existing and potential development partners concerning future multi-country initiatives addressing CACILM priorities; preparation of new multi-country project submissions to donors
- (ix) submission of up-to-date National Programming Frameworks to the Steering Committee

The National Secretariats, whose role will be enhanced in the Phase-2, support and promote the Initiative's national activities and facilitate the implementation of multi-country activities by:

- (i) serving as information hubs on matters related to all CACILM projects under implementation and being planned by the Initiative in their country; establishing an information network and exchange on CACILM-relevant activities in their country; maintaining contacts with the agencies involved in implementation of national CACILM projects, Initiative's partner organizations and civil society to ensure that an up-to-date picture of developments can be supplied to MSEC, ACG and members of the Steering Committee on demand.
- (ii) providing inputs into the consolidated region-wide project monitoring and evaluation system of MSEC

- (iii) developing and updating the National Programming Frameworks (NPFs) that serve as the policy foundation for in-country interventions to be supported by the CACILM
- (iv) ensuring a full in-country review of proposed NFP investment programs and its endorsement by the national Advisory and Coordination Group as well as consideration by the Steering Committee
- (v) guidance on any unresolved policy-relevant or strategic aspects of Initiative's implementation at country level
- (vi) providing logistical and project management support to country components of CACILM multi-project projects
- (vii) periodically compiling consolidated reports on NPF implementation to the CACILM Steering Committee

Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)	ADB, CIDA, FAO, GEF, GM, GTZ, ICARDA, IFAD, SDC, UNEP, UNDP, WORLD BANK	STEERING COMMITTEE SPA members + Chairmen of NCC + UNCCD National Focal Points	Multicountry Secretariat
5 Central Asian Countries	KAZ KYR TAJ TUR UZB	NATIONAL COORDINATION COUNCIL Ministries and National Agencies, International Projects, NGOs	National Secretariat

The Advisory and Coordination Groups (formerly National Coordination Councils) are government-constituted bodies responsible for integrating into national policy the overlapping priorities of three major UN environmental conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD, UNCBD) and identifying opportunities for synergistic and cost-effective response in investment and technical assistance activities in specific countries. ACG confirms the appointment of the head of NSEC. ACG is composed of the focal points of UNFCCC, UNCCD and UNCBD, representatives of the ministries of agriculture, water, environment and land use (if the last four are not already represented by a convention focal point), and the ministry of finance. ACG is responsible for:

- (i) ensuring that CACILM is aligned with the country's policy and strategic priorities and that implementation of the Initiative's investment and technical assistance activities is coordinated across relevant government agencies
- (ii) providing policy and strategic guidance to NSEC
- (iii) review and approval of the National Programming Frameworks and their updates
- (iv) through representatives on the Steering Committee, reviewing new CACILM multi-country projects for approval
- (v) considering requests by NSEC or MSEC to lessen obstacles created by insufficient cross-agency coordination
- (vi) considering recommendations by NSEC or MSEC for further policy or institutional re-alignment in support of country development objectives and the goals of UNFCCC, UNCCD and UNCBD

3.3. Projects, activities and achievements

From July 2006 to July 2010, CACILM Phase-1 supported the following types of projects and interventions:

- national demonstration projects and rural investment sub-projects – implemented by ADB, UNDP and GTZ
- sustainable land management (SLM) capacity building – implemented by UNDP and GTZ
- SLM information system, knowledge management and dissemination – implemented by ADB
- SLM research – implemented by ICARDA (under ADB umbrella)

Ongoing and completed projects under the CACILM Phase-1:

From July 2006 to July 2010, CACILM projects in effective implementation included 10 (11) national projects² and 2 multi-country projects. ADB made use of the GEF-3 funds and allocated its own resources to maintain national and multi-country secretariats, to initiate knowledge management, information system and research (via ICARDA) and to produce Central Asia's Natural Resource Atlas in the frameworks of multi-country project sub-components. In addition, the GEF grants was used in two ADB's \$ multi-million rural development and land improvement projects in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which started in 2009/10. UNDP was managing 5 national demonstration projects and recently started a multi-country capacity-building project. GTZ funded three national projects (without GEF financing) in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and provided co-financing for several multi-country and national CACILM GEF-supported activities.

In the CACILM Phase-1, projects were addressing predominantly land degradation issues in forestry (including riparian, desert and mountain forests), irrigated agricultural lands and pastures. Rain-fed agricultural lands were not addressed.

<p>KYRGYZSTAN 1. Demonstrating Sustainable Mountain Pasture Management in <u>Suusamyr</u></p> <p>UNDP Medium Size Project GEF: US\$ 950,000 Co-financing: US\$ 975,000</p> <p>2. Southern Agriculture Development ADB Full Size Project (cancelled) GEF: US\$ 2,500,000 Co-financing: US\$ 20,700,000</p>	<p>TURKMENISTAN 1. Capacity Building and on-the-ground Investments for Integrated and Sustainable Land Management</p> <p>UNDP Medium Size Project GEF: US\$ 975,000 Co-financing: US\$ 1,100,000</p>	<p>KAZAKHSTAN 1. Sustainable Rangeland Management</p> <p>UNDP Medium Size Project GEF: US\$ 950,000 Co-financing: US\$ 2,550,000</p>
<p>TAJIKISTAN 1. Rural Development Project</p> <p>ADB Full Size Project GEF: US\$ 3,500,000 Co-financing: 21,600,000</p> <p>2. Demonstrating Local Responses to Combating Land Degradation and Improving Sustainable Land Management in SW Tajikistan</p> <p>UNDP Medium Size Project GEF: US\$ 975,000 Co-financing: US\$ 1,000,000</p>	<p>UZBEKISTAN 1. Land Improvement Project in Bukhara, <u>Navoi</u>, Kashkadarya</p> <p>ADB Full Size Project GEF: US\$ 3,000,000 Co-financing: 76,400,000</p> <p>2. Ecosystem Stability in the Aral Sea region in Karakalpakstan</p> <p>UNDP Medium Size Project GEF: US\$ 950,000 Co-financing: US\$ 2,800,000</p>	<p>REGIONAL 1. <u>Multicountry</u> Partnership Framework Support</p> <p>ADB Full Size Project GEF: US\$ 3,025,000 GEF PDF-B: US\$ 750,000 Co-financing: US\$ 3,300,000 Co-financing PDF-B: US\$ 1,000,000</p> <p>2. Capacity Building</p> <p>UNDP Full Size Project GEF: US\$ 3,000,000 Co-financing: US\$ 3,550,000</p>

Other ongoing GEF and bilateral donor-supported national and regional projects, which have relevance for combating land degradation and improving watershed conditions:

- 1) GTZ-funded and implemented projects under CACILM and the UNCCD:
 - Sustainable Pasture Management in Jergetal-Onarcha in Kyrgyzstan (ongoing)
 - Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in High Badakhshan, Tajikistan (ongoing)
 - Sustainable Forest Management in Turkmenistan (ongoing)
- 2) CACILM “umbrella” projects and sustainable land management-related projects (selection based on ADB 2006):
 - Syr Darya Delta Control and Northern Aral Sea Preservation (WB)
 - Forest Protection and Reforestation (WB)
 - Afforestation of Former Aral Sea Bed in Uzbekistan (GTZ)
 - Improving Rural Livelihood through Efficient On-Farm Water and Soil Management in Central Asia (ADB)
 - Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands – global project (UNEP GEF)
 - Conservation of Tugai Forests in Amu Darya delta in Uzbekistan (UNDP GEF)

² Originally, there were 11 national projects, but in 2008 the ADB loan for South Kyrgyzstan integrated agriculture development project (US\$ 28 million) was cancelled along with the GEF grant (US\$ 2.5 million). This kind of development was criticized by the Kyrgyz GEF focal point.

- Sustainable Land Management in Pamir-Alai Mountains, KYR-TAJ (UNEP GEF)
- In-situ Conservation of Crop Wild Relatives in selected countries: UZB (UNEP)
- Tien-Shan Biodiversity Conservation project (WB GEF)

Main highlights and achievements of the CACILM Phase-1

One of the main achievements of phase I of CACILM is a functioning partnership with international, regional and national structures established and operational. Although nothing less should be expected, knowing the institutions and the region, this is an achievement in itself. A number of projects was started and implementation is on-going: Five GEF-supported national projects are complemented by three pilot projects funded by GTZ, and two multi-country projects. And, with some delays two investment projects on irrigated lands started in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, results can however not be expected anytime soon.

The CACILM multi-country secretariat in Bishkek has been well established as regional hub, also implementing functions beyond CACILM, e.g. the UNCCD's desertification reporting system. National secretariats are operational as well, although some feedback was received that funding for its staff was at times interrupted.

The CACILM website hosted by ADB in Manila is functional, however much of the knowledge base and geographical work done on drylands in the region is not yet available on-line to a general public. The Atlas of Natural Resources of Central Asia was published by ADB in 2010, it can be purchased in the ADB bookstore but is also available as pdf on-line. The research results of phase I are well documented and published by ICARDA and comprehensive sector studies of the forestry sector in Tajikistan and pasture management in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were published by GTZ.

- **Partnership**, regional/national structures established and running
- **Projects**: 5 national GEF-supported, 3 national GTZ pilot projects and 2 multi-country ongoing projects
- **2 investment** projects on irrigated lands in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with CACILM components are starting (results expected in 3-4 years from now)
- **Regional Hub**: CACILM Multi-country Secretariat was recently chosen by the UNCCD as a Central Asia regional reference centre for "PRAIS" desertification reporting system.
- Initial **information database** and **CACILM web-site** established (in Manila) <http://www.adb.org/projects/cacilm>
- Sustainable land management **research projects** completed and findings published (ICARDA 2009)
- A comprehensive **sector study** on the forestry sector in Tajikistan and pasture management in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan published (GTZ)
- **Atlas** of Natural Resources of Central Asia published (ADB 2010)

3.4. Funding history and prospects

At the beginning of the CACILM in 2006, the ADB and the GEF announced that five Central Asian countries launched a **US\$1377 million** programme to restore, maintain, and enhance the productivity of 10 million ha of degraded lands. This envisaged the GEF grant (**US\$100 million**), donor inputs/loans (**US\$872 million**) and national funds (**US\$405 million**).

GEF allocations for CACILM*

GEF phase	Amount envisaged in the initial CACILM plans, US\$	Amount used to date and projected, US\$
GEF-3 PDF-B	700,000	700,000
GEF-3 (LD)	20,000,000	17,500,000
GEF-4	40,000,000	-
GEF-5 (LD STAR)	40,000,000	18,500,000

* all figures are rounded

Envisaged co-financing for CACILM Phase-1*

GEF phase	Amount envisaged in the initial CACILM plans, US\$
ADB	101,000,000
UNDP	6,600,000
GTZ (bilateral)	1,700,000
Other	1,500,000
Governments	24,000,000

* all figures are rounded

The GEF focal points indicate that several misunderstandings and uncertainties related to the CACILM are linked to the question (and the original public announcement) of the impressive Initiative's total funding, the GEF contribution to CACILM (and projects that could be associated with CACILM) and prospects for donor/GEF financing in the future.

CACILM's Phase-1 was financed from multiple sources amounting to **a total of approximately US\$137 million** with contributions from the **international donor grants, technical assistance and loans up to US\$ 119 million, the GEF-3 grant financing up to US\$ 18 (20) plus the national co-funding around US\$20 million.**

By the initial plans, major recipients of the CACILM investments were Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan should have received GEF funding in addition to governmental inputs, while other countries relied on combination of international bank loans, national funds and the GEF grant.



The **total financing from the GEF to CACILM** according to the original ADB and GEF project documents (ADB 2006b, GEF 2006) was set at **US\$ 100 million** over a 10-year period. CACILM entered to the **GEF-3** (Land Degradation focal area) pipeline in 2004 with **US\$ 20,700,000**, including **US\$700,000 PDF-B GEF grant** for ADB to develop the project document/frameworks and management structure. During the Initiative's lifetime, an additional \$40 million should have been requested and received in the GEF-4 (fourth cycle completed in June 2010) and another \$40 million from the GEF-5 subject to the status of the GEF funds replenishment. It appears that **no GEF-4 funds were used** in CACILM.

For comparison, the IFAS Aral Sea Basin Programme project portfolio – another major regional donors and governments initiative on sustainable nature resource management and improvement of rural livelihoods – implemented in 1995-2005 exceeded **US\$825 million**, including **US\$441 million** of international loans and investments, **US\$190 million** technical assistance and grants. The GEF grants that supported the Aral Sea Basin Programme exceeded **US\$16(20) million**.

According to December 2009 CACILM Steering Committee decisions, most activities in CACILM Phase-2 will continue to be implemented at a country level. At the same time, the GEF will continue to remain an important financier of the

CACILM. It is anticipated that in the GEF-5, new projects will be submitted to the pipeline. At the same time, to reduce dependence solely on the GEF funding the need for diversification of financial sources was articulated.

4. Analysis: key findings

Analysis provided below only summarizes key findings and, as such, cannot address all issues that have been brought to our knowledge by the interviewed local and international players and the CACILM partnership structures.

Based on the collected material, *Zoï Environment Network* concludes that:

- CACILM partnership that started in 2006 made headway in furthering sustainable land management practices and approaches in selected land degradation hotspots of Central Asia, and helped to advance the scientific knowledge, regional and national coordination, and institutional mechanisms dealing with land degradation. The Initiative is seen as a unique partnership of the GEF, donors, governmental agencies and other stakeholders
- The GEF's role was instrumental in catalyzing co-funding from other donors, governments and at the local level
- Further opportunities and synergies between land degradation and climate change adaptation, biodiversity and watershed protection and efficient water use in agriculture are actively being sought in the CACILM Phase-2

At the same time, reviewers point out that the following aspects of CACILM, which triggered critical inquiries from several GEF focal points, have been subject to discussion at the GEF constituency meetings and other forums:

High promises raising high expectations. When CACILM was launched, it was broadly presented as a **US\$1.3 billion** Initiative for the decade 2006-2016, which boosted many expectations internationally, but in particular in Central Asia. At the current stage, the impacts 'on the ground' are limited or not well visible. Nevertheless, the Initiative's planned outputs eventually need to be measured vis-à-vis real results. While all ongoing CACILM demonstration, investment and capacity building projects address important sustainable land management issues, the full potential for synergism with other (completed and ongoing) sustainable land management regional and national activities that could have been put under the Initiative's umbrella is not yet capitalized. CACILM has shown a success in establishing regional/national institutional and administrative structures, initiating applied scientific research and concrete projects. In order to keep up momentum, high ambitions and continue to produce practical results, the CACILM partnership should provide systematic lessons learned, look for synergies, communicate successes and promote both farmer-level and large-scale long-term horizon investments into sustainable land management with consideration of emerging environmental themes.

While most of the pledged total CACILM funding was originally based on soft loans and national governmental inputs, the difference in amounts and disbursement plans between countries is substantial. For example, Turkmenistan originally had reasonably high GEF-funding ratio in national land degradation activities, while Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and, to a lesser degree, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan relayed on an envelope that combine soft loans plus GEF funding. As situation and priorities are evolving and significance of national inputs and ownership is growing, CACILM should keep a flexible outlook and communicate these changes and local realities more clearly in the Phase-2 and years to come. In our opinion, it is simply wrong, to broadcast a US\$1.3 billion programme, when, in reality it today encompasses only 10% of that sum and if ongoing/new projects go well, probably only 30% or so could be reached by the target date 2016.

Moving targets. CACILM has changed its priorities (moved away?) from a more agriculture-focused programme for sustainable land management to one of the watershed management and climate change resilience activities in Central Asia. This is due to changing donor priorities (ADB, GTZ, UNDP), funding availability, also a 'changing world' and local realities. Thus, some of the original thrusts of the Initiative have become obsolete. In spite of this, the original focus on combating soil degradation and promoting sustainable land management should remain one of CACILM's key assets.

Delays and cancellations. Some CACILM projects (both national and multi-country) have been delayed by years. For instance the UNDP-GEF capacity building activities under the CACILM Phase-1 have realistically started only in 2010 (in Phase-2). Two major ADB-led investment projects in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with CACILM GEF sub-components were similarly delayed and only kicking off now. Thus, results are still 'trickling in'. Third major ADB CACILM investment

project in south Kyrgyzstan was cancelled along with the GEF grant financing (US\$2.5 million) attached to it. Therefore, CACILM projects design, selection and implementation need to be enhanced and appropriate exit strategies should be envisaged to avoid generation of false expectations about donor support and the GEF's role and funding allocation.

Limited information, visibility and interaction. Such major regional processes as the Aral Sea Basin Programmes, EU-Central Asia bilateral cooperation programmes, WB/ADB investment projects in agriculture, water and infrastructure sectors, regional initiatives and projects on climate / drought risk management, transboundary waters (including Caspian Sea), cross-border biodiversity, and others seem to possess limited knowledge or too narrowly interact with the CACILM due to limited information and slow, complicated processes. Moreover, interaction at national level between project implementing agencies/PMUs with the GEF focal points and National Coordination/Advisory Groups was generally insufficient in the CACILM's Inception Phase-1. Majority of GEF focal points closely associate CACILM only with the GEF grant financing, which is not entirely accurate, since other major donors/partners, for example, GTZ participate in and provide support to the CACILM as part of the global and regional commitments under the UNCCD.

Impact on the ground 'does the land feel the difference?' is rather weak at this stage. It is in general very difficult to measure the 'impact' of a certain Initiative on the ground, here the efforts by the UNCCD and the GEF are underway to develop an indicator-based system. Usually a multiple of drivers and actions lead to outcomes.

CACILM-proposed indicators for impact assessment include:

- Rehabilitated lands (area) – interference: new factors of land degradation/abandonment
- Increase in land productivity (yield) – interference: favorable (or unfavorable) climatic conditions
- Change in rural livelihood (income) – interference: cash transfers by labor migrants
- Improved enabling environment for sustainable land management – interference: radical changes

Structures

The partnership is closely linked to international (donor) funding priorities and availability, and is essentially less country driven than could be desired. Most strategic impulses seem to come from outside the region. Political and institutional processes involved vis-à-vis the number, volume and geographic coverage of projects seem to be more complicated than necessary, since CACILM operates on a heavy partnership framework involving international steering committee, regional (multi-country) and national secretariats, national coordination councils. At the same time, NGOs and civil society organizations are minimally involved and some GEF focal points have rather limited information. Certain adjustments are, according to GTZ, already being made in bringing the national structures closer to the projects.

The fact that the CACILM national focal points are on the one hand identical with the UNCCD focal points, on the other hand nominated by agencies of land management or agriculture or similar may be the cause of the GEF focal points (usually within the Environmental ministries or equivalent) feeling left out. As often with such Initiatives, there is always a risk that they develop a more limited alliance than originally intended. This should be countered by on the one hand 'lighter' formal structures which will not consume most of management time/funds and more open 'general assemblies'.

The multi-country and national secretariats play essential role in bringing together various partners of the Initiative and monitoring/reporting/communicating its performance. However, their strategic role as well as structure and functioning of the national advisory bodies and the synergic links to different (ongoing and planned) ADB's, UNDP's, GTZ's (and other donor) projects related to land degradation, climate resilience, watershed protection could be further amplified.

Funding

Funding is coming late and it seems unlikely that the ambitious original target of US\$1.3 billion will be reached within the 2016 closing date. While GEF-3 funding for the CACILM phase-1 was with US\$18 million (of a pledged US\$20 million) almost on target, there was – due to delays and limited funds for land degradation – no GEF-4 funding whatsoever even though 40 million were planned. It seems that the countries were still occupied with GEF3 projects when the GEF-4 LD funds were depleted. The GEF-5 prospects – the STAR allocations for land degradation in the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan – are again relatively high with a total of US\$18.5 million at the level of GEF-3 disbursements, although less than half of the anticipated US\$40 million. The recent shift in focus, to widen up CACILM to problems of biodiversity and climate change may help to leverage GEF funding from a wider portfolio. In spite of financial crisis, donors and countries seem sufficiently capable to provide co-financing in cross-cutting areas, an opportunity that should be used by CACILM.

Branding and Public Relations

Looking from the outside, it is not always obvious what is under CACILM and what is not, since branding in the projects is often done by the partners as their projects (GTZ, UNDP, ADB etc) rather than have a common CACILM brand. Much more could be done to present the Initiative in a more user-friendly format to the outside world, and make at least the common outputs available under a CACILM or under a GEF label. While the branding – in a way also a public communication issue - was flagged by many interviewees, no particular efforts seem to be planned to change this, and, the language used in CACILM publications does not indicate a strong will to be understood by a broader community.

Information and Communication

Outputs of the regional 'commons' (information system, knowledge management, sustainable land management research, capacity building) are patchy, invisible and often not (yet) accessible to users both internationally and locally. One reason for this is certainly the late start of some of the activities, e.g. capacity building. This may have further implications with changing priorities of the Initiative having to deal with 'legacy' activities planned under old paradigms.

While there still is hope that most outputs will eventually be delivered, the fact that outputs of activities under 'information system' and 'knowledge management' are not generally available is disappointing. There reportedly exists large GIS databases/information and cartographic materials somewhere, but as long as this is not publicly (or at least institutionally) available one can doubt the usefulness of these exercises. The Atlas published by ADB is rather nice and informative product (although with limited exposure of environmental degradation and desertification issues), but if not generally available to a wider audience in the region it will go into history as yet another distant publication.

CACILM could definitely learn from the Central Asia water resource information system (CAREWIB), where under the auspices of the Scientific-Information Center of the Inter-state Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia (SIC ICWC) information from the region is publicly shared since 1993. With all existing information collection and reporting structures, CACILM could move forward with popularization of land degradation problems and solutions via mass media, popular reporting (Astana Environmental Conference in 2011) and education programs for youth and women.

Last but not least, effective communication of real outcomes and achievements can help in CACILM fundraising efforts.

Research

The research cluster from the beginning was dealing with a variety of issues in different places with quite limited funding. According to interviews, initial research was designed in a detached manner, not conducive to mainstream the findings into CACILM and land-related regional and national projects. Currently, with the shift in focus also the research pillar of CACILM is undergoing changes and is being 'modernized' to support innovation in land management.

CACILM structure and processes	Recommendations
Management/coordination at the level of donors and implementing agencies	The Steering Committee should invite more targeted national members and GEF focal points (when appropriate), NSECs and civil society groups to its meetings as observers. Less tedious internal coordination. Links to ASBP. Revise US\$ 1.3 billion target and better communicate new/shifting priorities
Management/coordination between CACILM actors in a country and interaction with GEF focal points	More strategic and proactive role should be taken by NSECs in Phase-2 Improve structure and functioning of National Advisory/Coordination bodies Regular briefings/updates at the Swiss GEF constituency meetings
CACILM functioning on-the-ground	Improve functioning of NSECs (status, pay, country specificity)
CACILM branding and visibility	Better articulate and promote CACILM in the region and in selected international mass-media and conferences/side-events Use CACILM and GEF logo in addition to lead project partners
CACILM knowledge sharing and information dissemination	Study and explore options for integration/links with CAREWIB water portal and other existing/emerging information dissemination canals and practices
New focus areas: climate change, water	Avoid duplication and to harmonize activities with ongoing and planned regional and national projects and initiatives Articulate the links between land degradation, water use and climate change
Donors/GEF funding prospects	Align CACILM more closely with available financing/new \$\$\$ mechanisms

	Integrate GEF-5 LD (STAR allocations) to CACILM priorities in Phase-2
National co-financing	Consider national activities on land improvement under the CACILM umbrella, catalyze donor support and interaction

Issues and questions	Strengths	Weaknesses
Initiative's objectives and focus areas	- Ambitious and focused on a very severe problem of global significance	- Too ambitious start-up and announcements, which, with the shift in focus, may even be widening
Initiative's structures and processes	- Good mix of international drivers and local stakeholders - Declared long-term objective to strengthen structures in the region, building on the existing	- 'Clubbishness', a very limited number of persons and agencies driving the Initiative. - Potentially overinflated structure in the region with national secretariats, a regional secretariat, project structures
Initiative's (Phase-1) outputs/results	- Operational structure in place, some outputs in the 'commons': information and research - Start-up of significant projects	- Delays leading to a still incomplete picture (e.g. regional capacity building has only effectively started in 2010) or cancellations of important projects - Some outputs are not generally visible/not accessible or both
National Programming Frameworks	- Adjusting to local realities and emerging priorities	- Shifting focus and diverting attention from land degradation hotspots/issue
Branding and awareness	- International visibility and a featured type of GEF partnership	- CACILM national projects sometimes implemented under a different label (ADB, GTZ, UNDP) and poorly known - GEF focal points are not aware of the latest changes and developments
UNCCD reference centre/knowledge hub	- Multi-country secretariat and national structures could play a vital role in strengthening UNCCD implementation and reporting	- Unified and policy-relevant indicators of land degradation (and CACILM measurable results) in the countries/region are not available in spite of research and information system management components
Resource mobilization	- The move towards climate change and water management is generally perceived as 'organic' based on the need to interlink land issues with water use and climate change and with prospects of new funding mechanisms - GEF-3 is generally on target - Important role of the Swiss GEF Council member in promoting land degradation allocations in GEF-5	- Missing out of the GEF-4 funding and limited allocations under GEF-5 (less than half of anticipated) - Uncertainties how GEF-5 LD funds and others will cover CACILM needs - Limited synergies with ongoing and planned regional and national processes (Aral Sea ASBP-2, -3, EU-Central Asia projects, TJK PPCR, active Initiatives on Environment and Security, Poverty and Environment)
Capacity building interventions		- Potential gap between the updated National Programming Frameworks and regional capacity building
CACILM projects (research, investment, demonstration, information system,		- Many "field" projects are late - GEF's role in large (investment)

knowledge sharing and awareness)		projects is not clearly articulated
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Based on this analysis, the following questions can be raised:

- what can Central Asian states do for the Initiative to reach the initial ambitious funding target of US\$1.3 billion? is time horizon till 2016 sufficient to get the viable and visible results?
- how can impact on the ground be measured 'does the land feel the difference', e.g. through the UNCCD indicator set and its PRAIS system?
- how will the available land degradation funding allocations under the GEF-5 (US\$ 18.5 million) be allocated? in the countries? common projects in the regions? can it be positioned as core or umbrella part of CACILM?
- what is the role of partners, especially the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD and others that specialize in facilitating access to finance, in further promotion of funding for land degradation activities under the CACILM?
- what are the prospects and role of donors in long-term investments to improved land and water management?
- can the role of research to mainstream best practices in sustainable land management be strengthened, for example via small scale (farm-level) interventions and the GEF/other donor small grants?
- how can information about land degradation in Central Asia in general and CACILM in particular be made more user friendly and disseminated more widely?
- what are the best structures (locally, nationally, regionally) to address issues of land degradation and how can they be strengthened
- how CACILM could create/promote synergies between existing environment and development structures and processes: e.g. Aral Sea Basin Programme (2011-15), water portal CAREWIB, climate adaptation action plans?
- how CACILM interventions could be aligned with the "Environment and Security" Initiative assessment findings on land use disputes and related issues (conflicts over access to irrigation water and arable lands in the Ferghana Valley, pasture use in Tien-Shan and Pamir, environment-health risks from contaminated lands) – in order to contribute to trust building and sustainable development at community and cross-border level

5. Recommendations

While there are some obvious weaknesses – potentially inherent with Initiatives of this size and complexity there are nevertheless also strengths, upon which future directions should build upon. We have developed some general headlines, which may help taking future directions but are also highlighted some concrete points that actually could relatively easily be implemented within the existing institutional and funding frameworks. Finally, we embark on a few recommendations addressed to Switzerland, what impulses could be given by the Swiss GEF Council member and other institutions to make CACILM a success.

1. Keep up the high ambitions but stay on the ground

Environmental problems with global significance, such as land degradation in Central Asia, need serious answers by the international community. With the instruments available under the GEF and elsewhere, CACILM is certainly the right answer. Nevertheless, reality checks are necessary and also large-scale programmes staying modest would do no harm. More work should be done at the farm/local level. While existing land-improvement investment projects are important, research and demonstration conducted under the CACILM suggests that farm- and community-level improvements of cropping and pasturing practices, efficient water and energy use, sound chemical management and soil protection could bring about paramount positive changes in sustainable land management.

2. Adjust program to changing priorities

The recent shift in focus of the Initiative is justified. External priorities change, and climate change has become a reality in Central Asia, too. Also the experience within the consortium may well rationalize such a shift. But then, this also brings responsibilities for CACILM to open up to other Central Asian initiatives, such as the regional Aral Sea process,

emerging WB, ADB, EU initiatives on climate, water and risk management, much more than done in the past. Under a widening scope beyond land degradation it may also be asked if the research agenda is still justifiable or possible.

3. Work on visibility, information and synergies

Good information and communication is the key for CACILM's further development. This starts with branding (call GEF a GEF) but in our opinion even more severe is the lack of understandable information about the Initiative and land degradation in Central Asia in general. Phase-1 has generated lots of unique data and useful information, not much of which is generally accessible. There seems to be even less information about the issues relevant for the people on the ground. Generate 'information for decision-making' and create local information system aiming at non-technical audiences. More visibility for the GEF and CACILM through more targeted branding and awareness campaigns via mass media resources and festivals/tours for journalists, capacities of Aarhus environmental information centres and NGOs.

4. Strengthen structures, build on the existing

CACILM has the long-term ambition to strengthen the institutions dealing with issues related to land degradation in Central Asia. Without such, finding the solutions to the problems will be unsustainable. The challenges are paramount, local institutions are still weak and there are no silver bullets for solutions. The risk of large externally funded Initiatives like CACILM is to succumb to the temptation of using project funding to create structures that work, but are however somewhat parallel to the official structures in the countries and ongoing processes in the region. The other extreme may be to rely solely on government-imposed structures (which vary hugely between countries). Here it will be vital to walk a relatively thin line between the two extremes, there are positive signals that the Initiative has learned from the Phase-1 and on the way of a pragmatic, potentially sustainable solution. Internal CACILM structures will likely benefit from a long-term horizon of 10+ years. Participation of civil society such as NGOs, communities and project results end-users (e.g. attendance of annual assemblies/steering committees, implementing small-scale projects) should be further encouraged. Synergies with existing competencies and structures (incl. political and information structures) should be well explored.

Swiss GEF council member

Which strategic and operational impulses can the Swiss GEF council member provide to the Initiative to give more impact, and better reach objectives?

All interviewees gave very positive feedback to SDC's early work on pastures and forests, in particular in the upstream countries Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and CACILM has benefitted from the results of these projects. Moreover, the role that Swiss GEF council member played in promoting the GEF-5 funding allocation for land degradation in Central Asia is regarded very positively. Future options for Swiss involvement in CACILM include:

- **business as usual:** stay engaged through the GEF, encourage international community via the GEF council to provide further support to the Initiative and implement corrections (as expressed in this document), encourage further information exchange through the GEF constituency and GEF focal point's feedback, and countries role in investment in the 'commons' of CACILM (regional components in Phase-2 under GEF-5), and, encourage SDC, SECO and other Swiss development partners to contribute to the positive developments of CACILM
- **increased engagement** with targeted projects and interventions, such as concrete 'Swiss' projects on pastures, mountains, forests, natural disasters risks and water management being more closely embedded into CACILM, stimulate exchange between CACILM projects and Swiss institutes (e.g. through PhD students, experts), or support the CACILM regional components, in particular information exchange in a focused manner.

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CACILM web-page <http://www.adb.org/projects/cacilm/>

CACILM knowledge management web-portal <http://cacilm.adb.org>

INTERVIEWS (selection):

ADB (Consultant): **Ivan Ruzicka**

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CACILM M-SEC Bishkek: **Kanysh Nurymgereyev**, Head of secretariat

CAREWIB Tashkent: **Iskander Beglov**, Project manager

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GEF focal point (representative), Turkmenistan: **Batyr Ballyev**, Head of department, Ministry of nature protection

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GEF Secretariat: **Mohamed Bakarr**, Senior Environmental Specialist, Sustainable Land Management

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GTZ-Bonn: **Anneke Trux**, Head, Convention Project to Combat Desertification (CCD Project)

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UNDP-GEF project "Demonstrating Local Responses to Combating Land Degradation, **Nargis Uzmanova**, Tajikistan

UNDP-GEF project "Achieving Ecosystem Stability on Degraded Lands in Karakalpakstan", **Irina Bekmirzaeva**, Uzbekistan