

CENTRAL ASIA

Tajikistan • Aksu



Context

The Aksu River catchment area (1,156 km²) is located between the Sughd region of Tajikistan (25%) and the southwestern part of Kyrgyzstan (75%). In its Tajik part, it covers an area of 284 km² with 34,412 inhabitants. Grazing, forestry and agriculture constitute the majority of the region's economic activities. The local climate varies from subtropical and arid in the lower zone to semi-wet in the upper zone. A national water reform project plans to move from an administrative water management approach to an integrated catchment area management approach. The objective is to create a River Basin Organisation responsible for the sustainable use of water and natural resources at the watershed level.

Stakeholders

The "National Water Resources Management" project is led by an international consortium composed of the NGO ACTED, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (HSI) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ-IS), and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The Tajik and Kyrgyz local governments are key components of the project with which ACTED has led the implementation of practices aimed at reducing the impacts of water-related disasters in the Aksu basin with local communities in both countries. The objective of the project is to (i) strengthen water resources and irrigation management in river basins; (ii) reduce water-related risks; and (iii) improve livelihoods and socio-economic indicators in rural areas of the Aksu basin.

Methodology

The process aims to facilitate cross-border meetings between stakeholders from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to initiate a cross-border dialogue between neighbouring communities in the Aksu catchment area. In addition to bringing together relevant ministries, community organisations, rescue teams and local community leaders met to share knowledge, expertise and experience in developing river basin management plans and disaster risk reduction strategies. The signing of a cooperation protocol between the local communities of the two countries should make it possible in the future to better prevent disasters, evacuations and exchanges of information.



VULNERABILITIES

ANTHROPOGENIC PRESSURES: deforestation, overgrazing, poor water resource management and inappropriate agricultural practices that bruise soils and increase the risk of landslides and mudslides in the event of heavy rains;

CLIMATE HAZARDS: regular mudflows, landslides and avalanches, especially in spring due to rising temperatures, melting snow and heavy and sudden rains;

NATURAL RESOURCES: destruction of agrosystems and houses by mudflows from large quantities of water flowing downstream; severe soil erosion.

ADAPTATION ACTIONS

In response to the major climate risks and hazards, several actions have been implemented:

- Early warning system linking Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan by telephone and software to alert authorities and individuals concerned, the population, community leaders and community relief teams in the event of a disaster;
- Installation of light structures to slow down sludge flows.

Several actions concern the protection of local natural resources (wood, energy):

- Passive reforestation (stopping deforestation by regulation) and active reforestation (mass planting);
- Awareness of the links between deforestation, poor resource and water management and natural disasters among local communities;
- Implementation of sustainable grazing management to reduce pressure on resources and water (construction of light livestock drainage infrastructure, sowing of grasses);
- Changes in agricultural practices (variety changes, end of irrigation, creation of secondary products);
- Technical assistance and training in the installation of insulation in homes and in improving the energy efficiency of heating systems (stove).

STRENGTHS OF THE APPROACH

- Integration of local populations into the participatory process and active participation of community leaders;
- Increased awareness of local issues and climate change;
- Application of the systemic approach at the scale of the catchment area (taking into account the interrelationships between the problem and social and economic activities).

LIMITS OF THE APPROACH

- Exclusion of local communities from decision-making and management once the participatory process of the project is completed;
- Slow changes in behaviour and habits, particularly for wood cutting, which remains a free and reliable source of energy since the energy crises resulting from the fall of the USSR;
- Difficulty in mobilising actors to initiate the work sites of the actions to be implemented.

SOURCES

- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2019). [Managing disaster risks and water under climate change in Central Asia and Caucasus](#)
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- IWSM (2014). [Integrated watershed management in Tajikistan](#)
- ACTED (2018). [Integrated Natural Resources Management in Tajikistan Aksu watershed - Good practices on Disaster Risks Reduction](#)