I. Project Context

Country Context

1. Uzbekistan is the third largest country in Central Asia by land mass, and the largest in terms of population (31.1 million as of January 1, 2016). Despite slow growth in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, Uzbekistan's economy continues to perform strongly. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged 8.3 percent per annum between 2008 and 2015, making Uzbekistan one of the fastest growing economies in the ECA region and the middle-income country grouping during this period. Poverty declined from 27.5 percent of the population in 2001 to 14.1 percent in 2013 and to 13.5 percent in 2014, and an estimated 13.6 percent in 2015. These results were due to rapid per capita economic growth, sustained annual increases in salaries and remittances, incomes from micro and small businesses, and the government's targeted social support programs. Remittances from labor migrants have helped many families in Uzbekistan keep poverty at bay. Poverty remains concentrated in rural areas and, as a result of low productivity growth in labor-intensive agriculture, the growth elasticity of poverty is lower than in comparable countries, suggesting that scope exists to make growth more inclusive and pro-poor.

2. The economy of Uzbekistan has relied on favorable terms of trade and remittances to generate foreign exchange revenues to support its import needs but this will probably change. The recession in Russia combined with slowing growth among Uzbekistan's other major trading partners (China, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Korea) will adversely impact the economy over the
medium term. GDP growth is projected to be 7.3 percent in 2016 and then gradually to recover to 7.4 percent in 2017 and 7.4 percent in 2018. According to Russia’s Federal Migration Service, Russia’s economic slowdown caused about 180,000 migrants to return home to Uzbekistan in 2014 and an additional 150,000 migrants in the first eight months of 2015. In 2015, the number of registered workers from Uzbekistan in Russia decreased by 15.6 percent. According to the Russian central bank, in the first six months of 2015, private transfers from Russia to Uzbekistan, in USD terms fell by 48 percent on an annual basis. In the foreseeable future, lower incomes, a higher cost of living, and economic conditions in Russia are likely to force more labor migrants to return to Uzbekistan. The prospect of declining remittances and returning migrant workers has prompted the authorities to focus on the creation of higher-productivity higher-wage jobs to absorb new labor force entrants.

3. Uzbekistan’s high GDP growth rate has been achieved through heavy reliance on extractives and natural resources, notably energy and water. As a result of high water losses and the dependence on pumps to supply irrigation water to 1.61 million hectares (27 percent of the 4.3 million hectares that have been developed for irrigation), the country has one of the most water and energy intensive economies in the world. The allocation of public resources across agricultural sub-sectors is skewed towards those that contribute least to GDP. Uzbekistan realizes that it can no longer maintain a business as usual approach and is seeking to adjust its growth model to ensure social and environmental sustainability.

4. The Ferghana Valley (FV) is one of the most densely populated regions in Uzbekistan. According to the 2011 census, out of the country’s total population of 29.1 million at the time, about 8.3 million (28.5 percent) lived in the FV. Socio-economic development of the region lags behind other regions of the country. GDP per capita in 2012 of the three provinces located in the FV (Ferghana, Andijan, and Namangan) was below the country average by 11 percent, 32 percent and 52 percent respectively. Poverty levels and poverty density are also very high across the region, and the region is home to one fourth of all the poor in Uzbekistan, while an estimated 48 percent of the poorest quintile of Uzbekistan lives in the FV. Over 65 percent of the population lives on less than 2 dollars a day. The FV is one of the more agriculturally developed regions of the country, and the yields per ha of most crops are higher than the national average. Dehkan farms are the main drivers of agriculture production in the valley, and account for 16 percent of the arable land, and over 60 percent of gross agricultural output. Wheat and cotton account for 35 and 34 percent of the arable land in the FV, respectively, with outputs that constitute 2.2 percent (for wheat) and 2.6 percent (for cotton) of the Valley’s GDP.

**Sectoral and institutional Context**

5. The share of agriculture in Uzbekistan’s GDP declined, from 30 percent in 2000 to 15.8 percent in 2014 as the economy transitioned from agriculture to hydrocarbons and metals. However, the share of agricultural employment in total employment is 27 percent, and agriculture will continue to be a critical source of rural employment and an important driver of economic growth and poverty reduction. Structural changes to the type of land tenure following the restructuring of large collective and state farms has resulted in the formation of private farms with long term leases and the expansion of small household plots. These farms are now responsible for much of the growth in agricultural output over recent years, with strong productivity gains leading to increased household incomes. State planning is now confined to cotton and wheat and more flexible farming decisions have been granted for other crops and livestock leading to significant
improvement in diversification.

6. With scarce land and water assets, a growing population, climate change risks and volatile export markets, modernization of the agriculture sector is indispensable to further improve its performance and to contribute to its integration into a more open and competitive economy while minimizing social disruptions. Low value-added crops continue to absorb a disproportionate share of land, water and labor resources. The cotton sector remains largely governed by state decisions and state-controlled companies in a monopolistic situation which has been limiting innovation and efficiency. As a result, cotton continues to use government resources through heavy and inefficient subsidies that distort farming decisions, offer non remunerative prices to farmers, limit private investments and, in some ways, lead to unsustainable and socially unacceptable practices in cotton production, especially at harvest time.

7. The government has recently demonstrated resolve to move away from state interventions and production quotas to promote a market-driven and privately-managed cotton value chain. The government recently prepared the Action Plan for Improving Labor Conditions, Employment and Social Protection of Workers in Agricultural Sector in 2016-2018 that proposes specific actions to improve agricultural efficiency by tackling specific inefficiencies in the cotton value chain and by establishing the proper market-driven incentives. The Government’s vision is to gradually replace the cotton quota system with market incentives to help farmers increase productivity and diversify, while stimulating innovation and efficiency.

8. Diversifying agricultural production has become a priority for the government. As a result, cotton production has declined from 1.83 million ha in 1990 to 1.28 million ha (about 30 percent of total area developed for irrigation) in 2013. The wheat area increased from about 0.63 million ha to about 1.44 million ha (approximately 33 percent) during the same period. Although the area under horticultural crops has increased from 0.51 million ha to only 0.61 million ha (representing some 14 percent of total cultivated area), yields have increased substantially between 1990 and 2013. Horticultural export earnings have jumped in recent years, from US$373 million in 2006 to US$1.16 billion in 2010, and the value of horticulture exports now exceeds that of cotton. More notably, horticulture is an important source of income for the 4.7 million households that operate dehkan farms.

9. In January 2016, a Presidential Decree outlined further steps to transform the agricultural economy by reducing the cotton production target by 10 percent by 2020. These measures are intended to release 170 thousand hectares from cotton cultivation into general agricultural use such as growing vegetables, potatoes, fodder crops, oilseeds, flowers or grapes. Agricultural diversification will be intensified with the following volume-growth targets adopted for 2020: potato, 35 percent; other vegetables, 30 percent; fruits and grapes, 21.5 percent; meat, 26 percent; milk, 47 percent; eggs, 74.5 percent; and fish, 250 percent.

10. The World Bank has supported the diversification into horticulture in Uzbekistan through various channels: policy dialogue, analytic work (e.g., Horticulture Policy Note for Uzbekistan, Strengthening the Horticulture Value Chain 2013), and investments (the on-going Second Rural Enterprise Support Project (RESP-II), and its Additional Financing (AF), and the Horticulture Development Project (HDP)). The Government has requested assistance from the Bank in
designing an agricultural modernization program. The overall goal of this program will be to maximize sustainable growth and jobs in the agriculture sector by strengthening relevant institutions, creating framework conditions, building capacities and promoting investment in productive assets. To help design this program, the Bank will provide technical assistance with the following three objectives: (i) increase returns from production of state-supported crops (cotton and quota-wheat); (ii) shift in horticulture and livestock production from commodity to value-chain agriculture; and (iii) attract private investment in processing and marketing.

Irrigation and Drainage

11. Because of the arid environment in most of the country, irrigation is essential to sustaining agriculture and rural incomes, employment and livelihoods of the many poor that depend on it. More than 85 percent (4.3 million ha) of the cropland is irrigated from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers and their tributaries.

12. Large-scale irrigation and drainage (I&D) development in Uzbekistan started in the late 1950s. The extensive waterworks, reservoirs and irrigation networks that were constructed since the 1950 are now aging. O&M has over the past 25 years suffered from substantial underfunding with only about 15-25 percent of requirements covered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR). Deteriorating infrastructure amplifies existing weaknesses in irrigation management, leading to low efficiency, with as much as 70 percent of the water not being used by the crops. As a result of the deteriorating infrastructure and poor management, the country loses an estimated US$1.7 billion annually (about 8 percent of GDP). The annual decrease in agricultural production as a result of poor water management is estimated to be on the order of US$2.0 billion.

13. Aging infrastructure, poor management and high inefficiency together with the dependence on pumping contribute to high O&M costs. More than 60 percent (US$350 million) of the budget of MAWR is allocated to paying for electricity to power pumping stations. Electricity for irrigation pumps accounts for 16 percent of the national electricity generation. It is estimated that a one percent increase in irrigation efficiency would lead to US$10m savings annually.

14. In response to these challenges, the GOU has implemented a number of reforms that are aimed at improving the sector’s sustainability and financial viability, including the support for Water Consumer Associations (WCAs), introduction of participatory irrigation management (PIM), hydrographization of irrigation management responsibility, and efforts to recover the costs of operation and maintenance (O&M). In May 2015, a Presidential Decree was issued on the Program for improving energy efficiency, the introduction of energy efficient technologies and systems in the fields of economy and social sphere in 2015-2019. The program calls for the implementation of measures to improve consumer-level energy efficiency, including in particular in irrigated agriculture. These reforms, in combination with rehabilitation of irrigation and drainage assets, have resulted in important improvements. In the Drainage, Irrigation and Wetlands Improvement Project (DIWIP, P009127, US$62 million, closed in June 2013) that was implemented in South Karakalpakstan, yields have gone up by 10-20 percent, and an additional 20,000 ha have been brought back in production. Under the Ferghana Valley phase I project (FVWRMP-I, US$66 million, closing on December 31, 2016), yields have gone up by well over 20 percent. In both project areas, high groundwater levels have declined and salinity reduced.
15. Estimates of the total required irrigation and drainage infrastructure rehabilitation costs in Uzbekistan vary from US$23 to 31 billion. It is clear that such requirements can only be met over a long period of time. The GOU has therefore adopted a phased approach to irrigation and drainage modernization, with a focus on priority areas in the Fergana Valley and South Karakalpakstan. While the initial projects focused on improving the drainage, the South Karakalpakstan Water Resources Management Improvement Project (SKWRMIP, P127764) and the proposed FVWRMP-II project focus on improving the irrigation situation.

16. Uzbekistan is one of the most water-dependent countries in the world, with over 80 percent of the country’s renewable water resources originating in neighboring countries. Annual water availability is close to 1,700 m³ per person and approaches stress levels. In the FV, water shortages can be acute at times, and particularly in the irrigation sector. Water shortage for irrigation in the valley is estimated at 3.34 billion m³ (BCM) per year, which is about 29 percent of the total required amount of water.

17. Water shortages have worsened since the early 1990s as a result of changes in the operation regime of Toktogul reservoir located in the Kyrgyz Republic. The reservoir is now operated to generate hydropower in winter, causing flooding in winter and shortages in summer. At the same time, high groundwater tables are affecting soil quality and agricultural production in the lower parts of the valley. The first phase of the FVWRMP has been successful in lowering high groundwater levels in selected parts of the FV. A more rational and proactive management of groundwater will help in reducing winter flooding while reducing summer shortages.

18. Water shortages in the FV also stem from: (i) misallocation, poor or ad-hoc/arbitrary water regulation practices and water management decisions and lack of coordination with upstream countries; (ii) inefficiencies and high losses throughout the irrigation systems; (iii) over-allocation of water in the Aral Sea basin; and (iv) impacts of climate change in the catchment area. As a result of population increase, economic development and climate change, water scarcity is expected to further increase in future.

19. Aside from the environmental consequences of desertification and salinization, water scarcity is becoming a binding constraint to growth in the economy of Uzbekistan. Public health is also starting to be adversely affected as water supplies dry up during the summer. Water wastage and water logging cause severe salinization: as much as 46 percent of the Ferghana region suffers from varying degrees of salinization.

20. Additional challenges that the water sector in Uzbekistan is facing include weak capacities and knowledge of modern water resources management tools, incomplete data collection systems to monitor usage and efficiency, the absence of incentives to improve performance, and the poor quality of service delivery by water service providers.

21. The Syr Darya river that the project area withdraws its water from is shared by Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Water resource availability in Central Asia has important seasonal, geographic and economic dimensions, with downstream countries highly dependent on upstream countries for essential irrigation water. Hydropower resources are concentrated in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, while thermal energy resources are
concentrated in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Energy-water linkages play a critical role in the future of Central Asia in terms of economic development, poverty alleviation and shared prosperity, food security, public expenditures and cooperative relations. These linkages are inextricable from perceptions of national security, regional stability and economic growth. Managing them requires managing complex technical and political issues and sometimes diverse development objectives. Yet history and experience elsewhere have demonstrated the potential for mutual benefits from sharing both energy and water resources across borders.

22. Five Central Asian states participate in the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (ICWC), established in 1992, for the regulation of water resources in the Aral Sea Basin. Since 1999, the ICWC is part of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). Heads of Central Asian states occupy the post of IFAS president on a rotational basis, with Uzbekistan currently serving. Strategic directions for the IFAS are formulated by the Council of Heads of the five states in the region.

23. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are signatories to the 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (the Helsinki Convention). It establishes the principle of equitable and reasonable use, not to cause significant harm to neighbors, and promotes the establishment of joint bodies to undertake consultations between riparian states. Uzbekistan is also a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses 1997 (Watercourses Convention). None of the other four Central Asian States is a party to the Watercourse Convention.

Cotton Harvest and Child and/or Forced Labor.

24. Cotton is harvested during the months of September and October. It is sensitive to weather conditions, and must be harvested quickly. Although mechanized harvesting was used extensively during the Soviet times, the subsequent farm restructuring and institutional changes in the state cotton system during the transition led to the deterioration of the large mechanical cotton harvester combines, which were not replaced. Additionally, the size, layout and sowing practices reflected the changes in the farming and, as such, had impact on labor practices. With privatization of farming practices and smaller farm sizes than the Soviet collective farms, farmers started to rely increasingly on manual labor. A large workforce is needed when cotton is harvested by hand. High peak labor demand during the cotton harvest period, in combination with labor shortages due to out-migration to the urban areas and abroad and below market value cotton picking fees resulting from the state procurement system, created conditions where farmers are unable to recruit sufficient labor and have to rely on mobilized work force. While child labor (children under 18) is no longer systematically used, the need for labor to pick cotton remains and has allegedly resulted in greater state-organized mobilization of adult labor during the cotton harvest. In the context of the state procurement quotas for cotton, the government is interested in meeting the quotas and thus ensuring that farmers have sufficient human resources to harvest the set amount of cotton. Hence, it employs its institutional resources to mobilize labor for cotton picking, which may be involuntary. Rural women are largely involved in voluntary manual cotton picking. They are particularly interested in picking cotton during the earlier passes, when the yields higher and quality of cotton is better, and in the fields closer to the residential areas, as their incomes from cotton picking under these conditions tend to be higher. Generated income from cotton picking during the earlier passes tends to make up a sizeable share of household annual income. Remote farms during the third or fourth picking pass, as well as farms with poor soil quality are particularly vulnerable to the use of forced
labor, especially when they have not yet met their production quota. The distance from residential areas, lower yields and poor quality of cotton, and consequently poor financial returns serve as a disincentive for voluntary cotton pickers.

25. Uzbekistan is a signatory to several International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions related to child and forced labor, but the enforcement of these conventions, as well as of existing national laws reflecting international agreements, has remained challenging, especially during the cotton harvest. Recognizing the need to change the system, the government of Uzbekistan has announced its plans to mechanize 70 percent of cotton harvesting by 2020. The 2015 cotton harvest was the first year when the cotton harvest mechanization campaign commenced in earnest. The Asian Development Bank is working with the government to formulate a strategy to mechanize agriculture, with a particular emphasis on cotton production. The Bank funded SKWRMIP is supporting cotton harvest mechanization on 25,200 ha.

26. The World Bank, in consultation with the government and development partners, has adopted a multi-pronged approach to address child and/or forced labor issues in Uzbekistan. These include (i) pursuing continuous country dialogue and collaboration with international/multilateral agencies and donors to address these issues; (ii) performing sector analytical work and policy dialogue to promote diversification away from cotton and mechanization of cotton harvesting; (iii) promoting crop diversification and intensification, and supporting agricultural mechanization through a number of investment operations; and (iv) strengthening project-level mitigation measures and binding provisions, including implementing a Third Party Monitoring (TPM) and Feedback Mechanism (FBM) to help address child and/or forced labor issues in connection with the project activities or within the project area. In 2014, the World Bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Labor Organization (ILO) that stipulates that the ILO will carry out third party monitoring in the Bank-financed project areas, as agreed with the GOU, in 2015 and 2016 (with the possibility of extension). The Feedback Mechanism is also carried out by the ILO and includes three components: (i) strengthening the existing national GRM mechanisms; (ii) a facilitation handled by the ILO as managers of the TPM, which serves as an independent channel for people not wishing to work through national channels; and (iii) the international channel through the ILO’s supervisory mechanism.

27. Following the monitoring of the 2015 cotton harvest, the ILO acknowledged that the GOU made significant progress in addressing issues of child and forced labor. The information campaign on labor practices increased awareness in the country about the national and international legal framework and about proper labor practices and work standards. Child labor, now increasingly deemed socially unacceptable, became rare and sporadic during the cotton harvest. Government commitment not to recruit medical and education staff for the benefit of cotton production has also yielded some positive results. At the same time, the ILO notes that organized recruitment of labor for the cotton harvest continues at a large scale across the country. Such recruitment takes different forms especially when government officials face demanding procurement cotton quotas. While mobilized labor may indicate voluntarism to participate in the harvest, the scale of mobilization in a short period of time carries certain risks and displays signs of coercive recruitment and, consequently, points to indicators of forced labor. The ILO concluded that monitoring has not provided conclusive information that beneficiaries of World Bank projects knowingly and systematically used child and forced labor during the cotton harvest.
II. Proposed Development Objectives
The project development objective is to improve the quality of irrigation and drainage service delivery to agricultural users within the project area.

III. Project Description
Component Name
Component A: Irrigation Modernization
Comments (optional)
This component aims to increase water supply both from surface and groundwater sources and to reduce wastage through investments in the modernization of the water distribution system. Investments will increase the capacity to control and distribute water along the canal network. Intermediate indicators include (i) area provided with improved irrigation and drainage services; and (ii) direct project beneficiaries (disaggregated by gender).

Component Name
Component B: Support for Agricultural Modernization
Comments (optional)
This component will promote intensification and diversification of agriculture and improved water management. The Project will use a combination of direct training activities, information dissemination, technology demonstrations, experience sharing activities and interactions with other sources of information, financial and technical support. Intermediate results indicator includes the adoption of improved agricultural technology promoted by the project, asset management processes established by project BAISs, AISs and WCAs, and increased collection rate by the WCAs in the project area.

Component Name
Component C: Project Management
Comments (optional)
This component will support strengthening the MAWR and the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) capacity for project management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) through the provision of goods, consultant services, training, and financing of incremental operating costs. It will support the preparation of a feasibility study and bidding documents for follow-up investment activities; and develop a comprehensive management information and data collection and reporting system on key performance indicators through, inter alia, baseline surveys; participatory assessments; mid-term reviews; and final evaluations. The EU grant will provide additional resources to support fiduciary management of the EU-funded project activities, and M&E, communication and visibility activities as per EU requirement.

IV. Financing (in USD Million)

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V. Implementation
Implementation Arrangements

28. Implementation arrangements for the project build on those that were adopted for FVWRMP Phase-I and that have been demonstrated to be efficient and effective. The MAWR, with branches at the district and regional levels, is responsible for water planning in the country and for O&M of the main I&D systems down to the farm level. The MAWR also administers international river systems with respect to water sharing and water quality control. MAWR is also responsible for the formulation and promotion of policies and strategies related to the development of agriculture in Uzbekistan. Within MAWR, a Deputy Minister responsible for water resources acts as the project head with overall responsibility for implementation of the project. The Deputy Minister responsible for water resources is also responsible for liaising with other ministries and government agencies.

29. Responsibility for day-to-day project implementation will be delegated to the existing PIU and headed by a project director, supported by technical and administrative staff in Tashkent. The PIU will maintain regional project offices (R-PIU) in each of the three Vilayats in the Ferghana Valley that will be headed by a regional director. The PIU will be assisted by national and international consultants on construction supervision, M&E, social and environmental safeguards, capacity strengthening and irrigation.

30. The PIU will be responsible for day-to-day management and implementation of the project, including procurement and financial management, and contract management. It will outsource most of the project activities, as outlined in the procurement plan, including construction contract management under component A and capacity strengthening under component B. To that end, the PIU will prepare TORs for each of the consultancy assignments identified in the procurement plan. All training activities will be integrated into one single capacity strengthening contract, including FFS, Demonstrations, training of staff from AIS, BAIS, PDWAR, HGAE, UNS, PSECA, DDAWR and BVOs, and training of WCAs and farmers. All training will be prepared, conducted and evaluated in an iterative manner, including needs assessment, implementation and feedback/evaluation.

31. A Ferghana Valley Project Coordination Committee (FVPCC) will be established in Ferghana to supervise and coordinate project implementation. The FVPCC will be jointly chaired by the deputy Hokims of Andijan, Namangan and Ferghana Vilayat. Its secretary will be the PIU director. Members of the FVPCC will be the mayors (Hokhims) of concerned regions located in Ferghana, Namangan and Andijan; local representatives of the Departments of Agriculture, Forest and Livestock; the National Environmental Agency (Goskompriroda); and two farmers—representatives of each region. The main task of the FVPCC is to coordinate the implementation of the project, review project M&E reports submitted by the M&E consultants, communicate the prohibition on the use of child and/or forced labor to project stakeholders, and recommend necessary actions when project implementation problems occur. It will meet semi-annually, or at the request of the chairperson or the secretary.

32. A Field Coordination Committee (FCC) will be established in each of the three project areas and chaired by the respective district Hokims. The Regional PIU director or his designate will act as secretary. Its members include local representatives of the Departments of Agriculture, Forest and Livestock; the national environmental agency (Goskompriroda); and two farmers—(
representatives. Meetings will be open for attendance by stakeholders on an observer basis. The main task of the FCC will be to coordinate the implementation of the project at Vilayat level, exchange information about project activities (in particular on progress in the implementation of civil works and training), communicate the prohibition on the use of child and/or forced labor to project stakeholders, and recommend necessary actions when project implementation problems occur. The FCC will meet at least quarterly, or at the request from the chairperson or the secretary.

33. The PIU will work closely with WCAs and Mahalla Committees in the project area to first inform and then ensure implementation of the citizen engagement activities under this project. WCAs and Mahalla Committees will be responsible for engaging its members in their respective designated territories, and M&E consultants will review these through regular reporting and share the finding with the PIU.

VI. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

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Comments (optional)

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