

## WATER DISTRIBUTION IN CENTRAL ASIA: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND MODERN THREATS

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**Relevance of the problem.** Water resources in the Central Asian region have long been an integral part of economic, social and political life. Today, this issue is one of the most pressing factors directly affecting the sustainable development of the region, environmental safety and interstate relations. As a result of the collapse of the unified irrigation system formed during the former Soviet Union, the balance in the distribution of water resources was disrupted, which led to disagreements between independent republics. Rapid population growth, climate change, the construction of new hydraulic structures and inefficient use of water are further aggravating water shortages in Central Asia. Therefore, the fair distribution of water resources, improving their management system and strengthening international cooperation are among the most important strategic issues of today.

**Purpose of the study.** To analyze the historical formation of the distribution of water resources in Central Asia, to identify the specific aspects of water policy that has emerged in the recent period since independence, and to shed light on modern threats and ways to eliminate them on a scientific basis. The study also aims to propose cooperation mechanisms for the rational use and equitable distribution of water resources between the countries of the region.

### **Research objectives.**

Analyze the historical process of water resource use in Central Asia and identify the stages of its formation.

Study the structure of water policy and irrigation systems in the region during the former Soviet Union.

Analyze the problems that have arisen in the republics in the post-independence period regarding water distribution and their causes.

Propose cooperation mechanisms for the effective use of water resources and achieving equitable distribution.

Irrigated agriculture has long been developed in Central Asia, and water resources have been the main source of life and economic activity in this region. The population around the Amu Darya and

Syrdarya basins has long built complex irrigation systems. Ancient civilizations such as Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khorezm developed precisely through the management of water resources.

At the beginning of the 20th century, when Central Asia became part of the Russian Empire and later the USSR, centralized management of water resources was established. In particular, in the 1960s-1980s, new canals, reservoirs and irrigation facilities were built to increase the volume of cotton production. This disrupted the natural balance of water resources and caused the drying of the Aral Sea.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the countries of Central Asia were faced with the issue of independent management of water resources. The unified irrigation system and the water distribution system, which were managed on the basis of general planning during the Soviet era, were now formed, subordinated to the national interests of each state.

As a result, the balance in water distribution was disrupted: the republics of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, located upstream of the water sources, set electricity production as a priority, while downstream countries such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan made water use for agricultural needs their main goal. This has exacerbated conflicts of interest in water use and led to regional political conflicts. Water scarcity is not only an economic threat, but also causes environmental and social problems. In the Aral Sea region, environmental disasters, migration and health problems are among the painful consequences of this process.

Sustainable management and equitable distribution of water resources in the Central Asian region can only be achieved through interstate cooperation. Since the politicization of the water issue reduces mutual trust in the region and hinders economic cooperation, a long-term strategic approach is needed in this area.

First of all, irrigation policy should be implemented in a manner that harmonizes environmental, economic and social interests. It is important to develop water diplomacy between the countries of the region, exchange information on the basis of mutual trust, and establish a joint monitoring system. In this regard, it is advisable to strengthen the activities of institutions such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Central Asian Regional Ecological Center (CAREC).

Another important area is the introduction of water-saving technologies, the expansion of drip irrigation systems in agriculture, and the modernization of water infrastructure. This will not only reduce water consumption, but also lead to economic growth. It is also important to study international experience in water resources management - in particular, the European Union's "Convention on Transboundary Waters" - and develop mechanisms suitable for the conditions of Central Asia.

## Conclusion

Water resources in Central Asia are one of the main factors of regional stability, economic development and social well-being. Historically, the way of life and irrigation systems that have developed around water sources have determined the political and economic relations of the republics of the region to this day.

The destruction of the single irrigation system inherited from the former Soviet Union, the process of basing each state's water use policy on national interests after independence, has led to an imbalance in water distribution. The establishment of water diplomacy based on mutual trust by the countries of the region, the creation of joint management and monitoring systems are the most important conditions for conflict-free and effective management of water resources.

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