Climate Policy in Georgia

Mukhigulishvili, Giorgi

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Mukhigulishvili, G. (2021). Climate Policy in Georgia. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 124, 3-6. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000511715

Climate Policy in Georgia

Giorgi Mukhigulishvili (World Experience for Georgia, WEG, and Ilia State University, Georgia)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000511715

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

Giorgi Mukhigulishvili is a certified review expert of national submissions of parties included in Annex I to the UNFCCC. He is a lead researcher in energy security and climate change studies at the think tank World Experience for Georgia (WEG). Mr. Mukhigulishvili is a lecturer in the master's programme Energy and Mineral Resources Management and Sustainable Development at Ilia State University, Georgia. His research interests are energy security, climate change and sustainable development.

Bibliography

- Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA) (2021) Fourth National Communication of Georgia under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Tbilisi: MEPA. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/4%20Final%20Report%20-%20English%202020%2030.03_0.pdf (accessed 12 July 2021).
- Ritchie, Hannah (2020) Sector by sector: where do global greenhouse gas emissions come from? Our World in Data, 18 September 2020, https://ourworldindata.org/ghg-emissions-by-sector (accessed 12 July 2021).

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

Larissa Donges (Independent Institute for Environmental Issues, Berlin, Germany) and
Mikheil Kurdadze (Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, Tbilisi, Georgia)

DOI: 10.3929/ethz-b-000511715

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