

New initiatives in the Aral Sea region

Over the past years new thinking is evolving in the Aral Sea region to counteract the environmental catastrophe – or at least to develop some positive initiatives that the local and international community can gather around to improve the living conditions in the area.

The idea of transforming Area Sea Area to a zone of environmental innovations and technologies was initiated by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. A “UN Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund” for the Aral Sea Region has been set up and an International Innovation Center for the Aral Sea Basin established.

In May 2021 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Aral Sea region declaring it a zone of ecological innovations and technologies and committing to promote greater research and scientific efforts to recover the region and improve its environment.

As an example, in a recent competition, the following four projects were selected as winners:

- **Agriculture and Land Management:** A landscape restoration process, built on using local sediments and waste materials to stabilize dry salty lands and prevent toxic soil from being carried by winds away from the damaged Aral Sea basin.
- **Sustainable Forestry:** A proposal envisioning the planting of flowering trees to develop a beekeeping industry that brings about jobs and income, along with reforestation.
- **Socio-Economic Development:** An initiative to empower rural women through online technologies, mentoring, and training in water and land management. It aims to connect with projects in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan.
- **Information and Knowledge:** An online cloud-based system that aims to protect grasslands and reduce rangeland destruction across Central Asia.

More information about the competition can be found here:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/04/09/innovative-restoration-plans-for-aral-sea-region-announced-at-global-disruptive-tech-challenge-2021>.

There are also other recent events in the region that demonstrate new ideas.

A festival of electronic music took place in Muynak 14-15 May 2021. The annual festival called Stikhiiya (in Russian “Element”, see photo) that among other things brought attention to the city and contributed to planting of 5000 trees in the city.



A bicycle marathon is being organised all over Uzbekistan in May-June 2021 in support of the same city of Muynak.

These initiatives aim to make a contribution to the development and living conditions of the city that was previously situated on the Aral Sea but is now far away from the remaining water.

But the most important recent contribution from an environmental perspective is the planting of bushes and trees on the dry bottom of the Aral Sea that is now the source of regular dust storms that spread over large areas of Central Asia. In Uzbekistan and also in Kazakhstan considerable efforts are made to establish vegetation on the former Aral Sea. Considering the local climate this is not an easy task but according to some reports there is some progress.