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Water in Central Asia: Abundantly Available, Heavily Contested, But Glue to International Collaboration

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Abstract

Central Asia is not only prominent for its human-made environmental catastrophe of which the Aral Sea crises is probably the most well-known, but not only example. The fashionable opinion that Central Asia as a whole is saddled with a water crises is truthful as well. But the trendy view that the region needs to cope with water scarcity, is however, regardless of how often it is repeated, only marginally supported by facts and figures from the past and present. The five countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan appear since years among the top per capita water users worldwide, with concurrently very modest to low water use efficiencies in the irrigated agricultural sector that however consumes the bulk of all water resources in the region. And this regardless the indicator analysed. Yet, the fact that the farming communities in e.g. tail end regions regularly face water shortages during cropping periods masks for a larger part the true causes of the water crises. This study unravels the water crises in Central Asia by tackling international and national facets and its relationships. It also addresses options for actions to ease the current water crises by structuring these on national level according to technical, financial and institutional aspects. It is concluded that the water crises in Central Asia clearly has international characteristics and much has been done. Predominating are also domestic facets that can be tackled by the individual countries and farmers. Yet, a collaboration among the countries in Central Asia is highly recommended to be better prepared for the water challenges to come.

Keywords: Aral Sea Basin, upstream. downstream, water scarcity