

# Environmental Concerns

**A**part from the Aral Sea, there are several environmental issues that need attention and active, long-term cooperation among CAREC members. The most important are:

- weak government ownership of environmental programs in some countries because of institutional constraints and poor understanding of the severity of the problems;
- inadequate budgets for national programs and regional initiatives and organizations;
- poor integration among national environmental strategies and an inability to mainstream environmental issues in economic development;
- a lack of national monitoring, information management, and analytical capacities that constrains effective policy design.

There is also an emerging environmental threat to regional stability and peace. Increasing demands on water by riverine states, including Afghanistan, and the ongoing stalemate in resolving the region's water-energy nexus is beginning to cause tension and open discord.<sup>10</sup> The issue of river pollutants crossing international borders is also acquiring added significance. Because measures to achieve sound water management cannot be separated from international management of shared water resources in the Aral Sea Basin and in several smaller basins, ADB is continuing its efforts to facilitate regional dialogue and plans to remain engaged with key decision makers.

CAREC members and development partners have taken a number of steps to improve environmental and

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natural resource management. International concern over the Aral Sea led to the launching of the first Aral Sea Basin Program under the banner of the Interstate Council for Saving the Aral Sea (later merged with the Interstate Fund for Saving the Aral Sea). The heads of state of five CARs constituted its executive committee and oversaw implementation. Principal funding for this initiative came from the Global Environment Facility (\$21.1 million) through the World Bank. Several other regional organizations have tried to address these problems. Of particular note is the Central Asian Economic Community's<sup>11</sup> successful brokering of the Interstate Agreement on Water and Energy Use in the Syr Darya signed in 1998 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan and acceded to by Tajikistan in 1999.

ADB has provided considerable environmental technical assistance to the region, primarily through grant funds channeled through ADB by the Government of Finland.<sup>12</sup> While the majority of this assistance has been directed to strengthening the capacities of national environmental agencies, several regional activities have also been undertaken to encourage cooperation in addressing natural resource management problems. These have covered mountain area development, water management, and land degradation as well as the creation of a regional environmental action plan. ADB has also promoted cooperation by lending its support to several regional gatherings.

ADB is working to better understand important environmental and natural resource management constraints on national economic development and to mainstream attention to these issues into its programs and into the economic policies, plans, and programs of the CARs. Most future technical assistance would best be organized at either the national level or under flexible regional umbrella arrangements designed to facilitate national programs and responses.