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# Abu Dhabi Fund Launches $5 Million Agricultural Resilience Project in Uzbekistan's Aral Sea Region

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**The Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) has officially inaugurated the Agricultural Production Systems Development Project in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, following a high-level field visit to the project sites. This landmark initiative, funded by an AED 18.7 million (USD $5 million) investment from ADFD, is designed to restore agricultural productivity and strengthen the resilience of communities grappling with the severe environmental challenges posed by the Aral Sea crisis.**

The project, titled "Development of Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems in Degraded Areas of Karakalpakstan," was launched in 2022 and introduces integrated agricultural systems to combat drought, desertification, and land degradation, aiming to transform the region's farming landscape.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by **H.E. Mohamed Saif Al Suwaidi**, Director General of ADFD; **H.E. Orinbayev Amanbay Tieubayevich**, Chairman of the Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan; **H.E. Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi**, Director General of the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA); and other key officials and partners.

## Innovative Systems for Arid Environments

The joint initiative is being implemented in collaboration with the Government of Uzbekistan (represented by the Ministries of Ecology and Agriculture), the **International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA)**, the **International Innovation Center for the Aral Sea Basin (IICAS)**, and the **Karakalpakstan Agricultural Research Institute (KARI)**.

The project focuses on introducing **drought-, heat-, and salt-tolerant crops**, applying advanced water and soil management systems, and developing innovative agricultural models to enhance food security and support sustainable livelihoods. It involves testing more than **20 resilient crop types** under extreme climatic conditions across three model sites.

A core component is the integration of cutting-edge infrastructure, including modern irrigation and drainage systems, cost-effective greenhouses, seed propagation units, and an **integrated agri-aquaculture system** that combines salt-tolerant crops with fish production. Furthermore, the initiative includes extensive **capacity building**, with training provided for nearly **2,000 specialists and farmers** on advanced practices and technology to ensure long-term sustainability.

## Empowering Communities and Aligning with Global Goals

ADFD emphasized that the project aligns with global efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Uzbekistan's national development agenda.

**His Excellency Mohamed Saif Al Suwaidi said:** "This project reflects the vision of our wise leadership and our shared commitment to advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals of strengthening food security worldwide. It reinforces the Fund's strategic approach to implementing innovative solutions, fostering impactful partnerships and enabling knowledge exchange between nations. Through such projects, we aim to empower communities to overcome environmental challenges, adapt to climate realities, and build stronger, more self-reliant economies."

**His Excellency Al Suwaidi added:** "Beyond the project's agricultural focus, the initiative also contributes to broader economic resilience, unlocking opportunities that align with Uzbekistan's national development agenda and long-term vision for an inclusive, sustainable future. Our collaboration with the Republic of Uzbekistan in this pioneering project underscores ADFD's dedication to generating measurable, lasting impact that benefits both current and future generations."

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## A Model for the Global South

Partners highlighted the project's success in pioneering innovative, scientific approaches to arid land challenges.

**Her Excellency Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Director General of the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture said:** "We are proud of our partnership with Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, through which we exemplify a scientific and practical model that transforms challenges into opportunities and establishes a successful example of strategic investment. In Uzbekistan, this collaboration has enabled the testing of more than twenty varieties of crops tolerant to salinity and drought, with significant nutritional value. It has also led to the development of the country's first integrated system that combines vegetable cultivation, algae cultivation, and aquaculture, while ensuring the optimal use of water resources. The project further included awareness and training programs to build farmers' capacities in production and to promote the sustainability of agricultural practices suited to arid and saline environments."

**Her Excellency Dr. Alzaabi added,** "The true value of the project lies not only in land reclamation or the

introduction of new technologies, but also in strengthening the resilience of farming communities and opening new horizons for achieving sustainable food and water security across the Global South.”

**His Excellency Xabibullaev Baxitjan Sagidullaevich, Director of the International Innovation Center for the Aral Sea Basin stated** that today’s meeting symbolizes confidence, cooperation, and solidarity. Since 2019, the Center and ICBA have jointly implemented scientific and practical projects, including the sustainable agriculture initiative in Karakalpakstan, supported by the Abu Dhabi Development Fund and other partners. This project created experimental fields, tested salt-tolerant crops and technologies, benefited over a thousand farmers, and was honored with the Energy Globe Award 2024.

**His Excellency Sagidullaevich also noted** that a new pilot on Integrated Agri-Aquaculture Systems is now being launched to combine crop and fish farming with efficient water use. These efforts strengthen food security, support climate change adaptation, and improve livelihoods in the Aral Sea region, while highlighting Uzbekistan’s active role in addressing global environmental challenges.

The project is considered a major milestone for Karakalpakstan, shifting the region from environmental challenges to a future of sustainable agriculture and providing a practical model of triangular South–South cooperation for the international community.