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# USAID ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION OF THE ARAL SEA II FACT SHEET

## OVERVIEW

The Aral Sea tragedy is one of the world's most infamous environmental disasters. Once the fourth-largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea began to decrease in the 1960s and by 1997 had shrunk to approximately 10% of its former size due to water diversions from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers to irrigate vast fields of rice, wheat, and cotton. Today, the area is often referred to as the Aralkum Desert, the newest desert in the world, spanning more than 62,000 square kilometers. The Aral Sea's dried lake bottom contributes heavily to annual sand and dust storms, making salt and pesticide residues airborne that endanger soil fertility, regional biodiversity, and animal and human health within a radiu kilometers.



Photos from 1973 (left) and 2020 (right) illustrate the drastic changes in the Aral Sea, which lies across the borders of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. (left: CAWATERinfo; right: Google Earth).

Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have undertaken various initiatives to promote knowledge exchange on best afforestation practices to combat the desertification, land degradation, and drought that leads to biodiversity loss and economic stagnation. These initiatives will help purify the air and enhance living conditions in sandstorm-prone areas, while also employing innovative technologies to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies through coordinated national and regional initiatives.

## **GOAL**

In support of these initiatives, USAID launched the Environmental Restoration of the Aral Sea II Activity (ERAS-II). In Uzbekistan, the Activity aims to employ, demonstrate, and evaluate a variety of innovative technologies and planting and irrigation practices that will add new dimensions to the regional knowledge base on afforestation of desert biomes while supporting private sector initiatives for environmental restoration and agro-business. By incorporating cutting-edge techniques into existing afforestation efforts in Karakalpakstan and by demonstrating the private sector's commitment to restoring the Aral Sea, the Activity will facilitate public and private ownership of the environmental agenda, thus enabling longer-term soil improvement and forest reclamation initiatives in the Muynak district of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

At the Aral Sea, ERAS-II will implement proven methods that enhance the sustainability of results and provide options for scaling up and replicating those efforts by local communities, governments of the region, and other donors. In addition to ecosystem restoration, the Activity will also facilitate cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by forming and moderating a bilateral working group for co-creating potential solutions and comprehensive restoration plans.

The Environmental Restoration of the Aral Sea II Activity will be implemented by the [USAID Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity](#) in cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Water Resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the ministries of Foreign Affairs, and key government agencies responsible for afforestation and rehabilitation works at the dried bottom of the Aral Sea in both countries.

**IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD:** October 2022- September 2025

**BUDGET:** \$1.65 million USD

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