



Regional cooperation enhancement for climate change adaptation policy and action harmonisation and coordination among South Caucasus countries





BACKGROUND

The risks of climate change repercussions are rapidly increasing worldwide. Climate-induced impacts are already observed in all three countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), which are especially vulnerable to shifting climatic patterns given their geographical location and natural conditions (complex terrain with extensive mountain networks) making these countries prone to various climate change-related natural hazards.¹ Several studies have estimated the increased adverse effects of climate-related hazards in the coming years in several sectors (forestry, agriculture, tourism), in certain geographical areas (mountain ecosystems, coastal zones) and upon certain resources (surface and groundwater resources, biodiversity) endangering both national and regional security and development.² As a result, there has been a growing awareness among the Caucasus countries about the importance of incorporating climate change adaptation-related actions and initiatives into decision-making to strengthen adaption capacity and to safeguard sustainable and climate-resilient development and the welfare of the region.

Climate change adaptation-related initiatives have been fairly implemented in national strategies (Nationally Determined Contributions) and in some sectoral policies over the past few years in each of the three countries. All are Non-Annex I parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement and are thus regularly updating their National Communications to the UNFCCC.³


Recognising the cross-cutting nature of climate change impacts, all three South Caucasus countries are coordinating efforts at national levels:

- In Armenia, the Ministry of Environment is the central authority on climate change issues, the focal point for the UNFCCC as well as the Nationally Designated Authority for the Green Climate Fund.

1 Rucevska, I., Emelin, V., Malashkhia, N., Kirkfeldt, T., Jørstad, H., Yemelin, V., ... & Lengyel, Z. (2017). Climate Change and Security in the South Caucasus Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia: Regional Assessment.

2 IPCC. (2022). Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

3 National Communication submissions from Non-Annex I Parties (Available at: <https://unfccc.int/non-annex-i-NCs>)



The primary coordinating unit is the Inter-Agency Coordination Council on Implementation of Requirements and Provisions of the UNFCCC, which coordinates climate-related issues at the interdepartmental level and includes all relevant ministries.⁴

- In Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources serves as the focal point for the UNFCCC and as the Nationally Designated Authority for the Green Climate Fund. Also, the State Commission on Climate Change, composed of representatives of 18 ministries and other governmental institutions, coordinates climate change response efforts.⁵
- In Georgia, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture is the central coordination body on climate change, focal point to the UNFCCC and the Nationally Designated Authority to the Green Climate Fund. In addition, it coordinates climate-related matters at the inter-ministerial level through the Climate Change Council, which includes all relevant line ministries.⁶

While no significant progress at the regional level has been made, a few bilateral initiatives have been implemented:

- Between Armenia and Georgia: The Declaration on Economic Cooperation (1993); the Agreement of Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of Georgia on the Prevention and Elimination of Consequences of Natural and Manmade Emergencies; Agreement for friendship, cooperation, and mutual security (2004); Agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the Republic of Armenia on cooperation in the field of environment and natural resources protection (1999) and establishment of the Armenian-Georgian Intergovernmental Economic Council.⁷
- Between Azerbaijan and Georgia: Agreement on the Strengthening of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security (1996); the Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Fields of Trade and Economy (1996); Agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on cooperation in the field of environment protection (1996).⁸ Some progress has been made in the preparation of a bilateral agreement concerning the Kura River, since water quality and quantity are the most prominent and critical transboundary resources affected by climate change. Water treaties have yet to be signed.

The above-mentioned agreements do contain some climate-related provisions, thus acknowledging the importance of climate change as a concern for water security, food security and social resilience.

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4 Decision of the RA Prime Minister N 719-A (2021) Об утверждении Межведомственного Координационного Совета по реализации требований и положений Рамочной Конвенции Организации Объединенных Наций об изменении климата и Парижского соглашения (Available in Armenian: <http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=154215>)

5 Amendment to Decree No. 560 dated 30 April 1997, of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On measures to ensure the fulfilment of obligations accepted by the Republic of Azerbaijan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change approved by the Republic of Azerbaijan on January 10, 1995" Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/36144>) Accessed on 26.10.2022

6 Government of Georgia. (2020). Decree #54 establishing the Climate Change Council (Available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4780380?publication=0>)

7 Bilateral agreements between Georgia and the Republic of Armenia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Available in Georgian at: <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/InternationalAgreements/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%AE%E1%83%94%E1%83%97%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9E%E1%83%A3%E1%83%91%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%99%E1%83%90.aspx>

8 Legal Framework. Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Armenia. Available at: https://azerbaijan.mfa.gov.ge/default.aspx?sec_id=1658&lang=2



DRIVERS AND TRIGGERS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

While climate change adaptation coordination mechanisms do exist at national levels, no efficient coordinating mechanism (similar to the Caucasus Biodiversity Council)⁹ exists that would aid each of these three countries in implementing climate change adaptation on a regional level. Hence, regional cooperation among the Caucasus countries, including the South Caucasus, is limited, and climate change adaptation actions are not coordinated in the common Caucasus ecoregion, especially for the protection and management of transboundary ecosystems and their services. Given that diverse ecosystems are not necessarily contained within national boundaries, regional collaboration and transboundary governance are essential to managing them as the cross-border entities that they are.¹⁰ Regional cooperation, through the effective management of transboundary ecosystems and their services, could ensure access to resources essential for the well-being of citizens, promote social and economic growth and reduce tensions in the region.

However, effective coordinated action for climate change adaptation across the region has been complicated in recent decades by the complex geopolitical situation. A lack of systematic studies, the absence of comprehensive knowledge on national climate change impacts, and siloed climate-related data and information combined with a shortage of financial and qualified human resources, mean that there are no comprehensive regional assessments. Coordination of climate actions and hierarchisation of priorities within current policy documents between the three countries still needs to be improved.¹¹

9 Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Resource Use, Annual Report 2005. WWF Caucasus Programme Office (Available at: https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/pdf_for_web.pdf)

10 Adler, C., P. Wester, I. Bhatt, C. Huggel, G.E. Insarov, M.D. Morecroft, V. Muccione, and A. Prakash (2022). Cross-Chapter Paper 5: Mountains. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UKpp. 2273-2318, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.022.

11 Shatberashvili, N. Rucevska, I., Jørstad, H., Artsivadze, K., Mehdiyev, B., Aliyev, M.,




RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the abovementioned circumstances, ***RIG proposes to develop a regional climate change adaptation agenda*** in addition to national plans and initiatives to work towards enhanced climate resilience of the South Caucasus populations in mountain areas and beyond.

Therefore, ***we are recommending all relevant actors***, including governments of the South Caucasus, the scientific community and international organisations (e.g., The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), The World Meteorological Organization (WMO)) and their member states to aid in the development of a regional approach for climate change adaptation in the Caucasus.

RIG considers of utmost importance the establishment of a regional mechanism that can help to solve the abovementioned problems for the well-being of citizens and for the security of the region by:

- Encouraging the exchange of experiences, best practices, and lessons learned concerning climate change.
- Strengthening capacities (financial, technical and organizational) at the national level, creation or identification of appropriate national bodies responsible for subsequent regional cooperation.
- Improving access of regional stakeholders to reliable and up-to-date information and knowledge in setting relevant goals and ensuring well-informed, evidence-based decision-making to improve the region's overall adaptive capacity.
- Involving scientists, academic institutions, and other experts to support and assist decision-makers with scientific knowledge and relevant data in the regional context.
- Establishing a regional document (non-regulatory, not legally binding) to set shared regional UNFCCC priorities and to: create joint long-term strategic approaches to address climate change adaptation across affected sectors; identify common priority



areas and assess their current state; elaborate climate scenarios and projections for transboundary hotspots to develop joint regional projects; and to implement relevant actions and initiatives for managing transboundary ecosystems and their services, while taking into account existing national strategies.

Objectives, tasks, composition, key elements, and main operating principles of the possible coordinating mechanism for regional cooperation remain to be determined. Evaluating different options concerning the format of regional cooperation, whether it be a platform or any other type of coordinating body, is a task for the Regional Initiative Group in accordance with National Initiative Groups. Therefore, it is important to:


- Elaborate a clear, acceptable and effective scheme for the formation and implementation of abovementioned regional cooperation mechanism. The Regional coordination body might be comprised of the representatives of the relevant ministries, scientists/academia, experts from non-governmental organisations, businesses, and civil society.
- Determine common regional climate change adaptation priorities and actions for integrating them with current regional and national efforts; jointly developing or updating policies, including sectoral ones; setting joint management practices and fostering regional climate change adaptation using ecosystem-based adaptation to protect ecosystems and their services as a sources for livelihoods.

In order to ensure an efficient performance of the regional cooperation mechanism, it is necessary to coordinate and harmonize with national adaptation plans (NAP), including both state as well as the local (non-state, or sub-national) level programs and plans. This approach requires the establishment of a coordinating mechanism for adaptation action at the national levels as well. The existence of such a mechanism will make it possible to lay the foundations for cross-border cooperation at the community/municipal levels.

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Within the framework of the project, National Initiative Group of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and Regional Initiative Groups have been created to strengthen national/regional dialogue and cooperation and advocate for sustainable development of mountain regions, and improve their resilience to natural disasters and climate adaptation capacities. The Policy Brief may not necessarily reflect the views and position of SDC



Institutional partners



3 Kostava I Turn, I Entrance, Apt. 14, 0179 Tbilisi, Georgia

E-mail: info@caucasus-mt.net

Web: www.caucasus-mt.net