



OPENING CONFERENCE CALL OF THE AMU DARYA BASIN NETWORK WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE 2010, 1100-1230AM (CEST)

BACKGROUND NOTE

Introduction

The EastWest Institute (www.ewi.info) and the Irrigation and Water Engineering Group of the Wageningen University (www.iwe.wur.nl) have jointly launched in 2010 a project entitled "Afghan-Central Asian water cooperation on management of the Amu Darya river: connecting experts and policy makers in the low lands."

Being carried out within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (www.dprn.nl), this one year process will focus on cross-border cooperation between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on the management of the Amu Darya basin's water resources.

The aim is to promote information exchange between academia, private sector experts and policy makers who work on Afghanistan and Central Asia, especially in sectors relating to rural development and water, thereby building important connections and raising awareness for sustainable development of the water resources in the basin.

The project will:

- Connect experts and officials in the rural development and water sectors;
- Collect, summarize and communicate current national policy priorities of key stakeholders;
- Collect, summarize and communicate academic suggestions for improved policies;
- Organize regular conference calls starting in the summer of 2010;
- Convene policy review seminars in the fall of 2010;
- Publish an outcome report.

The project is aimed at improving connections between relevant actors and producing informed policy recommendations that support ongoing reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in Afghanistan.

The Amu Darya's relevance for sustainable development and regional security

The Amu Darya provides an exceptionally valuable case to explore potential for enhanced cross-border cooperation between Afghanistan and the downstream Central Asian States. The Amu Darya is an essential tributary of the Aral Sea Basin and is crucial for the livelihoods of millions of people in the basin. Development of agriculture (in all riparian states) and hydro-electric power (in Tajikistan and Afghanistan particularly) depend heavily on the water resources of the Amu Darya. Hence, water strategies and projects (either irrigation or hydropower projects) in the upstream countries Afghanistan and Tajikistan are often contested by the downstream countries Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

A policy review process on this topic is very timely given the ongoing reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts of Afghanistan, and the commitment of the international community to foster development in Afghanistan. Increasingly, key donors for the water sector in Afghanistan are the governments of regional countries like Iran, China, and India, as well as remote stakeholders such as European countries including Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as multilateral organizations, including the Asian Development Bank, the European Commission, the Islamic Development Bank, and the UN (FAO, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, UNICEF). International non-governmental organizations are also playing an important role.

Often in these projects the focus is on local or meso level water infrastructure rehabilitation and development (such as dams and the rehabilitation of existing or the construction of new irrigation systems). Even though basin management is internationally promoted, in the context of Afghanistan the trans-boundary impact of the development projects is often overlooked or only addressed within the sub-basins contributing to the Amu Darya, but not the Amu Darya basin itself. The policy review process the Amu Darya Basin Network is geared towards will provide space for concrete suggestions for improvements of existing policies and the generation of new policy options towards sustainable development of Afghanistan considering the implications for downstream riparian states. As the international community is exploring new strategies for its approach to stabilizing Afghanistan, the need for regional approaches will become ever stronger.

About the implementing organizations

The **EastWest Institute (EWI)**, a not-for-profit Brussels-based think and do tank has operated for nearly 30 years long-term projects that aim to reduce tensions and promote dialogue and mutual understanding in critical locations around the world. Since its founding, EWI has committed itself to strengthening global security and to building a culture of conflict prevention by entrenching cooperation among and between states and non-state actors, including the private sector and civil society. EWI is a recognized global leader in its promotion of international cooperation between representatives from governments, business, military, media and other sectors of society in confidential and public dialogue to tackle intractable problems, build trust, reconcile disparate views and reframe issues.

EWI's role in establishing the Amu Darya Basin Network flows from its previous and ongoing work on Alternative Futures for Afghanistan and the Stability of Southwest Asia. In 2009, EWI, in partnership with the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, launched the project "Alternative Futures for Afghanistan and the Stability of Southwest Asia: Improving Regional Cooperation on Water." Supported by EWI's Parliamentarians Network on Conflict Prevention and Human Security, this project has aimed at contributing to more effective international cooperation to help stabilize Afghanistan and neighboring countries with a view to cross-border cooperation on water. A parallel series of off-the-record and private consultations have complemented the process of generating new policy options towards this goal. Improving the national and cross-border management of water resources of Afghanistan is a necessity to improve the lives of millions of people. Enhanced regional cooperation to avoid tension over the use and management of shared water resources will be crucial to the success of the Afghan government's and the international community's efforts to provide a secure and stable future for the country and its neighbors.

The **Wageningen University/Irrigation and Water Engineering Group (WU/IWE)** plays a major role in international research on irrigation and water management set in the context of rural transformation. The Irrigation & Water Engineering Group is committed to understanding all there is to water in agriculture. Irrigation - from farm to watershed level - is their main focus. They argue that water flows do not only follow hydraulic laws. It is true that pumps and weirs can move it up and canals and pipes can guide it down. But ultimately, people determine where it flows and which users get what share. Their aim therefore is not only to understand the technical and ecological forces, but also the social forces that drive water use. The WU/IWE plays an active role in education projects and curriculum development in the field of Integrated Water Resources Management perspectives. Main funders of IWE research and educational programs are DGIS, Partners for Water, the World Bank, Nuffic and SIDA.

The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** began work in the Aral Sea region in 2000, and in 2001, it opened a sub-regional office in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Since then IWMI's work in Central Asia has concentrated on addressing some of the key water management issues facing the region. While carrying out its work, IWMI collaborates closely with farmers, canal managers, relevant Ministries, and NGOs. Besides, IWMI has close relationships and collaborations with ICARDA, Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (SIC-ICWC),

the Global Water Partnerships' Central Asia chapter, Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Melioration, and other important development partners in the region, such as the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), Asian Development Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, UNDP, IDB, JICA, etc. Such relationships are maintained through regular donor coordination meetings, joint field missions, various focused meetings, workshops and round-tables to discuss issues facing the region.

Currently IWMI's Central Asian key activity is the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in the Ferghana Valley project. This project was initiated by SIC ICWC and IWMI and financially and strategically supported by SDC. The project is designed to improve the effectiveness of water resources management through the introduction of IWRM principles in the Ferghana Valley shared by 3 Central Asian countries - Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The project addresses possibilities for transparent, fair and efficient water allocation mechanisms among water users and between the project countries. The project is currently implemented within three pilot main canals - one per each project country and within two small transboundary tributaries.

For more information and to join the Amu Darya Basin Network, please visit our website at www.amudaryabasin.net