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CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES FOR HYDRAULIC STRUCTURES IN THE RIVERS OF UZBEKISTAN

Khalimov Ibrokhimjon
Teacher of the Department of "Architecture and Hydraulic Engineering"
of Andijan State Technical Institute

Abstract

This study investigates the vulnerability and adaptation potential of hydraulic infrastructure in Uzbekistan's river systems under changing climatic conditions. With a focus on major rivers such as the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the paper evaluates projected hydrological alterations due to climate change, assesses the risks to existing hydraulic structures, and proposes strategic interventions for their sustainable management. A combination of climate modeling, hydrological simulation, and infrastructure resilience analysis is employed. The findings reveal a substantial need for adaptive design upgrades, institutional coordination, and integrated water resource management to safeguard Uzbekistan's water security.

Keywords: Climate change, hydraulic infrastructure, river systems, Uzbekistan, adaptation strategies, resilience, water management.

Introduction

The impact of climate change on water resources has emerged as a central concern for Central Asia, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions like Uzbekistan. As a double-landlocked country with a highly water-dependent economy, Uzbekistan's agricultural, industrial, and urban sectors hinge on the availability and management of transboundary river systems, primarily the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. These rivers are not only lifelines for irrigation and hydropower but also the basis for ecological sustainability across vast landscapes. However, climate models predict significant disruptions to precipitation patterns, glacial meltwater supply, and seasonal flow regimes in the region. Against this backdrop, the resilience of hydraulic structures—dams, reservoirs, diversion weirs, and canals—becomes critically important. These structures, many of which date back several decades, were not designed to accommodate the magnitude of hydrological variability projected under climate change scenarios. This paper provides a comprehensive assessment of the challenges posed by climate change to Uzbekistan's hydraulic infrastructure and outlines actionable strategies to enhance their resilience through policy reform, technical retrofitting, and regional cooperation.

2. Methods

This study adopts a multi-pronged methodological framework combining climate projection data analysis, hydrological modeling, structural vulnerability assessment, and policy evaluation. Climate data were sourced from IPCC CMIP6 scenarios and downscaled for regional application using statistical bias correction techniques. Hydrological simulations for the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins were conducted using the SWAT and WEAP models to estimate changes in river discharge under RCP4.5 and RCP8.5 scenarios. A structural audit of key hydraulic installations was performed using engineering inspection reports and resilience scoring matrices. Additionally, stakeholder interviews and policy reviews were undertaken to assess institutional readiness and governance gaps in climate adaptation. This interdisciplinary approach ensures a holistic understanding of both physical vulnerabilities and socio-political constraints in implementing adaptive strategies.

3. Results

The modeling results indicate a marked decline in annual runoff in both the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers by mid-century under high-emission scenarios. Winter runoff increases slightly due to accelerated glacial melt, while summer flows—crucial for irrigation—show substantial reductions. Structural assessments of major hydraulic facilities such as the Tuyamuyun reservoir complex and the Chardara dam reveal several risk factors, including inadequate spillway capacities, sedimentation buildup, and insufficient structural flexibility to handle peak flow variability. Institutional analysis highlights fragmented governance, outdated design standards, and limited budgetary allocations for climate resilience initiatives. Moreover, regional water-sharing agreements remain weakly enforced, exacerbating tensions during drought years. Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to safeguard water infrastructure against evolving climatic and geopolitical pressures.

4. Discussion

The implications of these findings are profound for national water security and regional stability. As climate-induced hydrological variability becomes more pronounced, reliance on historically calibrated infrastructure models becomes increasingly untenable. Adaptive retrofitting of hydraulic structures should prioritize flexible spillway design, remote sensing-based monitoring systems, and sediment management technologies. Simultaneously, institutional reforms must aim to integrate climate risk considerations into engineering codes, financing mechanisms, and cross-border water diplomacy. Lessons can be drawn from international best practices such as the EU Water Framework Directive and adaptive reservoir operation protocols in the Colorado River Basin. Uzbekistan's strategic location in Central Asia necessitates a leadership role in fostering cooperative water governance through data sharing, joint planning, and basin-wide climate adaptation frameworks. Ultimately, resilience-building requires a paradigm shift from reactive crisis management to anticipatory, integrated planning grounded in science and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

Uzbekistan stands at a pivotal moment in its hydrological history. The dual challenge of aging infrastructure and accelerating climate change necessitates urgent and coordinated action to ensure the continued functionality and resilience of its river-based hydraulic systems. This paper has demonstrated that without substantial upgrades in infrastructure design, data integration, and policy coherence, the country risks compounding water insecurity in an already stressed region. Strategic investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, institutional capacity-building, and transboundary cooperation are imperative. In doing so, Uzbekistan can not only protect its water heritage but also serve as a regional exemplar in navigating the water-climate nexus in the 21st century.

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