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Inclusive Climate Adaptation in Central Asia: Strengthening Participatory Governance for Resilience

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Executive summary

Central Asia's climate adaptation strategies increasingly emphasize the need for inclusive participation, with national frameworks engaging government bodies, civil society, academic institutions, and local communities to enhance resilience against climate risks. While progress is evident in capacity-building and multi-level stakeholder involvement, the reliance on periodic consultations such as roundtables and workshops highlights a critical gap in establishing continuous, structured feedback loops. This shortfall limits the ability to systematically integrate local knowledge and address the unique challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Strengthening participatory governance through formalized feedback mechanisms and targeted outreach is therefore essential for improving transparency, responsiveness, and the overall effectiveness of adaptation measures across the region.

Dmitry Erokhin is a research scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). His interdisciplinary work spans digital analytics, economic cooperation, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk management. He holds a PhD from the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU). He can be reached at erokhin@iiasa.ac.at.

Introduction

Participation is emerging as a critical pillar in climate change adaptation efforts, ensuring that diverse voices shape policies designed to build resilience in the face of a changing climate.[1] As countries confront more frequent extreme weather events, unpredictable climatic patterns, and long-term environmental shifts, it is essential to actively involve communities and stakeholders in crafting effective and inclusive adaptation strategies.[2] In Central Asia, where geographical, socio-economic, and environmental vulnerabilities intersect, participatory approaches are particularly vital for addressing challenges such as water scarcity, agricultural vulnerabilities, and ecosystem degradation.[3] This policy brief focuses on participatory dimensions within Central Asia's climate change adaptation policies.[4] It examines the spectrum of stakeholders engaged, the consultation and capacity-building processes in place, and the methods used to disseminate information

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1 Aldunce, Paulina, Ruth Beilin, John Handmer, and Mark Howden. Stakeholder Participation in Building Resilience to Disasters in a Changing Climate. *Environmental Hazards and Resilience* (2021): 164–179.

2 Kirshen, Paul, Thomas Ballestero, Ellen Douglas, Christine D. Miller Hesed, Matthias Ruth, Michael Paolisso, Chris Watson, Phil Giffee, Kim Vermeer, and Kirk Bosma. Engaging Vulnerable Populations in Multi-Level Stakeholder Collaborative Urban Adaptation Planning for Extreme Events and Climate Risks – A Case Study of East Boston USA. *Journal of Extreme Events* 5, no. 2–3 (2018): 1850013. Sherman, Mya H., and James Ford. Stakeholder Engagement in Adaptation Interventions: An Evaluation of Projects in Developing Nations. *Climate Policy* 14, no. 3 (2014): 417–441.

3 Mustaeva, Nailya, and Saniya Kartayeva. Status of Climate Change Adaptation in Central Asian Region. *Status of Climate Change Adaptation in Asia and the Pacific* (2018): 41–67. Varis, Olli, and Matti Kummu. The Major Central Asian River Basins: An Assessment of Vulnerability. *Water and Security in Central Asia* (2016): 39–58. Zinzani, Andrea. The Reconfiguration of Participatory Irrigation Management in Water Users Associations: Evidence from Uzbekistan & Kazakhstan. *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* 25 (2015): 133-153. Zhang, Yan, and JoAnn Carmin. Achieving Urban Climate Adaptation in Europe and Central Asia. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 5088 (2009).

4 Relevant policies were extracted from the Climate Change Laws of the World Database using the keyword "adaptation" (Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics and Climate Policy Radar, 2025). For more information on the selected policies, please also see the Analysed Policies for Reference section of the policy brief. It is important to stress that not all of the identified policies are pure adaptation policies. The policy list includes mitigation and development policies with a focus on adaptation to demonstrate the interconnectedness of various policy areas.

to both the general public and vulnerable groups. Additionally, the brief assesses the effectiveness of the monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms in fostering a transparent and responsive policy environment. By identifying current strengths and gaps, the analysis aims to offer insights and recommendations for enhancing the inclusiveness and overall success of adaptation measures across the region.

Participatory Elements in Climate Adaptation Policies

Table 1 presented at the end of the policy brief provides a comprehensive comparison of the participatory elements in climate change adaptation policies across Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. It illustrates that, while all countries engage key groups such as national and local governments, the private sector, civil society, and academic institutions, with some also including vulnerable groups, communities, and international partners, their approaches vary. Consultation mechanisms range from interagency commissions, national workshops, and public hearings to digital tools and advisory councils. Capacity-building measures differ as well, encompassing training programmes, research initiatives, and technology transfers, while information dissemination strategies and channels for stakeholder feedback are implemented through a mix of official websites, public campaigns, and periodic review processes.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's climate adaptation policy framework shows a clear commitment to multilevel stakeholder engagement and capacity-building. Various government ministries, scientific institutions, industry representatives, and civil society organizations are brought together to shape strategies for adaptation. The development of an integrated monitoring, reporting, and verification system and the incorporation of climate change topics into educational curricula illustrate the country's drive to strengthen both institutional and technical capacities. Efforts to raise public awareness are also evident, with attention paid to including women, local communities, and other groups in planning and management.

Despite these positive steps, the policy documents lack a clear, continuous feedback loop for stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of climate measures over time. Although stakeholder consultations are part of policy formulation, no formal mechanism exists for ongoing input or for vulnerable populations to be systematically reached. Likewise, there is no dedicated channel for stakeholders to request additional information or clarify policy details beyond the existing general communications. While the government's emphasis on broad participation and transparency is noteworthy, the absence of a structured feedback system may limit timely adjustments and risk overlooking the needs of certain groups.

Overall, Uzbekistan's climate strategies reflect considerable progress but would benefit from more explicit outreach and evaluation processes to ensure that all voices are heard and that policies remain responsive to evolving challenges.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's climate adaptation policy framework underscores a broad-based, multi-level approach to addressing climate change. Government ministries, civil society organizations, academic institutions, private sector actors, and international partners are all recognized as key participants in formulating and implementing climate measures. The emphasis on capacity building through education and training helps foster awareness across society, and the electronic information management system promises to improve data collection and transparency. Furthermore, alignment with the Aarhus Convention and the establishment of the Aarhus Centre reflect Turkmenistan's intention to enhance public access to environmental information.

Nonetheless, the documents do not detail a robust, continuous feedback loop that would allow stakeholders to evaluate policy effectiveness or propose improvements on an ongoing basis. While they highlight roundtables, workshops, and periodic consultations, there is no dedicated, structured mechanism to ensure that community voices, particularly those of vulnerable groups, are consistently heard. Although monitoring and evaluation frameworks exist, they often rely on general reporting by government entities, without specifying how indicators will be refined or how lessons learned will translate into timely policy adjustments.

Overall, Turkmenistan's climate policies exhibit a willingness to coordinate across different sectors and to build institutional capacity, yet they would benefit from more explicit channels for stakeholder feedback, clearer outreach strategies for marginalized populations, and more transparent, detailed metrics for assessing progress.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan's climate adaptation policies showcase broad stakeholder engagement, ranging from national ministries and research institutes to local authorities, civil society, and international partners. They highlight inter-ministerial coordination and regular consultations. Capacity-building initiatives such as training programmes for public officials and specialized technical staff are mentioned, indicating a strong commitment to strengthening institutional and human resources. The water sector reform programme stands out for its decentralized, basin-level management approach, which encourages local participation and empowers water user associations. Moreover, the emphasis on gender issues, as seen in the National Strategy for the Activation of the Role of Women, underscores the government's recognition of inclusivity as a crucial component of sustainable development.

Nevertheless, certain gaps remain. While there is a clear intent to keep stakeholders informed through reports and workshops, no dedicated mechanism exists for continuous, structured feedback on policy implementation. References to vulnerable groups appear in multiple documents, yet details on targeted outreach or specialized communication channels are limited. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are in place, but information on how adaptation results will be measured or refined over time is not always specified.

Overall, although Tajikistan's strategies demonstrate notable progress in coordination and capacity-building, clearer guidelines on integrating lessons learned and ensuring ongoing community feedback would enhance their effectiveness and inclusivity.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's various climate adaptation strategies show a consistent effort to involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders, ranging from central

government bodies and local self-governance structures to civil society organizations, academia, and international partners. Most documents emphasize multi-level coordination and participatory approaches, reflecting a genuine commitment to transparency and inclusiveness. They also highlight capacity-building as a priority, with plans for training, institutional strengthening, and the adoption of digital tools that promise more efficient monitoring and reporting.

At the same time, several gaps remain. While strategies mention the importance of reaching vulnerable groups and ensuring they have a voice, there is often no dedicated mechanism or channel to engage them systematically. Many documents describe roundtables and conferences as forums for stakeholder input, but the feedback loop appears ad hoc rather than embedded in a formal, continuous process. Similarly, although the monitoring and evaluation frameworks are referenced frequently, they tend to rely on broad performance indicators without offering concrete details on how results will be measured and adjusted over time. This lack of specificity could hinder effective tracking of progress and limit opportunities for timely course corrections.

Overall, Kyrgyzstan's policy landscape demonstrates ambition and a willingness to coordinate across government and society, but it would benefit from more rigorous and clearly defined mechanisms for feedback, especially for vulnerable populations, and from more transparent metrics to evaluate the actual impact of proposed actions.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's climate adaptation policies showcase a deliberate effort to involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders. Central and local government bodies, research institutions, NGOs, and international partners are all recognized as contributors to policy formulation. Legal provisions mandate public participation in decision-making and guarantee the right to access environmental information. These frameworks have been bolstered by specialized institutions such as Kazgidromet and the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Ecology and Climate, whose work underpins monitoring systems for environmental data. In addition, capacity-building initiatives ranging from university programmes on green technologies to professional training signal a clear commitment to strengthening human resources for the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Nonetheless, certain limitations persist. Although strategic documents emphasize transparency, there is no singular, formal feedback mechanism that consistently channels public and expert input into policy revisions. Stakeholders can submit comments at various stages, but the process is often fragmented, and it can be difficult to track how feedback ultimately shapes decisions. While outreach campaigns and open data portals exist, there is no clearly defined strategy for reaching vulnerable or marginalized groups with targeted communication. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks rely heavily on national reports and inter-ministerial coordination, yet details on how adaptation measures will be refined based on performance remain sparse.

Overall, Kazakhstan's approach demonstrates strong intentions and considerable institutional development, but it would benefit from more explicit, continuous feedback loops and a clearer focus on the most at-risk communities.

Cross-Country Comparison and Discussion

Across Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, climate adaptation policies share a strong commitment to multi-level, multisectoral stakeholder participation, yet differ in their implementation specifics. All five countries engage government bodies, academic institutions, civil society, and international partners, reflecting a common regional emphasis on broad-ranging consultations. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan notably rely on national consultations and interagency groups, emphasizing the role of international support (e.g., UNDP, UNFCCC), with Uzbekistan highlighting collaboration with national meteorological services. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan utilize more structured approaches, incorporating dedicated councils, digital platforms, and periodic public consultations into their monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Capacity-building and information dissemination vary across these frameworks. Turkmenistan prioritizes climate education integration into formal curricula and specialized training, bolstered by international partnerships. Uzbekistan similarly benefits from international technical assistance but emphasizes training through meteorological services. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, however, focus more on innovation hubs and vocational programmes designed to develop stakeholders' green technology skills, while Tajikistan relies on international collaboration, particularly for hydrometeorological knowledge transfer.

Significant variation exists in operationalizing continuous stakeholder feedback. Kazakhstan institutionalizes stakeholder engagement and feedback through legal frameworks mandating public hearings and environmental assessments and leverages advanced digital tools for systematic, real-time input. Kyrgyzstan also utilizes digital platforms to enhance transparency and participation. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan tend to depend on periodic reviews and ad-hoc consultations, lacking structured mechanisms for continuous feedback. Tajikistan uniquely emphasizes localized participation through structured inter-ministerial councils and basin-level water management forums.

Information dissemination strategies also differ, with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan using advanced digital tools to reach remote and vulnerable populations effectively. Tajikistan's basin councils and Turkmenistan's Aarhus Centre target localized vulnerable groups, embedding these efforts within broader communication strategies. Across all five countries, transparency is reinforced through UNFCCC reporting and public climate data access; however, structured feedback loops remain limited.

Despite a shared commitment to participatory governance and promising initiatives in capacity-building, operational gaps persist. The reliance on periodic consultations rather than continuous feedback mechanisms limits regular assessment of policy effectiveness, incorporation of community insights, and systematic addressing of vulnerable groups' needs. Improving digital inclusivity and formalizing continuous, structured feedback channels are essential steps to strengthen the adaptive capacity, responsiveness, and equity of climate adaptation policies across the Central Asian region.

Conclusion

Inclusive climate adaptation in Central Asia demands meaningful participation at every governance level, ensuring resilience that genuinely reflects local needs and priorities. The analysis underscores the significant strides made across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan towards embedding participatory governance into their climate policies and institutional frameworks. However, gaps persist, notably in the depth and consistency of stakeholder engagement, accountability mechanisms, and inclusion of vulnerable communities.

Addressing these gaps will require targeted interventions: clearer policy mandates to institutionalize inclusive participation, systematic capacity-building initiatives for governmental bodies and civil society, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks that assess participatory practices and their outcomes transparently. Furthermore, strengthening regional cooperation to facilitate cross-border knowledge exchange and coordinated responses will significantly enhance overall effectiveness and resilience.

Ultimately, achieving truly inclusive climate governance in Central Asia hinges on shifting from tokenistic stakeholder consultations to authentic and empowered stakeholder involvement. Prioritizing inclusivity not only ensures equitable adaptation but fosters stronger societal trust, legitimacy, and durable climate resilience in the region.

Recommendations

Central Asian countries have made strides in developing climate adaptation policies, yet challenges remain in ensuring their effectiveness and inclusiveness. To address these gaps, the following recommendations aim to institutionalize participatory mechanisms, enhance outreach efforts, and strengthen governance structures. By implementing these measures, policymakers can improve transparency, accountability, and the overall adaptive capacity of climate policies, ensuring that vulnerable communities are actively engaged and better protected against climate risks:

1. **Institutionalize continuous feedback mechanisms:** Develop and integrate formal channels for ongoing stakeholder input such as digital platforms, regular public consultations, and scheduled review sessions to ensure that policy effectiveness is continuously monitored and adjusted. This approach should particularly prioritize mechanisms that systematically capture feedback from vulnerable and marginalized groups.[5]
2. **Enhance targeted outreach strategies:** Implement dedicated communication plans that specifically engage vulnerable communities and other underrepresented groups. Tailored

[5] Kopec, A. (2023). Policy feedback & research methods: How qualitative research designs with marginalized groups inform theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*, 16094069231217915.

outreach initiatives, including localized information campaigns and stakeholder workshops, can improve the accessibility of adaptation measures and ensure that all segments of society are adequately informed and involved in decision-making processes.[6]

3. **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks:** Establish detailed, transparent performance metrics and indicators to track the progress of adaptation initiatives. This should include the development of robust monitoring systems that not only assess overall policy outcomes but also specifically measure the impact on populations, ensuring that lessons learned are systematically incorporated into future policy adjustments.[7]

4. **Bolster capacity-building initiatives:** Expand training programmes and educational initiatives to not only enhance technical and institutional capacities but also to improve participatory governance skills. By empowering local communities, civil society organizations, and government agencies, these initiatives can foster more effective stakeholder engagement and facilitate the implementation of adaptive measures.[8]

5. **Foster intersectoral and multi-level coordination:** Strengthen collaborative efforts between government agencies, academic institutions, civil society, and international partners to harmonize adaptation strategies. Enhanced coordination can promote the sharing of best practices and resources and ensure a more unified and resilient response to climate challenges across the region.[9]

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Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Participatory Mechanisms in Climate Change Adaptation Policies across Central Asia (constructed by the author)

Dimension	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan
Which stakeholders are involved?	National government, private sector, civil society, academic and research institutions, community and vulnerable groups	National and local government, private sector, civil society, academic and research institutions, community and vulnerable groups	National and local government, community and vulnerable groups, civil society, international partners	National and local government, private sector, civil society, academic and research institutions, international partners	National and local government, private sector, civil society, academic and research institutions, community and vulnerable groups, international partners
Which consultation mechanisms are mentioned?	Public consultations, multi-agency working groups, technical expert reviews, stakeholder forums	Interagency commissions, national workshops, stakeholder consultations, collaboration with international organizations	Roundtables, national workshops, sectoral working groups, local-level consultations	Public hearings, inter-ministerial meetings, digital government tools, roundtable discussions	Public hearings, advisory councils, multi-stakeholder committees, e-government portals
Which capacity building mechanisms are mentioned?	Research initiatives, specialized training, data collection improvements, technology transfer from international partners	Training programmes, curriculum integration, improved climate data systems, collaboration with UN agencies	Awareness campaigns, specialized training	Institutional strengthening, professional training, climate finance readiness, integration of climate topics in education	Environmental education reforms, technology transfer, targeted training, research and innovation programs

Mechanisms to inform stakeholders about participation?	Official websites, bulletins, and public awareness campaigns	Broad public awareness campaigns and media outreach; the Aarhus Centre helps disseminate information	Public workshops, local media, NGO involvement	Digital government platforms, local authority channels, public announcements; some e-government tools	State media, official websites, mandatory public disclosure, various communication channels
Mechanisms to inform vulnerable populations?	General communication channels (mass media, bulletins) expected to reach all; no specialized outreach for vulnerable groups	Inclusion of vulnerable groups in general outreach; no dedicated mechanism but references to ensuring broad coverage	Some targeted measures (especially for women and rural communities) but not always formalized; mostly through local NGOs and workshops	Inclusive approach via local governance structures; no separate mechanism but integrated in broader outreach	Universal right to information under law; no separate mechanism for vulnerable groups, but broad public awareness requirements apply
Mechanisms for stakeholders to request and access information?	Open data from official websites; no distinct request platform	Aarhus principles acknowledged, information mainly via official channels; no explicit request portal	Publicly available climate reports, official websites, open-data approach; no dedicated request portal	Public data, e-government, official websites, and on-demand info from state bodies; no single request portal	Guaranteed right to information; official websites and formal requests possible under law

How is implementation monitored and evaluated?	National monitoring, reporting, and verification system, regular inventory and reporting	Interagency bodies track adaptation progress, periodic reporting, and collaboration with UN partners	Integrated monitoring and evaluation with national agencies, sectoral data collection, vulnerability assessments in national reports	Results-based monitoring with indicators, data collection by state agencies, periodic reporting	National monitoring system, inter-ministerial oversight, periodic reviews under state planning frameworks
System for stakeholders to provide feedback on effectiveness?	Stakeholder forums and public consultations; no continuous feedback portal, but input integrated into periodic policy updates	No distinct formal mechanism, feedback typically gathered via consultation events and interagency meetings	Workshops, roundtables, and local consultations; no single formal system, but feedback is integrated during reviews	Public hearings, advisory boards, e-government platforms, feedback loops embedded in development planning	Public hearings, advisory councils, provisions for public input, a triennial review by coordination bodies serves as a feedback loop

OSCE Academy in Bishkek
1A, Botanichesky pereulok
Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic 720044

Tel: +996 (312) 54-32-00, 54-12-00
E-mail: rtd@osce-academy.net
Website: www.osce-academy.net