

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: RSES

TA No. and Name TA 5941-REG: Combating Desertification in Asia		Amount Approved: \$450,000	
		Revised Amount: –	
Executing Agency: ADB	Source of Funding: ADB-funded TA Program; Global Mechanism	TA Amount Undisbursed 39,276.50	TA Amount Utilized 410,723.50
Approval	Date Signing	Fielding of Consultants	Completion Date
29 September 2000	28 November 2000	–	Original 31 December 2001 Actual 31 October 2005
			Closing Date
			Original 31 December 2001 Actual 31 December 2005
Description			
<p>The United Nations Convention on Combating Drought and Desertification (UNCCD) is a multilateral environment agreement directed at addressing land degradation and the poverty that contributes to it in dryland areas. The UNCCD is important in Asia because at least 1.3 million ha of agricultural lands are degraded in the region. Nine ADB DMCs have large land areas within the arid, semiarid and dry subhumid zones, which include the 5 Central Asian Countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, Mongolia and Pakistan. Accordingly, 32 DMCs (including the 9 mentioned) had ratified the UNCCD as of by 2001. In view of the urgency of addressing their land degradation problems, these 9 DMCs have the most advanced actions on UNCCD implementation. All have appointed a national focal point, established a high-level interministerial national coordinating body to review and guide UNCCD implementation and completed preparation of National Action Planning, though this was not the case at the outset of the TA. In addition, the Central Asian Countries have prepared a subregional action plan to address land degradation. ADB and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD, together with partner institutions responded to the requests of these DMCs to further advance their UNCCD-related initiatives through this TA in the following areas: (i) review of enabling policy and institutional factors; (ii) creation of opportunities for mainstreaming UNCCD objectives in development planning; (iii) identification of associated investments.</p>			
Objectives and Scope			
<p>The TA aimed to assist the 9 DMCs to refine, adopt and implement national action programs to combat desertification in arid, semiarid, and dry subhumid regions. The TA was designed to complement other ongoing and planned activities in support of UNCCD implementation. Further, the processes supported under the TA were expected to be firmly nested within each country's policy and institutional framework for addressing land degradation. Specific activities to be supported were: (i) preparation of regional/subregional or national policy/strategy papers to address issues and strengthen national action programming; (ii) convening multistakeholder national and subregional forums on UNCCD implementation; (iii) identification of investment, TA and capacity building concepts for financing by bilateral agencies, multilateral funding agencies (including ADB) the Global Environment Facility (GEF) or the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).</p>			
Evaluation of Inputs			
<p>ADB and the GM respectively provided grants of \$250,000 and \$200,000 to fund the TA, with additional counterpart financing from participating countries. The completion date was revised several times to take advantage of opportunities that arose during TA implementation, primarily for additional contributions to development of the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) now being supported under RETA 6236. While originally designed to cover 9 countries in Asia, the TA was focused primarily on the five Central Asian Countries, which provided the best opportunities to achieve the TA's objectives. This adjustment was not at the expense of other countries (particularly PRC and Mongolia), as other TAs emerged to provide capacity and resources to address land degradation issues in these countries. The consultants performed well in their respective tasks as shown by the quality of documentation produced and other TA outputs. These inputs especially included those of international consultants who reviewed the national plans for UNCCD implementation in the five Central Asian countries and assisted with the conceptual structuring and logistical arrangements for the Tashkent Forum and the first gathering of the partners that resulted in formulation of the CACILM partnership. Domestic consultant inputs provided important bridging analysis that maintained CACILM's momentum while ADB organized a follow-up RETA to solidify the program and partner commitments. The forums organized allowed participating countries to provide inputs at the national and subregional levels and to elevate the stature of land degradation issues in national and sectoral planning. National Working Groups were mobilized in Central Asia to deliver background studies. A Task Force was created to prepare the CACILM framework, and it met several times to assess the inputs from TA consultants and their counterparts from across the region.</p>			

Evaluation of Outputs/Outcomes

The TA envisioned four major outputs: (i) strengthened national action programming process; (ii) policy dialogue agenda on dryland management; (iii) a pipeline of investment and capacity building concepts; (iv) GEF concept paper for GEF/CARs partnership. These were all fully accomplished and are embodied in the specific achievements described and evaluated below.

Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) for the Implementation of UNCCD in the Central Asian Republics. The TA was instrumental in bringing the SPA into existence. This partnership was entered into on 10 October 2001 at COP5/UNCCD, between the GM-UNCCD, ADB through RETA 5941, CIDA and UNCCD Project of GTZ. Other agencies such as IFAD, SDC, ICARDA, UNDP and UNEP later joined the SPA. The SPA enhances collaboration between the Central Asian Countries and their external partners for effective UNCCD implementation. It also promotes complementary program activities, joint technical guidance, enhanced communication, information exchange and coordination and served as donor platform for imitating CACILM. The TA acted as the catalyst in developing the SPA with leadership from GM and ADB, which continues to play an important role in financing CACILM activities. The Partnership-driven programmatic approach to addressing these environmental and related social problems is now recognized globally as a model for GEF programs.

Tashkent Forum on Land Degradation in Central Asia. The “Subregional Partnership Building Forum for Central Asian Republics: Confronting Land Degradation and Poverty through Enhanced UNCCD Implementation” was held on 30 June–4 July 2003. The Forum identified a practical course of action—the Tashkent Joint Platform of Action for UNCCD Implementation—that outlined a clear set of objectives and preliminary tasks both for the five Central Asian Countries and for the SPA and other partners. The TA also supported preparation of national background papers—Issues and Approaches to Combat Desertification—that guided the meeting. A subregional synthesis paper prepared under the TA for the Forum also served as the best available resource on the status and prospects of UNCCD implementation in Central Asia.

Global Environment Facility (GEF) Engaged and Funding the Preparation Phase of CACILM. Based on the results of the Forum, the TA supported the preparation of a CACILM GEF Project Development Fund (PDF-B) proposal that resulted in \$700,000 in GEF cofinancing for CACILM's design. Reports prepared under the TA also created the groundwork for the Technical Assistance for CACILM (RETA 6236) by giving a prominent place to issues relating to multi-country cooperation and partnership among the Central Asian Countries and donor agencies with the objective of combating land degradation by accelerating UNCCD implementation in the Central Asia subregion.

CACILM Program and Support Project Approval. The TA's inputs led directly to ADB and partners successfully obtaining approval from GEF for \$20 million in grant financing for the first phase of CACILM's implementation. National Programming Frameworks supplemented and greatly enhanced existing National Action Plans in all five countries. The CACILM program is closely aligned with GEF's Country Partnership Program (CPP) for Sustainable Land Management, and CACILM is the only multi-country model of the CPP. A 10-year program of policy and institutional reform—coupled with \$1.3 billion in investment—is envisioned. The first RETA to manage CACILM's implementation and support multi-country efforts received \$3.025 million in GEF cofinancing and will be approved shortly.

Overall Assessment and Rating

This TA is rated as successful. While there were some delays in its implementation which warranted extensions, and its attention eventually focused on 5 of the 9 targeted countries, these adjustments served to enhance the TA's results. The four outputs described have fully addressed the objectives of the TA in each of the 5 Central Asian Countries and across the entire Central Asia subregion. The TA was also able to seize new opportunities to address land degradation in a more sustainable way by supporting engagement with other partners, especially the GEF and the GM.

Major Lessons Learned

1. Development of partnership-based and programmatic approaches to addressing complex environmental and natural resources management problems takes time and sustained effort. Advisory TAs with such objectives must consider this in their design.
2. The TA achieved an extremely high level of leveraging, and the application of this approach to similar circumstances may be fruitful.
3. The TA demonstrated how strong collaboration between ADB and other partners, including the GM, can result in the policy and institutional analysis and partnering arrangements that lead to higher quality and increased investments.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The CACILM program will carry on as a legacy of this TA in Central Asia. Opportunities for ADB interventions on sustainable land management (with cofinancing from GEF and other partners) should be further explored in India, Pakistan and Mongolia building on the TA's experience.