



## Fast Facts

**Country:** Uzbekistan

**Duration:** March 2012 to February 2015

**Implementing UN Agencies:** UNDP; WHO; UNFPA; UNV; UNESCO

**Other Implementing Partners:** Local municipalities; Government institutions; International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea; local NGOs

**Budget:** \$3,840,449.82

**Key Words:** Livelihood restoration; capacity-building; multi-sectoral cooperation

## BACKGROUND

Once the world's fourth largest lake, the drying up of the Aral Sea is considered to be one of the world's worst environmental disasters, causing a cascade of challenges for the already disadvantaged region of Karakalpakstan. Desertification and the increased salinity of water have degraded all arable land, thus worsening food and economic insecurity leading to malnutrition and a poverty rate of 44%. In addition, severe dust storms as a result of the dry sea bed worsened the respiratory health of the local population and added stress to an overburdened healthcare system. These multifaceted and interconnected

impacts have limited economic opportunities and undermined community resilience. Therefore, it was necessary for effective and sustainable responses to comprehensively address the challenges faced by the population of Karakalpakstan that once relied heavily on the Aral Sea for their food and livelihoods. Specifically, it was imperative to provide sustainable income-generating opportunities and implement the complementary capacity-building of healthcare workers and local authorities in order to create structures for long-term resilience to address the effects of the Aral Sea disaster.

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the programme was to empower the rural communities of Karakalpakstan that were affected by the Aral Sea disaster by improving their economic, food, and health security. The programme also aimed to enhance the capacity of Government institutions to cope with the complex challenges. This dual protection and empowerment mechanism was set-up by: (i) enhancing economic security for vulnerable groups such as women and youth by providing a range

of income-generating opportunities; (ii) improving the capacity of healthcare workers to address the consequences of the environmental disaster on health with a specific focus on youth-friendly services; and (iii) strengthening the capacity of regional and district authorities to develop and implement more effective evidence-based policies through improved data management and delivery of social services.

### BENEFICIARIES

The programme directly benefitted over 130,000 rural inhabitants through improved socio-economic, food and environmental security. In addition, the capacity-building measures benefitted over 900 healthcare professionals, 2,300 community

volunteers and youth, as well as 200 civil servants from various Government ministries. This in turn indirectly benefitted nearly 500,000 men and women thanks to the provision of enhanced healthcare and governance.



Credit: UNCT  
Secretary-General António Guterres visits the programme site



Credit: UNCT

## NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The programme strengthened the food and economic security of the local population through improved sustainable agricultural practices and irrigation systems. Through environmentally friendly and community-based mechanisms that increased productivity, the programme demonstrated the value of better resource management to reverse the previous trend of scarcity-induced insecurity. Likewise, vulnerable groups were empowered to improve their own situation thanks to innovative and inclusive income-generating opportunities such as entrepreneurship for women, setting-up small businesses, and eco-tourism.

(ii) Furthermore, the health and well-being of community members were greatly improved through the training of healthcare professionals, procurement of medical equipment, and awareness-raising for the local population. In partnership with the Government and universities, volunteering was institutionalized as

a way of enhancing community-based disease-control and extending the access to health services and vital information to reach those left behind. (iii) Moreover, bottom-up mechanisms were complemented with enhanced capacities of Government institutions in data collection and management of human security indicators and development statistics to enrich design and implementation of evidence-based policies. In addition, to ensure the programme contributed to the long-term socio-economic development of the region, technical training for Government employees also improved the delivery of social services and essential utilities such as gas and electricity.

(iv) In addition, the programme was recognized for its advancement of gender equality as it promoted both gender inclusion and empowerment throughout its interventions and also worked to mainstream such practices in the community and the Government.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The programme highlighted how complementary bottom-up and top-down approaches of protection and empowerment successfully integrated all stakeholders from the community to the national level in mitigating the complex challenges resulting from the Aral Sea disaster. Fundamentally, the programme demonstrated the value of a people-first approach whereby locally owned and demand-driven interventions were more effective and sustainable by harnessing the human potential of communities. In addition, the participation of community members especially the youth as volunteers also revealed the benefits of training local agents of change for greater scope and impact. The multiplier effect of capacity-building brought programme interventions to those left behind and allowed for Government

mainstreaming and replication. Furthermore, the programme improved data collection and management in order to implement more efficient evidence-based interventions for the enhanced delivery of social services thus improving the relationship between the Government and the region's marginalized population. The programme also highlighted the key role of national authorities in advancing human security beyond the short-term as close cooperation with the Government led to the upscaling of the programme to include a trust fund for the wider Aral Sea region incorporating the best practices from this programme. This success demonstrates the catalytic nature of the fund and the human security approach in unifying multiple stakeholders for the real benefit of vulnerable people.

