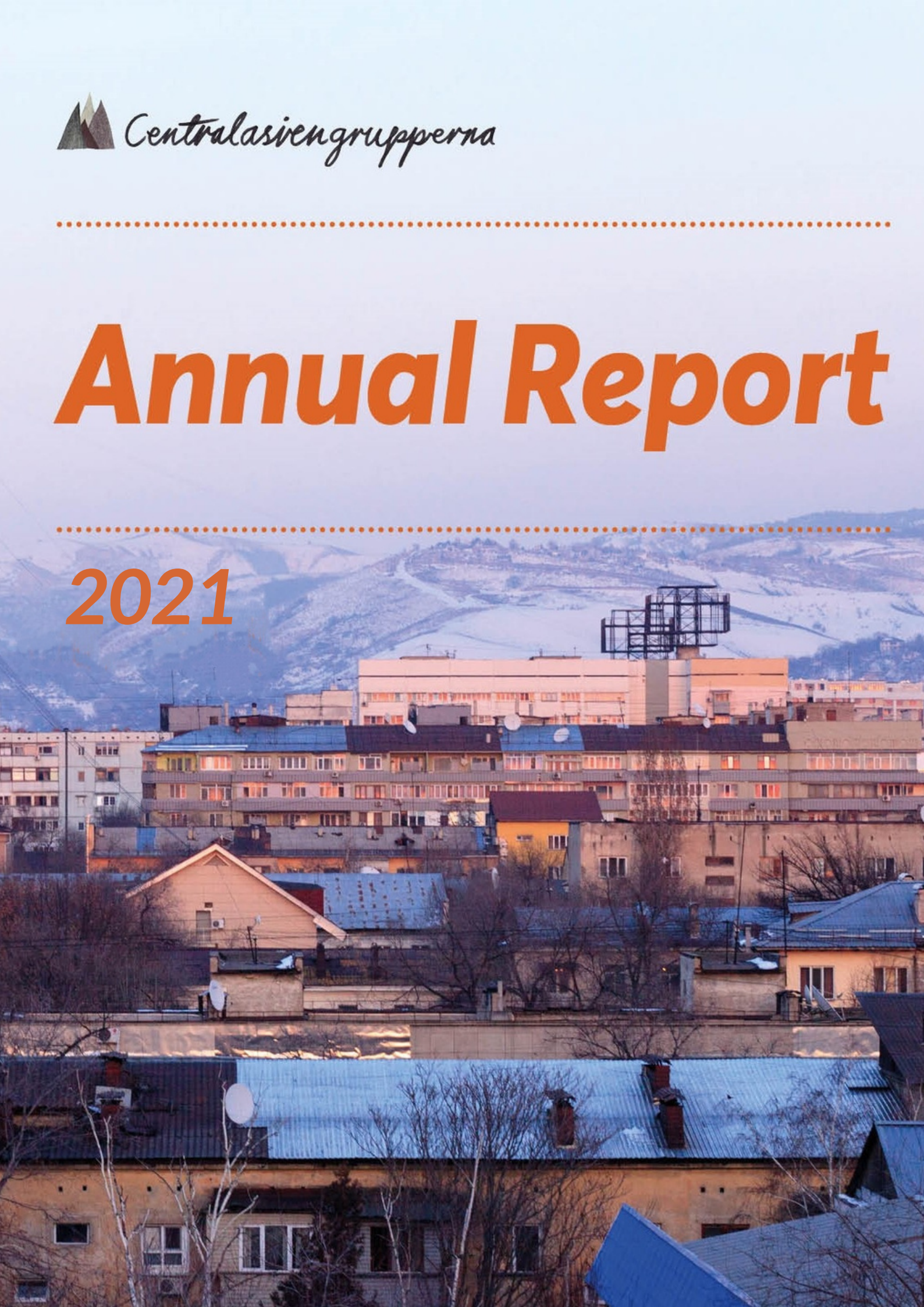


Annual Report

2021



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About Central Asia Solidarity Groups

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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RUSSIA

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

SYRIA

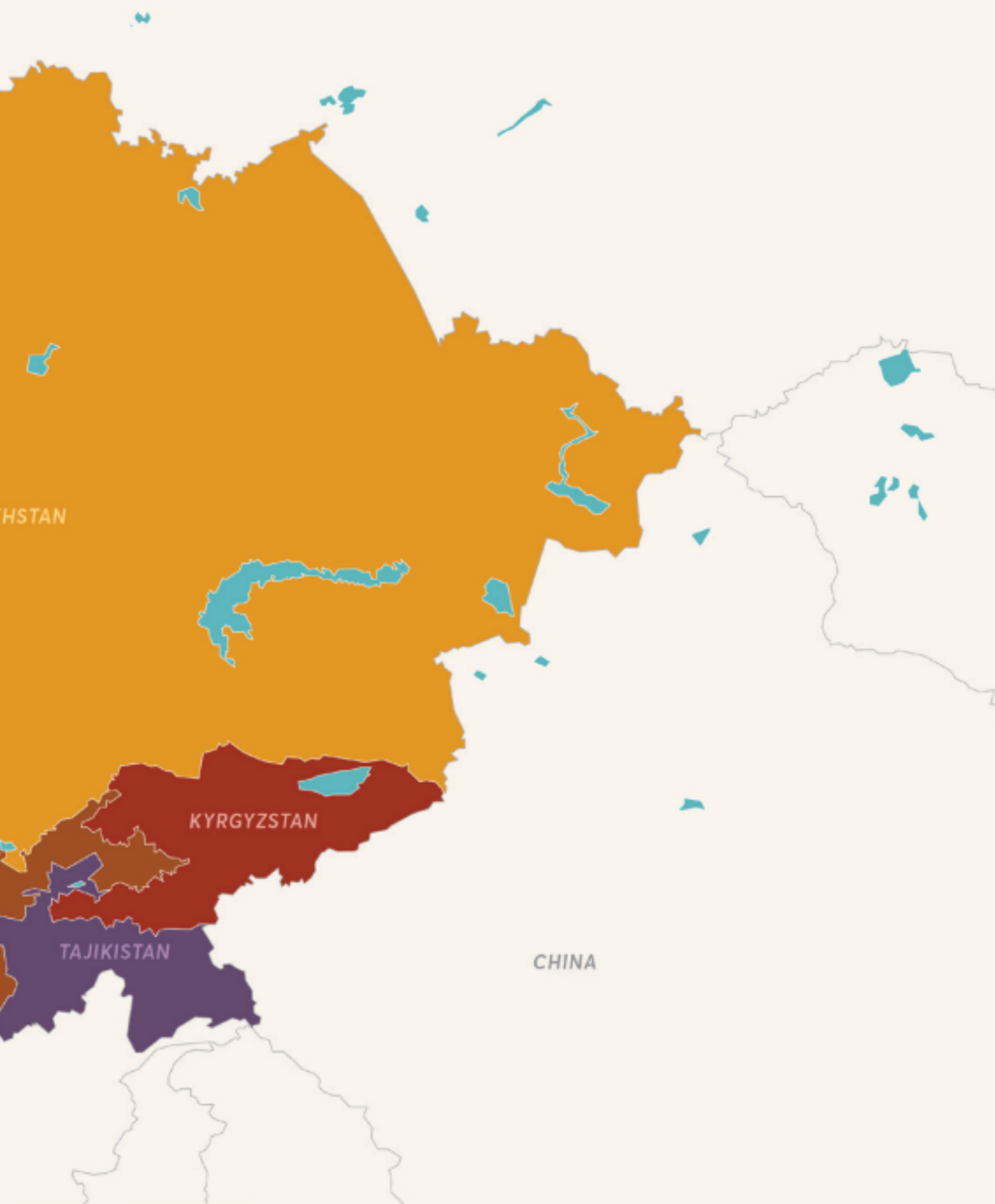
CASPIAN SEA

TURKMENISTAN

UZBEKISTAN

IRAN

AFGHANISTAN



KAZAKHSTAN

KYRGYZSTAN

TAJIKISTAN

CHINA

Editorial

Having been two co-chairpersons within the board this year has meant a great joy for both of us; sharing work and effort, discussing ideas and development has offered a way for both effectiveness and solutions to come to life. As always, the CAG community has been a wonderful family for us to be a part of; having a great time and effort working with CAG's board members, with talented and driven colleagues at the office, and with our energetic partner organizations in Central Asia!



This year has been both a strange and extraordinary year for CAG. As an organization, we had to get used to working in a world of covid – something that unfortunately has been extended beyond anticipated timelines. However, due to the longevity of the situation, we have picked up on digital routines that have been used to hold activities when needed. Luckily certain events, such as the Central Asia Days, were held live and in physical reality. In addition, this year saw a financial challenge, where CAG had less institutional funding, which provided further challenges.



Despite difficulties, this year has been a really productive and successful one. Having worked with interrelated and parallel tasks on board and office level, CAG has managed to plan for and further develop policies and routines to move towards becoming a program organization, rather than an organization which is only project-dependent. For example, this has been done through collaborations between the board and office, as well as including partner organizations' perceptions in developing pathways of change within CAG's thematic areas.

Along with more long-term and strategic developments, CAG has put in great work with partners in Central Asia to apply for and receive grants. The approved projects have been developed with new and innovative aspects and methods, and have been granted to CAG and partners in the region. With information and advocacy work in Sweden – a central aspect for awareness raising, changing attitudes and behavior, and civil society development in the region – CAG had successfully promoted knowledge exchange.

Last year CAG initiated the Strategic Resource Fund (SRF) to support regional grassroot organizations and their projects, aiming to provide resources for actors and their strategic interventions in their respective contexts. Three grassroot partners in the region were granted project funds, and each of the projects have been carried out with success. A couple of these partners and their SRF projects initiated further project ideas and proposals which have gotten accepted and granted.

Focus on strengthening partnerships has been a great part of the year, and CAG has been collaborating with existing partner organizations and individual activists, as well as new actors. This is something that we as an organization want to continue with this upcoming year.

Best wishes,
Johan & Lola
CAG Chairpersons

Management

The board

In 2021, the CAG board convened for 11 protocolled meetings at various locations across Sweden. In addition to these meetings, the board met in Malmö on August 28th for a summer board day to discuss the future plans and redefining the Thematic Program Areas of CAG. Over the year, members of the board also convened in smaller groups to manage ongoing projects and deepen collaborations with Central Asian civil society partner organizations. Financial stability has been another priority area for the organization during the year. CAG focused on building consistent funding from grants and donors rather than primarily operating on a project-to-project basis. For instance, CAG applied for major grants such as the Large Program Funding from SIDA – a 5-year institutional grant, that would allow CAG to work with a more long-term approach with our Central Asian partners. Additionally, the board has explored grassroots fundraising, building sponsorships and increased member donations, to raise untied resources.



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

Johan Blomqvist, co-chairperson

Lola Matmusaeva, co-chairperson

Gustaf Sörnmo, treasurer

Talgat Subanaliev, secretary

Viktor Romanov, board member

Habira Majieva, board member

Gustaf Sörnmo and Viktor Romanov have been authorized signatories.

Maria Jönsson has been the auditor.

The nominating committee consisted of Josefin Åström and Filippa Almlund.

Organization and office

In 2021, CAG established new partnerships in the region and continued to collaborate with long-term partners. Our collaborations spread across Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. All of our partnerships fall under the four thematic areas of democratic youth organizing, women's rights, climate and environment, and security and resilience. It is often the case that projects in the region intersect thematically and integrate a Rights-based approach. In Sweden, we continued our work with information and advocacy activities by organizing a wide range of activities, where partners, activists, researchers from the region take an active role in ensuring that their voices are heard and represent the current developments in Central Asia. On the organizational level, CAG has worked on developing and updating our thematic working areas, as well as preceded with working on a number of strategic goals that were set in 2018.

Over the past year, a total of 7 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, 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.

Thematic Program Areas

During the course of this year, the board and office has been working with strategic development and especially with the evolution of CAG's Thematic Program Areas (TPAs). Especially over the last 3-4 years, our TPAs have grown and deepened. Today CAG is working in four thematic areas: 1. Democratic Youth Organizing, 2. Gender Equality, 3. Conflict Transformation and 4. Environment and Climate.

This year CAG has been looking at how to articulate and streamline what is happening within the different TPAs, to make working within CAG and with partners more effective. This process has taken place in close dialogue with several Central Asian partners that have expertise in many of these areas. The TPA work has been done by looking at vision and problem formulations within each thematic area, based on internal experience and partner perspectives, as well as establishing maps of how different activities may lead to outputs and certain overall results. The work with the TPA frameworks is still in progress, and will be continuously evolving. The board sees the frameworks as living and organic documents that will change and adapt over time, where organizational learning based on experience and partner perspectives are at the heart of the process.

Covid-19

The global pandemic continued to affect a handful of joint activities with partners in Central Asia. For example, we had to cancel the entire cycle of exchanges in 2021 and instead organized one long-term residency in Sweden. The internship project that we hoped to launch in 2021 was delayed due to the pandemic as well. In addition, our communication with partners took place only online, while physical visits were almost entirely canceled. Our partner organizations in Central Asia were not affected by the pandemic due to the absence of restrictions, but some partners had to adjust activities in order to minimize spread of the infection. In Sweden, CAG continued to operate as regular, with introduced measures that were based on national and local regulations and recommendations. Compared to 2020, we implemented more activities in a physical format in 2021. We continue developing strategies for individual projects to allow implementation both offline and online, as well as closely monitor developments around the global pandemic.

Strategic Resource Fund

For many years, CAG has been aware of the limited resources available to projects and initiatives in Central Asia; especially for grassroots organizations or groups of activists in civil society. 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 organizations themselves. Therefore, back in 2020, Central Asia Solidarity Groups launched the “Strategic Resource Fund” to support civil society actors in Central Asia. It aims to provide resources for civil society actors for strategic interventions in their respective contexts. The fund primarily focused on financial resources, but also provided various forms of capacity building, international networks, and partnerships, long-term funding schemes, etc.

Over the course of the past year, we have supported three projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. All three of our partners within this funding scheme are grassroots and are closely tied to local communities – something that CAG has always prioritized. First, SRF for Uzbekistan enabled provision of psychological support to victims of violence and offline meetings in a safe space provided more opportunities for the victims of violence to regain confidence and take action in the future. Other, small funding for Kazakhstan, enabled FemAgora to review their existing website and adjust it both technically and linguistically to reflect their organizational principles and values and further, design their own virtual visual language. Third, SRF for Kyrgyzstan, supported biodiversity initiatives of ISDS that focused on enabling the sustainable use of natural resources, including wetlands, in the Son Kul area and raising awareness of local community members of the importance of preserving these unique territories.

It has been an exciting opportunity for CAG to support these organizations and groups that essentially contribute to strengthening the civil society in the region, and establish more long-lasting and impactful partnerships. Outcomes and activities of the projects can be read under the Activities section in each thematic area of CAG’s work.

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

FemAgora is a feminist organization that highlights the activities of women and the gender situation, to solidarize feminist initiatives in Central Asia. FemAgora is an online platform that emphasizes on virtual activism and brings together 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 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.



El Too

El Too is an organization that organizes activities and events for environmental protection and restoration, promotes the rational and effective use of natural resources at the household and community levels and introduces new resource-efficient technologies. The public foundation El Too was established in 2001 that intended to provide alternative perspectives and sources of income. Now the organization has 20 years of experience in promoting and developing community-based ecotourism, raising awareness of sustainable uses of natural resources among the local population, introduction of energy-efficient technologies, community-initiated micro reserves and, as of recently, permaculture practices, sustainable livelihood and food security in the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan.

Little Earth

Little Earth is an organization working with nature protection, with a creative approach to solving traditional environmental problems, with many years experience of work in the field of sustainable energy and community mobilization. Little Earth aims to make people more receptive to environmental and sustainable development issues, increase communities' role and participation in their solution. They want to preserve for future generations what they love and admire - the unique nature of Tajikistan and the planet.

Activities in 2021

Over the course of 2021, CAG has conducted a wide range of projects linked to its thematic areas, as well as partnership development and advocacy work. The following sections summarize 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 10 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 traditions of the country.



Workshops on gender-based violence in Uzbekistan

Central Asia Solidarity Groups has helped to build the capacity of Uzbekistan-based initiative NeMolchi.UZ, which works to contribute to elimination of all forms of violence against women. CAG supported a series of workshops where the members of the initiative converged to make a definition of gender-based violence and how to work against it. As the final outcome of the workshops, an internal guiding document was created for staff and volunteers; a reference point for their struggle against gender-based violence in Uzbekistan. The document contains information about the work of the initiative, common violence prevention measures, different forms of violence, and additional resources on gender-based violence. The document enables the institutionalization of knowledge and ensures a smooth transition of knowledge within the initiative.

Strategic funding to FemAgora

The lack of strategic flexible resources and core funding for grassroots organizations in Central Asia can affect their visibility and sustainability in negative ways. CAG supported the digital feminist movement and activism in Kazakhstan by supporting partner FemAgora with strategic funding. The small funding enabled FemAgora to review their existing website which included information about FemAgora Festival 2020, and adjust it both technically and linguistically to reflect their organizational principles and values and further, design their own virtual visual language. The impact of which can be seen in the FemAgora Festival 2021 already. The Festival team created a new Central Asian Feminist platform that visually represents the concept of the Festival.

Workshop in gender equality with El Too

At CAG we always prioritize supporting our partner organizations by helping them expand their capacities and sharing the knowledge and experience CAG has gained throughout its existence. On October 28th a session on gender equality was held by El Too and CAG to discuss what shapes the ideas and values around gender equality and women's rights and how can said perceptions evolve and change. The session was attended by several local civil society organizations, as well as other individuals with key functions in the local community. The session itself lasted for 2.5 hours and a write-up on how to discuss gender, perceptions thereof and how it impacts on climate change is currently ongoing. The idea is that the document will serve as a point of reference for communicating and facilitating discussion about gender among project participants, local organizations as well as be a useful document for new members of staff and volunteers.

Awareness raising campaigns

Within our joint project with the partner Novi Ritm, a series of activities to increase knowledge and awareness around issues of gender equality were organized for university and high school students in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan. The activities included a series of sessions and outreach activities with the purpose to provide knowledge on relevant topics, as well as open up opportunities for further engagement in the activities of Novi Ritm. In conjunction with the activities, a number of podcasts on the topics of gender and bullying were created to eradicate myths around gender and equality. The podcasts involved experts in gender, who had the opportunity to interact with youth and address their most common questions and misconceptions around gender equality, as well as long-term effects of bullying at schools.

Conference Kyzdyn Kyrk Chachy uluu

Another highlight of last year from Kyrgyzstan: Novi Ritm organized a conference called “Kyzdyn Kyrk Chachy uluu” (meaning respect for women), in honor of International Women’s day. One of the goals of the conference was to create a platform that would motivate young women and girls to openly engage in discussions around gender and women’s rights, as well as boost the spirit of sisterhood and solidarity. The conference was attended by 120 young women and girls. Most importantly, Novi Ritm always encourages activists with a bottom-up approach – this conference was initiated by young women and girls, members of Novi Ritm network of activists.

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.



Biodiversity initiatives of lake Son-kul

CAG supported the initiative Sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity of wetlands of Son-Kul Lake by the local community, implemented by the Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy (ISDS) in Kyrgyzstan. Together with the Pasture Union of Cholpon rural municipality, ISDS focused on enabling the sustainable use of natural resources, including wetlands, in the Son Kul area and raising awareness of local community members of the importance of preserving these unique territories. A study of biodiversity monitoring (inventory of flora and fauna and analysis of wetlands of the Son-Kul basin) was carried out by experts of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic together with local community members. As a result of the study, a scientific review was prepared on the main species of fauna, especially waterfowl living in the Son Kul area. In these territories, including their nesting sites, analysis of the current situation on biodiversity, problem areas were identified, and recommendations and proposals for sustainable management of natural resources were developed.

Piloting permaculture initiatives for women in rural Kyrgyzstan

Since March 2021, CAG in partnership with El Too has been piloting permaculture initiatives among rural communities in Kyrgyzstan, as an intervention to deal with the problems of food insecurity, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss as well as gender inequality and community health. The villages in north-east of Kyrgyzstan are increasingly vulnerable to changes in the climate caused by limited precipitation and growing land degradation issues due to excessive livestock grazing. The vast majority of the population are reliant on agriculture, however, they increasingly struggle to run and sustain agriculture in a traditional way. In this already challenging environment, women get to face discrimination as their significant role is seen just as an accessory to men and excluded from decision-making processes.

Having analyzed the ecological and socio-economic problems of the area, CAG together with local partner organization El Too introduced permaculture initiatives among local women. Within this project, numerous trainings on permaculture were conducted for 60 women from 5 different villages. Activities included preparation of soil, mulching and greenhouse building for seeds germination, garden designing, composting, production of biohumus, learning water saving techniques and biotechnical treatment through “useful insects”.

As a result of the project, about 90% of participants developed their own permaculture kitchen gardens. In each village a demonstration site was established where other villagers could come and learn about the permaculture practices. Women learnt about additional sources of income from selling seedlings, new herbs and vegetables, biohumus and worms that can bring up to 1500 USD for the summer season (average income of 1 farmer is 220 USD per month). Through sessions on food security and cooking, women learnt how to enrich and diversify their family diet by using a diverse set of greens and vegetables.

The project also included a right-based component that was dedicated to strengthening the land rights of women and creating a discussion platform for women and local decision makers. As a result, 60 participants and other 50 people from the area received free judicial consultation in land related issues, and as a result, we compiled the collection of cases of women land issues: rental, land transformation, inheritance, division of common goods after divorce etc., and distributed among our participants and duty bearers. More than 20 decision makers from 9 municipalities improved their knowledge on changing land rights.

Ecological masculinities workshops

Back in 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. Then, 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 spring 2021, CAG participated in an online interactive workshop – consisting of five sessions where participants explored connections between masculinity and climate, personal influence and input to nature and reflections on how we can contribute to change in mutual and diverse ways? It was an opportunity to network and explore potential collaborations in the future. The learnt methods will be helpful for CAG to try out in Central Asia and bring masculinity conversation to the surface.

The workshops were conducted by our partner organization MÄN together with MenEngage Alliance.

Previously, 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. The aim was to disseminate the method and try it out in Central Asia and Russia, however, due to the pandemic the implementation remained on hold.

Climate emergency campaign

Since 2020, CAG has been part of a network of civil society organizations who have together declared a climate emergency (<https://klimatprata.se/klimatnoedlaege/>). Together with Vardagens Civilkurage, Framtidsjorden, Fältbiologerna, IKFF and Latinamerikagrupperna, CAG has worked on internal and external developments. This has ranged from exchanging ideas and policies between the organizations, aiming to develop environmentally friendly plans and guidelines. The meetings have also focused on building a community where work can be synergetic and results have a greater impact. These have ranged from sharing invitations to projects and events, as well as planning on how to reach out to the general public and key actors, such as government agencies and donors.

Democratic Youth Organizing

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.



Face to Face debate school

Within a joint project with our partner Novi Ritm, a debate school named “Face to Face” was created as a platform for young people in the city of Osh to increase their critical skills through debating social and political issues. The main goal of the school was to increase knowledge and awareness around topics such as human rights, tolerance, anti-discrimination and gender equality. In total, 20 young people participated in the school and the most active young became debate coaches.

Volunteer programs in southern Kyrgyzstan

A volunteer program for young people was implemented for thirty young people that aimed to increase leadership skills as well as promote principles of democratic engagement of young people, who are willing to contribute to positive changes in Kyrgyzstan. The program also provided multiple opportunities for the volunteers to actively contribute to fields such as human rights, gender equality, and conflict resolution. In addition, the volunteers were trained in public speaking and implementation of social projects. After the completion of the program, volunteers organize eight thematic initiatives such as girls groups, sessions on political awareness, eco group, tik tok and debate groups, as well as self-defense groups for women and girls. In total, the thematic initiatives involved more than seventy young people.

Projects for migrant children and youth in Russia

Central Asia Solidarity Groups, together with our partner organization Children of Saint Petersburg, continued our collaboration in 2021 with a project targeting youth and children with migrant backgrounds. Two coloring books as well as two video clips were produced. The books illustrate stories of migrant children and youth and highlight the importance of education, equality, non-discrimination. They also serve as information points for young people and families their rights to education, as well as encourage them to stand up for their rights and ensure that they are fulfilled. The clips were designed to provide a step-by-step guidance on how to enroll in schools and higher education institutions and specialized courses. Both books and clips have been widely disseminated online and offline.

Summer camp and festival days

A summer camp and festival days were organized for young people, local decision makers, as well civil society organizations in St. Petersburg. Both events were attended by around 150 young people and 30 local civil society and decision makers. The summer camp was composed of interactive sessions and events that educated youth about gender equality, conflict solving, nonviolent communication and sex education. The sessions incorporated art and art therapy as the main methodologies for working with these issues. The festival days aimed to raise awareness and increase sensitivity about the situation of migrant children, youth and families among the general public and decision makers. Both events served as a platform to communicate project results such as books and animated video clips.

Exchanges and residencies

One of the central goals for CAG is to build bridges among activists and young people both in Sweden and Central Asia and create a stronger awareness of Central Asia among the Swedish audience. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are countries that Swedes/Europeans know little about - a black spot on the map.

At present, there are few opportunities for activists and representatives of civil society from Europe and Central Asia to meet, exchange experiences and build alliances, especially involving young people. Central Asia is a low-priority region for the majority of international donors, which means that funding opportunities are scarce. Currently, CAG is more or less the only organization that has been trying to build bridges with exchanges, volunteer work, capacity building and activist residencies between the regions for almost a decade. Despite the limited financial funding, CAG always looks for ways to provide the opportunities for young people from Sweden, Central Asia and Russia to meet, learn from each other, take part in various educational initiatives and work transnationally with various social justice issues.

Our previous exchanges and residencies proved to be extremely successful. It deliberately focused on quite broad concepts such as anti-discrimination, democracy, Human Rights, democratic forms of leadership and organizing, gender equality, conflict resolution and others. In addition to raising skills, knowledge and competencies of these issues among the participating youth leaders, it strengthened the partnership between CAG and local organizations in Central Asia and gave rise to new projects, initiatives and collaborations.

Residency

Due to the changes brought by the global pandemic, Central Asia Solidarity Groups had to readjust the initial plans to organize residencies and exchanges in Sweden and Central Asia. Instead, we arranged a ten-month residency in Sweden, which allowed us to work more closely with the participant of the residency and enable a long-term collaboration within two main areas. The first area focused on acquisition of knowledge about participatory research methods that were later implemented in real life together with local CSOs in Central Asia. The second area enabled the resident to implement some of the activities within Central Asia Solidarity Groups' information efforts in Sweden, which also led to an increased knowledge of the local civil society context, international development cooperation, as well as practical implementation of Agenda 2030. In addition, the residency increased the organizational network of the local players in Central Asia, which is reflected in the updated touring exhibition of CAG.

Youth volunteers from Russia

Central Asia Solidarity Groups hosted two volunteers from Russia in 2021, who became part of the office team and engaged in various activities at the main office in Malmö and beyond. Volunteers were provided with opportunities to learn about internal organizing of the non-profit sector in the Swedish context and delved into some of the pressing issues in the region of Central Asia by engaging with our partner organizations as well as researchers and activists.

Information and Advocacy Work

Over the past eight years, CAG has increasingly focused on information and advocacy work in Sweden and Europe. CAG 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 fifth year in a row, our exhibition on Activism, Civil Society and Rights-based work in Central Asia toured Sweden. The touring exhibition on human rights and civil society was installed in two new locations during autumn 2021. The first stop was in Mjölby during October before moving on to Eslöv in November. The exhibition was updated during summer 2021 and featured several new organizations as well as new information on existing portraits. It was well-received in both towns with a broad audience consisting of the general public and library staff expressing a strong interest in the content.

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.

In 2021, additionally, four new storylines were created, with the expanded version seeking to familiarize the player with common situations and struggles of matters related to LGBTQ+, climate change and mental health in Central Asia. The role play game was promoted during different kinds of events and two separate events dedicated to the game were carried out. Due to the pandemic restrictions in Sweden, the first 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. Second one, was conducted together with student feminist association of Malmo (FAMUS). During the session participants learned about the above mentioned topics and played the interactive digital game; participated in the discussions to exchange thoughts, impressions, reflections and interacted with different other participants; as well as providing feedback.



Human Rights Days

CAG is actively involved and participating in events addressing human rights issues from different perspectives to raise awareness about the human rights situation in Central Asia. One of these events is the Swedish Forum for Human Rights that took place 19-21st of April 2021.

The Swedish Forum for Human Rights is the biggest Scandinavian event for human rights. This year due to COVID the event has gone digital. Every year the Forum offers more than 200 lectures, workshops and seminars for everyone who is interested in human rights.

CAG was one of participants along with different CSOs, NGOs, grassroots and other actors this year. CAG's digital stall included our publications on topics such as youth activism and feminism movements in Central Asia, annual reports, exhibitions as well as explainer clips to ensure the audience had a wide variety of sources to learn more about Central Asian civil society. Our role play game and a Central Asia quiz featured as interactive activities for attendees.

Apart from the exhibition stall CAG organized a mini-seminar on the topic "How ecology affects peace and conflict in Central Asia" with the focus on the ecological issues of Central Asia, the role of the local communities in environmental protection and how climate change is affecting the region. The seminar was held by Ilia Domashov, Nature conservation specialist, ecologist, acting Associate Professor of Higher School of Medicine in Bishkek.

Central Asia Days 2021

The conference Central Asia Days went back to its physical format in 2021 after having gone digital in 2020. The event took place on 25-26 November at ABF in Stockholm and was well received by the audience and speakers. The programme focused on the various issues related to gender, climate, youth and economics since Central Asia gained independence in 1991.

Saltanat Shoshanova discussed about discourses around gender, queerness and feminism in contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, that are complex overlapping contexts in which different artistic and activist practices appear. Iulli Didovets presented on the assessment of climate change impacts on water resources in the Central Asian region and carefully explained the consequences of water shortage and melting glaciers. Eliza Mandieva joined digitally and presented on the transition from education to work of youth in the Caucasus and Central Asia region drawing on data of the initial results of her research project. She discussed how women often transition back to home as well as compared the reasons between youth in several post-soviet states in terms of them dropping out of education or failing to get a job.

Uriintuya Batsaikhan presented on the economic transition in Central Asia after 30 years, focusing on the role of monetary policy and sustainable finance and the role of economic linkages in peace prospects in the region. Damir Esenaliev presented on building social cohesion in Kyrgyzstan and focused on findings and lessons from impact evaluation studies. He highlighted how the impact of international development cooperation projects sometimes is minor, or, in a few cases, even negative. Tilek Mamytova presented on the role and impact of international development agencies in Central Asia - perception of the development programs by beneficiaries, challenges during the program implementation and positive outcomes in the example of Kyrgyzstan.

Movie Screenings

Over the course of 2021, CAG organized several movie screenings both in Malmö and Stockholm as an attempt to showcase pressing social issues in Central Asia. On May 17th CAG screened a documentary portraying Khadicha, who tirelessly campaigned for the release of her husband, human rights activist Azimjon Askarov. Askarov was imprisoned for the crimes he said he did not commit after the interethnic clashes that took place in 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan. He was held in prison for 10 years until his death in 2020. The movie screening took place online and featured the director Martina Shupac as well as the Civil Rights Defenders expert Muzaffar Suleymanov.

On October 20, CAG screened the movie *I am not sick! – I am gay* to showcase the LGBTQ+ situation in Kazakhstan. In Central Asia LGBTQ+ members and gender-nonconforming people are seen as sickness. They face a lot of challenges, persecution and oppression both at societal and governmental levels.

As part of the annual Central Asia Days conference, CAG arranged a film screening at Zita Bio in Stockholm. The film screening consisted of two 40-minute documentaries “Water, Thirst Time” and “Mardikor” that shed light on important perspectives related to gender and climate.

Lectures

CAG had the opportunity to collaborate with a wide range of educational institutions during autumn 2021. A lecture was arranged together with Mittuniversitetet Östersund in September 2021 focusing on gender, conflict and risk mitigation for a group of students studying for their bachelor degree in the same subject. Two lectures were arranged together with the Swedish Development Forum in November and December which were open to the general public. The lectures focused on youth and education as well as comparing gender and women's rights in contemporary Central Asia with its Soviet counterpart. A final lecture was arranged on December 8th together with UF Malmö, the student association focusing on international relations at University of Malmö. This lecture brought up the civil society developments in Uzbekistan and was open to the students interested in this topic. CAG has also launched a resource hub on its website. The hub will contain a set of pre-recorded lectures by Central Asian professors and will be made available, free of charge, to the general public. New lectures will be added on a continuous basis throughout 2022.

Virtual Hearings with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

As part of the information and advocacy efforts in Sweden, CAG arranged two digital hearings in 2021 with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first hearing took place on March 3rd and focused on climate change and its effects on Central Asia. The presentation was made by Anara Alymkulova from CAG's partner organization ISDS. The second hearing was arranged on December 10th and focused on social cohesion and the impact international development cooperation projects have, or do not have, on local communities in Central Asia. The presentation was made by Dr. Damir Esenaliev. Representatives from Swedish MFA, CAG and the guest speakers from Central Asia participated in the hearings.

Global Voices interview

In June 2021, CAG was invited by The Swedish Development Forum (FUF) to feature in their interview series Global Voices. CAG invited a professor of History of Kyrgyzstan, who has a long experience in both research and teaching, Cholpon Chotaeva for the interview about the situations for women, the status of the many different ethnic minority-groups, different development issues in Kyrgyzstan and the hope she has for the future of the people. Kyrgyzstan is an unknown country for many Swedes and other Europeans. This episode was an attempt to provide information and raise awareness of the country, its people and history. In addition, several of CAG's publications now feature in the Swedish Development Forum archive

Feminist festival

One of larger events in Sweden that is held on annual basis – Feminist Festival took place in November of this year in the city of Malmö. Central Asia Solidarity Groups organized a movie screening at Panora Bio that was followed by a discussion facilitated by an activist from Kyrgyzstan. The movie named Take and Run provided insights into the illegal practice of bride kidnapping and is based on a story of a young woman, who pursues her education, but who suddenly is abducted and married to an unknown man. The audience engaged in a discussion around the rights of women in Kyrgyzstan and a discourse on whether the practice has evolved to become a tradition.

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