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Spatial and temporal dynamics of groundwater table and salinity in Khorezm (Aral Sea Basin), Uzbekistan



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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is a major economic activity in the countries of the Aral Sea Basin, employing about 60% of the rural population. The countries in the region depend on water resources, the majority of which comes from the rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya, for irrigation. In recent years, water shortages have become more frequent and are especially acute in the downstream areas of the two rivers. The Khorezm region is located in the lower Amu-Darya River delta. Despite the water shortages, the irrigated areas in the region are experiencing a rapid rise in the groundwater (GW) table after applications of water for irrigation and leaching. The shallow saline GW leads to soil waterlogging and salinization, which reduce crop yields. The GW table rises in conditions of flat topography and extremely slow lateral subsurface water flow and exceeds the critical threshold, which was defined for the conditions of Khorezm to be 1.2 – 1.5 m below the ground surface depending on several factors, such as soil properties, soil and GW salinity, precipitation and evapotranspiration (ET), methods of irrigation and agro-techniques, and crops grown. To maintain crop yields sustainably, it is important to be able to estimate the causes of spatiotemporal changes in shallow saline GW, location and magnitude of the areas at risk of waterlogging and salinization and to develop management measures aimed at remediation or alleviation.

This study investigates the long-term sustainability of irrigated agriculture in Khorezm through an analysis of the temporal and spatial changes of GW table and salinity. Due to the nature of the analysis, secondary data collected by government agencies in Uzbekistan were extensively used in this study. The following objectives were defined to achieve the main goal: 1) to estimate seasonal and long-term temporal and spatial dynamics of GW table and salinity, 2) to identify the areas of potential risk from shallow saline GW, 3) to estimate the accuracy of different interpolation methods in delineating areas with high GW table and salinity, 4) to establish the factors influencing the spatial and temporal distribution of GW table and salinity, and 5) to identify areas characterized by rapid temporal changes in GW salinity (hotspots).

The temporal and spatial dynamics of GW table and salinity in the region were assessed in April, July and October during the period 1990 to 2000 from the 1987 monitoring wells that belong to the Hydrogeologic Melioration Expedition of the Khorezmian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources of Uzbekistan. The hydrograph of the Amu-Darya River, drainage discharge, drainage and irrigation water salinity as well as areas sown with winter wheat were used to explain the causes of the negative changes in the GW table and salinity. After benchmark years, when the statistically significant temporal changes in the average GW table and salinity occurred, had been identified, the study concentrated on the analysis of the spatial distribution and causes of the spatial changes in the selected measurement periods.

Four interpolation methods were employed for the estimation of the spatial distribution of GW table and salinity, namely ordinary and universal kriging, inverse distance weighted (IDW), spline, and triangulated irregular networks (TIN). Soil lithology, irrigation and drainage networks and topography were used to explain the causes of the spatial changes in GW table and salinity. Analysis of the spatial changes over time resulted in the establishment of ‘hotspot’ areas in the Khorezm region during the study period.

Temporal analysis revealed that the GW tables were unacceptably shallow throughout the region in the three measurement periods. The average values of the GW

table were 1.36 m below the ground surface in April, 1.25 m in July and 1.82 m in October. The critical threshold for risk of waterlogging and salinization was exceeded in all the measurement periods. The rise of the GW table occurred in the period 1990 to 1994 in April, and 1996 in October. After that, GW tables declined until 2000. July readings were constant despite the years with lower and higher river runoff during the study period. Both the GW table rise in April and shallow levels in July were explained by the increased water diversion and use in Khorezm during the period from 1990 to 1994. The hydrograph of the drainage discharge was used as a proxy to the water use in Khorezm. The introduction of winter wheat appeared to have led to a considerable increase in the GW table outside the growing periods in October by 73 cm.

The rise in the GW table shows that irrigation water is diverted from the river in greatly increased amounts and is not used efficiently. Non-efficiency is clear from the GW recharge and the shallow GW levels, which potentially could result in waterlogging and salinization. The observed GW table rise in October as a result of the introduction of winter wheat allows concluding that cropping patterns in Khorezm must be set up with care in order to avoid adverse soil conditions.

GW salinity was low, being 1.81 g L^{-1} in April, 1.77 g L^{-1} in July and 1.68 g L^{-1} in October. There was a decreasing pattern of GW salinity in April from 1.98 g L^{-1} in 1990 to 1.62 g L^{-1} in 1994 with a subsequent rise to 1.85 g L^{-1} in 2000. In July, a salinity decrease was observed until 1996 – 97 with a subsequent rise until 2000. For October, a decrease from 1.81 g L^{-1} in 1990 to 1.55 g L^{-1} in 1996 was followed by an increase to 1.75 g L^{-1} in 2000. The salinity of irrigation water played an important role in salt accumulation in the GW in April and October, which was not the case in July. The changes in water diversion significantly influenced GW salinity changes only in October.

Given the apparent low salinity levels in the GW, and provided the GW tables in the region are sufficiently deep, there seems to be no or little threat of soil salinization from GW. However, upper GW layers were not captured by the monitoring wells. More detailed investigation is necessary to identify the actual levels and origin of the GW salinity.

Analysis of the spatial distribution of GW table and salinity was performed using the kriging interpolation method, because with this method the estimation errors were the lowest among the four compared interpolation methods. Shallower GW table and higher salinity occurred in the southern and western parts of the region. Soil lithology was found to have a significantly strong influence on the spatial distribution of GW table and salinity. Because of the soil lithology and the influence of the Turkmen Canal (subsurface inflow) the drainage network in the southern part of the region was not efficient in lowering the GW tables to acceptable levels.

The areas at risk from shallow saline GW during the study period were assessed to be ca. 65-70% in April and July. In October, the areas at risk of waterlogging and salinization varied from ca. 1% in 1990 to ca. 36-43% in 1996, and to ca. 6% in 2000. Extremely large areas appear to be jeopardized from the shallow saline GW tables and it is likely that only large amounts of water for leaching and increased irrigation providing downward percolation for salt removal prevent the soils in Khorezm from becoming extremely saline. However, this leads to excess surface water, which creates a still higher GW table rise and salinity increase.

Analysis of the spatial changes in GW salinity that occurred during the study period showed an occurrence of hotspot areas (Figure 5.32). A hotspot area is defined as

an area where soil conditions are jeopardized by the increasing long-term seasonal GW salinity, the dynamics of which are higher than in the other areas. These areas occurred in all lithological soil types and probably under different cropping patterns and irrigation intensity. A detailed analysis of the occurrence of such hotspots in Khorezm would allow an estimation of the role of natural conditions and management factors, further allowing the definition of actions to be taken for remediation or alleviation not only in these areas but also in the entire irrigated areas of the Khorezm region to assure sustainable agriculture.

To assure sustainable agricultural practices in the Khorezm region, the following recommendations are made. As the IDW interpolation method performed better than the TIN method in estimating the distribution of the areas with shallow and saline GW tables based on the existing number of the monitoring wells, and since it does not require special training, this method should be implemented for a clearer spatial estimation and further alleviation measures when necessary. Spatial assessment revealed shallower and more saline GW in the southern and western parts of the region, which was not clear in the maps produced by the TIN method. These are the priority intervention areas in Khorezm in terms of better drainage solutions and cropping patterns. A detailed investigation of the causes for the occurrence of hotspots and associated natural conditions/management factors will enable an assessment of the most sustainable long-term agricultural practices. On unproductive (marginal) land, resources should be reallocated to better areas, while additional measures might be necessary in the hotspot areas (e.g., growing of salt-tolerant commercial trees or halophytes).

Räumliche und zeitliche Dynamik von Grundwasserspiegel und -salinität in Khorezm (Aralseebecken), Usbekistan.

KURZFASSUNG

Die Landwirtschaft beschäftigt etwa 60% der ländlichen Bevölkerung in den Ländern des Aralseebeckens und ist damit einer der größten Wirtschaftszweige. All diese Länder hängen von Wasserressourcen ab, die zum überwiegenden Teil aus den Flüssen Amu-Darya und Syr-Darya stammen. In neuerer Zeit sind Jahre mit Wasserknappheit häufiger geworden, und diese ist in den unteren Flussläufen dieser beiden Flüsse besonders stark ausgeprägt. Die Region Khorezm liegt am unteren Amu-Darya-Delta. Trotz der Wasserknappheit wird in den bewässerten Gebieten dieser Region ein schneller Anstieg des Grundwasserspiegels infolge Bewässerung und Auswaschung von Salzen (leaching) beobachtet. Das hoch anstehende, saline Grundwasser (GW) führt zu Problemen mit Staunässe und Salinisierung, beides Faktoren, welche die Anbauerträge vermindern. Das GW steigt unter den vorherrschenden Bedingungen einer flachen Topographie und extrem langsamer lateraler unterirdischer Wasserbewegungen an und erreicht schnell den kritischen Grenzwert, der für Khorezm bei 1.2-1.5 m unter der Bodenoberfläche definiert wurde, und der von verschiedenen Faktoren abhängt wie z.B. Bodeneigenschaften, Boden- und GW-Salinität, den Niederschlägen und Evapotranspiration (ET), den Bewässerungs- und Anbaumethoden, und den angebauten Feldfrüchten. Damit die Erträge nachhaltig hoch bleiben, ist es wichtig, die Ursachen für die räumlich-zeitlichen Änderungen des flachen und salinen GW, sowie die Lage und Ausdehnung der Flächen mit Staunässe- und Salinitätsrisiko zu erfassen, und Management-Ansätze zu einer Verbesserung der Situation zu entwickeln.

Diese Studie hatte zum Ziel, die langfristige Nachhaltigkeit des Bewässerungsanbaus in Khorezm mit Hilfe einer Analyse der zeitlich-räumlichen Änderungen von GW und Salinität zu analysieren. Die Natur dieser Analyse brachte es mit sich, dass umfangreiche, durch Regierungsorganisationen in Usbekistan gesammelte sekundäre Datensätze herangezogen wurden. Die folgenden Ziele wurden definiert: (1) die Bestimmung der saisonalen und langzeitlichen zeitlichen und räumlichen Dynamik des GW-Niveaus und seiner Salinität; (2) die Identifizierung der Regionen unter potentiellen Risiko durch hoch anstehendes, salzhaltiges GW; (3) die Bestimmung der Genauigkeit verschiedener Interpolationsmethoden zur Erfassung von Flächen mit hohem GW-Stand und hoher Salinität; (4) die Erfassung der Faktoren, die die zeitliche und räumliche Verteilung des GW und der GW-Salinität bestimmen; und (5) die Identifizierung der durch schnelle zeitliche Veränderungen der GW-Salinität gekennzeichneten Flächen (sog. „hot spots“).

Die zeitliche und räumliche Dynamik von GW-Spiegel und -Salinität in der Region wurden jeweils im April, Juli und Oktober im Zeitraum 1990-2000 in 1987 GW-Messstationen erfasst, die von der „Hydrogeologic Melioration Expedition of the Khorezmian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources of Uzbekistan“ betrieben werden.

Die Hydrographie (Jahres-Abflußganglinie) des Amu-Darya, Drainagewasserabfluß, Drainage- und Bewässerungswasser-Salinität sowie die mit Winterweizen bebaute Fläche wurden herangezogen, um die Gründe für die negativen

Veränderungen in GW-Stand und –Salinität zu erklären. Nachdem Bezugsjahre, in denen statistisch signifikante zeitliche Veränderungen in GW-Spiegel und -Salinität erfolgen, identifiziert wurden, konzentrierte sich die weitere Analyse auf die räumliche Verteilung und die Gründe für die räumlichen Veränderungen in den ausgewählten Erfassungsperioden.

Vier Interpolationsmethoden wurden für die Abschätzung der räumlichen Verteilung von GW-Ständen und –Salinität herangezogen (ordinary and universal kriging; inverse distance weighted (IDW); spline; triangulated irregular networks (TIN)). Bodenlithologie, Bewässerungs- und Drainage-Netzwerke, und Topography wurden herangezogen, um die Gründe für die räumlichen Veränderungen in GW-Stand und –Salinität zu erklären. Die Analyse der räumlichen Veränderungen in der Zeit führte zu einer Festlegung von ‘Hotspot’-Bereichen in Khorezm in der Untersuchungsperiode.

Die zeitliche Analyse ergab, dass die GW-Spiegel in den 3 Erfassungsperioden in der gesamten Region inakzeptabel flach waren. Die Durchschnittswerte der GW-Stände waren 1.36 m unter Bodenoberfläche im April, 1.25 m im Juli und 1.82 m im Oktober. Der kritische Grenzwert, der ein erhöhtes Risiko von Staunässe und Salinität anzeigt, wurde in allen Erfassungsperioden überschritten. Der Anstieg des GW-Spiegels erfolgte in den Jahren 1990-1994 im April, und in 1996 im Oktober. Danach gingen die Werte bis zum Jahr 2000 wieder zurück. Juliwerte waren konstant, obwohl Jahresabflussganglinien höher oder niedriger waren. Sowohl GW-Anstieg im April als auch flache GW-Stände im Juli wurden durch die erhöhte Wasserentnahme in Khorezm in der Periode 1990-1994 erklärt. Der Jahresabflussgang wurde als Näherungswert für die Wasserentnahme in Khorezm herangezogen. Die Einführung von Winterweizen führte zu einem deutlichen Anstieg des GW-Spiegels außerhalb der Anbauperioden im Oktober um 73 cm.

Ein Anstieg des GW-Spiegels zeigt, dass aus dem Fluss Bewässerungswasser in großen Mengen entnommen und ineffizient genutzt wird. Die Ineffizienz ergibt sich deutlich aus dem Nachfluss an Grundwasser und den flachen GW-Ständen, welche potentiell zu Problemen mit Staunässe und Salinität in der Region führen können. Der beobachtete GW-Anstieg im Oktober als Folge der Einführung von Winterweizen zeigt dass Feldfrucht-Rotationen in Khorezm behutsam eingeführt werden müssen, um die Bodenfruchtbarkeit nicht zu beeinträchtigen.

Die GW-Salinität war gering, mit 1.81 g L^{-1} im April, 1.77 g L^{-1} im Juli und 1.68 g L^{-1} im Oktober. Auf einen Abfall der GW-Salinität im April von 1.98 g L^{-1} in 1990 auf 1.62 g L^{-1} in 1994 folgte ein Anstieg auf 1.85 g L^{-1} im 2000. Im Juli, ein Abfall der Salinität wurde bis 1996 – 97 beobachtet, gefolgt von einem Anstieg bis 2000. Im Oktober, folgte dem Abfall von 1.81 g L^{-1} in 1990 auf 1.55 g L^{-1} in 1996 ein Anstieg auf 1.75 g L^{-1} in 2000. Die Salinität des Bewässerungswassers spielte eine wichtige Rolle bei der Salzakkumulation im April und Oktober, aber nicht im Juli. Die Unterschiede in der Wasserentnahme beeinflussten die Veränderungen der GW-Salinität in signifikanter Weise nur im Oktober.

Niedrige GW-Ständer in der Region vorausgesetzt, gibt es bei diesen niedrigen Salzgehalten kein oder nur ein geringes Risiko einer Bodenversalzung durch Grundwasser. vorausgesetzt, Allerdings wurden höhere GW-Lagen durch die GW-Messstationen nicht adäquat erfasst. Genauere Untersuchungen sind notwendig, um die tatsächlichen Werte der GW-Salinität und die Ursachen ihrer Entstehung zu erfassen.

Eine Analyse der räumlichen Verteilung von GW-Stand und –Salinität wurde mit der Kriging-Methode durchgeführt, denn der Abschätzungsfehler war mit Kriging am niedrigsten im Vergleich der vier Interpolationsmethoden. Flachere GW-Stände und höhere Salinität zeigten sich in den südlichen und westlichen Teilen der Region Khorezm. Die Bodenglithologie wurde als ein signifikanter Faktor für die räumliche Verteilung von GW-Stand und –Salinität erkannt. Wegen der Lithologie und dem Einfluss des Turkmen-Kanals (unteriridische Zuflüsse) war das Drainagenetzwerk in den südlichen Teilen der Region nicht effizient genug, um die GW-Stände auf akzeptable Niveaus zu drücken.

Die von flachem, salinen GW bedrohten Risikoflächen umfassten in der Untersuchungsperiode im April und Juli ca. 65-70% des Landes. Im Oktober variierten die entsprechenden Flächen zwischen ca. 1% in 1990 bis auf ca. 36-43% in 1996, zu ca. 6% in 2000. Weite Flächen scheinen durch flache, saline GW-Stände ungünstig beeinflusst zu sein, und vermutlich sind es nur die großen Wassermengen, die für die Salz-Auswaschung und Bewässerung eingesetzt werden, und die eine vertikale Abwärtsbewegung der Salze ermöglichen, die die Böden in Khorezm vor extremer Versalzung bewahren. Allerdings führen diese zu einem Überfluss an oberflächennahem Wasser, welches wiederum die GW-Stände und –Salinität ansteigen lässt.

Die Analyse der räumlichen Veränderungen in der GW-Salinität zeigten das Vorhandensein von „Hotspot“-Bereichen (Abb. 5.32). Ein solcher Bereich ist definiert als eine Region, in der sich die Bodenbedingungen durch eine langfristig ansteigende saisonale GW-Salinität verschlechtern. Diese Flächen gibt es in allen lithologischen Bodentypen und vermutlich unter verschiedenen Anbaupflanzen und unterschiedlicher Bewässerungsintensität. Eine detaillierte Analyse dieser Hotspots würde es erlauben, die Rolle der natürlichen Gegebenheiten und der Bewirtschaftungsfaktoren abzuschätzen, und es damit ermöglichen, Vorschläge für Maßnahmen zu einer Bodenverbesserung nicht nur in diesen, sondern in der gesamten Bewässerungsfläche Khorezms zu definieren, um damit eine nachhaltige Landwirtschaft zu garantieren.

Um eine nachhaltige Landwirtschaft in Khorezm zu ermöglichen, werden die folgenden Maßnahmen vorgeschlagen. Da bei der gegebenen Zahl der GW-Beobachtungsstationen die IDW-Methode zur Abschätzung der GW-Verteilung besser als die TIN-Methode geeignet ist, und da kein spezifisches Training zur Anwendung dieses Verfahrens erforderlich ist, sollte dieser Methode der Vorzug gegeben werden, um eine bessere räumliche Abschätzung der GW-Verteilung und bessere Vorhersagen zu ermöglichen. Die räumliche Analyse zeigte flacheres und stärker salines GW in den südlichen und westlichen Teilen der Region, was aus den mit TIN erstellten Karten nicht ersichtlich wurde. Dieses sind die Regionen in Khorezm, für die prioritär eine bessere Drainage und optimierte Feldfrucht-Rotationen gefunden werden müssen. Eine detaillierte Analyse der Gründe für das Auftreten von „Hotspots“ und der diese begleitenden natürlichen Gegebenheiten und Managementfaktoren wird es erlauben, die langfristig nachhaltigsten landwirtschaftlichen Praktiken zu finden. Ressourcen sollten von unproduktivem (marginalen) Land auf bessere Standorte umgewidmet werden, während für „Hotspots“ zusätzliche Maßnahmen wie z.B. der Anbau salztoleranter Bäume oder von Halophyten notwendig werden können.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Objectives	3
1.3	Outline of the study	4
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1	Characteristics of groundwater with emphasis on (semi-)arid zones	5
2.2	Interaction of GW – surface water	8
2.3	Spatial and temporal aspects of GW table and salinity	9
2.4	Features of GW table and salinity in the Khorezm region	13
3	MATERIALS AND METHODS	17
3.1	Area description.....	17
3.1.1	General information	17
3.1.2	Location	17
3.1.3	Climate	18
3.1.4	Relief, geology and geomorphology.....	20
3.1.5	Hydrogeology	21
3.1.6	The Amu-Darya River	22
3.1.7	Soils	24
3.1.8	Crops	26
3.1.9	Farming system.....	26
3.1.10	Irrigation network and method of irrigation	27
3.1.11	Drainage network.....	29
3.2	Data collection and statistical analysis	30
3.2.1	GW table and salinity.....	31
3.2.2	Amu-Darya River runoff and salinity	32
3.2.3	Drainage discharge and salinity	33
3.2.4	Soil salinity	33
3.2.5	Irrigation water use and salinity.....	34
3.2.6	Irrigation/drainage network	35
3.2.7	Soil lithology.....	35
3.3	Analysis	35
3.4	Data processing and methods	36
3.4.1	Elevation data and DEM construction	36
3.5	(Geo)-statistical analysis.....	38
3.5.1	Exploratory data analysis	38
3.6	Methods of interpolation	39
3.6.1	Kriging	39
3.6.2	Inverse Distance Weighted method	42
3.6.3	Spline	42
3.6.4	Triangulated irregular networks.....	43
3.6.5	Validation.....	44

3.6.6	Time series analysis	44
3.6.7	Groundwater recharge.....	45
3.6.8	Change detection method.....	46
4	TEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF GROUNDWATER TABLE AND SALINITY .	48
4.1	Introduction	48
4.1.1	Quality of groundwater salinity readings.....	50
4.1.2	Quality of groundwater table readings.....	52
4.2	Characteristics of groundwater table and salinity in Khorezm.....	54
4.2.1	Seasonal dynamics of groundwater table.....	54
4.2.2	Seasonal dynamics of groundwater salinity.....	57
4.3	Temporal dynamics of groundwater table and salinity	59
4.3.1	Groundwater table changes.....	59
4.3.2	Groundwater salinity changes.....	63
4.3.3	Groundwater salinity and soil salinity changes	66
4.4	Causes of groundwater table change in April and July	67
4.4.1	The Amu-Darya River runoff change	67
4.4.2	Drainage discharge.....	70
4.5	Causes of groundwater table change in October	73
4.6	Causes for groundwater salinity changes	75
4.6.1	Water supply and salinity.....	75
4.6.2	Drainage salinity	77
4.6.3	Groundwater table in districts.....	79
4.7	Discussion.....	80
4.7.1	Temporal dynamics of groundwater table and salinity.....	80
4.7.2	Increased diversion and water use	81
4.7.3	Temporal groundwater table and salinity changes.....	81
4.8	Conclusion.....	83
5	SPATIAL DYNAMICS OF GROUNDWATER TABLE AND SALINITY	86
5.1	Introduction	86
5.2	Spatial analysis of groundwater table.....	87
5.2.1	Kriging	87
5.2.2	Inverse Distance Weighted method	99
5.2.3	Spline	102
5.2.4	Comparison of kriging, IDW and spline methods for estimating groundwater table.....	105
5.2.5	Triangulated irregular networks (TIN)	106
5.3	Spatial analysis of groundwater salinity.....	107
5.3.1	Kriging	107
5.3.2	Inverse Distance Weighted	118
5.3.3	Spline	121
5.3.4	Comparison of kriging, IDW and spline methods for estimating groundwater salinity.....	124
5.4	Estimation of groundwater table and salinity using cokriging.....	125
5.5	Summary: Selection of the best-performing method.....	126
5.6	Assessment of areas at risk from shallow saline groundwater	126

5.7	Factors influencing spatial distribution of groundwater tables in Khorezm	129
5.7.1	Ancient Amu-Darya River beds.....	130
5.7.2	Influence of lithology on spatial groundwater table	131
5.7.3	Drainage network efficiency.....	133
5.7.4	Digital elevation model and topographic indices.....	136
5.7.5	Effects of other possible factors on GW table dynamics	140
5.8	Factors influencing spatial groundwater salinity distributions.....	140
5.8.1	Ancient Amu-Darya River beds.....	140
5.8.2	Soil lithology.....	141
5.8.3	Irrigation network	141
5.8.4	Topography	143
5.9	Identification of spatial patterns of groundwater salinity	144
5.10	Discussion.....	148
5.10.1	Introduction.....	148
5.10.2	Quality of interpolation.....	148
5.10.3	Soil lithology.....	151
5.10.4	Drainage network efficiency.....	153
5.10.5	Digital elevation model.....	154
5.10.6	Irrigation water salinity.....	155
5.10.7	Hotspot identification.....	156
5.11	Conclusions	157
6	GENERAL DISCUSSION	161
6.1	Introduction	161
6.2	Assessment and implications of groundwater table and salinity dynamics in Khorezm.....	161
6.3	Temporal seasonal and annual changes in groundwater table and salinity and soil lithology	162
6.4	Hotspot identification	164
6.5	Summary.....	164
7	RECOMMENDATIONS	166
7.1	Introduction	166
7.2	Spatial distribution of groundwater table and salinity.....	167
7.3	Hotspot areas	169
7.4	Summary.....	169
8	REFERENCES.....	171
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Government of Uzbekistan maintains an intensive groundwater (GW) monitoring system throughout the country, including the Khorezm region, one of the smallest administrative districts of the country. Continuous records are provided for both GW depth and salinity. More than 240,000 ha out of the total of 275,000 ha of irrigated land in Khorezm are under the control of a large number of staff in each district. Every year, substantial financing is directed to the maintenance and operation of a large number of monitoring wells (2300 units in 1990) from the state budget given to water management agencies. This great attention paid to GW is due to the fact that GW is one of the important components of the agricultural system in the region (Kats 1976; Nurmanov 1966).

As in other regions with similar (semi)arid climates, GW provides additional sources of water for irrigation through pumping. However, the peculiarity of GW in Khorezm is its rapid rise after irrigations and shallow position throughout the growing period from April till September, extremely slow lateral flow due to low hydraulic conductivity in the upper part of the soil and small slopes and intensive accumulation of salts (Kats 1976). Shallow saline GW and a constant capillary rise due to evaporation is one of the main mechanisms of soil salinization processes, resulting in reduced land productivity. Therefore, an intensive irrigation and drainage network is maintained to leach the salts from the soil and GW and remove them out of the area. This network is apparently not efficient, because the areas with moderately and strongly saline soils covering ca. 50% of the region did not significantly differ between 1990 and 2000 (GME report, 2001).

Despite the importance and relatively large investments into GW monitoring, data analysis is under-developed. It takes weeks, if not months, to manually draw paper maps of the GW table (or salinity) after the data have been processed. The base paper maps were prepared more than 10 years ago (personal communication with GME staff) and are extremely outdated, because the irrigation and drainage networks have undergone (re-) construction changes, new irrigated areas have appeared or been reallocated, and some lakes disappeared in the periphery of the region (Dzhabarov

1990). The readings are usually recorded on paper. The transfer of the readings to the maps is subject to errors and the controlling opportunities are reduced. Local specialists have drawn maps based on the linear interpolation between data values utilizing the interpolation method of triangulated irregular networks. Apart from many errors, these maps become rapidly outdated, as GW fluctuations are very dynamic. Computerized data processing approaches are not yet introduced aside from a data coding procedure. This restricts data analysis to a simply static comparison of the readings of previous with those of current years. The use of modern (geo)-statistical methods of analysis and mapping would allow a statistically-based identification of cause-effect relationship of the irrigation and drainage resources.

This study forms one component of a multidisciplinary research development project on the current situation in the areas of the lower Amu-Darya River reach. It is well known that enormous diversions and water use from the Amu-Darya River have caused serious environmental problems in the Aral Sea Basin, thereby deteriorating rather than improving, as was anticipated, the economic and social welfare of the people in the region (UNESCO 2000; Vlek et al. 2001). Especially the population in the regions of the lower Amu-Darya River area face acute socio-economic, environmental and particularly health problems. These problems have been attracting the increasing attention of the world research community as they have grown from a local to a global scale. The extent of the problems demands a radical solution, as the former gradual intervention has not led to any success. The research community has been tasked and mandated to investigate the situation in the lower Amu-Darya River Basin. The ZEF/UNESCO research project “Economic and Ecological Restructuring of Land and Water Use in the Khorezm Region (Uzbekistan): A Pilot Project in Development Research” affiliated with the university of Bonn, was initiated to identify economically and ecologically sustainable land and water-use strategies in Khorezm, Uzbekistan, and to encourage local scientific and technological capacity-building (Vlek et al. 2001).

Although the focus of this study is on the GW component, because of the complexity and interlinkage of GW dynamics with other factors it could not be restricted to GW analyses alone. An understanding of the GW dynamics is needed as well as basic intelligence of the efficiency of land- and water-resources use, irrigation and drainage network and the influence of the environmental factors in the region. The

cause-effect relationships of the various interlinked components indicate that changes in one could immediately affect the others and thus, the whole system. Therefore, environmental factors and agricultural management practices have been analyzed concurrently to explain the changes in GW.

1.2 Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyze the long-run sustainability of irrigated agriculture in Khorezm through an analysis of the spatial and temporal changes of GW table and salinity. The following specific objectives/research questions were defined to achieve the main goal of this study:

- To estimate seasonal and long-run temporal and spatial groundwater table and salinity,
- To identify the areas of potential risk from shallow saline groundwater,
- To estimate the accuracy of different interpolation methods in delineating areas with high groundwater table and salinity,
- To establish the factors influencing the spatial and temporal distribution of GW table and salinity, and
- To identify areas characterized by rapid temporal changes in GW salinity (hotspots).

The following are the research questions:

- 1) To characterize the ameliorative conditions in the region through an analysis of the level and salinity of GW,
- 2) To analyze the causes for temporal changes in GW table and its salinity,
- 3) To analyze the causes for the spatial changes in GW table and its salinity,
- 4) To determine potentially unsustainable irrigated areas based on established patterns of the GW table/salinity dynamics, and
- 5) To recommend proper management actions in the potentially non-sustainable irrigated areas.

1.3 Outline of the study

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 describes the general aspects and current knowledge of GW flow and salinity dynamics, their peculiarities in Khorezm and existing methods of (geo)-statistical analyses and interpolation methods. The area description and materials and methods are explained in Chapter 3. Data collection and methods used in the analysis are briefly discussed. The area description includes the geographic location, as well as the predominant features of the climate, soils, geology and hydrogeology, irrigation and drainage network and crops grown. Chapters 4 and 5 contain the results of the spatio-temporal analyses of GW table and salinity in Khorezm. The general discussion is given in Chapter 6. Finally in Chapter 7, recommendations for necessary actions to improve agricultural management practices in the Khorezm region are presented.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Characteristics of groundwater with emphasis on (semi-)arid zones

Studies of different aspects of hydrological processes are a special concern of research in the scientific community. Many problems related to water resources exist such as proper allocation of scarce water among competing users, agriculture and environment, its over-exploitation, lack of freshwater and point- and non-point source deterioration of quality. Solving them requires understanding of the processes and improved knowledge of relations among watershed components like rivers, irrigation and GW, hydrology and topography, climate, vegetation, and soil parameters, analysis of their interactions and prediction of possible adverse changes (Wilson et al. 2000).

Groundwater studies have received wide attention, as 97% of the freshwater worldwide is stored underground (UNEP 1996). Groundwater plays an important role as a source for drinking water and for irrigation purposes. In most arid areas where precipitation is low, GW is the only source of water. With population growth, over-exploitation and pollution of GW resources is becoming an increasingly evolving process, which requires urgent intervention and protection.

GW is defined as subsurface water storage. The dynamics of GW depend to a great extent on climate, geology and topography (UNEP 1996; Sophocleous 2002), which are considered as the three main factors in the hydrologic landscape that control subsurface water flow (Sanford 2001). In arid/semiarid climates, natural GW changes occur mainly due to evaporation from the soil surface and transpiration by vegetation, while precipitation and upslope flow determine recharge. In irrigated areas, where the rate and/or spatiotemporal distribution of precipitation are frequently inadequate for farming, recharge occurs mainly through irrigation.

In arid/semiarid regions, GW influences the soil formation processes, moisture and solute transport dynamics and is one of the important factors ameliorating soil conditions (Kats 1976). Irrigation changes the surface and subsurface hydrology causing GW table fluctuation (Bos 1996) and mobilizes salts that are naturally present in the rock and soil (Ghassemi et al. 1995; Hillel 1998, 2000). Rising GW eventually comes close to the soil root zone (ca. top 1 meter), which, with improper management, may lead to waterlogging and salinization through capillary rise (FAO 1996 a; Bos 1996;