



GLOBAL DISRUPTIVE TECH CHALLENGE 2021

RESTORING LANDSCAPES IN THE ARAL SEA REGION

THE CONTEXT

What is the Global Disruptive Tech Challenge 2021?

The Global Disruptive Tech Challenge 2021 aims to identify and support disruptive technologies and innovative approaches to landscape restoration in the Aral Sea region of Central Asia. The Challenge will select innovators (individuals or entities) from around the world whose work may change the lives of millions of people in the Aral Sea region. Proposals obtaining the best scores will obtain recognition and awards.

Why the Aral Sea?



The Aral Sea is disappearing

The Aral Sea in Central Asia, once the world's fourth-largest inland water body, has almost disappeared, due to more than 30 years of overuse of its resources. Much of its water has been diverted to grow water-intensive crops, such as cotton and rice. This dramatic change has led to a steep decline in the environmental, social, and economic well-being of the region.



Climate change and livelihoods

The disaster has been further impacted by global climate change, which is already affecting the livelihoods of more than four million people who live in the Aral Sea crisis zone. That covers a significant part of Uzbekistan and the southern part of Kazakhstan; in total, 40 million people live in the Aral Sea basin and may be affected further by the disaster there.



Salt?

Moreover, salt from the drying Aral Sea basin is found far beyond this region, including in Scandinavia and Antarctica. Every year, winds carry some 150 million tons of this salt – often made toxic due to the runoff of pesticides and fertilizers used in intensive farming – from the Aral Sea over hundreds of thousands kilometres.

More information on the degradation of the Aral Sea can be found [here](#).

Why disruptive technologies?

Innovative technologies and approaches have the power to substantially “disrupt” the status quo of development paradigms. Disruptive technologies can help to alleviate the negative impacts on landscapes from natural and human-induced factors, while also addressing the need for economic growth and sustainable development.

Innovators are invited to propose their disruptive and innovative solutions to landscape restoration issues in the Aral Sea region; particularly those with the potential to scale-up in the entire Central Asia (from the mountains to the steppes).

CHALLENGE WEEK

What is Challenge Week?

Challenge Week is a 5-day event, in which an esteemed jury panel will select Challenge winners from a pool of 24 solutions. Please find the full program of Challenge Week and an overview of the 24 shortlisted proposals [here](#).

When? 5-9 April 2021

Where? [Online](#)

Why attend or write about the Challenge Week?

- Enjoy a front row seat as an expert jury chooses the winning proposals
- Get inspired by the keynote speakers
- Connect with world leading environment and development institutions, regional organizations and universities
- Network with other participants
- Make your mark on the global landscape restoration community



KEY MESSAGES

1. The Aral Sea in Central Asia is disappearing. Once the world's fourth-largest inland water body, it has been almost depleted by the diversion of its resources for irrigation to produce such water-intensive crops as cotton and rice.
2. The disappearance of the Aral Sea, now about one-tenth of its former size, has adversely affected the livelihoods and economies of some 40 million people living in the Aral Sea basin.
3. Intensive farming of cotton, rice and other commodities has involved the use of toxic chemical and pesticides, which drain into the Aral Sea Basin and leech into the soil and water tables, threatening the well-being of those living in the area.
4. Restoring this landscape demands innovative approaches that can be deployed quickly, are affordable and easy to use on a large scale. Those are the goals of the 2021 Global Disruptive Tech Challenge, hosted by the World Bank, the Kazakh-German University (DKU), the Global Landscapes Forum, and other partners.
5. The Global Disruptive Tech Challenge 2021 aims to identify and support such technologies and approaches to solve this region's challenges, awarding winners USD 4,000 plus mentorship. During Challenge Week 5-9 April 2021, a jury will select Challenge winners from a pool of 24 proposed solutions.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Official website of the Challenge ([English](#)/[Russian](#))
- [Challenge Week live stream](#)
- Press center
- Images
- Curated [selection of knowledge products](#) on Central Asia



#TechChallengeCA

is the official hashtag of the Challenge. Add the hashtag to your social media posts and join the Challenge online!

The challenge is organized with the support of the Central Asia Water and Energy Program (CAWEP) a multi-donor Trust-Fund financed by the European Union, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The challenge is administered by the World Bank and will inform the Resilient Landscape Program in Central Asia RESILAND CA +, currently under preparation. It is implemented by the Kazakh-German University (DKU), the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and Plug and Play (P&P).