



**THE IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WASTELANDS AND THE
STRENGTHENING OF COTTON DOMINANCE ON THE IRRIGATION
SYSTEM IN ANDIZHAN REGION DURING THE SOVIET
GOVERNMENT**

Turgunov Abdurakhmon
Andizhan State University Andizhan region,
Andizhan city, Republic of Uzbekistan.

Abstract:

This article investigates the impact of wasteland reclamation and the consolidation of cotton monoculture on the irrigation system in the Andizhan region during the Soviet era. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet government intensified its policy of agricultural specialization, designating Uzbekistan as the primary hub of cotton cultivation. Within this framework, Andizhan became a key site for large-scale land development projects, including the transformation of wastelands into arable fields and the expansion of irrigated territories. Drawing on historical sources and archival materials, the study analyzes how the construction of canals, reservoirs, and pumping stations both facilitated cotton production and exposed critical vulnerabilities in the irrigation network. The research further examines the long-term socio-economic and ecological consequences of these interventions, particularly the overexploitation of water resources and the disruption of traditional agricultural practices. By situating Andizhan's experience within broader Soviet agrarian policy, the article contributes to the historiography of Central Asia, offering insights into the intersection of state planning, regional development, and environmental change.

Keywords: Party congress, cotton, irrigation, agriculture, Central Fergana, wasteland.

During the 1950s–1970s, active work was carried out in Central Fergana, in the Boz district, on the development of reserve and boz lands. Boz district stood out as one of the leading regions in this process. In this region, 2,803 hectares of new land were



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developed for agricultural needs in 1950–1954, and 2,960 hectares in 1953–1958. The Leninsky, XVII Party Congress, Kirov, Okhunboboev, Lenin, Stalin and Kalinin collective farms played an important role in this work [1. Sheet 5]. In 1956, although the planned 654 hectares of land were not fully developed, a total of 770 hectares of land were developed. The planning brigade of the Shahrikhan MTS was unable to fully implement the plan on the designated 520 hectares of land. By 1958, 48.8 thousand hectares of land were prepared for irrigation. Of this area, 35.7 thousand hectares were fallow lands, and 13.1 thousand hectares were protected lands. The distribution by regions was as follows: Andizhan - 12911 hectares, Namangan - 17233 hectares, Fergana - 18679 hectares. As of November 1 of this year, a total of 51149 hectares of land had been prepared for irrigation and melioration [2. Sheet 35].

At the same time, the irrigation and land reclamation works carried out in the Andizhan region during 1953-1970 through the Andizhanstroy trust were not fully completed. This was due to several factors: the dispersion of irrigation institutions and the lack of specialists, the untimely provision of financial support, and the insufficient preparation of design and estimate documentation. For example, if by the beginning of 1968 only 50 percent of the land preparation projects were ready, this figure reached 62 percent by July; in 1970 - 47.1 percent, and in 1972 - 51 percent. Technical shortcomings were also observed in these documents.

In 1959–1961, serious problems were also observed in the development and effective use of existing reserve lands. Thus, plans for the development of new lands in Central Fergana in many cases remained unfulfilled.

In the Andizhan region, large-scale land development, irrigation, and reclamation projects were initiated in accordance with the state plans for 1959–1961. Under the framework of the Seven-Year Plan, it was projected that 20.5 thousand hectares of new land would be brought under cultivation. However, the actual implementation fell short of expectations, with only 15.2 thousand hectares prepared for irrigation and reclamation—amounting to 51 percent of the target. Within Central Fergana, 9.6 thousand hectares were developed, representing 70 percent of the regional plan. Nevertheless, the incomplete realization of land development goals across the wider



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area gave rise to significant challenges, underscoring the gap between planning directives and practical execution.

According to the state plan, only certain districts fully or partially achieved the development targets between 1959 and 1961. In 1959, Balikchi district successfully fulfilled its objectives, followed by Chinobod and Turakurgan in 1960, and Jalaquduk, Marhamat, Pakhtaobod, and Uchkurgan in 1961. In contrast, many other districts failed to complete the designated land development projects, and in some cases, implementation remained only partial. For instance, in Boz district, merely 707 hectares of land were developed out of the 1,855 hectares allocated in the plan, which accounted for just 38 percent of the target. Similarly, Altynkol and Izboskan districts did not fulfill their obligations. These shortcomings were largely attributed to technical deficiencies and organizational weaknesses on the part of the implementing authorities [3. Sheet 45-46].

At the same time, based on the targets set for the preparation of new lands for 1962, it was expected that 10.5 thousand hectares of land would be put into operation, of which 5 thousand hectares of land were to be subject to capital irrigation and land reclamation. Another 4.7 thousand hectares of land were to be prepared at the expense of previously put into operation lands. As of March 10, 1962, a total of 5684 hectares of land had been prepared, of which 4307 hectares were prepared with capital complexes and 1377 hectares were prepared through repair work. Despite this, in some districts, for example, in Holdevonbek and Moscow, the established plans for land preparation were not fulfilled [3. Sheet 46].

Delays in the preparation of new lands were also observed in Balikchi district. The process was hindered by the frequent breakdown of earthmoving equipment, technical malfunctions, and a shortage of qualified personnel. At the Mingbulaq state farm, only 65 percent of the available machinery was engaged in the assigned tasks, while five tractors were diverted to other operations. In 1961, earthmoving equipment remained idle for a total of 1,099 machine-days, resulting in considerable setbacks in land development. By January and February 1962, the utilization rate of earthmoving equipment in Balikchi district had fallen to zero, with no new land prepared during this period.



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The above-mentioned circumstances reveal that the activities undertaken by the Andizhanvodstroy Trust and the Utselkhoztekhnika organizations in preparing new lands lacked both systematic planning and comprehensive execution. Such shortcomings not only reflected weaknesses in organizational management but also highlighted deeper structural problems in the implementation of Soviet agricultural policy at the regional level. The absence of a coordinated approach resulted in significant theoretical and practical deficiencies in the design of land development projects, as well as in the repair and maintenance of irrigation systems. In 1961, these difficulties became particularly evident: the Andizhanvodstroy Construction and Installation Department, together with the district branches of Utselkhoztekhnika, failed to carry out irrigation works according to schedule, while prolonged periods of machinery downtime further exacerbated the situation. Although these obstacles considerably slowed the pace of land development, they did not completely halt the initiation of new projects, thereby underscoring the tension between ambitious state planning directives and the limited technical and organizational capacity available for their realization.

At the same time, in 1962, clarification work was carried out on the use of the developed lands. As a result of the inspections, it was stated that in the future, in order to achieve high efficiency in the work of the Andizhanvodstroy Trust and Utselkhoztekhnika, it was necessary to implement uniquely coordinated processes of excavation, irrigation and reclamation networks.

Thus, difficulties in the process of developing new lands arose mainly due to the lack of technical resources, unskilled personnel, systematic work, as well as the disorganization of activities. These problems led to a delay in the expansion of arable land and the renewal of agriculture. Large losses and a decrease in work in these processes, in turn, required subsequent regulation and reforms for effective economic growth.

According to the Land Management Department of the Andizhan Regional Agricultural Department, at the end of 1959, there were 376.8 thousand hectares of arable land in the region's collective and state farms. According to the group for the development of new lands of the regional executive committee, in 1960-1961, 8.8 thousand hectares of new and plowed lands were developed. Thus, by the end of



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1961, there should have been 385.6 thousand hectares of arable land. However, according to the land balance as of November 1, 1961, the amount of arable land amounted to 375.9 thousand hectares, that is, 0.9 thousand hectares less than in 1959. Despite the fact that 8.8 thousand hectares of new land were developed in 1960–1961, the cultivated area amounted to 381.1 thousand hectares, which was less than the 385.8 thousand hectares [3. Sheet 50].

In the 1960s, irregularities were observed in the calculation of agricultural acreage on collective farms and state farms in the Andizhan region. As a result of inspections during the measurement of land plots in 1961, it was revealed that the areas of cotton and rice crops were hidden or incorrectly indicated. Similar situations were observed in the Khojaabad and Uychi districts. For example, in Khojaabad, 584.6 hectares of cotton and 61.5 hectares of rice were hidden, while in Uychi, 589.4 hectares of cotton and 145.5 hectares of rice were not indicated.

In 1960–1961, changes in the organization of acreage in the region, as well as organizational errors, led to a decrease in cotton and rice yields. Despite the increase in cotton acreage in 1961, yields decreased compared to 1959. Also, inefficient use of water resources in 1960–1961, particularly the misuse of water pipes and irrigation systems, had a negative impact on productivity.

In Andizhan region, it was found that the cotton yield in 1961 decreased by 40 thousand tons compared to 1959. In many districts of the region, for example, in Chust, Andizhan, Lenin, Izboskan and Chinabad, cotton yields decreased by 2–8 centners in some cases. In 1961, most of these cases were associated with inefficient water use [3. Sheet 52].

In areas such as Balikchi, Chinobod and Naryn, problematic water use for irrigation of agricultural crops also had a negative impact on productivity. With water withdrawal in the region by 105–159%, sufficient water was provided to the cotton field, which led to a decrease in productivity.

In 1962, new measures were planned to develop land and improve irrigation. In 1962, a plan was implemented to prepare 9,700 hectares of new land and restore arable land. Despite this, land reclamation work was often delayed and carried out unsystematically on some land plots, including in Central Fergana.



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Also, judging by the latest results in 1962, resettlement and land development work was also carried out intensively. In areas such as Andizhan, Khojaabad and Altynkul, new lands were explored and population resettlement was successfully carried out. In 1971–1975, the Boz district achieved agricultural development, improved water management, and the development of new lands.

At the same time, the work carried out in the field of irrigation and land reclamation in 1976-1978 was of great importance in the development of cotton growing in the region. In 1978, 40 hectares of new land were developed, 1,442 hectares of land were improved in land reclamation, and 662 hectares of land were created under the capital plan [4. Sheet 46].

In short, the problems in the agricultural and irrigation sectors of Andizhan region in the 1960s and 1970s were associated with a decrease in productivity, inefficient water use, and delays in the adequate restoration and development of land. All this indicates that a systematic approach and improved organizational work were required to solve the problems of agricultural development.

Conclusion

The experience of the Andizhan region during the Soviet period illustrates the profound and lasting impact of state-directed land development and the consolidation of cotton monoculture on both the irrigation system and broader patterns of regional development. The large-scale reclamation of wastelands and expansion of irrigated areas significantly increased cotton yields and reinforced the strategic role of Uzbekistan as the “cotton base” of the Soviet Union. However, the pursuit of quantitative production targets often came at the expense of systematic planning, technical efficiency, and ecological sustainability. Frequent delays in land preparation, machinery downtime, and organizational shortcomings revealed the gap between ambitious state directives and the actual capacity of local institutions to implement them.

At the same time, the intensification of cotton cultivation placed increasing pressure on the irrigation network, necessitating constant repair, expansion, and reorganization. While new canals, reservoirs, and pumping stations facilitated short-term agricultural growth, they also entrenched a system of overexploitation that



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contributed to long-term environmental degradation and water scarcity. Thus, the Andizhan case underscores the contradictions inherent in Soviet agricultural policy: the drive for rapid economic gains through monoculture undermined the prospects for balanced and sustainable land and water management.

Ultimately, this study highlights the need to view Soviet-era agricultural transformations not only as instruments of economic modernization but also as processes that reshaped ecological systems and rural societies in complex and often detrimental ways. The Andizhan experience contributes to a broader understanding of how centralized planning, when combined with ecological neglect, generated both achievements and vulnerabilities that continue to shape Central Asia's environmental and socio-economic landscape today [5. –P. 411].

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