

Possible green recovery strategies in Central Asia and opportunities for cooperation

Today, environment and climate issues are high on the global agenda of the world community. Understanding that habitat conservation and restoration are essential to sustainable development, to the quality of life of people, in general, to the future of our civilisation.

Environmental security and climate resilience of the Kyrgyz Republic is one of the priorities in the country's strategic development. Here, the Kyrgyz Republic (hereinafter referred to as the KR) has been working systematically on environmental issues of importance to our people.

The Kyrgyz Republic makes it a priority to be among successful environmentally-focused countries, changing first and foremost itself, its place in nature, and shaping an economy with the interests of future generations in mind.

Today, the Kyrgyz economy is already low-carbon, with 80 per cent of electricity generated by hydropower, a carbon-free energy source. Still, we have a lot of capacity and potential to further develop hydropower plants.

Kyrgyzstan, like other CA countries, is working on its nationally determined contribution (NDC) on GHG emission reduction and climate change adaptation and investment prospects.

The updated NDC sets out a climate change strategy by 2030 and recognises the importance of a low-carbon strategy.

The main mitigation policies and measures of NDC are identified in the energy, agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors:

- developing renewables;
- reducing current GHG emissions by expanding the gasification and use of electric vehicles;
- improving energy efficiency.

Adaptation measures are designed and presented in line with the three global adaptation goals of the Paris Agreement:

- Strengthening adaptive capacity;
- Strengthening resilience to negative impacts;
- Reducing vulnerability of populations and systems to the effects of these impacts.

The timeframe for updated NDC is set till 2025, which compared to first set of NDC covers all of the most vulnerable sectors: water, agriculture, energy, emergencies, public health, forests and biodiversity, as well as the new cross-cutting themes “Climate Resilient Areas and Green Cities” and “Improving Adaptive Reporting”.

The implementation of many adaptation measures depends on the successful mobilisation of external funding. Due to this, some of the activities planned under the mentioned timeframe can be initiated but not fully completed.

According to the draft updated NDC, the contribution of the KR to the Paris Agreement is:

- GHG emissions will be reduced by 16.63% in the business-as-usual scenario, and by 36.61% with international support by 2025;
- By 2030, reduction will be by 15.97% in the business-as-usual scenario, and by 43.62% in case of international support.

Also during his address to the UN General Assembly, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic noted that he would strive to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 by introducing more carbon-free energy sources, especially hydropower.

The Kyrgyz Republic is a Central Asian country rich in mineral resources and biodiversity. The country's ecosystems form a significant part of the flow of transboundary rivers in the Central Asian region, but the mountainous terrain and higher than average temperature rise predetermine a high vulnerability to climate change. We intend to preserve Kyrgyzstan as a country of snow-white peaks and emerald lakes.

The main factors affecting the country's environment are:

- growing anthropogenic load on the environment: economic and population growth, which increases CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions from fossil fuel combustion, use for electricity and heat production, industry and transport;
- climate change due to rising temperatures;
- growing number of natural disasters and processes, leading to natural and man-made emergencies.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic effect on the global environment, demonstrating the unpreparedness of today's global society to respond rapidly and deal with global emergencies. In particular, introduction of quarantine measures led to a slight decrease in atmospheric air pollution, however the volumes of municipal solid waste have increased significantly.

The Kyrgyz side understands “green recovery” as a transition to a green economy, which will not only improve the economic and social situation, but also will have a positive impact on resolving the existing environmental problems.

The benefits of green recovery are substantial and tangible, but a set of measures need to be put in place to achieve the objectives, namely:

- improve resource management and stimulate productivity;
- promote economic activity where it is most beneficial in the long term;
- introduce the use of effective and innovative circular production methods to reduce the burden on the environment.

For example, the Kyrgyz Republic has envisaged tax incentives for those operating electrically-powered vehicles; legislation on water resources is being reviewed and action plans to reduce CO₂ in large populated areas are being developed.

As the experience of European countries shows, climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability measures take the form of comprehensive long-

term programmes that take into account geographical location, meteorological conditions and consumer habits. The above factors should therefore be considered as starting points for green recovery in CA.

Among other things, the Kyrgyz Republic is looking into international practice in the transition to alternative energy sources with a consequent reduction in the use of environmentally harmful materials, decreasing the atmospheric emissions and working on climate change adaptation.

It is important that green recovery should be a collaborative, coordinated effort that has a realistic chance of delivering its objectives.

Since independence, the Kyrgyz Republic has undergone major changes in social development. We have adopted strategic development documents, created an environmental legislation framework, signed a number of new international agreements, conventions and protocols on environmental protection, sustainable development and climate change, and established an environmental management system.

The Kyrgyz Republic's accession to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change of 2000 (UNFCCC) laid the foundation for national policy and cooperation with the international community on the climate agenda. The adoption of the Paris Agreement to the UNFCCC (2015) and Kyrgyzstan's accession to it (2019) have predetermined new directions for national policy and cooperation with international organisations and partner countries.

There are great opportunities for regional cooperation on climate action.

In the longer term, the Kyrgyz Republic intends to reduce gradually fossil fuel subsidies. The harmonisation of measurement, reporting and verification guidelines and the elaboration of a regional low-carbon development strategy can be enabling factors for low-carbon development of the region.

Given the new opportunities, the Kyrgyz Republic supports the green recovery principles, and stands ready to cooperate to achieve key environmental and climate sustainability goals.