

YEAR 2024



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SUCCESS STORIES BOOK

THE USAID CENTRAL ASIA'S REGIONAL WATER AND
VULNERABLE ENVIRONMENT ACTIVITY

PREPARED BY:
THE REGIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
CENTRE FOR CENTRAL
ASIA (CAREC)



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A CASE OF SUCCESSFUL COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE EXPERIENCE OF KAZAKHSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

PUBLICATION DATE: 31.01.2024

URL: [HTTPS://WWW.RIVERBP.NET/ENG/COMMUNITY_OF_PRACTICE/CASES/KEYS-USPESHNOGO-SOTRUDNICHESTVA-VUZOV-TSENTRALNOY-AZII-OPYT-KAZAKHSTANA-I-TADZHIKISTANA/](https://www.riverbp.net/eng/community_of_practice/cases/keys-uspeshnogo-sotrudnichestva-vuzov-tsentralnoy-azii-opyt-kazakhstana-i-tadzhikistana/)

In Central Asia, science and education in the region has been hindered by a lack of cooperation among universities, a situation that has similarly influenced multi-country solution building in water management and environmental protection.

To address these needs, USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) teamed up to support the Network of Academic Societies (NAS) and an online Community of Practice where regional water specialists, academics and students can share ideas and build professional relationships.

NAS formed in 2012, established by CAREC

with support from the EU, World Bank, USAID, and other donors to unite universities and research centers in the region. Bi-annual meetings of NAS provide opportunity for academic institutions to find potential collaboration.

One example is a guest lecture delivered by L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU) to students and faculty at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (APA) in May 2023. Then, in the autumn-winter semester later that year, nine APA students went to ENU on a study exchange for classes in international law, international relations, and regional studies. Another cohort of APA students will study at ENU in spring 2024.

Photo 1. Guest lecture at APA under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2023





Photo 2. Students of APA under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan during the Nexus Game process at the L.N. Gumilyov ENU, 2023

*“Our students received an excellent opportunity to gain experience in Kazakhstan. This is a clear example of how we, the universities of Central Asia, can successfully interact and generate mutual benefits for both sides, because science is developing thanks to openness and communication,” said **Alisher Saidmukhtorov**, Head of the Department of International Law, APA under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.*

In November 2023, ENU, APA and Ferghana State University met online to share their respective experiences in teaching and supervising graduate students in water diplomacy. From this experience, APA announced plans to advise doctoral students on this topic in the future.



Photo 3. Participants of the teleconference between the universities on November 8, 2023 (on the left – APA under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, on the right – L.N. Gumilyov ENU)

*“It is the academic community that can give impetus to solving the water issue and strengthening transboundary water cooperation in the region in terms of science. Therefore, it is important to interact and cooperate within this network and strive to find a common solution for all,” said **Aigerim Ospanova**, PhD, Professor, Head of the Department of Regional Studies, Faculty of International Relations, L.N. Gumilev ENU.*

At the moment ENU and APA are striving to develop scientific cooperation, which include plans for doctoral thesis advising, joint scientific projects and events, guest lectures, etc. Representatives of the universities are in close contact through the NAS meetings where they regularly report on their joint activities.

*“Our cooperation was made possible thanks to the efforts of the USAID Central Asia’s Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity, CAREC and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It was the NAS meetings that became the platform where we can exchange experiences and contacts for subsequent meetings,” said **Ospanova**.*

Thus, the NAS and the Community of Practice of Central Asia have become the platform that helps to develop cooperation between universities at the regional level. Now the USAID Regional Water Vulnerable Environment Activity, together with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, are ready to further develop this platform and urge all universities in the region to join.

Photo 4. Aigerim Ospanova and Alisher Saidmukhtorov at the NAS meeting in Almaty, 2023





Photo 5. International scientific and practical conference on "Sustainable water resources management as the basis for solving the strategic goal of food security in a changing climate" at TAU, Dushanbe, 2024

WORLD WATER DAY IN CENTRAL ASIA: COOPERATION OF UNIVERSITIES

PUBLICATION DATE: 14.05.2024

URL: [HTTPS://WWW.RIVERBP.NET/ENG/COMMUNITY_OF_PRACTICE/CASES/VSEMIKIRNY-DEN-VODNYKH-RESURSOY-V-TSENTRALNOY-AZII-UNIVERSITETY-PRODOLZHAYUT-AKTIVNOE-SOTRUDNICHESTVO/](https://www.riverbp.net/eng/community_of_practice/cases/vsemirnyy-den-vodnykh-resursoy-v-tsentralnoy-azii-universitety-prodolzhayut-aktivnoe-sotrudnichestvo/)

World Water Day, celebrated on March 22 every year, is a global initiative aimed at raising awareness of the importance of clean water and sustainable water management. It was established by the UN General Assembly in 1992 and was first celebrated in 1993.

World Water Day provides an opportunity to discuss issues related to access to clean water, as well as to emphasize the importance of cooperation at the international level to solve these problems. It aims to draw attention to issues of water conservation, sanitation, hygiene and water efficiency.

This year, World Water Day has become a unifying factor between universities in Central Asian countries. Based on the relationships

established within the framework of the Network of Academic Societies (NAS) meetings, universities organized joint events, invited representatives of other universities as guests or partners.

Since the theme of the World Water Day in 2024 was "Water for Peace", on March 6-7 in Dushanbe the ***Tajik Agrarian University named after Sh. Shotemur (TAU)*** with the support of the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity hosted an international scientific and practical conference on "Sustainable water resources management as the basis for solving the strategic goal of food security in a changing climate." The conference was organized by the Faculty of Hydro-reclamation of TAU.

This conference has become a platform for several Central Asian universities: National Research University “Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers”, Kyrgyz National Agrarian University named after K.I. Scriabin, the Kazakh National Agrarian Research University. During the event reports on agriculture, food security, rational water use, etc. were presented. Following the results of the conference, a collection of scientific articles was published.



Photo 6. International scientific and practical conference on "Sustainable water resources management as the basis for solving the strategic goal of food security in a changing climate" at TAU, Dushanbe, 2024

*"In-depth study of the issues of sustainable management of water resources and food security in Central Asia is possible only through cooperation and mutual dialogue. This conference, organized in honor of the World Water Day, helped us to share experiences with our colleagues from other universities and draw mutually beneficial conclusions," said **Shavkat Pulatov**, NAS member, Head of the Department of Land Reclamation, Recultivation and Protection of Land, Faculty of Hydro-Reclamation, Tajik Agrarian University named after Sh.Shotemur.*

Another major event took place on March 14 in Tashkent, at the **University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED)**. The round table on "Climate change and the role of media and education in shaping a sustainable future" was organized by UWED and the Public Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media. It was attended by UWED teachers and students, representatives of national media, international organizations and environmental activists. In addition, the event was open to other universities. Thus, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan also joined the event.

Photo 7. Round table on "Climate change and the role of media and education in shaping a sustainable future" at UWED, Tashkent, 2024



The main goal of the round table was to attract the attention of young people to environmental problems existing in this area, present future risks, as well as measures to counter the environmental crisis. In addition to the effects of climate change, the round table discussed the results of the UN Climate Change Conference, which was held in Dubai from November 30 to December 12, 2023. The participants of the event shared their vision of the existing problems and ways to combat and adapt to climate change in Uzbekistan and the region.



Photo 8. Round table on "Climate change and the role of media and education in shaping a sustainable future" at UWED, Tashkent, 2024

*"This round table has become a platform not only for media and eco-journalists, but also for us, the universities of Central Asia. It is very important to talk openly about the existing environmental issues of the region in a dialogue format, as this helps to find mutually beneficial solutions together. We are always open to cooperation with universities in our region," said **Suriya Turayeva**, NAS member, Associate Professor majoring in «Environmental Protection and rational use of natural resources», University of World Economy and Diplomacy.*



Photo 9. Participants of the round table on "Climate change and the role of media and education in shaping a sustainable future" at UWED, Tashkent, 2024

In addition to high-level scientific conferences, university venues hosted events with the participation of students from various universities. Thus, on March 11, the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity, together with the **Kyrgyz National Agrarian University named after K.I. Scriabin**, held a national event celebrating Water Resources Day.

For two days, teams of leading Kyrgyz universities – Kyrgyz National Agrarian University named after K.I. Scriabin (KNAU), Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University named after B. N. Yeltsin (KRSU), Kyrgyz State Technical University I. Razzakov (KSTU), the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) competed in an innovative interactive game – the Climate Fresk, played the Nexus Game and staged costume scenes. As a result of the competition, the KSTU team became the winner, KRSU took the second place, KNAU took the third place, and AUCA took the fourth. The students also visited the Sokuluk district, got acquainted with the hydraulic structures of the Sokuluk River and the Sokuluk reservoir and held a clean-up of the coastal zone of the reservoir.



Photo 10. Students' visit to the Sokuluk district in Kyrgyzstan, 2024

Also on March 18, in Bishkek, the **Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University named after B.N. Yeltsin** (KRSU) hosted the competition "Water for Peace – 2024" with the participation of students and teachers of the following universities: KRSU, Khujand State University named after B.Gafurov (KSU), Ural State Forest Engineering University (USFEU), National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU). Thus, students of these universities competed in a quiz on the topic "Water resources", which showed the high level of training of each team.



Photo 11. Participants of the competition "Water for Peace – 2024" at KRSU, Bishkek, 2024

During the competition, students also participated in the photo contest "Water in our lives". And KRSU students demonstrated a film on "Determining the quality of water from various sources of water supply for the population". As a result of the competition, the first place was taken by KazNU students, the second – by KSU, the third – by USFEU, and the fourth place – by KRSU.



Photo 12. Participants of the competition "Water for Peace – 2024" at KRSU, Bishkek, 2024

*"Today's event showed how talented and smart our future young specialists can be. Such events help to support the exchange of experience and knowledge between universities in the region. Students from different countries share their vision and serve as an example to each other," said **Galina Frolova**, NAS member, Head of the Department of Water Resources and Engineering, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University named after B. N. Yeltsin.*

It should be noted that all the events were supported by active NAS members, who involved their colleagues from other universities. It is thanks to their efforts that the NAS has great weight and influence in the field of education in the region. After all, only active actions, the desire for cooperation and dialogue can help our universities to interact closely and share experiences.

Thus, within the framework of World Water Day, the NAS, supported by the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, once again proved its usefulness in developing cooperation between universities in the region. The NAS meetings, held every six months, have become a platform for networking at universities in Central Asia.

Photo 13. Participants of the competition "Water for Peace – 2024" at KRSU, Bishkek, 2024



NEXUS GAME IN CENTRAL ASIA: MORE THAN 400 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN THE BASICS OF THE NEXUS APPROACH

PUBLICATION DATE: 23.05.2024

URL: [HTTPS://WWW.RIVERBP.NET/ENG/COMMUNITY_OF_PRACTICE/CASES/NEKSUS-IGRA-V-TSENTRALNOY-AZII-BOLEE-400-CHELOVEK-OBUCHENY-OSNOVAM-NEKSUS-PODKHODA/](https://www.riverbp.net/eng/community_of_practice/cases/neksus-igra-v-tsentralnoy-azii-bolee-400-chelovek-obucheny-osnovam-neksus-podkhoda/)

Since 2022, the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity has begun active support for interactive modeling of Nexus approach (Nexus game) in Central Asia, implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) within the framework of the European Union (EU) project "Nexus Dialogue in Central Asia".

Using the game format to explain the interconnection and interdependence of the water, energy and food sectors, which directly affect the socio-economic development of any state, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the expansion of the Nexus game coverage in five Central Asian countries.

From March 2022 to May 2024 more than 400 people took part in the Nexus game events, including young water diplomats, leading teachers and students of state academies and universities, members of basin organizations, heads of the water sector, journalists, and even employees of international development organizations (USAID, EU, GIZ). The desire to participate in the game was also expressed by the Chairman and members of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (the highest regional body in Central Asia for the implementation of decisions of the Council of Heads of Founding States on the Aral Sea problem), the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development and the National Commission on Irrigation and Drainage of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Photo 14. Nexus game at the "Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers" National Research University ("TIIAME" NRU), Tashkent, 2022



Interactive immersion into intersectoral relationships helps representatives of different fields and specialists at all levels to understand the practical interdependence of sectors, the need for compromises and possible synergies.

What is the Nexus game?

The Nexus game is a facilitated process of playing 5 different scenarios for the development of territories upstream and downstream in the context of climate change, taking into account the availability of water resources, the needs of the population, industry, agriculture, wetlands and neighboring countries. It allows participants not only to better understand complex environmental and socio-economic dynamics, but also to experience the consequences of various development strategies in practice. By emphasizing the need for trade-offs and cooperation between different sectors and

countries in the face of climate change and limited resources, the game promotes the development of more flexible and sustainable development strategies, taking into account the interests of all stakeholders. Thus, the Nexus game promotes the development of teamwork skills, conflict management and decision-making in conditions of uncertainty.

The game was developed by the Centre for Systems Solutions in collaboration with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and the «Sustainable Energy for All» Initiative. It was brought to Central Asia on the initiative of CAREC with funding from the European Union in 2018.

With the support of the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity, the EU and CAREC, the game was introduced to the Central Asian academic community.

Photo 15. NAS members introduced to the Nexus game. Dushanbe, 2021



In the period from 2022 to 2024, more than 15 trainings were conducted and more than 10 sets of the game were handed over to leading academies and universities in Central Asia, in particular: the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the L.N. Eurasian National University. Gumilyov (Astana, Kazakhstan), Kazakh-German University (Almaty, Kazakhstan), Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Tajikistan), University of Central Asia (Khorog, Tajikistan), National Research University "Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers" (Tashkent, Uzbekistan), Academy of Public Administration services under the President of Turkmenistan, Turkmen Agricultural Institute, UNRCCA Preventive Diplomacy Academy (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan).

These universities have not only been trained

in the Nexus game, but also actively apply it in their educational activities among students.

It is worth noting that the game is used not only at the faculties of ecology and natural sciences, but also at the faculties of state and municipal administration, law, economics and management, international relations and world politics. This means that the Nexus approach is in demand both for environmentalists and for managers, lawyers, economists, foreign affairs specialists, etc.

Application sustainability

In two years, 10 bilateral memorandums of cooperation were concluded, according to which academies and universities, trained and provided with game sets, committed to use the game in their curricula, as well as integrate it into the educational process, which is an important step towards teaching students sustainable development and intersectoral interaction.



Photo 16. Handing over the Nexus game sets to Central Asian universities (from left to right - APA under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, University of Central Asia, Turkmen agricultural institute, APA under the President of the Tajik Republic). Astana, Khorog, Dashoguz, Dushanbe, 2022-23



Photo 17. Nexus game at CALP and CACCC, 2023

Feedback from participants:

*“Ensuring water, food and energy security is at the top of today’s global development agenda. Nexus simulation is a great tool to learn to appreciate many interconnected challenges arising from the interactions between the water, energy, food sectors and ecosystems. It is valuable for training future specialists who will work in these key sectors to manage vital resources in the most efficient way to make our economy more resilient to climate change and revert environmental degradation,” stated **Dana Akhmedyanova**, Head of the International Relations Department of the Gumilyov Eurasian National University.*



Photo 18. Nexus trainings at Central Asian universities (from left to right - "TIAME" NRU, Academy of Civil Service under the President of Turkmenistan, APA under the President of the Tajik Republic, APA under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Tashkent, Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Astana, 2022

*"The interactive immersion format is extremely convenient for mastering such a multi-component approach as WEF Nexus, which does not only require a good theoretical foundation, but also the development of negotiating skills, cross-sectoral thinking and strategic planning," noted Mr **Somon Ismatov**, Vice-Rector for international relations, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.*

*"Training on the principles of cross-sectoral thinking in such digestible, interactive format perfectly complements the existing theoretical material that we provide to future leaders of the country, and can be a guarantee of environmental rationality and economic decision-making quality in the future," stated Ms **Aina Mamytova**, Head of the Research Department "Green Economy" of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.*

"The Nexus game is a great opportunity to understand the Nexus approach, as well as the specifics of transboundary water problems in Central Asia. She teaches how to conduct interstate negotiations taking into account mutual interests, which is very important in teaching international students," said Aigerim Ospanova, PhD, Professor, Head of the Department of Regional Studies of the Faculty of International Relations, L.N. Gumilyov ENU.



Photo 19. Nexus game at the Central Asian universities (from left to right – APA under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "TIAME" NRU, L.N. Gumilyov ENU, APA under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic). Astana, Tashkent, Osh, 2022-2023

Thus, the USAID Central Asia's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity, in cooperation with CAREC and the EU, contributed to the active dissemination of the Nexus Approach in the Central Asian region. The Nexus game has become a unifying factor for universities in the region and helps in training a cohort of highly educated specialists interested in solving environmental problems in Central Asia.

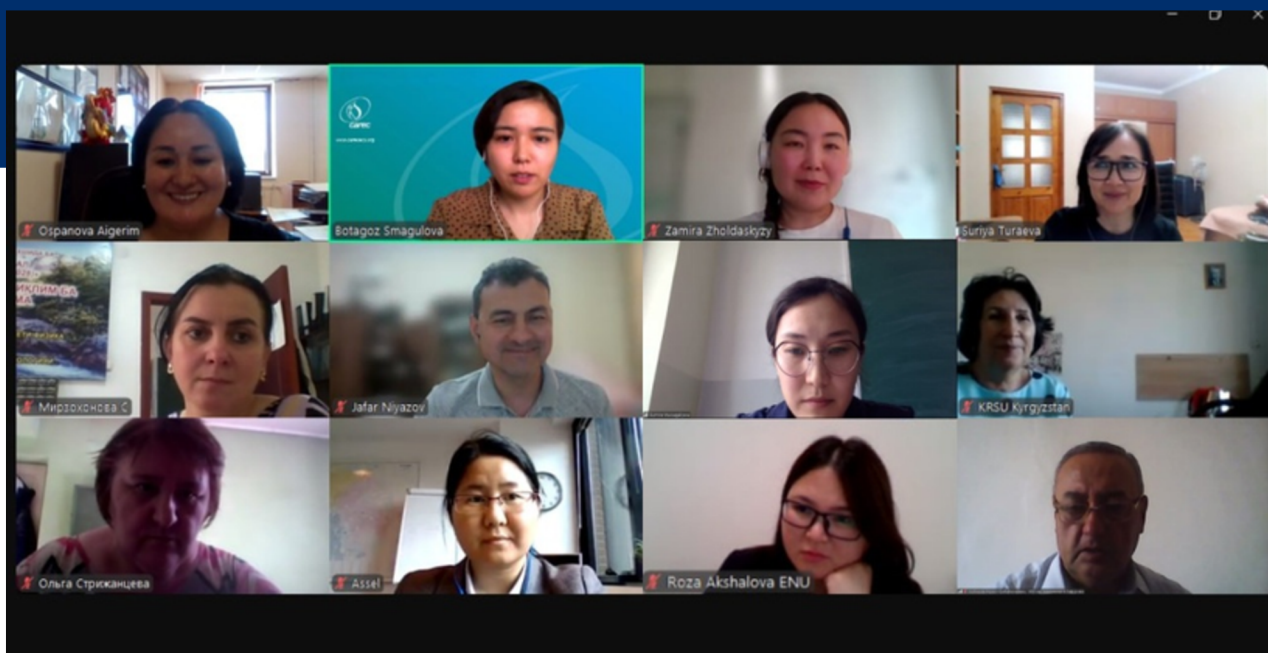


Photo 20. Participants of the online-meeting on floods, 2024

NETWORK OF ACADEMIC SOCIETIES TACKLES FLOOD ISSUES IN THE REGION

PUBLICATION DATE: 30.05.2024

URL: [HTTPS://WWW.RIVERBP.NET/ENG/COMMUNITY_OF_PRACTICE/CASES/SET-AKADEMICHESKOGO-SOOBSHCHESTVA-PODKLYUCHILSYA-K-RASSMOTRENIYU-PROBLEMY-NAVODNENIY-V-REGIONE/](https://www.riverbp.net/eng/community_of_practice/cases/set-akademicheskogo-soobshchestva-podklyuchilsya-k-rassmotreniyu-problemy-navodneniy-v-regione/)

The heavy floods and disasters in northwest Kazakhstan (and flooding in other Central Asian countries) prompted the Network of Academic Societies (NAS) to address this issue to discuss what the academic community might contribute in terms of solutions.

The meeting convened on May 17 with NAS members and representatives from other universities and the [Community of Practice](#), initiated by the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED) and hosted by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC).

In a wide ranging discussion, the meeting centered around four points that explored the origins and consequences of floods in Central

Asia, the measures available to mitigate the impact of floods and reduce vulnerability, and how improved training of water specialists could help alleviate the impact of floods on human communities.

Participants express strong agreement that flooding has intensified in recent years and that a lack of updated water infrastructure and sufficiently trained water sector personnel are exacerbating an already delicate situation with regard to flood control and future potential disasters. They also agreed that an improved early warning system for the countries of Central Asia could significantly help lessen the human loss and economic impact of inundation.

*“Discussing with our colleagues from other Central Asian countries such an important topic as floods, we came to the conclusion that there is an urgent need to train qualified specialists,” said **Suriya Turayeva**, Associate Professor of Environmental Protection and Rational Use of Water Resources at the UWED.*

In this regard, USAID Central Asia’s Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment Activity is working to fill these needs by collaborating with NAS universities to update curricula and teaching materials to reflect the latest ideas and innovation in water management. USAID is also cooperating with national governments to provide upgrades and physical assessments

at important water facilities in the region (e.g., Tallimarjan reservoir in Uzbekistan). The meeting was an important step in strengthening cooperation between Central Asian universities and promoting joint scientific and practical initiatives. As well, it demonstrated the effectiveness of NAS as a dialogue platform for universities in the region.

*“The importance of academic cooperation in the field of rational use of water resources and environmental protection is an important and necessary initiative, as scientific and academic cooperation will contribute to solving urgent water and environmental issues of regional and international importance, as well as reducing the risk of disasters of natural and man-made origin. This network in Central Asia will strengthen and coordinate the role of science and education in the region,” said **Jafar Niyazov**, an academic at the Institute of Water Problems, Hydropower and Ecology of the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan.*

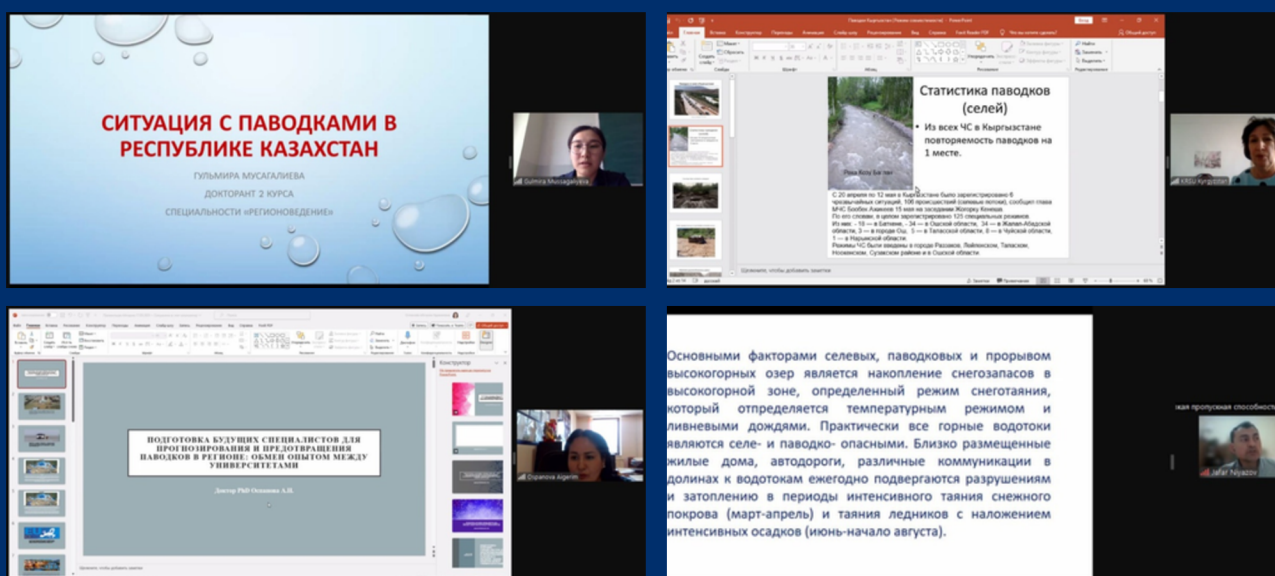


Photo 21. Speakers of the online-meeting on floods, 2024

The effective work of NAS on flood issues is just one example of how the academic community can make a significant contribution to solving urgent problems in the region, combining efforts to achieve common goals of sustainable development and environmental protection.



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