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# ***Annual Report***

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**2020**

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# About Central Asia Solidarity Groups

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Central Asia Solidarity Groups (CAG) is a politically and religiously independent non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote a democratic Central Asia, with a strong, active and inclusive civil society ensuring that human rights are protected and social justice is achieved. We seek to accomplish these goals through long term solidarity work, trainings, exchange programs and advocacy efforts in the thematic areas of:

1. **Democratic Youth Organizing**
2. **Gender Equality**
3. **Climate and environment**
4. **Conflict Transformation.**

Our geographical focus is on Central Asia, a region comprising the five post-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In addition to our work in Central Asia, we run several projects in Sweden and support organizations implementing projects linked to Central Asia in Russia.

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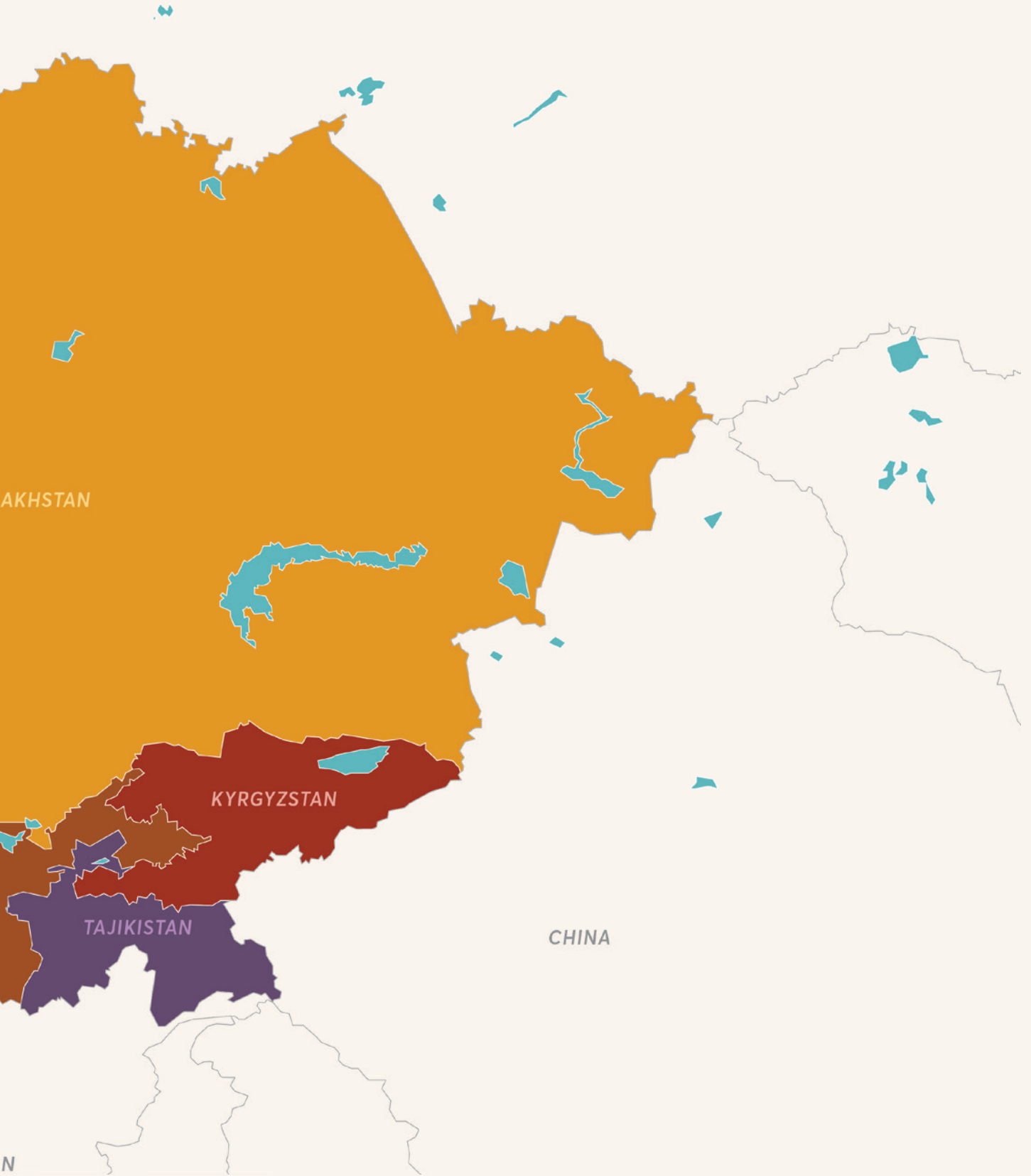
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# Central Asia







# Editorial

It has been a great pleasure of mine being the chairperson for Central Asia Solidarity Groups this year, and collaborating with remarkable people in the board and on the office level. This year, the board has seen committed and enthusiastic members, and CAG has gotten some brilliant new colleagues at the office level. It is because of these persons that the year has managed to be a good one.

Because, this year has been a strange and extraordinary year for CAG and everyone involved – even more so than usually. Undoubtedly the Covid-19 virus and the global pandemic has been on everyone's mind and affected all of us this year. So is also the case for CAG, the organisation's activities and our partners. Most of us would probably want to forget the year and the uncertainty and sorrow that it has brought with it. For CAG it has had its unforeseen disadvantages that has limited some of the planned activities for the year, notably the planned exchange activities which would have required international travel. But it has also had some unforeseen positive effects, such as having our interns from Kyrgyzstan with us for a longer period of time – which in retrospect has led to some great advantages in this year's activities.

The Activity Plan for 2020 was developed for the annual meeting that took place in March 2020, where it was approved by the CAG members in the meeting. The Activity Plan was developed by the board with a background in the Strategic Goals that were brought to life in 2018, and that run over a five year period. In the Activity Plan for 2020, the board put a focus on working with gaining knowledge about CAG as well as our partners, developing tools to build the capacity in the organisation and in the network, and to shift from a project-based orientation to a broader and more mainstreamed approach to the organisation's Thematic Program Areas (TPAs). Much of the effort during the year has been based on developing methods to gain insights from partners and their theories of change; what they see as the causes and effects of problems, possible paths to solutions and what actors are stakeholders in their work. The results from the workshops that followed has set the stage for articulating TPAs – this year with a strong focus on the field of Gender.

Because of reduced costs and surpluses, CAG has this year had resources that have been made available for organisations in the network to develop and apply for funding. As a result CAG is directly funding three organisations and their projects: ISDS, NeMolchi and FemAgora. We as an organisation hope to be able to continue this work and have established the Strategic Resource Fund, to enable funding to organisations, activists and initiative groups that otherwise would have a hard time accessing funding, and to circumvent sometimes complicated and slow funding process with traditional donors.

A large change within CAG this year has been the shift of TPAs, where 'Culture' has been replaced by a new thematic area: 'Environment and Climate'. The development of the new TPA Environment and Climate has taken place in stages; first through a regional research that was conducted during last year, secondly a by a field visit to Central Asia, and thirdly through the work of the board throughout the year. There have also been several pilot projects implemented and several new upcoming projects in this thematic area. Related to the new TPA, Environment and Climate, CAG has joined the campaign and announced 'Climate Emergency' with Framtidsjorden, Fältbiologerna, IKFF, Latinamerikagrupperna and Vardagens Civilkurage.

I believe strongly that the work that has been going on this year has set the scene for the future of CAG. Working with establishing a new thematic area, and clearly articulating the pathways of the others, will surely create a foundation and a framework for future ambitions. I hope that despite the negative effects of the global pandemic, and how it has impacted all of our work and personal lives, that we will be able to take with us the progress made in 2020 into 2021 and the future.

Sincerely yours,  
Johan Blomqvist



# Regional Overview of Central Asia in 2020

2020 has been an extraordinary year on a global level and Central Asia is no exception. Whilst Covid-19 and the implications thereof have impacted the region to a large extent, ranging from food shortages to financial instability, there are a myriad of other news events that occurred in the region in 2020.

In Uzbekistan, there have been serious concerns about the government's influence on the country's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as the government only allows state run NGOs to operate. The government is also making it very hard for grassroots NGOs to register. Such a policy limits the number and types of NGOs that operate in Uzbekistan. A new Code of NGOs is being drafted, however, it is unclear whether it will contain elements which facilitate the registration of grassroots NGOs or not.<sup>1</sup> Uzbekistan has since the death of former president Karimov showed several improvements linked to human rights, however, attacks on civil society are still common.<sup>2</sup> After charity initiatives in Uzbekistan had been successful in collecting money to provide supplies to people affected by Covid-19, the government banned charity initiatives stating that they may be undertaking fraudulent financial actions. Instead, the government set up their own Covid-19 relief initiative, which reportedly has not provided adequate support as a result of insufficient allocation of resources.<sup>3</sup> From an environmental and climate perspective, a high energy demand in Uzbekistan has led the government to suggest a reduction of the current gas and coal energy usage from 86% down to 50%, whilst increasing energy generated from nuclear, solar and wind power.<sup>4</sup>

In Kazakhstan there are plans to increase green energy usage from the current rate of 3% in 2020 to 30% of the energy coming from renewable sources by 2030.<sup>5</sup> Despite alleged improvements to human rights, being sentenced to prison for criticising the ruling party is still a reality in Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup> The Belt and Road initiative, a large scale infrastructure and economic investment initiative run by China, has resulted in heightened Chinese investments in the country, particularly in the border areas. The public in has mixed reactions to the Chinese investment expansion, some perceive China as a chance of finally obtaining money for investments such as renewable energy projects, whilst others are worried about the prevalence of coercive cultural assimilation measures carried out by China, similar to those taking place in Xinjiang.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/why-is-it-difficult-to-open-an-ngo-in-uzbekistan>

<sup>2</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/reality-check-on-human-rights-in-uzbekistan/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-charities-resist-government-monopolization-of-social-protection>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Uzbekistan-plans-route-to-cleaner-electricity-mix>

<sup>5</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/the-green-steppe-kazakhstan-and-its-green-energy-future/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-activist-punished-for-being-rude-about-ruling-party>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-09-14/chinas-new-silk-road-traverses-kazakhstan-some-kazakhs-are-skeptical-chinese>

Tajikistan continues to have several cases of torture against religious minorities, despite including 'Freedom of Religion' in their constitution. Cases of detention and torture against hijab-wearing women continues to be a common feature in the country.<sup>8</sup> The Tajik government also banned an independent, regional news provider from operating in the country, something which has been widely criticised internationally.<sup>9</sup> China has in 2020 continued to invest in Tajikistan, particularly in the Pamir region. A new airport has been built in Tashkurgan, close to the border of Tajikistan, as well as a military field.<sup>10</sup> Similar to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan also experienced increased civil society initiatives following the pandemic, despite NGOs in the country experiencing enhanced restrictions and are since 2019 forced to report to financial spending and personnel information to the Ministry of Justice. Small civil society initiatives proved to alleviate unmet public needs, such as collecting money to provide resources to the health care sector.<sup>11</sup> Elections were held in the country in October, resulting in yet another victory for President Rakhmon, who has been serving as President since 1992. There were officially five candidates taking part in the election, including Rakhmon, however none of the candidates were allowed to criticize the president. In addition, Tajikistan has no free media nor an independent opposition.<sup>12</sup>

Kyrgyzstan had a new law adopted on domestic violence in 2017, however, the prevalence of such violence remains high. Two women lost their lives as a result of domestic violence earlier in 2020. The high fine is allegedly one of the reasons why charges are dropped, as joint household budgets are common, thereby forcing the victim to pay as well.<sup>13</sup> Similar to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan's government has tried to find ways to limit the funding NGOs can receive from abroad. Even if the draft law proposing increased rules regarding the transparency of funding received by NGOs was not adopted by the Parliament in 2020, political analysts are concerned about the government in Kyrgyzstan's attempt to label NGOs as foreign agents and thereby restricting their ability to operate. A similar law was adopted in Russia in 2012. Analysts worry that the new law will leave NGOs in a vulnerable position, as the state allocates very limited resources to the NGO sector.<sup>14</sup> Approximately 2% of the NGOs in Kyrgyzstan receive financial resources from the state. Political turmoil hit Kyrgyzstan following the October elections. Often regarded as 'semi-free and fair', the elections on the 4th October resulted in four parties being elected for parliament, all with ties to president Jeenbekov. The run-up to the

elections had been marked by alleged vote-buying, public coercion and damaging opponents by undermining their credibility as a party. This ensured parties which were not in favour of the president Jeenbekov failed to reach the 7% threshold for entering in the elections. Protests broke out following the results announcing Jeenbekov as winner. Protesters took to the streets, attacking businesses as well as the presidential palace. Former president, and now also the current president, Sadyr Japarov was released from prison following the protests and will now act as interim president until new elections are held in January 2021.<sup>15</sup>

Following the pandemic, Turkmenistan has faced food shortages and price rises to a larger extent than usual, with locals being forced to queue for hours and forced to purchase unnecessary items when purchasing staple goods.<sup>16</sup> The government has not provided much information regarding the number of Covid-19 cases in the country, often denying the prevalence of the virus in the country.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2582](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2582)

<sup>9</sup> <https://cpj.org/2020/04/tajikistan-bans-independent-akhbor-news-website/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://jamestown.org/program/beijing-implies-tajikistans-pamir-region-should-be-returned-to-china/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/silver-lining-of-pandemic-redefining-civil-society-in-tajikistan>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/emomali-rakhmon-wins-tajikistan-election-with-more-than-90-of-vote/a-55238879>

<sup>13</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/curbing-domestic-violence-in-kyrgyzstan-are-victims-protected>

<sup>14</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/unhealthy-attention-to-npos-in-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>15</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstans-japarov-revolutionary-crime-fighting-anti-corruption-crusader>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-subsidized-food-strings-attached-shortages-economy/30901417.html>

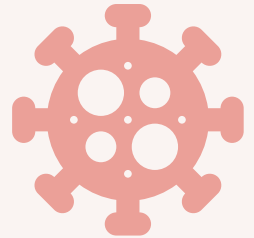
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# Covid-19

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The pandemic has affected our joint projects with partners in Central Asia and Russia. Some of the key activities within our joint projects are transnational in nature – i.e. exchange programs and residencies – and these have been affected the most. We had to cancel entire cycles of exchanges and residencies in 2020 and plan them for the year of 2021. Our partners were affected by local lockdowns and had to switch activities to an online format. In some cases CAG, together with partner organizations decided to stop long-term activities such as volunteering activities in Kyrgyzstan. In other cases due to

an abrupt shutdown of borders, we decided to prolong the duration of activities for several months to assure the security of the involved participants. In Sweden, CAG continued to operate as regular, with introduced measures that were based on national and local regulations and recommendations. Given the multiplicity of our activities in Sweden and beyond, CAG had to carefully adapt to advice from our donors that implied introduction of changes to activities not only in Sweden, but in Central Asia and Russia as well. These were quickly integrated to assure the safety of all stakeholders.



# Management

## The board

In 2020, the CAG board convened for 9 protocolled meetings at various locations across Sweden. In addition to these meetings, the board met in Malmö on June 6th for a strategy session to discuss long-term organizational and thematic priorities. Over the year, members of the board also convened in smaller groups to manage ongoing projects and to initiate new ones. At the beginning of this year, one board member visited our projects and partners in Central Asia. Other visits to the region by the board had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.

During board days in 2018, six strategic goals were set for the upcoming five years of the organization's activity up until the Annual Meeting in 2023. The board chose to prioritize three of these areas in 2020: well-defined and up-to-date thematic program areas; development of reliable, equal and long-term partnerships with CSOs and activist groups active in/with Central Asia, and organizational culture. The latter focus on further development of routines and practices that would ensure transparency, sustainability and reliability of CAG. Financial stability is another area of focus for the organization, as CAG focuses more on receiving consistent funding from grants and donors rather than primarily operating on a project-to-project budget.

Most importantly, CAG expanded its work with the new thematic programme area of environment and climate, which is largely based on the worsening environmental baseline in Central Asia as well as on a global level. This has also included declaring a climate emergency together with several other organisations based in Sweden.



Over the past fiscal year, the board has consisted of the following people:

**Johan Blomqvist**,  
chairperson

**Aida Akhmedova**,  
vice chairperson

**Gustaf Sörnmo**,  
treasurer

**Lola Matmusaeva**,  
board member

**Habira Majieva**,  
board member

**Talgat Subanaliev**,  
substitute board  
member

**Gustaf Sörnmo**  
and **Viktor Romanov**  
have been authorized  
signatories.

**Maria Jönsson**  
has been the auditor.

The nominating  
committee has consisted of **Josefin Åström**  
and **Filippa Almlund**.

## Organization and office

In 2020, CAG continued to develop a democratic organizational structure that is sufficiently robust to be able to carry out large-scale projects, while at the same time being receptive to new initiatives, collaborations and endeavors. In addition to the board and the Malmö office team, CAG presently has several committees as well as a number of thematically oriented working and project groups. CAG has no geographically-fixed local branches, and the above-mentioned groups are not tied to specific locations. Our main geographic areas of activity in Sweden are Malmö/Lund, Stockholm and to some extent Göteborg.

Over the past year, a total of 8 staff members worked at the main office in Malmö. These included project managers, administrators and volunteers. The office staff has included Viktor Romanov, Maria Pettersson, Ainagul Amatbekova, Talgat Subanaliev, Gustaf Sörnmo, Josefin Åström, Gyunay Mamedova and Mariia Koltsova. The work carried out at the office has varied, and has included tasks such as project management, evaluation, administration, budgeting, and the writing of grant applications. In addition, the office has worked to organize lectures, training courses, workshops, exchanges, study trips and other local events.

## Internal Trainings

Over the past year, the board and office team partook in several training sessions aimed at strengthening organizational capacity, improving specific skills and developing new methods for training, quality control and evaluation. CAG organized training days and courses for staff and members, covering topics such as biological diversity and intersection of gender and climate, workshops on theory of change, results-based management, digital security, mental health and burn-out prevention in the civil society sector.

## Webpage and Social Media

The website of CAG functions as a hub for analysis of, advocacy for, and information about Central Asia and our work in the region. In addition to that, various events were promoted on our social media platforms on Facebook and Instagram, such as Central Asia Days, lectures and campaigns. The total number of followers on CAG's Facebook and Instagram pages add up to more than 1423, and the number of website visits equaled 27648 in 2020.



“

*I had only a vague idea about Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a region – like many other Swedish people. For me it was a bit of a blank spot on the map, which really sparked my interest and curiosity.*

”



Interview with Johan Blomqvist  
by Gyunay Mamedova

**Johan Blomqvist is a chairperson of CAG who has a rich experience in civil society engagement starting from his studies at the university. Apart from being involved with CAG, Johan is currently working with communications in the Marketing and Admissions department at an International School in Bangalore, India. In the interview, he shares his background within development work and civil society, both in Sweden and abroad, his views on civil society and what keeps him motivated for a long time.**

**Let's start with your educational background. What did you study?**

I have an educational background in Development Studies (Bachelor) and Welfare Policies and Management (Masters) from Lund University, where I have always had an extra interest in topics related to democracy, Human Rights, social and economic justice, and sustainability. My studies have always had a special focus on how the international aid community works – or sometimes does not work – and what practices and discourses there are out there. For example, in my Master's thesis I looked closer at power mechanisms found in international development work, and how local and international organizations navigate the field to do the best work they possibly can.

**Why did you get involved in Central Asia for the first time?**

During my studies I was also involved in the Swedish civil society organization Tamam – the largest anti-racist organization in Sweden – where I first started as a volunteer, and then got involved on a strategic level and as a board member. As a board member in Tamam I got experience – not only of board-related work, such as planning and creating policies, annual action plans and budgets – but also communication work and employee responsibilities.

When I had finished my Masters at Lund University, I got to hear about CAG through colleagues at Tamam, and the opportunity to go to Kyrgyzstan for a year to work on a youth democratisation project with one of CAG's local partner organization, Novi Ritm. To be honest, I had only a vague idea about Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a region, – like many other Swedish people. For me it was a bit of a blank spot on the map, which really sparked my interest and curiosity, as I have always been keen on travelling and exploring new parts of the world, landscapes and environments, and different cultures.

“

*It is especially the people I have met and worked with that have made me love the region, and why I am still involved through CAG – and why I will always feel a special connection to Central Asia.*

”

During my year in Kyrgyzstan, working on the project as the representative from CAG together with the local partner, Novi Ritm, I got to develop and practice many new skills, and be engaged in organizational development and capacity building, as well as every part of the project cycle – from assessment and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and designing and writing a new application for the continuation of the partnership with Novi Ritm. My time in Central Asia also allowed me to travel around Kyrgyzstan and visit Uzbekistan, seeing new panoramas, exploring what seemed like untouched landscapes and meeting fantastic people. It is especially the people I have met and worked with that have made me love the region, and why I am still involved through CAG – and why I will always feel a special connection to Central Asia.



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### **What is civil society for you? Why is it important to work with CS in Central Asia?**

Common in all my previous experiences have been civil society, and the power of people and communities in changing our societies and the world. Although being a very broad and diverse field, the civil society sector to me is a fundamental and essential part of development – in every country and across regions. Civil society varies from formalised and established I/ NGOs, to activists and spontaneous interest groups and movements. It works as a platform, allowing people and communities to organise and get together around things that matter to them – enabling them to share experiences and form a collective voice, developing and deepening knowledge and skills, and put pressure on people and organizations in power to make changes that improves people's lives and the environment that surrounds us all.

### **What challenges that civil society works with in Central Asia?**

Challenges addressed by civil society in Central Asia, ranges from conflicts and rights issues related to discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and identity, socio-economic status to environmental and climate issues and community engagement and involvement in addressing these. Because Central Asia for many people is a blank spot on the map, and because of the way that the international aid community gives importance to certain countries based on the DAC's Official Development Assistance ranking, development efforts and civil society organizations in the region have been deprioritised. Due to lack of knowledge of the region and the issues and challenges faced by people and communities among decision makers and key professional groups, resources are not readily available – making civil society organizations many times struggling for funding and enlisting international support for pressuring political stakeholders and governments agencies.

### **What is the role of CAG in these processes? What is the unique approach that CAG takes to avoid the so-called mainstream approach to solidarity work?**

For CAG, solidarity work is at the very heart of everything that the organization does. Key here is the word "solidarity", which means that long-term partnerships are at the core of how we engage with civil society in the region. It is not only about working on an isolated project, but to build a long-lasting relationship and being able to work together and bring about results that spread and are sustained over time.

For this to become a reality, partnerships focus on a reciprocal – a two-way – process, where voices, perspectives and ideas from the grassroots makes out the foundation for how CAG structures its work, and how CAG works to mobilise resources and where CAG facilitates capacity development.

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“ *Knowing that I have had the chance to contribute in even a small way gives me the motivation and sense of purpose when waking up in the morning.* ”

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A central part of this work is establishing contacts and building onto the network, as well as carrying out meetings and workshops to analyse problem areas, needs assessments and actors involved, and links between root causes and possible solution outcomes. An example of this is an effort that has been going on for the last three years, where CAG has researched, mapped and initiated contacts with civil society organizations in the region, put together a method for workshopping around how organizations view change happening and carried out such workshops with about 10 organizations in the region. Moreover, CAG recently started the Strategic Resource Fund, to directly fund organizations and projects in its network. The fund has also allowed CAG to make available resources for groups that are not formalised in a way that might be required to get funding, or for organizations that don't have long enough experience to enable them to get funding from donors.

### **What keeps you motivated to do what you do?**

Although issues and problems around us – in Sweden, Central Asia and all over the world – can sometimes seem and feel overwhelming, I believe it is the organizations and people that I have met through my work that keeps me going. I am very happy to see that people I have met and our partner organizations, such as Novi Ritm, have continued to grow and develop – becoming a long-term partner of CAG and doing the good work that they are doing. The change that they make in their own lives and the lives of their communities is so important, and knowing that I have had the chance to contribute to that in even a small way gives me the motivation and sense of purpose when waking up in the morning.

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# Our Partners

## Novi Ritm

Novi Ritm, founded in 2014, is an organization by and for young people. The group's foremost area of activity is in the city of Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan, where they run an office and a social coffee shop. The organization functions as a platform for youth with a variety of backgrounds to explore and discuss social issues, to develop ideas and implement their own projects. The organization's vision is a society in which young people work together to create a just, equal and sustainable world. The organization conducts its activities in the form of lectures, workshops, campaigns and camps through non-formal education for youth in the fields of: human rights, gender equality, environmental justice, social entrepreneurship and conflict prevention.



## Children of St Petersburg (CSP)

Children of St. Petersburg, founded in 2012, is a non-governmental volunteer organization founded with the aim of providing free Russian language courses to the children of labor migrants from Central Asia. The group assists children with integration into Russian society and helps prepare them to enter school in their new home. At the moment, CSP provides Russian language courses and school preparation classes in one youth center and 11 city libraries. Besides the language and academic support, cultural events such as museum and theater visits, sightseeing, and summer/winter camps are also organized. Over the past eight years, CSP, together with "Gul", a team of young women from Central Asia, have initiated publication of Gul journal in four languages. The intended audience of this journal is primarily migrants, and it provides information regarding the daily life necessities of migrants living and working abroad. In addition, CSP has been organizing winter and summer camps for kids.



## NeMolchi.Uz



**NEMOLCHI.UZ**

NeMolchiUZ is a small-scale initiative set up in 2017 to give a voice to women and girls affected by gender-based violence in Uzbekistan. The initiative is made up by a web platform, which provides advice on what people can do if they experience domestic

violence or other types of abuse, and also functions as a tool by which women and girls can share their own experiences. The purpose of NeMolchiUZ is to break the culture of silence, shame and mainstreaming around and of gender-based violence.

## FemAgora

The annual FemAgora feminist festival took place online for the first time from August 25 to September 30, 2020. This year, the festival featured events and workshops, as well as special art and teaching materials. Traditionally, the goals of the festival are to highlight the activities of women and the gender situation, to solidarize feminist initiatives in Central Asia, which became especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the life of especially vulnerable groups and communities. Speakers of meetings and authors of publications were artists, journalists, representatives of national women's mechanisms, researchers, directors and other experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.



## Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy (ISDS)

The Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy (ISDS) is a non-governmental organization established in 2012 in Kyrgyzstan. The mission of the organization is to promote sustainable development by identifying and implementing traditional and innovative approaches to solving environmental, economic and social problems at the local and national level, as well as to provide financial, organizational, informational and other support for the activities and initiatives of local communities aimed at developing and improving their living standards. The organization's vision is strong local communities in Kyrgyzstan that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable with strong local traditions based on continued intergenerational exchange.



## Vardagens civilkurage



Vardagens civilkurage (Everyday Civil Courage) is a youth organization that trains practical civil courage, based on non-violent pedagogics. VC has great experience in training youth and young adults in conflict intervention and has developed extensive methodological resources for training in this field. The trainings enable participants to intervene in various everyday life situations containing oppression, inequality, exclusionary norms, abuse of power, discrimination, injustice and violence.

## MÄN



MÄN (Men for equality) is a non-profit, feminist Swedish organisation founded in 1993 as a platform for men to take action against men's violence towards women. MÄN works to change destructive masculinity norms and reduce male violence. Their vision is an equal world free from violence.

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# List of Activities in 2020

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Over the course of 2020, CAG has conducted a wide range of projects linked to its thematic areas, as well as partnership development and advocacy work. The following sections summarises each activity and the achievements thereof according to thematic area.



# Gender Equality

A common pattern across all Central Asian countries is the prevalence of various restrictions being placed on women and girls. Gender hierarchies permeate all aspects of society, including family structures. This manifests itself in widespread violence against women and harsh gender norms which saturate and structure daily life. Even though several of the countries in the region have ratified the Convention of Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration, women continue to be discriminated against both in public and in private. It is not uncommon for young girls to be pressured into marrying a stranger, or to be kidnapped and then forced to marry the abductor. For many, marriage at a young age forecloses educational and professional opportunities later in life.

In Kyrgyzstan, where CAG has several years of experience working with local women's and feminist rights activists, violence against women has not only increased but also become normalized and more widely accepted. Around 30% of women in Kyrgyzstan, and nearly

20% of women in Kazakhstan, have reported that they have experienced some form of gender-based violence. This rate is highest in Tajikistan, where 58.2% of women have been victims of gender violence. While there is no official data available on gender-based violence in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, reports suggest that the issue is a major problem in these countries as well. In all countries, the actual figures are expected to be higher, since data is limited and the likelihood that many instances of gender-based violence are underreported. This is mainly due to social norms and the widespread idea that domestic violence is a family matter, even by police and other civil servants.

In Central Asia, independent women's movements are not welcomed by the state officials. Furthermore, such movements are blamed for the introduction of so-called "westernized values" and thus encroaching on the traditional values of Central Asian society. Discourses containing terms such as 'domestic violence', 'non-discrimination' and 'gender topics' are thereby discredited for breaking more traditional principles of the country.



## Online Feminist Festival

In 2020, CAG supported the regional Feminist Festival, organized by the Almaty-based organization FemAgora. The Festival has been running for three years, and each year it has been innovating new forms of engagement and expanding its thematic and sectoral outreach. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Festival went online and multiplied its outreach and impact. Based on FemAgora's analytics, the Festival engaged up to 5,000 participants through Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

During 2020 the Festival diversified speakers, participants and audiences from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan by meaningfully engaging representatives of various communities, including migrants, rural women, people with disabilities, women former prisoners, women living with HIV, women who use drugs, sex workers, LGBTIQ and non-binary people. Both digital and physical forms of engagement were used with their audience by diversifying the formats of activities. Along with online events, 16

open panel discussions, two registration-only workshops, and one closed-group seminar for community members, FemAgora launched two brand-new creative projects: Feminist Paper Dolls and Digital Multimedia Book of Central Asian Poetry. Both are available at [www.femagora.org](http://www.femagora.org).



## Feminale in Bishkek

CAG supported the 2019 edition of The Feminale of Contemporary Art – the Biennale of Feminism – by financing the creation of a virtual exhibition space documenting all the different artwork originally exhibited at the Kyrgyz National Museum of Fine Arts in Bishkek. The virtual exhibition can be found here: <http://bishkekfeminists.org/ru/feminnale>. The Feminnale was dedicated to the theme of women's economic freedom and available for 17 days (November 27 – December 15), with 50 artists from 22 countries participating. Every day events and workshops about economic freedom, emancipation, feminism, mental and physical health were held. The 2019 Feminnale sparked controversial public debate in Kyrgyzstan, leading to partial censorship of the exhibition. After negotiations with the Ministry of Culture, some of the exhibits were taken to a private coworking space.





## Online training sessions in Russia

In October, the Swedish organization MÄN (Men for equality) conducted a two-day online training session with our partner in Russia, Children of St. Petersburg (CSP), as part of a larger collaborative project funded by the Swedish Institute. With this collaborative project, CAG and CSP aim to promote the right of education for children, youth and families with migrant backgrounds. We also address issues related to gender inequality, discrimination, and human rights, as well as raising awareness about relevant issues through art among the public and decision-makers. Artistic methods and interactive exercises play an important role in this project – such as creating theatre plays, coloring books and video clips – as does organizing public events for the general public and decision-makers, creating theatre plays and creating coloring books and video clips.

The online training session was the first activity of the project, that aimed to explore new methods of working with youth and children with our partners that will be integrated in further activities of the project. Sessions included, among other activities, learning about interactive methods such as “small and big room” to provide a space for young men to share their experiences and reflections and Role Plays methods on how to engage young men to address sensitive topics, and many others. Moreover, the sessions contained informative videos about masculinity and stereotypes.



## Information campaign about domestic violence

An information campaign was organized together with our partners, which resulted into a video clip about domestic violence. It was broadcasted for one month on a local TV channel in Southern Kyrgyzstan. The clip reached a broader public and raised awareness about domestic violence and provided contact details of hot lines and a number of shelters. In total, the campaign lasted for three months and consisted of one conference, 3 peacetables, fundraising activities, sessions about domestic violence, dinner discussions about abusive relationships, attracting local youth to participate in activities by handing out flyers and posters, and social media publications.



CAG financially supported the creation of *Feminist dialogues – Kyrgyzstani feminist and women movements' stories* – an 80-page publication documenting 7 years of activism in Bishkek Feminist Initiatives and activist voices all over Kyrgyzstan.

# Climate and Environment

The global ecological crisis is the greatest existential threat to humankind, but also to other species, life forms and ecosystems. Climate change has already had a significant negative impact on the region of Central Asia. According to GIZ, the region is suffering from the consequences of climate change more than most other regions of the world. It is predicted that the expansion of deserts and arid areas will continue; a grim statement, considering they already make up 80 percent of the total territory of Central Asia. On top of that, above-average

increases in temperature combined with water shortages and extreme weather events are also being frequently observed. A continued business-as-usual approach to the ecological crisis could lead to a Central Asia that, within decades, will be much less hospitable to human communities, potentially leaving many areas uninhabitable. At this moment, regional security and economic growth remain at the spotlight of the region's political discourse, while the growing threat of climate change and environmental breakdown is largely being overlooked or ignored.



## Research trip to Central Asia

In March, CAG conducted a research trip to Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with the aim of expanding our network with environmental organizations and movements in these countries and learning more about the various ecological challenges facing the region. In total, CAG met with a total of 14 environmental organizations and groups. Due to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic, the trip had to be cut short but the main objectives of the trip were nevertheless achieved. After the trip CAG has engaged in project design and partnership building activities with the organizations ISDS and El-Too (Kyrgyzstan) and Little Earth (Tajikistan), in addition to having a considerably wider and deeper

network to civil society, activists and scholars working in the thematic area of climate and environment. Based on dialogue with our new partners in this area, three applications were submitted to ForumCiv to explore local interventions such as energy sovereignty among remote mountain communities in the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. At this stage, CAG has secured funding to launch permaculture initiatives and small-scale ecological preservation/reservation around the lakes of Issyk kul and Song kul in Kyrgyzstan, in 2021. The research trip has also contributed with knowledge related to developing the new thematic area on environment and climate within CAG.



## Seminar and workshops on ecological masculinities in Moscow

In patriarchal societies, hegemonic masculinity norms tend to be constructed so as to promote and idealize domination over both women and nature. Many studies show that men have a significantly more negative ecological impact than women – for instance, by measures such as CO2 emissions per person. On a collective level, men are in the overwhelming majority in executive and decision-making roles in the fossil industry, leading figures in climate denialism and right-wing parties – entities complicit in climate disruption and ongoing ecocide. These norms and related behaviours not only harm women, communities, ecosystems and the planet; but also come at a severe price to men themselves, in terms of emotional pain, unrealistic self-expectations, relational distancing and violence.

During 2020, CAG collaborated with the Swedish organization MÄN to explore ways on how alternative, more ecological masculinity norms can be explored and embodied among men. MÄN has developed a methodology that creates a safe space for men for discussions and reflections on how they behave as men. Participants are seated in a circle and welcomed to share personal reflections on a specific gender-related topic, such as relationships with partners, family members, ecosystems and the wider community of life. Thus, the space allows men to explore their own attitudes and behaviours, gain

perspectives, connect with other men and create their own version of what it means to be a man. Originally the methodology was developed in the wake of #MeToo and focused primarily on gender-based violence targeting women, but has since been expanded and now also incorporates sessions around the intersections of masculinities, climate change and ecological destruction.

In the beginning of March 2020, a three-day long event was conducted in Moscow; one day of seminar and two days of interactive training. The training component was more practical and interactive, where a smaller group of men from Russia and Central Asia took part in a 2-day training. It was based on the newly developed methodology – adapted to a post-Soviet context – about how to shift masculinity norms away from its more toxic and ecologically destructive manifestations, toward care and mutuality. The seminar part gathered mostly scholars and experts and laid out the knowledge foundation related to the theme – gender and ecology. This provided the participant with an overview of the research in this domain.

CAG supported four activists from our partner organizations such as Children of St Petersburg in Russia and Novi Ritm in Kyrgyzstan, to attend the conference in Moscow.

*"I have learnt many things; I liked the methodology itself – sitting in a circle, I could share with my stories, thoughts... and the special thing about the circle is that you don't get any feedback from others and you have a chance to self-reflect on your own actions through your own narratives. Also, I learned how the masculinity norms affect the environment, and it turned out that these are ordinary things that I face in everyday life – do whatever I please as a man; toxic masculinity norms. To conduct such sessions in Kyrgyzstan might be a bit challenging, as our society is quite conservative, however, it's worth challenging the norms and bring new perspectives; I do not doubt the effectiveness of this initiative, however, it can be adapted to the context of my community. I hope after participating in conversations in a circle, men will gain perspectives and become more sensitive to violence against women and destructive behavior towards the environment..."*  
– Mamatkazy, an activist from Osh, Novi Ritm.



## Pilots on eco-masculinities in Russia and Kyrgyzstan

Right after the return of our activists back home from the Masculinity workshops in Moscow the world was engulfed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Extensive quarantines impeded the process of implementing pilots based on the methodology learned in Russia. Online meetings regarding the adjustment of the methods to a digital context were held with MÄN. However, the coup in Kyrgyzstan in October halted the implementation of the pilots, hence, the process got delayed. Even so, activists from Novi Ritm managed to launch the process; as of now a total of 6 group meetings out of 8 were conducted in Osh in collaboration with Novi Ritm. Our activists from Bishkek and St Petersburg plan to conduct men group sessions in the nearest future and integrate the methodology in their future projects.

## Declaring climate emergency and networking

Together with 4 other Swedish civil society organizations, CAG declared climate emergency in 2020. As the climate crisis escalates and insufficient action is seen from the political sphere, this campaign recognizes that it is not enough to pressure politicians and other decision-makers to act; civil society also needs to transition and declare climate emergency themselves. This is no mere symbolic statement but a campaign that requires substantial changes within the participating organization. In the case of CAG, we have during the year developed our new thematic area concerned with climate/environment in Central Asia, built partnerships and initiated projects in this field, allocated resources to work with various ecological issues in the region, conducted information and advocacy work on climate change, radicalized our ethical and sustainability policies, among other things. More information about the campaign, the participating organizations and their commitments can be found at: <https://klimatprata.se/klimatnödläge/>



In addition to building partnerships with environmental organizations in Central Asia, CAG has also expanded our network in Sweden and Europe substantially, now including organizations such as Ecosystem Restoration Camps, Klimatpsykologerna, Lodyn, various scholars and activists, to name a few. Furthermore, CAG joined the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) network in 2020.

## Klimatprata.se

In close collaboration with our friends at Vardagens civilkurage, we have contributed to creating and launching the online toolkit Klimatprata ("Talking Climate" in English). This website has gathered a vast amount of voices, reflections, suggestions and strategies on how to bring the climate crisis on the agenda and how to discursively create conditions for action. For instance, the site user can get advice on how to tackle climate denial, deal with various misconceptions on the causes of the crisis, and learn more about nonviolent tactics in everyday conversations. The site is currently being translated into English and will be available in early 2021. In addition to developing the material for the website, CAG has together with Vardagens civilkurage conducted multiple trainings – both physical and digital – that provide a space for participants to interactively explore different methods of creating constructive conversations about the climate and ecological crises.



“ We work with the environment and nature because we want to save our planet for future generations. ”

— Environmental Organizations (ENGOS) in Central Asia on their work and challenges

Interview by Mariia Koltsova

During the last two years working on projects connected to environmental issues became one of the priorities to CAG. Climate change has already had a negative impact on the region of Central Asia.

In the following interviews three representatives of our partner organizations from Central Asia telling us about their experience and thoughts related to the current situation with climate issues in the region.

### **Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy,** Anara Alymkulova, Kyrgyzstan

Tell us more about the organization? When it was founded and what are the main goals?

'Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy' Public Fund was founded in 2011 with a main goal to contribute to sustainable development through the application of innovative and traditional approaches to the solution of environmental, social and economic problems on the local, regional and global levels.



“ Our focus is on local communities based on participatory approaches and the key principles “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” ”

Our organization has implemented a number of projects aimed at supporting over 200 local initiatives, mostly in mountainous rural areas.



Which projects have you been implementing during the last years and why?

We have provided local communities with the support in preserving traditional ecological knowledge and biocultural heritage by developing and promoting “Nasyat” Network for Biocultural Diversity in Kyrgyzstan. Currently, the Nasyat network includes more than 60 NGOs and community-based organizations, as well as custodians of traditional knowledge and youth leaders. Also, we have created **Community Climate Change Adaptation Centers** in some pilot areas of the country to restore and protect pasturelands by revival of traditional knowledge and discuss local-level solutions for biodiversity conservation and climate change.

We are also working with youth and children to re-evaluate local biodiversity, natural resources and local culture to promote **Place-based Education** concept by developing pre-school orchards & mini-preserves, ethnobotanical gardens, learning local history/biocultural heritage mapping, etc.

What is your analysis of climate change in Central Asia? What niche do you occupy in combating climate change and other ecological problems in the region?

For Kyrgyzstan, the consequences of climate change are devastating, thus, the country suffers frequent flooding, mudslides, avalanches, snowstorms and mountain spills. There are over 200 natural disasters in the country every year, exacting significant societal and economic tolls. While local people directly experience weather trends and impacts, rarely are there resources or opportunities for people to connect this experience to a broader understanding of climate change. We see our role to help local communities by creating Community-based Climate Change Adaptation Centers (CCCACs) to build up a local level platform to educate and empower community citizens about environmental issues, climate change and adaptation practices and bring together multiple generations to combine traditional ecological knowledge with climate science ensures robust and on-going dialogue and learning.

Do you feel any changes in the sphere of climate activism during the last years?

We see more and more people in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia have better understanding about threats of climate change and undertake a more proactive role to protect the environment and fight against climate change, environmental issues.



There are different climate movements on national, regional and global levels that unite people of different ages and backgrounds but with the common goal to protect our commons (lands, water, air, etc.).

In your opinion, what are possible solutions for climate-related issues in your region?

Climate change is one of the most complicated and multi-faceted problems –not only for Central Asia – and requires well-coordinated work of government agencies, academic/science, private and public institutions.

“ Public awareness raising about climate change risks and its impact on key sectors across the region: agriculture and livestock, water resources, health, biodiversity, and energy, is one of the possible solutions. Introducing and using climate change adaptation/mitigation practices on all levels is another solution to solve climate issues. ”

## El-Too, Nuraiym Syrgak

Tell us more about your organization?

The organization "El-Too" was founded in 2001, I joined the organization only a year ago. The main goal of the organization is promoting ecological tourism, nature and biodiversity conservation. We mainly work on the territory of Issyk-Kul. Our current projects are connected with establishing micro-reserves on the water-line, and raising ecological awareness of local populations.

Which projects have you been working with for the last years?

We are working on our main project for now which is called *"Birds of Issyk-Kul – strengthening collaborative efforts in wetlands and waterfowl conservation"*. The project is located in the unique area which is the best area for winter birds, we want to save this area and organize birdwatching, ornithological tours there. The project have been started 5 months ago from studying the awareness of local people about ecological issues and local biodiversity.

At the same time we are working on the legislation in order to give municipalities more opportunities to act in the sphere of environmental protection. In the future we have a plan to conduct a series of information campaigns, make films, organize seminars and festivals, develop booklets to raise awareness of local people about the issue.



Do you feel any changes in the attitude of people and activists towards climate issues?

I am an anthropologist and have been conducting research on this topic. Local and rural population see that nature is changing, the temperatures are extreme, but they do not see what is behind it. The farmers are not adapting to changes but do not know why it happens and farmers are not ready to act on climate change. There are some activists in Bishkek, but in general people are not concerned about climate issues in the countryside.

What are the possible solutions for climate-related issues in the country?

We have so many problems in the country and one of them is air pollution. We need to develop sustainable energy, we need to work on saving the green areas, we have to control architecture. Bishkek was the greenest city in the country during the Soviet Union; however, nowadays it leads the list of cities with the worst air quality in the world. We need to introduce an efficient irrigation system since one third of the population engaged in agriculture. There are so many things to be done.

“ Local and rural population see that nature is changing, the temperatures are extreme, but they do not see what is behind it. ”

## Little Earth, Tajikistan, Timur Idrisov

Tell us more about your organization, how was it founded?

"Little Earth" was founded as an informal activist group in the end of the year 1997. Back then the organization was called "For The Earth". We work with the environment and nature because we want to save our planet for future generations in Tajikistan and all around the planet.



We are seriously improving sanitary conditions, safety and saving time that people still use for collecting brushwood.

Do you feel any changes in the sphere of climate activism and the attitude of people towards environmental issues during the last years?

It seems to me that people have begun to talk more about climate change and the amount of environmental organizations in Tajikistan has been increasing during the last few years. This may be due to many factors, but primarily due to the increase in international funding. I do not know how long it will last. Plus now people are thinking more and more about the coronavirus pandemic, and not about the climate.

At the same time a huge number of people do not know the basic information about climate change and have no idea what it is, at least the people we work with. And I don't think that there are some huge changes compared to what we started. Ecologists have a toast to "the success of our hopeless cause", it is an endless process. We do what we can and what we think is right.

In your opinion, what are possible solutions for climate-related issues in your region?

There must be political will. We have a lot of strategies, programs and laws in Tajikistan, some of them are very effective but most of the questions remain on paper because the reality is completely different. There must be a general understanding that green ecology is not just words and it seems to me that we don't have this kind of understanding yet. But of course it is a complex issue, there are some steps that should be taken in both the economic and educational spheres. Climate change should be discussed in the media, should be taught in schools and spread everywhere.



What kind of projects have you been implemented during the last years? What is your niche in the fight against climate change in the region?

On a grass root level we bring technologies and practices that help people to adapt to climate change. We promote sustainable energy solutions and clean technologies, especially in remote mountainous areas in Tajikistan. At the same time we play a role of a bridge between local communities and officials on different levels. We want officials to understand the situation and needs of real people and real vulnerable communities. In addition, we hold campaigns involving young people in environmental issues.

What are your main achievements during the last years ?

We have a lot of small achievements, as we work on a grassroots level. We provide local communities with either resource-saving equipment or one that runs on renewable energy sources, such as solar kitchens, solar portable lanterns or pressure cookers that save fuel.

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# *Democratic Youth Organizing*

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The countries of Central Asia are generally categorized as hierarchical societies in which citizens and civil society have little influence on the political system. Marked by age-based hierarchies, the societies of the region grant little voice to young people, and decisions that affect young people and their futures rarely embrace the perspectives of the youth. For the last five years, independent voices in Central Asia have been forced to deal with increased repression as a result of continued pressure from authorities. Civil society groups face restrictions imposed in the name of law and order, and their work has been increasingly stigmatized and criminalized. The existence of better opportunities for civil society organizations has a direct correlation with the health and quality of a democracy.

As an example, in Kyrgyzstan – a country generally depicted as a democratic oasis in comparison to its neighbors – there are several factors that severely limit young people's ability to actively and meaningfully participate in civil society. Because of persistent state corruption, as well as a lack of knowledge and advocacy channels, the youth of Kyrgyzstan experience difficulties in being able to exert influence on their life situation as well as claim their human and democratic rights.





## Youth Empowerment with Novi Ritm

Since 2014, CAG has cooperated with the youth organization Novi Ritm in southern Kyrgyzstan. During 2020, a solidarity project called “Securing the rights to rights of youth in southern Kyrgyzstan” was the main focus of cooperation between the two organizations. The two year project has had its goal that young people in southern Kyrgyzstan – with a focus on Osh city – will be able to effectively make use of their rights. Current decision-makers, potential future decision-makers as well as youth in general (with a focus on young women), have built awareness about existing laws and policies countering discrimination. Furthermore, young women have been personally and politically empowered for them to make claims for their rights when they are breached.

During the year, Novi Ritm concluded two cycles of the long-running initiative called Girls Group, a self-development and awareness raising group for girls and young women. This year, the programme included, in addition to the regular sessions on for example street harassments, domestic violence and sexual and reproductive rights, were sessions on body positivity coupled with yoga. Girls who previously participated in the Girls Group had an opportunity as Girls Group Alumni to continue their journey within Novi Ritm by implementing their own initiatives. Two such events were Evening of Art, an event focusing on how art can be used in activism, and a Feminism Talk, a format of events held at Novi Ritm for some years. The Feminism Talk of the alumni was held on International Day of Girls on October 11 and the topic was the possibility of leading a child free life, and the political participation of women. During the International Day of Girls, an online reading of fairy tales in Kyrgyz language about strong and powerful girls was held as well.

Apart from focusing on gender equality, youth were involved in campaigning for the environment. Youth volunteers at Novi Ritm ran the campaign “Love for nature through equality” which included live talks about ecology and environmental challenges, for example through a two-days eco-camp. As part of strengthening girls and young women for them to be better prepared to stand up for themselves and others, regular psychological consultations were

held with individual girls and women throughout the year with a psychologist connected to Novi Ritm. Another aspect of improving girls and women’s capacities to speak up in the face of breaches of their rights is legal advice. For this reason, a day of judicial consultation was held as well.



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## Peace table

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One of the milestones within the joint project between Central Asia Solidarity Groups and Novi Ritm, a peace table was organized in Osh. The peace table has multiple stakeholders from local and regional levels. These included board members and youth activists from Novi Ritm, activists from Sweden, Poland and Southern Kyrgyzstan, as well as representatives from the Osh police department, who primarily work with youth. The main objective of the peace table was to encourage policy dialogue and foster cooperation between decision-makers and youth. Activists from Sweden and Poland contributed with their knowledge on how decision-makers cooperate with young people in Sweden and Poland respectively.

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In addition, multiple sessions were organized for the participants of the peace table with topics such as human rights, anti-discrimination policies, and the absence of a unified anti-discrimination policy in Kyrgyzstan and how it affects lives of young people. These sessions were followed by group discussions, including representatives from different countries, and primarily dedicated to strategies about how one can tackle discrimination and its different manifestations.

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## Exchange visit to Kyrgyzstan

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Ten youth workers from Sweden and Poland were hosted by Novi Ritm in Kyrgyzstan for 15 days in 2020. The exchange took place both in Bishkek and Osh and consisted of study visits to civil society organizations that work with gender, youth, freedom of speech, LGBTQ+, climate and environment. The exchange visit also provided plenty of opportunities to attend workshops and sessions organized by local organizations, as well as networking events and a peace table conference together with local decision-makers. Eventually, the participants enhanced their practical knowledge on how to work with issues related to age, ethnicity, and gender in different contexts and how to make relevant stakeholders such as representatives from youth councils as well as police working with young people involved in these processes.



# Information and Advocacy Work

Over the past seven years, CAG has increasingly focused on information and advocacy work. The organization strives to represent and amplify Central Asian grassroots, civil society and marginalized voices towards the Swedish public and decision-makers. In doing so, CAG aims to introduce perspectives that are rarely included at the higher levels of political processes. Information and advocacy work includes, but is not limited to, touring exhibition, role play days, theme days, Central Asia Days, lectures and explainer clips. We strive to establish contacts with universities, decision-makers, and international organizations. CAG's information and advocacy work includes raising pressing issues related to our thematic areas, which is exemplified by the focus of Central Asia Days and in the content of the exhibition.



## Activism, Civil Society and Rights-based Work in Central Asia Exhibition



For the fourth year in a row, our exhibition on Activism, Civil Society and Rights-based work in Central Asia toured Sweden. The exhibition was first put up in Lund in spring and was well received by the local visitors in the library venue. The other physical version of the exhibition was held in the main venue of Sensus in Malmö. As Covid-19 had some form of impact on most of our activities this year, the exhibition was no exception. An online version of the exhibition was therefore created and aired on Malmö Mediakanal, a local TV channel which reaches 120,000 households around Malmö. The digital exhibition also remains accessible on our Youtube channel.

## Role Play Days

Another core aspect of CAG's advocacy work is to organize Role Play Days. In 2019, CAG introduced an innovation to the approach turning it into a digital roleplaying game; which, in its turn, proved to fit neatly with the changed conditions given the pandemic. The goal behind this roleplaying game is to deepen one's knowledge about solidarity work and activism through the lens of Central Asia.

The role play was conducted online via Zoom. Besides immersing themselves into the situation of LGBTQ+ people in Kyrgyzstan, participants also learned about other issues in Central Asia.

Additionally, four new storylines were created, with the expanded version seeking to familiarise the player with common situations and struggles of matters related to LGBTQ+, climate change and mental health in Central Asia. The role play game will be promoted during different kinds of events and a separate event dedicated to the game is yet to be carried out. You can find the link to play it on CAG's website and instagram profile in the taplink.



## Video clips



Following last year's video clip on climate change, CAG produced a wide variety of clips on topics such as migration, authoritarianism, civil society, women's rights, as well as youth and security in Central Asia. The purpose of the clips is to increase knowledge about Central Asia and an opportunity to learn more about current developments and its impact on the region's countries, such as how migration affects local communities, how the implementation of UN Resolution 2250 is done in Central Asia and how civil society is forming itself in the region.





# Central Asia Days 2020



On the 6th and 7th of December, CAG hosted the seventh annual Central Asia Days conference. Following the Covid-19 restrictions, CAG decided to hold Central Asia Days 2020 online. This year's conference consisted of a series of lectures with activists, civil society representatives and researchers from Central Asia and Europe that work closely with various issues related to Central Asia.

The first day featured three lectures. The first lecture was named *Patterns of External and Internal Migration in Central Asia* and was led by Aida Alymbaeva, PhD candidate, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany. The lecture was dedicated to the migration trends in Central Asia; which is primarily a provider of labour migrants to Russia, especially those from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as well as the reasons and effects of migration. The second lecture was named *Chinese Authoritarian Technologies*, held by Niva Yau Tsz Yan, a resident researcher at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI). Niva Yau discussed China's use and promotion of authoritarian technology in Central Asia, detailing their impacts on daily lives of ordinary citizens and local governments in terms of security and trade. The third lecture *Regime Stability and International Relations in an Age of Covid-19* was given by Oleg A. and Edward Lemon, a research assistant professor at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University and president of the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs. They talked about how the pandemic and recent political crisis in Kyrgyzstan

are shaping the region's domestic and international politics, including relations with the region's two major external powers: Russia and China. The speakers also focused on how Covid-19 has weakened trust in the state and how citizens have responded by stepping in to fulfill roles traditionally taken on by the state, including providing welfare and security.

**Central Asia Days 2020 virtual**

DECEMBER 06, 13.00 - 17.30	DECEMBER 07, 11.00 - 15.30
<b>13.00 - 14.15 Migration</b> <i>Patterns of External and Internal Migration in Central Asia</i> <b>Aida Alymbaeva (KG)</b>	<b>11.00 - 12.15 Civil Society</b> <i>as a substitute of an under-performing state in the Kyrgyz Republic</i> <b>Dr. Sharshenov</b> will explore various grassroots volunteer movements in Kyrgyzstan function in times of crisis. <b>Aijan Sharshenov (KG)</b>
<b>14.45 - 16.00 Chinese authoritarian technologies</b> <i>On China's use and promotion of authoritarian technology in Central Asia and how it impacts daily lives of the local communities.</i> <b>Niva Yau Tsz Yan (Hong Kong)</b>	<b>12.45 - 14.00 The impacts of climate change on the gender</b> <i>How climate change influences the gendered roles, needs, inequalities in Central Asian societies. An outlook for measures and mainstreaming.</i> <b>Nozilkhon Mukhamedova (UZ)</b>
<b>16.15 - 17.30 Regime Stability and International Relations in an Age of Covid</b> <i>How the pandemic is shaping the region's domestic and international politics</i> <b>Edward Lemon (US) &amp; Oleg</b>	<b>14.15 - 15.30 Climate Change and public participation</b> <i>The participation of public organizations in work on climate change at local, national and regional levels. The main challenges and positive developments that the public environmental movement in Central Asia faces.</i> <b>Timur Idrisov (TJ)</b>

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The second day of the conference consisted of three lectures as well. Aijan Sharshenova, an associate research fellow at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, presented on the topic of *Civil society as a substitute of an under-performing state in the Kyrgyz Republic* within the first lecture. The lecture was dedicated to various grassroots volunteer movements in Kyrgyzstan, which often step in to complement or to fill in the gap left by the state in the times of crisis. The second lecture *Gendered impacts of climate change in Central Asia* was given by Nozilakhon Mukhamedova, a senior researcher in Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany. The

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lecture focused on the impacts of climate change on the gendered roles, needs and inequalities in Central Asian societies and gave an outlook for measures and future mainstreaming. The third and the last lecture *Climate change and public participation* was held by Timur Idrisov, a senior adviser in the national environmental NGO Little Earth in Tajikistan. The presentation included examples of the participation of public organizations in work on climate change at the local, national and regional levels, as well as the main challenges and positive developments that the public environmental movement in Central Asia faces.

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Feedback from attendees included:

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“ I learned about the climate movement and migration in Central Asia. ”

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“ I have learnt about climate and environment - something I have not explored in depth before. ”

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“ I feel I have been very naive about many aspects of life I take for granted – topics like authoritarian technology and the handling of the pandemic in particular. ”

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# Partnership Development

## Participatory research with civil society organizations

A core aim for CAG is to always get better at what we do, including expanding our range of partners in Central Asia and identifying how to best support their work. We attempted to do it through participatory research with civil society organizations in Central Asia; to find out about the key issues that civil society in Central Asia are working with and to help finding pathways of change as it is part of our mission and to facilitate the capacity development among CAG's network, and to find new possible solutions and pathways of change.



The research consisted of workshops that were carried out with 12 organizations in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The workshops were built around tools such as Theory of change, Stakeholders analysis and Problem/Solution tree, which had several benefits for the participating organizations. The outcomes of the workshop can lay a very good foundation for potential future partnerships and projects. Since the workshop, CAG has begun collaborating with several of the participating organizations. Additionally, the knowledge gained during the research enables CAG, as a non-Central Asian organization, to make sure that our work supporting CSOs in our network is done in a relevant, ethical, participatory and equal way.



## Pathways of Change – How Partners Envision the Future



The data gathered from the aforementioned workshops was analysed and turned into the publication *Pathways of Change – How Partners Envision the Future*. CAG also included three climate organizations' data in the publication. The purpose of the publication was to better understand how the organizations work with theory of change and what commonalities as well as differences there are to the way they work. Such a publication is a helpful tool for CAG, its current partners and potential future partners to map how civil society organizations in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan operate. The publication has been distributed across the participating organisations' networks as well as in CAG's network. The overall aim is to spread information and knowledge which will contribute to the strengthening of the CSO network in the region by increasing the understanding of other CSOs' strengths and needs, which in extension encourages contact and collaboration.

## Strategic Resource Fund

For many years, CAG has been aware of the limited resources available to projects and initiatives in Central Asia; especially for grass-roots organisations and individuals or groups of activists in civil society in all of the countries. Much of this is due to international development discourses, donor priorities, as well as complicated and time consuming funding processes that often includes a need for substantial contributions from the project organisations themselves.

Therefore, CAG launched the Strategic Resource Fund (SRF) in 2020; a fund that aims to easily provide resources for civil society actors in Central Asia for strategic interventions based on their own experiences, expertise and context. The fund primarily focuses on financial resources, but can also provide various forms of capacity building, international networks and partnerships, and long-term funding schemes. It is a fund with the goal to strengthen the relationship between CAG and its partners, where it enables quicker and alternative routes to partnerships as well as an exchange of knowledge and perspectives.

When piloting the SRF this year, CAG developed two types of grant forms: a standard and smaller grants. The standard grant is for projects up to 7,500 USD. The smaller grant is for projects up to 2,000 USD. Going through an application process with 25 organisations and groups from various countries and locations in Central Asia, a dialogue was established with a selection of the actors, and three projects that were selected and granted funding. The organisations and their projects will be implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and respectively work with climate, provide online psychological support for victims of domestic violence, as well strengthen Central Asian feminist/queer, trans- and women-led grassroots, community-based and locally organized groups and projects in the region.

The board of CAG is very excited about the opportunity to support these organisations and groups, and interested in seeing the outcome and possibilities to maintain the partnerships, learn from these processes, as well as increase the reach of the SRF – that way contributing to strengthening the civil society in the region, and establish more long-lasting and impactful partnerships.

# Financial Report

## Income statement

### Operating incomes, changes in inventories etc.

Grants

Other incomes

**Sum operating incomes, changes in inventories etc.**

**2020-01-01**

**2020-12-31**

**2019-01-01**

**2019-12-31**

2 468 211

8 917

**2 477 128**

3 082 882

1 874

**3 084 756**

## Operating costs

Development projects

Exchanges and trainings

Volunteering and activist residencies

Information and advocacy

Cultural projects

Other external costs

**Sum operating costs**

-1 567 715

-132 592

-230 964

-453 684

-13 289

-70 537

**-2 468 781**

-1 629 987

-363 221

-144 888

-510 975

-39 289

-78 245

**-2 766 605**

**Operating profit**

**8 347**

**318 151**

**Results after financial posts**

**8 347**

**318 151**

**Results before tax**

**8 347**

**318 151**

**Results of the year**

**8 347**

**318 151**

## Balance sheet

2020-12-31

2019-12-31

### Assets

#### Current assets

##### Current receivables

Other receivables

128 511

24 335

Sum current receivables

128 511

24 335

##### Cash and bank balance

Cash and bank balance

1 504 762

785 048

Sum Cash and bank balance

1 504 762

785 048

##### Sum current assets

1 633 273

809 383

##### Sum assets

1 633 273

809 383

## Equity and liabilities

### Equity

Balanced profit or loss

643 741

325 590

Result of the year

8 347

318 151

##### Sum equity

652 088

643 741

#### Current liabilities

Tax liabilities

18 192

26 016

Other liabilities

120 441

31 589

Accrued expenses and deferred income

842 552

108 037

##### Sum current liabilities

981 185

165 642

##### Sum equity and liabilities

1 633 273

809 383

All amounts in SEK

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# Acknowledgments

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## Individuals

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## Organizations

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El-Too, FemAgora, ISDS, Kobiety, Lastochki, Little Earth,  
Lund City Library, MÄN, Novi Ritm, Nemolchi,  
Sensus Malmö, Vardagens civilkurage

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**SI.** Svenska  
institutet



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**FBA**

**EAC**  
**EA**  
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Executive Agency

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