

New project aims to boost agri-production in degraded areas of Aral Sea basin

Dubai, UAE, 23 August 2022 - As part of international efforts to support agricultural productivity and sustainability of resources in view of the challenges of climate change, a new quadripartite collaboration was launched to support resource-poor rural communities and develop degraded ecosystems in the Aral Sea region.

Launched with funding from the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development ([ADFD](#)), the project will be implemented by the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) through its Regional Office for Central Asia and the South Caucasus in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in partnership with the [Ministry of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan](#) and the [Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan](#). The project will specifically target vulnerable communities living in the degraded areas of Karakalpakstan, a republic within Uzbekistan.

A memorandum of understanding was signed to this effect between ADFD, the Ministry of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan, and a cooperation agreement was concluded between ADFD and ICBA. The project is expected to directly benefit up to 15,000 farmers and agropastoralists and their households (up to 75,000 people), develop the capacity of up to 150 extension workers, as well as establish or strengthen up to 15 farmers' cooperatives.

H.E. Mohamed Saif Al Suwaidi, Director General of Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, said: "The cooperation with the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) reflects ADFD's keenness to support scientific research institutions that work towards sustainable development in developing countries."

He added that the new project constitutes an important step towards enhancing sustainability of the food security system in different regions of Karakalpakstan, and that the partnership contributes to rapid attainment of self-reliance in food and a strategic stock of crops, as well as job creation. The project also supports the environment by ensuring sustainability of natural resources.

H.E. Academician Ibrokhim Abdurakhmanov, Minister of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan, said: "Changes in the state of the natural environment due to human influence, strong anthropogenic impact on living and non-living components causes local, regional and global environmental problems. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to the leadership of the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development of the United Arab Emirates and the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture, which are providing environmental, agronomic, and economic solutions to tackling the Aral Sea problem, which is considered the most dangerous point of the ecological crisis in the region."

H.E. Alisher Shukurov, Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture of Uzbekistan, said: "This is a very important project which will integrate agricultural sciences and research for development activities across the whole value chain. The project will promote climate-resilient agriculture through science-based technologies, innovations, and knowledge. The productivity enhancement business model activities provide farmers with access to yield-enhancing, soil and water productivity improving packages and solutions effectively. Our mutually beneficial partnership with ICBA through this project will improve the research capacity of our agriculture research institutions in Karakalpakstan."

Running from 2022 to 2026, the project is designed to enhance farming communities' resilience to climate change and develop their adaptive capacity to land degradation and other unfavorable factors.

This will be achieved through, among other things, the introduction of stress-resilient crops, best practices in crop, soil and water management, and integrated farming systems.

Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Director General of ICBA, said: "We are pleased to extend our thanks to the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development for their constant endeavor to support agricultural development projects, which have the best impact on developing the capabilities of rural communities and improving their quality of life. We are also pleased to cooperate with the Ministry of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan in the implementation of this important initiative targeting rural communities in Karakalpakstan. The center started working with local partners in Uzbekistan in 2006 to implement a wide range of projects and activities aimed at crop diversification and adaptation to climate change and capacity development. Building on our past experiences and successes, we are excited to pass on the knowledge and expertise of our center to improve the lives and livelihoods of people most at risk from the effects of climate change, salinity and ecosystem degradation in the Aral Sea region."

As part of the project, ICBA will establish a seed production unit to cater to farmers' need for quality seeds as lack of access to diverse climate-resilient crops and their improved seeds is regarded as one of the main constraints on agriculture.

Moreover, the project will engage local and international organizations to support national agricultural development policies, as defined in Uzbekistan's Agri-Food Development Strategy 2019-2030, contribute to the country's efforts to improve food security and nutrition among vulnerable rural communities and several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDGs 1, 2, 5, 13 and 17.

The shrinking of the Aral Sea is considered one of the planet's worst environmental disasters. Its consequences are far-reaching, affecting the lives of millions of people in and out of the Aral Sea region. They range from salt and dust storms, loss of biological productivity and biodiversity, deterioration of ecosystems, water supply and health risks, to economic losses. And this situation is exacerbated by climate change. All this calls for finding sustainable solutions based on science and innovation to the challenges faced by local populations.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is an applied agricultural research center with a unique focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to

different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.
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