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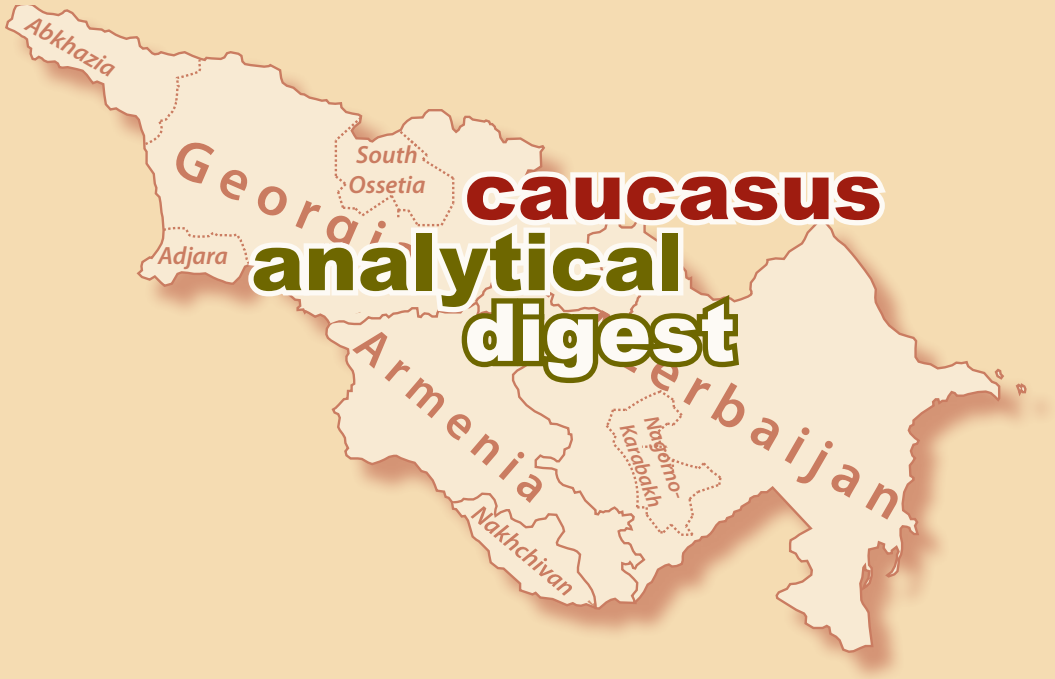

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PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN GEORGIA'S CLIMATE POLICY

Special Editor: Larissa Donges (Independent Institute for Environmental Issues in Berlin, Germany)

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Participation of Civil Society in Georgia's Climate Policy

Introduction by the Special Editor Larissa Donges (Independent Institute for Environmental Issues in Berlin, Germany)

In 2017, the government of Georgia approved the Paris Agreement and thus committed to helping keep the rise in global temperatures in this century to well below 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels by developing ambitious climate targets and measures. Georgia already faces changed climatic parameters and extreme weather conditions which highlight the country's vulnerability and the need for climate protection and adaptation. Georgia's specific goals in terms of reducing national emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change have to be published in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and be updated regularly. Additionally, the climate policy of Georgia is outlined in several other documents. The elaboration of such targets, strategies and documents is a complex challenge for society as a whole which requires the interaction and active involvement of a wide range of actors. This special issue draws attention to the role of Georgian civil society and its opportunities for participation within climate policy processes.

The first article provides an overview of the current national climate policy as described in the NDC, which is accompanied by the 2030 Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Within the development of such documents and the environmental decision-making processes related to it, the participation of civil society is required according to international agreements such as the Aarhus Convention, the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and national legislation such as Article 29 of the Constitution of Georgia. Based on these requirements, the second article examines how participation rights are being implemented in practice. It analyses opportunities and challenges of the involvement of civil society organisations in climate political decision-making, for example during the update of Georgia's NDC, and furthermore gives recommendations on how the involvement could be improved in the future. The third article adds a different perspective to the Special Issue, namely the question of why gender matters in climate policies. Georgia is one of 64 countries (out of 195) which refers to gender in its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) and dedicates one chapter in the NDC to gender-responsive climate policies. However, gender has not been mainstreamed into any other climate or energy policies of Georgia. The article illustrates why and how gender responsiveness and participation of women in climate issues should be strengthened in Georgia.

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Climate Policy in Georgia

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Abstract

In April 2021, Georgia published its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document, setting more ambitious objectives and targets compared to the previous NDC. Although Georgia faces various national security threats, such as ongoing Russian occupation[1] and the Covid-19 pandemic, it stays committed to the objectives of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement. With its insignificant share of the total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and considering the country's national circumstances (as a developing country with high mountains and diverse climate regions, Georgia is already experiencing climate change impacts throughout its territory), adaptation is becoming a more urgent need for Georgia. However, it is still lacking a national adaptation strategy. Even though the climate policy of Georgia is outlined in several documents aiming to strengthen the country's commitment, they are lacking consistency. This article describes the climate change policy arrangement of Georgia, its particular national context, and challenges the country faces in its climate mainstreaming process.

Introduction

In 1994, Georgia acceded to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and on 21 February 2017, the Government of Georgia approved the Paris Agreement. Consequently, Georgia has revised national climate goals and objectives in its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document,[2] adopted in April 2021. Although Georgia faces national security threats from Russian occupation, economic and political crises as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, it sets more ambitious targets compared to the previous NDC. According to the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) of Georgia[3], the country plans to unconditionally reduce its GHG emissions by 15% below the business-as-usual (BAU) scenario for the year 2030 (which would constitute a 24% reduction below the 1990 level). The 15% reduction target will be increased up to 25% (constituting a 40% reduction from the 1990 level) in a conditional manner, subject to a global agreement addressing the importance of technical cooperation, access to low-cost financial resources and technology transfer. However, according to the updated NDC the targets are now 35% and 50–57% below the 1990 level, respectively. In the previous NDC, targets were set against BAU scenario, while in the updated version targets are set against the 1990 emissions level. Georgia stays fully committed to the objectives of the UNFCCC and acknowledges the urgent necessity for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The updated NDC aims to support sustainable development in the country and defines the following targets:

- Unconditional limiting target of 35% below 1990 level of its national GHG emissions by 2030.
- Provided international support, Georgia is committed to a target of 50% below 1990 level by 2030 if the world commits to the 2° C average global temperature increase holding scenario.
- In the case that the world commits to the 1.5° C average global temperature growth scenario, Georgia will target to reduce emissions by 57% compared to their 1990 level by 2030.

According to the latest National GHG Inventory Report of Georgia[4], net emissions (excluding land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) activities) amounted to 17,766 kt CO_2 equivalent in 2017. Although Georgia's share of global GHG emissions is only about 0.04% as of 2016[5], developing and implementing mitigation measures along with adaptation measures would synergise the country's adaptive capacity, creating economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Considering that 54% of Georgia's territory is located at an altitude of more than 1000 meters, the variety of

1 Russia has occupied Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions which amounts to more than 20% of the country's territory. Available at: https://ssg.gov.ge/en/page/occupied-territories (accessed 9 October 2021).

2 See Georgia's Updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), available at: www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Georgia%20First/NDC%20Georgia_ENG%20WEB-approved.pdf (accessed 24 June 2021).

3 According to the previous NDC, unconditional limiting target of national GHG emissions was about 24% below 1990 level by 2030. See INDC of Georgia, available at: https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Georgia%20First/INDC_of_Georgia.pdf.

4 See https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NIR%20%20Eng%2030.03.pdf (accessed 12 July 2021).

5 National GHG emissions of Georgia were 18,534 kt CO_2 equivalent (excluding LULUCF) in 2016 (MEPA, 2021), while global GHG emissions were 49.4 billion tons CO_2 equivalent in 2016 (Ritchie, 2020).

its landscape, the wealth of its natural resources[6] and the ongoing climate change process in the last 30 years, adaptation is becoming more urgent for the country.

The wide spectrum of negative consequences of climate change has already become visible in Georgia over the past 30 years. According to the Fourth National Communication of Georgia (FNC), the average temperature in Georgia has already increased by about 0.47° C[7]; annual precipitation has increased in western Georgia, while it has decreased in some eastern regions. An increasing trend of intensive and frequent hydrometeorological events and intensive melting of glaciers is evident. Climate change has a significant impact on human health as well. The number of climate change associated diseases (chronic obstructive pulmonary syndrome, asthma) have been in the leading positions according to the FNC (MEPA, 2021, p. 19).

According to the FNC, the negative consequences of climate change in Georgia will be even stronger in the future. The country's main goal is to improve its readiness and adaptability by developing sustainable climate practices, such as early warning systems, that reduce the vulnerability of the country (especially of communities in high mountainous areas). Climate mainstreaming—integrating climate change policies into national and sectoral policies—is critically important, providing opportunities to realise other national goals and objectives, such as sustainable economic development and ensuring energy, social and environmental security, more easily.

National Climate Policy

The national climate policy of Georgia is outlined in several documents. The recently published NDC defines climate goals and overall targets until 2030, while its Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan[8] provides sector specific targets and relevant measures in detail. The Long Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT LEDS), which will be published by the end of this year, is intended to be a visionary policy document with no concrete mitigation measures and action plan, extending its scope until 2050. The National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) outlines integrated energy and climate measures at the national level, and will be finalised by the end of 2021. To meet its obligations under the UNFCCC, Georgia regularly publishes the National Communications (NC) and the Biennial Update Reports (BUR) on climate change issues[9]; the latest FNC was published in April 2021 (MEPA, 2021). Although these documents should be harmonised, they are lacking consistency (NDC, LT LEDS and NECP use different software and assumptions in developing mitigation scenarios) mainly due to the lack of a robust and sustainable legal and institutional framework, capacity, and knowledge transfer mechanism.

Georgia's updated NDC is accompanied by the 2030 Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to identify mitigation measures that facilitate unconditional and conditional commitments and mitigation targets in the sectors transportation, building, energy generation and transmission, agriculture, industry, waste management and forestry. The NDC document needs to be updated every 5 years. Under the Paris Agreement, the country is obligated to set more ambitious goals and targets with each new NDC.

The current Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan provides targets for some sectors and defines policy objectives for others, such as: reducing GHG emissions by 15% in the transport sector by 2030 compared to the baseline scenario; decreasing GHG emissions by 15% in the energy generation and transmission sector by 2030 compared to the baseline scenario; reducing GHG emissions by 5% in the industry sector by 2030 compared to the baseline scenario; increasing carbon capture capacity of forests by 10% by 2030; and promoting low-emission approaches in the building, agriculture, and waste sectors.

Under the Paris Agreement, all countries agreed on an Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) for action and support, including clarity and tracking of progress to achieve NDCs and Parties' adaptation objectives. Unfortunately, Georgia has not yet developed the national adaptation plan. To ensure long-term sustainable development in the country, it is critical to assess its climate change vulnerabilities and plan relevant adaptation policies and measures. However, based on the preliminary assessment Georgia has identified several adaptation objectives and needs of vulnerability assessments in the updated NDC:

- Assess the impact of climate change on coastline, glaciers, forestlands, mountain ecosystems and ecosystem services.
- Assess the impact of climate change on the availability of groundwater and surface water resources for sustainable use in different economic sectors.

6 Georgia is home to about 100 species of mammals, more than 330 species of birds, about 48 reptiles, 11 amphibians and 160 species of fish (MEPA, 2021).

7 In 1986–2015, compared to 1956–1985, the mean annual ground air temperature in the country increased almost everywhere, depending on the regions—in the range of 0.25–0.58° C (see MEPA, 2021).

8 See 2030 Climate Change Strategy of Georgia and Action Plan 2021–2023, available at: www.eiec.gov.ge/getattachment/30bb3f45-7d2e-442d-8b47-26bd650e72db/CSAP-01-12-2020.pdf.aspx (accessed 24 June 2021).

9 See Second Biennial Update Report of Georgia (SBUR), available at: https://unfccc.int/documents/196359 (accessed 24 June 2021).

- Assess and strengthen adaptive capacities of the agricultural sector to ensure food security.
- Assess the effects of climate change on human health and take measures to mitigate the damage caused by extreme weather events.
- Strengthen adaptive capacities of the most vulnerable winter and coastal resorts.

Under the Paris Agreement, countries must develop and submit a 'Mid-Century, Long-Term Low GHG Emission Development Strategy' (LT LEDS) to the UNFCCC Secretariat. Although Georgia published its Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) in 2017, it was not officially approved by the government. The strategy aimed to ensure an integrated approach for long-term sustainable development, considering the national development goals and circumstances. As part of the EU4Climate project funded by the European Union (EU), Georgia started developing the LT LEDS document in 2020. The strategy intends to promote the goals and policies of the Paris Agreement and to ensure low-emission and climate-friendly development for the period 2020–2050.

National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), which describe a unified, integrated policy and measures for energy and climate issues at the national level, need to be developed by each EU Member State and by the Contracting Parties of the Energy Community. Georgia, being a member of the Energy Community, plans to submit its NECP by the end of 2021. It will cover the period 2021–2030 and include a vision for 2050 to comport with the policy objectives of the EU, the Energy Community, and the UNFCCC/Paris Agreement. The NECP covers five main areas: energy security; Georgia's internal energy market; energy efficiency; decarbonisation and renewable energy sources; and research, innovation, and competitiveness.

Despite some progress in climate change policy development, Georgia has significant challenges and barriers to successfully upholding its commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement: the country lacks qualified staff at the national and municipal levels in public institutions responsible for climate change policy. The Climate Change Division at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) of Georgia, which is responsible for climate change policy development and the implementation, is staffed by only four employees. Although the Climate Change Council (CCC)[10] was established in January 2020 to strengthen cooperation and coordination on climate change policy among state institutions and with civil society organisations, it is as of October 2021 still inactive.

In Georgia, climate change policy planning takes place not only at national level, but also at the municipal and city levels. Twenty-four Georgian cities and municipalities have joined the Covenant of Mayors initiative, committed to achieving 20% reduction of GHG emissions by 2020 and 40% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Due to the lack of qualified staff and analytical capacity, cities and municipalities are unable to meet their commitments in an efficient and timely manner. The deficiency of qualified staff at public organisations responsible for climate change policy is balanced (to a degree) by active involvement of non-governmental organisations experienced in climate issues.

Additionally, as a developing country Georgia faces a shortage of state financial resources to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. Most measures are implemented with donor support; due to the lack of climate mainstreaming, there are hardly any climate-related research and academic institutions in the country, and educational courses and programs on climate change issues are missing; the country lacks an integrated database of projects that directly or indirectly contribute to climate change mitigation or adaptation; limited public awareness results in an absence of public demand on climate protection actions. All of these problems hinder development and implementation of climate-friendly and sustainable technologies.

Conclusion

Although Georgia faces various national security threats, it sets ambitious climate targets for 2030 in its updated NDC, staying committed to the objectives of the UNFCCC and acknowledging the urgent need for climate change mitigation and adaptation. If there were no Russian occupation, economic crises or Covid-19 pandemic, the country would have set more ambitious climate targets for 2030, considering its full jurisdiction over the in fact occupied territories, and more financial resources would have been allocated for the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures. In addition to the NDC, the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan of Georgia outlines the national climate policy in other documents. The LT LEDS is intended to be a visionary policy document with no concrete mitigation measures and action plan, extending its scope until 2050; the NECP outlines integrated energy and climate measures at the national level; to meet its obligations under the UNFCCC, Georgia regularly publishes the NC (the fourth and latest was published in April 2021) and the BUR on climate change issues. Considering the country's national circumstances and climate change observations during the last 30 years, Georgia needs to adapt, and quickly. Even though Georgia has started to

10 The Climate Change Council was created under the Decree No. 54 of the Government on 23 January 2020.

develop adaptation and mitigation measures in different sectors which should help provide synergies and create economic, social, and environmental benefits, it is still lacking detailed national adaptation strategies and plans.

The climate policy of Georgia is outlined in several documents aiming to strengthen the country's commitment. However, national and sub-national climate policy documents lack consistency due to the absence of a robust and sustainable legal and institutional framework, capacity to plan, implement and monitor a policy development, and knowledge transfer mechanism.

Research shows that the negative consequences of climate change will be even stronger in the upcoming years, and that climate mainstreaming plays an important role in achieving national climate goals and objectives.

About the Author

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The Voice of Civil Society Organisations in Georgia's Climate Policy

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Abstract

Ambitious climate protection is a complex challenge and task for society as a whole which requires the interaction of a wide range of actors. Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in shaping the national climate policy framework and its implementation. They are a constructive driving force in the transformation process, bringing the needs and interests of local people into national and international discourse. International agreements and national laws require their participation in environmental decision-making processes. But which opportunities do Georgian CSOs currently have to participate in national climate policy? This article analyses opportunities for and barriers to participation in climate political decision-making, for example during the update of Georgia's National Determined Contribution (NDC), and gives recommendations on how the involvement could be improved in the future.

Introduction

Analyses by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) show that 2020 was the second-warmest year on record (Lindsey/ Dahlman, 2021). The 2020 Global Climate Report from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information shows that every month of 2020 except December was among the top-four warmest on record (NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, 2020). The ten warmest years on record have all occurred since 2005 (Lindsey/ Dahlman, 2021). Despite shutdowns and economic slowdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, emissions of

carbon dioxide and methane – the two most important anthropogenic greenhouse gases – surged in 2020.[1] This data illustrates an urgent need for climate action. However, the national climate targets adopted and climate protection measures planned and implemented worldwide to date are inadequate to fulfil the Paris Agreement.[2] At the end of 2015, Georgia, alongside 194 other countries, agreed in Paris to limit global warming and its impacts, and to set national climate targets (the so-called 'Nationally Determined Contributions' – NDCs) in line with the 1.5° C target. Georgia submitted its first quantified Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in 2015. The updated NDC was published in April 2021.

Within this process, the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) can be crucial to advocate for more ambitious targets and amplify the voices of the most vulnerable, poor and marginalised populations. The scope of activities and advocacy work of CSOs ranges from raising awareness about climate change, building capacity, supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation activities to conducting research, developing strategies and climate protection and adaptation measures, and influencing concrete climate policies. This involvement of CSOs (and the public) in environmental issues is regulated internationally, especially by the 'Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters' (hereafter 'Aarhus Convention'). Georgia signed the convention in 1998 and ratified it on 11 April 2000. Since its entry into force in October 2001, the requirements of the convention have had supremacy over national law (except the constitution of Georgia). Furthermore, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the Paris Agreement, clearly demands public participation in the context of climate change.

But what opportunities do Georgian CSOs currently have to participate in national climate policy? Which existing national legal frameworks require public participation and the involvement of civil society within climate-related policy-making? What does the practical implementation of these rights look like? Which barriers hamper meaningful participation of CSOs, and how can future involvement of civil society be improved? These questions were analysed by the Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU) and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus) within the framework of the international project 'Strengthen Civil Society for the implementation of national climate policy' in a comprehensive study (Donges et al., 2020). This article summarises the main findings and focuses in particular on the updating process of Georgia's NDC. The project is a cooperation of UfU, BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany), Censat Agua Viva Colombia (Friends of the Earth Colombia), Greens Movement of Georgia (Friends of the Earth Georgia) and Ecoaction Ukraine, supported by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) as part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI).

The Right to Participate

Public participation in environmental and climate change-related decision-making in Georgia is secured through two major international documents, the Aarhus Convention and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (which came into full force in 2016).

The Aarhus Convention, the major international treaty ensuring public participation in environmental decision-making processes, came into force in 2001 in Georgia. Before that, the only legal basis for binding public participation in environmental/climate change-related decision-making was The Law of Georgia on Environment Protection (1996), according to which one of the main environmental principles is the public participation principle. It is defined as the 'participation of the public in the process of making important decisions related to the carrying out of an activity'.

A legal framework dedicated to climate change does not exist and is considered under the broader context of environmental legislation, although climate change is one major threat perceived by Georgian society (Durglishvili/ Kechakmadze, 2020). The Constitution of Georgia (1996) and the Environmental Assessment Code (2017) provide this broader context of environmental legislation but are not limited to climate issues. Article 29 of the Constitution of Georgia (The Right to Environmental Protection) states that 'everyone has the right to receive full information about the state of the environment in a timely manner. Everyone has the right to care for the protection of the environment' and that the 'right to participate in the adoption of decisions related to the environment shall be ensured by law'.[3]

1 'Despite pandemic shutdowns, carbon dioxide and methane surged in 2020: Carbon dioxide levels are now higher than at anytime in the past 3.6 million years', NOAA Research News, 7 April 2021, https://research.noaa.gov/article/ArtMID/587/ArticleID/2742/Despite-pandemic-shutdowns-carbon-dioxide-and-methane-surged-in-2020 (accessed 3 May 2021).

2 Compare https://climateactiontracker.org, accessed 3 May 2021.

3 See Constitution of Georgia, available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/30346/36/en/pdf, p. 11 (accessed 19 August 2021).

The Environmental Assessment Code[4] aims at ensuring public participation in environmental decision-making and provides the legal basis to promote a broader involvement of the society in decisions related to activities which are likely to have an impact on the environment and human health. According to the Code, development projects in Georgia are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment to be undertaken in participatory manner during the screening and scoping, as well as during the procedure for issuing environmental decisions through which climate change could be directly or indirectly addressed.

Climate-Committed CSOs at the Table

Georgia has a fairly active civil society in the environmental sector, including grassroots groups and small organisations such as the non-governmental organisations EcoVision or Green Regions, and larger ones with international links and funding, such as Greens Movement of Georgia (Friends of the Earth Georgia) or the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN). In recent years, there has been a slight increase in the number of young volunteers and grassroots organisations that set new standards for mobilisation and participation. This movement of young people and youth groups is not donor-driven, but rather is based on independent volunteerism and social mobilisation.

Yet, a deeply rooted participatory civic culture is missing in Georgia (Freedom House, 2018); civic engagement, volunteering and the number of memberships in associations and organisations is quite low (Latsabidze, 2019). The climate-engaged civil society in Georgia is still a relatively new movement with limited financial and human resources. According to the website 'www.csogeorgia.org', only 176 of Georgia's 1266 CSOs work on ecological topics such as biodiversity or waste management.[5] CSOs working explicitly on climate issues, such as emissions reduction or climate change adaptation, represent a minority in Georgia and have only recently begun organising themselves in networks such as the 'Climate Change Coalition'. Only a few organisations such as Friends of the Earth Georgia, the Energy Efficiency Centre (EEC), CENN, REC Caucasus, Remissia, World Experience for Georgia (WEG), Green Alternative, the City Institute and EcoVision deal directly with topics such as climate change, emissions reduction and renewable energies. Their opportunities to get involved in political decision-making range from informal methods (such as campaigns, dialogues with political representatives, protests etc.) to formal and institutionalised participation processes (such as legally required public participation related to permitting procedures or the preparation of environmental plans, programmes or policies). In the following we will focus on the recent revision of the NDC, a national process in which civil society had to be involved according to the Aarhus Convention.

The revision started in 2018 and was combined with the development of the 2030 Climate Change Strategy and 2021–2023 Action Plan (CSAP). These aim to define the legal instruments, activities and methods to be used to reach the country's climate targets. To initiate the NDC update, a climate change conference was organised by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) in September 2018. Due to its open dialogue format, about ninety stakeholders from different sectors were involved in this process. At the end of 2018, MEPA initiated seven sectoral working groups to elaborate the CSAP of Georgia. Representatives of some CSOs were involved in the groups that worked on construction/buildings, forests, waste management, energy generation and transmission, agriculture, transport, and industry. The working groups met in 2019 and 2020 (in the latter year on a very restricted basis due to the Covid-19 pandemic) to elaborate concrete measures to reduce national emissions and fulfil the country's climate commitments.

During the process, CSOs were asked to comment on certain chapters and the draft version of the CSAP. In addition, MEPA organised a workshop with CSOs to discuss the integration of gender issues into climate change policies. CSOs tried to contribute to the revision of the NDC and the development of the CSAP by participating in the workshops, but also criticised the process for not being ambitious enough with regard to the formulated emissions reduction targets. Therefore, in 2019, GMG initiated a process to elaborate a civil society-based understanding of an ambitious NDC. Together with other CSOs they formed the network 'Climate Change Coalition', analysed the original INDC as well as NDC and CSAP of Georgia and worked out sector-specific recommendations on how to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, for example in the transport and building sectors. The coalition now brings together about 200 CSOs, experts and other stakeholders from

4 'Georgia: Adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code (GE0057)', Open Government Partnership, www.opengovpartnership.org/members/georgia/commitments/GE0057/ (accessed 5 July 2021).

5 See https://csogeorgia.org/en/organizations?searchQuery=&showCategory=7&showCharity=&showCommunity=&regionID= (accessed 6 August 2021).

Georgia.[6] In December 2020, the coalition presented the civil society partners' visions and comments on the CSAP and Georgia's 2030 Climate Change Strategy to representatives of non-governmental, governmental and international organisations as well as embassies and stakeholders from different regions of Georgia.

Barriers and Challenges to Participation

As described, civil society actors already benefit from some participation rights and specific opportunities to shape national climate policy. However, the existing framework and opportunities for participation do not yet fully meet the requirements of the Aarhus Convention and many obstacles still impede equal and effective political participation in climate policy. Based on a standardised evaluation scheme, Donges et al. (2020) assess the general conditions for participation, specific opportunities and practices in Georgia using five main criteria (fundamental requirements, enabling legislation, supporting governance & structures, qualitative participation processes, capacity building) and 25 indicators in total. The analysis showed that there are some fundamental barriers, like the often-missing political will to consider climate change as an urgent topic and to involve civil society meaningfully in the corresponding decision-making or the risk of democratic backsliding,[7] which prevent transparent policy-making with civil society.

The analysis of the legal framework revealed that the provisions of the Aarhus Convention have not been fully incorporated into national legislation. According to Georgian legislation, the Convention does not need to be translated into national law and can be applied as a directly applicable source of law. Nevertheless, an incorporation into national law would create more legal certainty for affected citizens and the public institutions which have to implement the provisions.

With regard to existing participation processes such as the NDC update and CSAP development, civil society representatives interviewed criticised that it is always the same small circle of established, well-known, rather large and professional national-level CSOs that is invited to relevant meetings of the government. This means that there is a lack of inclusiveness and transparency that prevents the participation of, for example, smaller and newer CSOs or organisations which represent certain population groups (e.g., young people or minorities) or regions. In addition, an appropriate variety of participation instruments and methods adapted to different conditions and topics, such as round table discussions, focus groups or future workshops is lacking. Missing or insufficient information before and during participatory events about the topic and background (as well as the planned procedure) is a further major barrier for the effective participation of civil society.

Moreover, information on climate change and the related political processes (such as the international climate negotiations) is often very technical, and thus difficult to understand. In many cases, specific information and international documents on climate issues are only available in English, which represents a language barrier for some stakeholders. Another problem is that deadlines for the submission of comments and recommendations are often too short for CSOs to participate meaningfully; they would need more time to elaborate statements/comments, for instance, on draft documents. Finally, ideas and comments of the public and CSOs are rarely considered in final decisions, and transparency about the decision-making process is missing. Other major barriers to CSO participation are their often-limited financial and time resources as well as sometimes-limited knowledge and weak capacity for exercising participatory mechanisms, which can be tediously bureaucratic. Since Spring 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented an additional hurdle to participation processes. In-person meetings with several participants were no longer possible, and government agencies failed to provide adequate digital alternatives.

The Way Forward: People-Centred and Ambitious NDC in 2025?!

NDCs have to be submitted every five years to the UNFCCC secretariat. The next update is requested in 2025. In order to push countries to grow more ambitious with their goals over time, the Paris Agreement provides that successive NDCs will represent a progression compared to the previous NDC and reflect a country's highest possible ambition. In this process, the government of Georgia should profit from and incorporate the knowledge and perspectives of its civil society. Besides expert knowledge on certain fields, such as renewable energy or local climate adaptation, CSOs often have deep insights into the needs and social values of the society and can speak up for those who are not heard (e.g., local communities, minorities). They also act as an intermediary between state and society, as well as between different political sectors that need to cooperate to protect the climate and human well-being. Through their various activities, CSOs can promote the participation of cit-

6 'International conference presenting civil society visions on Georgia's CSAP 2030 and CAP 2021–2023', Greens Movement of Georgia/ Friends of the Earth Georgia, 28 December 2020, www.greens.ge/en/news/international-conference-presenting-civil-society-visions-on-georgia-s-csap-2030-and-cap-2021-2023 (accessed 10 May 2021).

7 'Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Weak checks and balances threaten anti-corruption efforts', Transparency International, 29 January 2019, www.transparency.org/en/news/weak-checks-and-balances-threaten-anti-corruption-efforts-across-eastern-eu (accessed 10 May 2021).

izens in climate protection and policy, and ultimately contribute to a better acceptance of political decisions among society. Therefore, the government should consider the contributions of civil society as an asset, not a barrier, in the political process.

Existing legislation should be amended to ensure the effective implementation of Articles 7 and 8 of the Aarhus Convention (these articles refer to public participation with respect to plans, programmes and policies, and the preparation of executive regulations and generally applicable legally binding rules). Detailed and binding standards for formal and informal climate-related participation procedures which go beyond the requirements of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook and the Rules of Procedure for Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Documents[8] should be set.

Regarding structural opportunities for improvement, leading ministries such as MEPA should foster coordination and cooperation with other ministries (such as the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development or the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure), political levels, public authorities and structures such as the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC)[9] to design effective and efficient participation processes. Furthermore, structures to foster inter-ministerial cooperation such as the Climate Change Council should be opened up to allow representatives of civil society to join so that they can observe and influence the implementation of Georgia's climate change policy and climate-related international commitments.

Concrete participation processes, such as the update of an NDC, should be meaningful, inclusive, transparent and binding. The organisation should include important elements such as: stakeholder mapping (including the regional and local levels); the elaboration of an engagement plan and timeline; appropriate, interactive, deliberative and dialogue-orientated formats; transparency; accessible information; clear communication; the provision of adequate financial resources; and a transparent review procedure.

Another key measure to improve future engagement of civil society in Georgia's climate policy is to increase capacity building. On the one hand, political authorities should be trained on how to implement long-term and well-coordinated participation procedures. On the other hand, technical knowledge and capacity on climate issues and political participation should be built among CSOs, for example through funded civil society projects and/or support from government agencies (in the form of workshops, training courses, financial grants, etc.).

CSOs themselves should strengthen their national and international networks, partnerships and knowledge sharing (with other CSOs and the relevant scientific communities) in the future, for example within their ongoing and planned projects and activities. By exchanging their experiences and lessons learned from the recent NDC update and CSAP development they can increase capacities, create synergies for upcoming processes, and enhance their engagement in ambitious climate action that complies with the Paris Agreement.

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8 The national legislation of Georgia consists of primary and secondary legislation (laws and sub-laws). With regard to the sub-laws, the latest specifications and requirements for public participation can be found in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook (2019) that includes the Rules of Procedure for the Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Documents. They were approved by Decree 629 of December 2019, which entered into force in 2020 and replaced the Policy Planning Manual of 2016. According to Article 9 of these rules, it is mandatory to hold public consultations before the adoption of a draft policy document in the form of meetings and/or in electronic format. See Administration of the Government of Georgia (2019).

9 In 2013, the EIEC was created within the structure of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia. It is a legal entity under public law with the aim of raising public awareness on environmental protection, supporting public participation in decision-making processes, and increasing access to justice according to the Aarhus Convention (see www.eiec.gov.ge, accessed 6 August 2021).

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Why Gender in Georgian Climate Policies?

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Abstract

This article addresses the lack of gender responsiveness and highlights the necessity for the involvement of women in climate policies and actions in Georgia. The need for mainstreaming gender in climate policies and actions is being recognised and encouraged by international researchers and agencies. Although considerable progress on legislative equality has been made in recent years, gender is not yet mainstreamed into any climate or energy policies in Georgia, with the exception of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). Based on analyses of existing documents and policies related to climate change, this paper suggests that the Georgian government should develop gender-responsive climate policies through an intersectional approach, building capacity on gender mainstreaming in the relevant sectors, upscaling existing best practices by civil society, grassroots organisations and national experts, and conducting deep gender analysis as stipulated by the NDC.

Introduction

Research shows that climate adaptation and mitigation actions are more successful in achieving their objectives and are better accepted when gender is mainstreamed and when they are implemented in a gender-responsive manner (Lv/ Deng, 2019). Countries that have higher women's participation and gender equality have lower climate gas emission, when all other relevant variables, such as population or gross domestic product (GDP), on emissions are controlled (Ergas, 2012). Increased women's participation in climate policy has led to higher effectiveness and responsiveness of climate and environmental policies (Burns/ Daniel, 2020).

Gender inequality affects access to and control over resources, institutional structures, social, cultural and formal networks and decision-making processes. Poorly designed or implemented climate solutions can actually exacerbate gender and social inequality, among other adverse environmental and social impacts (IPCC, 2018).

Gender mainstreaming or gender-responsiveness of national policies should not only mean considering women as a vulnerable group, or indeed equal participation of women and men. It is essential to do in-depth analysis to investigate the injustices that hinder gender-responsive policy making (UNIDO, 2014). Assessing gender-based inequalities followed by systematic main-

streaming of gender into climate policies and actions ensures that these are appropriate to the local context and address the needs and rights of women and men as stakeholders, and that they have equal access to resources, decision-making and benefits of climate actions (Burns/ Daniel, 2020).

International Obligations

Internationally, the ecofeminist movement has been pushing to include gender in environmental and climate policies since the 1990s (EEB/ WECF, 2021). One of the key areas for change in the Beijing declaration (United Nations, 1995) was the intersection of gender and environmental dimensions. It calls on governments and organisations to conduct gender-responsive research and create a platform where women are involved in decision-making processes related to sustainable development. The platform states that governments should 'establish strategies and mechanisms to increase the proportion of women, particularly at grass-roots levels', as 'their experience and skills in advocacy for and monitoring of proper natural resource management too often remain marginalised in policy-making and decision-making bodies, as well as in educational institutions and environment-related agencies at the managerial level' (UN, 1995, pp. 104–105).

In 2015, the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognised the need for gender equality as a preambular principle for all climate action. As a mechanism of the Paris Agreement, National Determined Contributions (NDCs) stipulating national climate goals and objectives should have references to gender included in terms of equality, gender-responsiveness, and women's empowerment as well as leadership in climate actions (Siegele, 2020).

The Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (ELWPG) and its Gender Action Plan (GAP) was adopted at the Conference of the Parties (COP) 25 one year after the Paris Agreement. It aims to set up platforms for capacity building on gender and to further mainstream gender in 'all relevant targets and goals in activities under the Convention [UNFCCC]' to increase 'effectiveness, fairness, and sustainability' (Burns/ Daniel, 2020). Georgia is party to the Beijing platform and the Paris Agreement, as well as being signatory of the ELWPG; thus, it is obliged to integrate gender and empower women as described.

Gender in Georgia's Climate Practices

Women as Vulnerable Group and Managers of Resources

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2010), women are more sensitive towards climate change than men, due both to their physiology and to economic and social barriers. In most municipalities of Georgia, more women than men live below the poverty line. Thus, the government will need to make greater efforts to ensure adaptation to climate change of this vulnerable population group at all levels (National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia, 2016).

The unsustainable energy situation especially in rural areas affects women disproportionately (UNECE, 2020). In rural areas, women have less access to clean and easily obtainable cooking and lighting fuel resources. Consequently, women have to do more physical work to take care of the household, leaving less time for self-development due to the lack of access to electricity. Increasing access to energy would reduce women's physical labour burden and contribute to women's economic empowerment as they could access the opportunity to work from home; furthermore, reliable lighting would contribute to greater security for women (UNECE, 2020).

In Georgia, households spend up to 25% of their income on energy bills, while not being able to keep their poorly insulated houses comfortable during winter. Women spend more time at home because many of them are housewives, and therefore spend most of the day caring for children and the household (WECF, 2016). Thus, spending more time inside, women and children suffer more from indoor air pollution caused by the use of solid fuels in inefficient stoves for heating (affecting 80% of the rural population) and cooking (affecting 20% of the total population) (WECF, 2020).

The National Sustainable Energy Action Plan of Georgia (NSEAP) has acknowledged that women are the main energy users in rural communities as they spend most of their time cooking on wood stoves. Women use ecosystem services differently from men, as their traditional roles in the household and community require them to look after cattle grazing in the forest and collect non-timber forest products, such as wild berries and nuts, medicinal herbs, mushrooms, etc. (UNECE, 2020).

The report 'Gender Assessment of Agriculture and Local Development Systems' confirmed the crucial role of women as resource managers, as women were found to engage in agricultural activities on 80 more days per year than men. Although women are more involved in agricultural work, they have 20% less access to information about the agricultural sector and any state services available compared to men. According to the UN Women/ SCO/ ADC's report, there are three possible reasons for this. First, agricultural education is limited in Georgia, especially in rural areas because there are no proper programs available to advance expertise in the agricultural sector. Stereotypes dictate to women that this field is not suitable for them, and social and cultural restrictions prevent women from advancing in the agri-

cultural sector. Finally, since women spend most of their time caring for the household, they don't have time to develop new skills (UN Women/ SCO/ ADC, 2018).

Several civil society initiatives have recognised women's distinct role in managing energy resources and designed gender-sensitive pilot interventions in Georgia accordingly (WECF 2015; CENN, website). Most national policy documents on energy or climate have yet to do so.

Women as Agents of Change and Decision-Makers

With only 22% of parliamentarians and 33% of ministers in 2021, women are not represented equally in Georgia's government (Parliament of Georgia, website; Government of Georgia, website). The women's participation rate in UNFCCC missions in Georgia has been increasing up to around, but rarely more than 50% over the previous years, and in the past five years a woman was appointed as head of delegation three times. The ELWPG encourages parties to appoint and provide support for a member of the UNFCCC country delegation as 'National and Climate Change Focal Point (NGCCFP) for climate negotiations, implementation and monitoring'. They are in charge of coordinating gender mainstreaming in the national climate policies and get specific support from the UNFCCC. By January 2021, 83 countries have submitted a NGCCFP, among them Georgia.

Georgia's updated NDC has a separate section on gender and climate change that aims to mainstream gender, further equal participation, empower women, build capacity, and develop gender-responsive climate policies.

The NDC also addresses Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to eliminate gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls by means of their economic, political and social empowerment. However, the NDC excludes target 5c of SDG 5, which underlines the importance of taking legislative measures to achieve gender equality.

In addition, the document mentions the role of women as educators, decision-makers and agents of change, their active involvement in the education system, and their unique position to increase energy efficiency in households. However, it does not foster the discussion on how women's empowerment can be achieved through their involvement in decision-making processes or measures to implement any of the other gender aims, nor does it formulate measurable targets. Surprisingly, the draft Climate Action Strategy Plan (CASP) (MEPA, 2020), which outlines the implementation plan of the NDC, does not mention gender in any way. Neither is women's equal participation in climate policies and actions addressed in the Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS), Green Budget, National Communication (NC), or the Association Agreement.

Nevertheless, gender has been integrated into Georgia's two Green Climate Fund (GCF) proposals and Gender Action Plans (GAPs), as mandated by the GCF. These GAPs include gender training and 30% women's representation in stakeholder consultations/staff, as well as analysis on gender roles and impacts (UNDP, 2018; GIZ, 2020). The LEDS includes a Communication and Awareness-Raising Strategy also aiming to 'address the issues of gender, youth and people with disabilities (PWD) in its outreach efforts'.

Additionally, Georgia has registered a gender-sensitive Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) on the efficient use of biomass at the UNFCCC and submitted it for funding to the NAMA Facility, a union of donors funding low-carbon development initiatives. Despite high ratings and international interest, it has not been financed due to geographical priorities. The NAMA was developed by a coalition of civil society organisations and included women's empowerment targets such as a quota on women in decision-making, a gender-sensitive financial mechanism and capacity building for women and men (WECF, 2015).

Most Civil society organisations have not been integrating a gender approach into its climate actions, with the exceptions of Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) and to some extent the Rural Community Development Agency (RCDA). With the exception of the previously mentioned NAMA, civil society did not take a stance on advocating for gender-responsive climate policies, despite an active dialogue between environmental NGOs and decision-makers. They lack the capacity and awareness to integrate gender approaches into environmental action and advocacy. Women and gender NGOs, on the other hand, are not actively involved in climate actions or policies, as they lack the technical expertise on combating climate change. Civil society in Georgia works in silos, each in their own area of expertise, and it lacks cooperation.

Gender-Sensitive Reporting and Monitoring

The NDC intends to collect and manage gender-disaggregated data on greenhouse gas mitigation and climate change adaptation and conduct gender analysis where relevant. However, no methodology has been laid out, nor have gender-disaggregated data been presented publicly except for reports by civil society. The Biannual Update Report (BUR) (MEPA, 2018) and fourth NC (MEPA, 2021) do not consider gender at all.

According to the Draft National Sustainable Energy Action Plan of Georgia, the Georgian government intends to include gender in every aspect of each SDG,

and put 'special emphasis on ensuring that all SDGs have gender-sensitive indicators and that gender equality policies reflect commitments made in the nationalized SDGs and their targets' (UNECE, 2020, p. 43). The plan does not discuss any further how this can be shaped. Even though the international SDG 13 mentions gender (target 13B), this has not yet been adopted in the national targets.

The 2017 Energy Survey[1] gives an extended overview of all issues that households in Georgia are struggling with. The gender of respondents was recorded, but was not considered in the survey. The household as 'black box' is used in all analyses.

Recommendations on How to Strengthen Gender Responsiveness and Participation of Women in Climate Issues

Georgia was one of 64 countries (out of 195) which referred to gender in its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) in 2016 and elaborated on it more in its NDC in 2020. The NDC intends to mainstream a gender-sensitive approach and has mentioned the most important aspects and tools to reach gender responsiveness in climate action and policies. However, the CAP and CSAP do not describe in any way how to ensure gender-responsive climate actions. Gender is being touched upon in some of the other climate-related policies and plans, but there is no consistent strategy.

Georgia is part of all gender-related conventions and has made remarkable progress on implementing SDG 5 (WeResearch, 2019). It has integrated women's rights almost completely up to international standards into the national legislation. But gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and actions requires both financial and human resources, experience and expertise. It requires an inter-sectoral approach throughout different ministries, institutions and civil society.

To strengthen gender responsiveness and participation of women in climate policies and actions, we recommend the following measures and steps:

- Full implementation of the NDC, thus ensuring women taking leadership roles in creating gender-responsive policies is a key aspect of the Georgian state's agenda in combating climate change and achieving sustainable development. The Georgian state should ensure that women are equally represented in decision-making processes at local, national and country delegate levels to UNFCCC missions.
- To achieve this, an inter-sectional approach is key. Through increased inter-departmental and inter-sectoral communication, a consistent gender strategy can be developed and integrated into all relevant policies and actions as laid out in the NDC. Gender experts from the national ministries and institutions, international organisations and national experts can be involved in the development of climate policies. Georgia's NGCCFP should be empowered to coordinate the process with the support of international organisations.
- All organisations working on climate issues should build capacity on gender and women's empowerment, including international and civil society organisations. During the COPs, the delegation can take part in different workshops on gender. Also on a national level, workshops addressing the topic can be organised upon request by international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Climate Technology Center and Network (CTCN) or the UNFCCC. International organisations have developed a wealth of guidance on all aspects of gender mainstreaming in climate policies and actions (UN Women, 2016).
- The climate department under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is in general open to civil society involvement from both the gender- and environmentally-oriented organisations. This should be facilitated to a greater degree through public reviews, consultation meetings and appropriate funding, with a focus on a more active involvement of women's organisations, while building capacity of the environmental sector on gender. Civil society and international organisations can provide expertise on mainstreaming gender in a consistent manner in climate policies and actions. This approach should include empowering, involving and building capacity of grassroots organisations. They are guardians of their environment and a valuable source of information, ensuring that planned climate actions are beneficial for the local population. Grassroot organisations have a direct interest in preserving their environment and first-hand experience with local ecological and social realities. Their involvement and support is crucial for climate actions to succeed, as the recent developments around the Namakhvani hydropower project demonstrate.[2]
- In order to implement the NDC's intention to use gender-disaggregated data and carry out gender analysis where necessary, the relevant institutions should be engaged, including those working on the energy survey, NCs, BURs and CAPs. In order to develop effective policies, it is necessary to first adequately

1 See https://www.geostat.ge/media/20691/energoresursebi_2017.pdf (accessed 19 August 2021).
2 See https://oc-media.org/thousands-turn-out-for-kutaisi-hydropower-protest/ (accessed 19. August 2021).

assess the situation by using gender-disaggregated data, taking into account sex (the biological attribute of being female or male), gender (referring to socially constructed roles), race, ethnicity, location, migration status, marriage status and so on (Duerto Valero, 2019). This process requires resources and can take years to update missing information and track the relevant changes (OECD, 2015).

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Anna Samwel is the head of Women Engage for a Common Future's branch office in Georgia, supporting local women's and environmental organisations to create a gender-just and healthy planet for all.

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CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends in Georgia. CRRC-Georgia, together with CRRC-Armenia and CRRC-Azerbaijan, constitutes a network of research centers with the common goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus.

Center for Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Zurich

The Center for Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Zurich is a center of excellence for Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian studies. It offers expertise in research, teaching and consultancy. The CEES is the University's hub for interdisciplinary and contemporary studies of a vast region, comprising the former socialist states of Eastern Europe and the countries of the post-Soviet space. As an independent academic institution, the CEES provides expertise for decision makers in politics and in the field of the economy. It serves as a link between academia and practitioners and as a point of contact and reference for the media and the wider public.

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