WECOOP 2

Regional Coordination and Support for the EU-Central Asia enhanced Regional Cooperation on Environment, Climate Change and Water - EuropeAid/137334/DH/SER/Multi-Re-Launch 2016/ 377-028

Technical Report:

Assessment of the ICSD

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EU-Central Asia enhanced regional cooperation on Environment, Climate Change and Water

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASB	Aral Sea Basin
ASBP	Aral Sea Basin Programme
CA	Central Asia
CAREC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia
CA RC RES	Central Asian Regional Centre for Renewable Energy Sources
EC	European Commission
EC IFAS	Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
EU	European Union
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
ICSD	Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development
ICWC	Interstate Commission on Water Coordination
IFAS	International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODL	Senior Officials (Russian abbreviation)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PC	Public Council under ICSD
REAP	Regional Environmental Action Plan
REP4SD	Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
RMC	Regional Mountain Centre under ICSD
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIC	Scientific Information Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WECOOP	Regional Coordination and Support for the EU-Central Asia enhanced Regional Cooperation on Environment, Climate Change and Water
WGSO	Senior Officials Working Group
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key regional stakeholders in Central Asia for the European Commission and the WECOOP project is the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD). ICSD was established in 1994 by a decision of the Interstate Council for the Aral Sea. It serves as the main regional body in Central Asia for the cooperation on environmental protection and sustainable development.

Under the auspices of ICSD and with support by UNEP, the Regional Environmental Action Plan (REAP) was developed and agreed by the Central Asia countries in 2003-2004. The Regional Environmental Action Plan is the key specific work programme for the ICSD activities. The necessity to update this document was widely recognized by the Central Asian states and the new REAP is currently being updated by the regional working group with the assistance of the Central Asia Nexus Dialogue project financed by the European Union.

The updated REAP will require new capacities from ICSD, including its national bodies, to address SDGs and new climate change challenges.

This Technical Report is the main output of the activity on identification of the ICSD key capacity building needs and priorities, including ICSD national bodies, as per the Terms of Reference of WECOOP Senior Non-Key Expert. The report has been prepared based on (i) the information received during meetings with ICSD and IFAS, including their national bodies, and international partners including UNEP, CAREC, GIZ, UNECE, (ii) review and analysis of ICSD decisions, reports and other related material available produced by its national and international partners, (iii) information provided by the Central Asia Nexus Dialogue project.

It is envisaged that the identified capacity building activities will be supported jointly with the following international partners: GIZ, UNEP, CAREC, EC IFAS, OSCE, UNDP.

2. STATUS, COMPETENCES AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE ICSD

The Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) is one of two commissions of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). The other commission is the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia (ICWC). IFAS is the main regional interstate organisation in Central Asia dealing with the water governance and environmental cooperation. The objectives of IFAS include establishing and maintaining an interstate environmental monitoring system, database and information systems, mobilizing financing for regional programmes to protect air, water and land resources, flora and fauna, as well as funding joint scientific and technological projects and measures for the management of transboundary waters. The central structural units of IFAS are the Board and the Executive Committee as the standing executive body of the Fund (EC IFAS).

ICSD operates currently under the governance of EC IFAS. According to its Statute, the main objective of ICSD is the coordination and governance of the regional cooperation in Central Asia for environmental protection and sustainable development. It was originally called "the Interstate Commission on Socio-Economic Development, Scientific, Technical, and Environmental Cooperation", but changed its name in 1995. Currently, the organisation has a mandate limited mostly to Central Asian cooperation for sustainable development. In addition to it, ICSD has also the mandate to coordinate activities on the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements at the regional level. The geographical scope of ICSD covers the entire CA region (incl. Caspian Sea), according to its updated Regulations adopted on 18 December 2000[1].

As a rule, ICSD convenes meetings twice a year and participating states are represented by delegations headed by national environmental authorities. Each delegation should also consist of one representative of the ministry of economy and one representative of the country's scientific community. In recent years, the participation of ministries of economy in ICSD meetings has not been regular. The Chair of the Commission is nominated by the country hosting the ICSD meeting.

According to the ICSD Statute, the working bodies of the Commission are the Secretariat, the Scientific Information Centre (SIC ICSD) and the Advisory Council that is not established yet. The Secretariat should provide technical and financial support for the ICSD activities but its role is limited to the logistical support of ICSD meetings. Currently, the most active working body of ICSD is the Scientific Information Centre. The SIC ICSD staff consists of 20 people: 8 people in the headquarters and 3 people based in each country. The headquarters are based in the Turkmenistan's National Institute of Desert and the director of this Institute serves as the director of SIC ICSD. The national branch of SIC ICSD was registered as a legal entity in Tajikistan. The other national branches in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan do not have

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[1] See decision No.3 of the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development dated 18 October 2000 (Almaty, Kazakhstan).
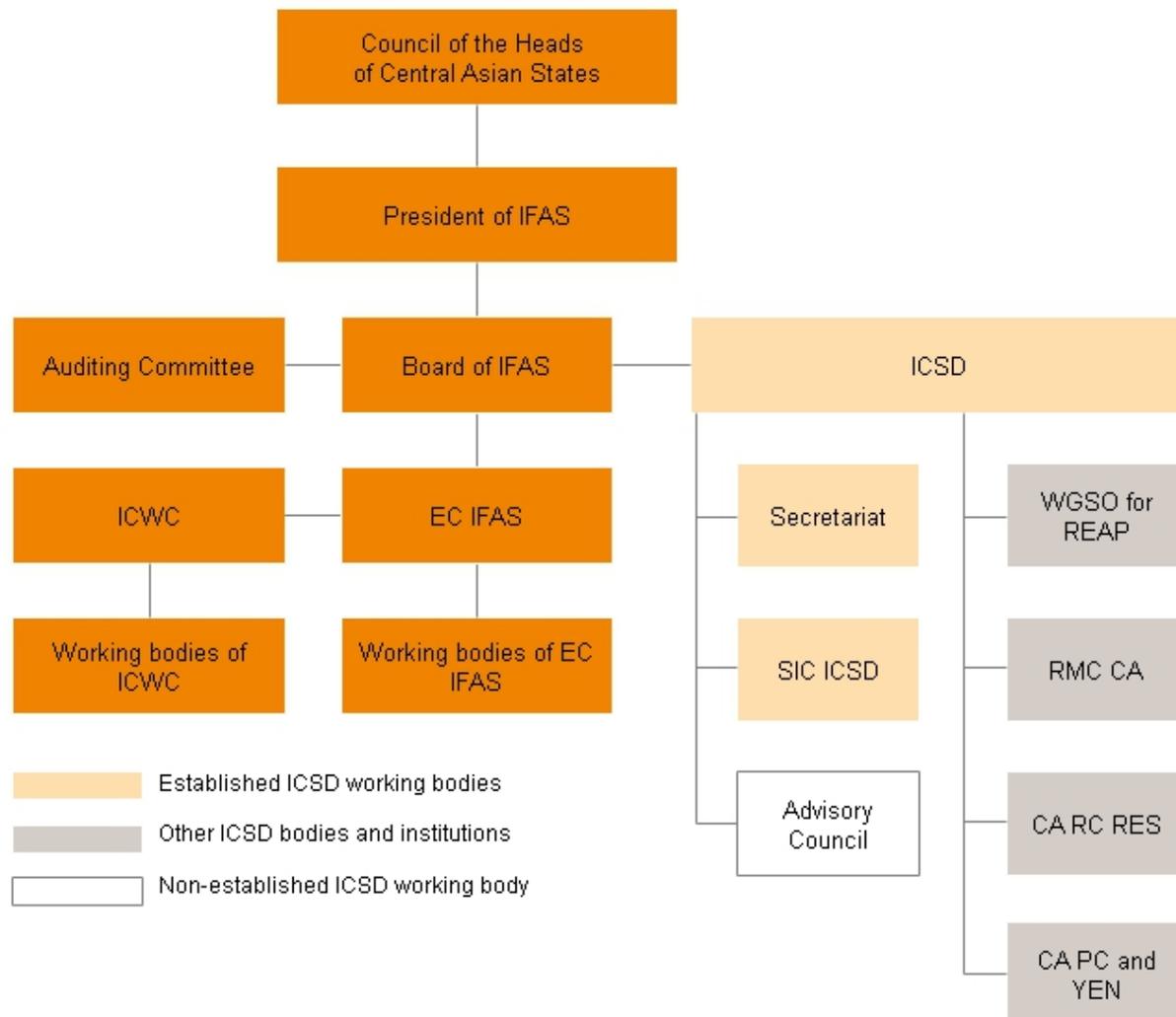
legal personality and are units of different national governmental or non-governmental organisations[2].

Since 2000 the following other bodies and organisations have been established within the ICSD structure for developing and implementing REAP and regional projects:

- Senior Officials Working Group (WGSO);
- Public Council under ICSD (PC);
- Youth Environmental Network of Central Asia (CAYEN);
- Regional Mountain Centre of Central Asia (RMC);
- Central Asian Regional Centre for Renewable Energy (RC RES).

[2] GIZ Report "ICSD Organizational Assessment and Revitalization", see at p. 7.

Figure 1. Structure of ICSD within IFAS

Parity of representation of countries, rotation of chairmanship and secretariat between the participating countries and consensus-based decision-making are the guiding principles for the governance of ICSD. According to its Statute, the ICSD consists of 15 members: 3 from each state (heads of national environmental authorities, deputy ministers of economy, representatives of scientific communities). The rotation of chairmanship and secretariat usually takes place every two years. The only exemption was made for Turkmenistan as the state serves these roles for four years due to the temporary suspension of membership in IFAS by Kyrgyzstan. The decision-making by consensus is also set by the ICSD Statute and followed in practice.

The ICSD Statute does not refer to transparency, accountability, stakeholder engagement, access to information as governance principles of the organization. In practice, some

stakeholder engagement is ensured by the establishment of the Public Council consisting of 3 representatives of NGOs and other members of the public from each country. Members of the Public Council participate in the meetings of the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development as observers without voting. Transparency of activities and access to information on the activities of ICSD are ensured by national offices of the ICSD Scientific Information Centre, namely by Kazakh[3], Tajik[4] and Uzbek offices[5]. The websites provide detailed information on ICSD governance and activities, ICSD meetings, bodies and organisations, useful materials on sustainable development, etc.

Currently ICSD operates under the EC IFAS and financing of the activities of the Commission and its working bodies has to be carried out through contributions of countries to IFAS. This decision, however, has not been fully implemented. First of all, each country allocates less than its expected contribution to IFAS. Secondly, a part of the funds from the IFAS membership fee is usually sent by each country to its national branch of IFAS in the national currency and used for the branch activities and implementation of national projects within the country. Countries do not make regular contributions for joint activities and regional projects by IFAS. International organisations and donors fund almost all regional projects carried out within the ICSD framework. In these circumstances it is very difficult to make any firm conclusions on the financial sustainability of ICSD.

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[3] https://www.mkurca.org/

[4] http://filial-nic-mkur.tj/ru/

[5] http://mkur.uznature.uz/rus

3. ICSD POLICY, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The main policy document for all bodies under IFAS, including ICSD, is the Aral Sea basin programme for assistance to the Aral Sea basin countries: ASBP-1 (1994-1999); ASBP-2 (2000-2010); ASBP-3 (2011-2015). ASBP-3 includes four areas: (1) integrated use of water resources; (2) environmental measures; (3) social and economic measures; and (4) improvement of institutional and legal mechanisms.[6] ICSD participated in the preparation of project proposals of ASBP-3 for donors, but most projects received almost no funding. Currently, a fourth iteration of the Aral Sea Basin Program (ASBP-4) is under development.[7]

In addition, ICSD has its own work programme – **Regional Environmental Action Plan** (REAP), presently succeeded by **Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development** (REP4SD). This instrument is not fully linked to ASBP and the national strategies and priorities. REAP included 5 areas: air pollution, water pollution, land degradation, waste management and degradation of mountain ecosystems. This document does not cover water and water related ecosystems, climate change mitigation and adaptation. REAP was approved by ICSD in 2001, and by IFAS in 2003; REP4CSD is in development since mid-2018.

Another framework document of ICSD is the **Central Asian Initiative on sustainable development**, initiated by ICSD in cooperation with CAREC and presented at the World Summit on sustainable development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002[8]. The Initiative includes the list of common Central Asian goals and commitments on sustainable development.

ICSD also developed and approved in 2008 the sub-regional strategy for sustainable development of Central Asian countries, an additional framework document to improve environmental cooperation in the region.

In 2006, ICSD in cooperation with UNEP developed the **Framework Convention on the Protection of the Environment for Sustainable Development of Central Asia** (the Convention)[9]. The Convention sets the legal framework for environmental cooperation of the Central Asian countries but has not come into force: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have not adopted it yet.

According to the 2017 GIZ ICSD Organisational Assessment and Revitalisation, CA countries, in cooperation with international partners, have established within ICSD (1) the regional dialogue platform, (2) regional policy coordination and (3) regional projects' implementation mechanism.

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[6] http://www.ifas.kz/upload/userfiles/files/3.pdf

[7] REP4SD Production and Management. Draft Concept note by Philipp Reichmuth, November 2018

[8] https://www.unece.org/env/efe/kiev/proceedings/html/item7b.speeches.docum.html

[9] https://iea.uoregon.edu/treaty-text/2006-environmentalprotectionsustainabledevelopmentcentralasiaentxt

1) ICSD as a regional dialogue platform

ICSD meetings do happen regularly: twice a year in accordance with the ICSD Statute. They serve as an official multilateral and high-level platform where the Central Asian countries and their partners have possibility to meet and to discuss regional environmental issues. It is also important that ICSD provides a platform for cooperation with environmental NGOs in Central Asia and supports participation of NGOs in the regional processes.

2) ICSD as a platform for regional policy coordination

ICSD has a number of successful examples of regional coordination, including the joint preparation and participation in the Pan-European (1998, 2003, 2006, 2011) and Asia and the Pacific (2000, 2005, 2010) regional conferences, RIO+10 Summit (Johannesburg, 2002) as well as in the sessions of the Conferences (Meetings) of the Parties to different UN conventions.

Also, a number of initiatives and documents were developed under the auspices of ICSD, including:

1) the first integrated "State of Environment" assessment for Central Asia developed for the 4th Pan-European conference "Environment for Europe" in 1998,

2) the REAP development process since 1999,

3) the Central Asian Initiative on sustainable development in 2003,

4) the development of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Environment for Sustainable Development in Central Asia adopted in 2006.

3) ICSD project-related activities

Some project-related activity is happening at the ICSD but it remains at a low level due to the lack of capacity and experience of ICSD in project preparation and management. Some implementing agencies engage ICSD as a platform for "regionalizing" their projects. However, ICSD does not implement any projects on its own, such activities are being implemented by the ICSD structures, namely the Scientific Information Centre (SIC) and its national branches, Youth Environmental Network of Central Asia, Regional Mountain Centre of Central Asia, and Central Asian Regional Centre for Renewable Energy.

4. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC NEEDS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

This Technical Assessment is focused on specific needs in capacity building and institutional strengthening of the ICSD but it is premature to make such an assessment in relation to the new Regional Environmental Action Plan. Currently, the process of development of this document is at the stage of elaboration of proposals at national level. The proposals are not yet in the public domain to be the basis for an assessment of specific needs for the implementation of the new REAP.

A number of assessments of the needs for institutional strengthening and capacity building were conducted in relation to the fulfilment of the mandate of the ICSD and more effective implementation of the previous REAP. It is worthwhile for this assessment to take into consideration the findings and conclusions of two studies. First, the most recent one, namely the 2017 ICSD Organisational Assessment and Revitalisation by GIZ. This assessment was supported by the GIZ Regional Programme on Sustainable and Climate-Sensitive Land Use for Economic Development in Central Asia (SUSTAIN-CA). Second, the 2012 Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" which assessed the needs for institutional strengthening and capacity building for the implementation of the previous REAP. That assessment was initiated and commissioned by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Evaluation Office, Nairobi.

Based on the analysis of the information presented in this report and the results of the above-mentioned assessments, the following areas for the ICSD institutional strengthening and capacity building are identified:

- strengthening the current institutional set-up of the ICSD to fulfil its broad mandate;
- overcoming high dependence of the ICSD on donor support for the implementation of its basic functions, e.g. costs of participation of delegations in ICSD meetings;
- promotion of legal instruments as the basis for ICSD activities;
- more active involvement of the ICSD in project-related activities, including project design, implementation and monitoring;
- thematic re-focusing from Aral Sea related environmental and sustainable development issues only to the regional cooperation on implementation of SDGs, the Paris Agreement, environmental conventions, etc.;
- strengthening the role of the Public Council as the platform for engagement of stakeholders and experts into the ICSD processes and activities.

Despite the existence of proposals calling for the institutional modernisation of the ICSD, it requires the ICSD members' motivation and political will to pursue such institutional modernisation. As it falls outside of the scope of the WECOOP project, the focus of this report is

on the capacity building of the ICSD on the basis of available tools provided by the WECOOP projects and international, regional and non-governmental organisations. They are presented in a table in the next section of this report.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ICSD CAPACITY BUILDING AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Identified needs	Recommendations	Available tools
Strengthening the current institutional set-up of the ICSD to fulfil its broad mandate	1) involvement of more high-level officials in ICSD meetings; 2) capacity building of the ICSD secretariat and its structures; 3) review of necessary amendments to the IFAS and ICSD founding documents to strengthen the ICSD competences; 4) development of a regional mechanism on distribution of common benefits from improved cooperation using the best practices and initiatives, including the Green Bridge Partnership Programme.	
Overcoming high dependence of the ICSD on donor support for the implementation of its basic functions	1) including costs of participation of delegations into national budgets of hosting countries; 2) support of inter-sessional activities by hosting countries through the ICSD secretariat and by the establishment of thematic working groups.	
Promotion of legal instruments as the basis for ICSD activities	1) review of the current legal framework of the ICSD; 2) promotion of the ratification of the Framework Convention on the Protection of the Environment for Sustainable Development; 3) preparation and negotiation of decisions for adoption by ICSD.	1) UNEP Guidelines on compliance with and enforcement of multilateral agreements 2) relevant Convention's implementation guides
More active involvement of the ICSD in project-related activities, including project design, implementation and monitoring	1) capacity building for the ICSD secretariat and SIC on project design, implementation and monitoring; 2) More active participation of the ICSD secretariats and SIC and its branches	1) WECOOP Regional Knowledge Centre; 2) CAREC Knowledge Hub; 3) WECOOP trainings on green finance and project design; 4) WECOOP, CAREC and GIZ thematic trainings.
Thematic re-focusing from Aral Sea related environmental and sustainable development issues only to the regional	1) development of a regional long-term vision/ strategy on sustainable development and SDGs for a long-term and stable cooperation in CA; 2) trainings on the Paris Agreement, SDGs, climate change adaptation	1) UN SDGs Knowledge Platform; 2) The European Climate Adaptation Platform; 3) future Central Asian Climate Adaptation Platform;

cooperation on implementation of SDGs, the Paris Agreement, environmental conventions, etc.	and mitigation with focus on their regional dimensions;	4) capacity building activities under relevant environmental conventions.
Strengthening the role of the Public Council as the platform for engagement of stakeholders and experts into the ICSD processes and activities	1) raising public awareness of the role of the Public Council; 2) expanding the current composition of the Public Council; 3) providing for broader participation of stakeholders and experts at the ICSD meetings.	Living Asia social media, www.livingasia.online