



## **CAREC Institute Chai Talk on**

### **The Central Asian Development Pivot: New Approaches, New Opportunities**

#### **Webinar**

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2026, 14:50-16:30 (Beijing time)**

#### **Background and Rationale:**

Central Asia finds itself at a pivotal moment in its development journey. The post-Soviet era has exposed the difficulties of applying standard economic models. Post-Soviet transformations show that standard market liberalization often fails to address regional development challenges effectively. For instance, agricultural reform diverged from neoclassical expectations, encountering market failures, institutional inertia, and cultural mismatches that hindered productivity and economic restructuring. This discrepancy suggests reconsidering the economic models in favor of political economy explanations and frameworks emphasizing state intervention and adaptive policymaking.

At the same time, state-led initiatives have been crucial in cushioning market disruptions and maintaining economic stability, challenging the neoliberal assumption of minimal state intervention. Instead, the state is seen as essential for steering equitable development outcomes, a lesson relevant across the region. Integrating moral and ethical considerations by governments into economic development is crucial, promoting approaches that prioritize human development, equitable resource access, and social justice over mere GDP growth.

Economic liberalization linked to global capital accumulation impacts urban space and livelihoods, demanding attention to socio-environmental impacts alongside modernization. Such interactions between state policies, corporate interests, and community welfare illustrate the multifaceted nature of economic development that traditional economic models cannot fully capture.

Development is deeply entwined with cultural identity and heritage. The textile industry exemplifies this convergence, where neoclassical explanations fail to grasp broader socio-political processes involving state-driven identity formation and cultural struggle. The ethnic textile sector highlights the contest between preserving cultural authenticity and achieving commercial viability. To effectively manage the dynamic interplay between preserving artisanal heritage and achieving market efficiency, a crucial balanced approach is required, one that incorporates elements from both state efforts in standardizing designs and market flexibility. This example strongly supports integrating cultural political economy perspectives into development discourse, advocating for policies that effectively balance economic performance with cultural sustainability.

Education and knowledge production are pivotal for developmental capacities. The internationalization of higher education presents challenges in reconciling market-oriented reforms with educational

autonomy and pluralism. Universities, which function as autonomous spaces fostering intellectual and personal development, have the potential to become engines of socially responsive knowledge production and innovation, crucial for sustained development, when they are supported by the appropriate policy measures.

Reflections on the Soviet experience highlight the importance of coordinated knowledge systems for technological advancement and sustainable industrial growth. By prioritizing multidisciplinary research and skills development, the academy of sciences delivered significant benefits, including rapid modernization and the creation of a sustainable knowledge economy. Building on this positive foundation, policies can be inspired to strengthen scientific capacity and cultivate vital, endogenous technological expertise.

Several contributions advocate for development paradigms centered on human dignity rather than solely economic metrics. One approach conceptualizes political economy to highlight systemic inequality, promoting dignity-based economics that recognizes poverty and inequality as politically and socially constructed phenomena requiring holistic, rights-based responses. Such frameworks challenge neoliberalism's predominance by asserting the moral purpose of economies—promoting equitable access to education, healthcare, housing, and clean water as foundational human rights. Adopting dignity-based approaches aligns with emerging global discussions on sustainable and just development, resonating with the region's specific social realities and aspirations.

In light with this, the CAREC Institute's recent research report, "Addressing Socio-Economic Inequality: Decent Work in CAREC's Green and Digital Transitions,"<sup>1</sup> highlights a critical contemporary challenge: the ongoing green and digital transitions risk replicating past failures if not carefully managed to promote decent work and reduce socio-economic inequalities, echoing the need for adaptive, context-specific strategies. The report warns that the potential benefits of green and digital shifts could be undermined by similar factors, including uneven infrastructure, skills gaps, and political economy barriers that hinder inclusive outcomes. Therefore, the report's call for targeted policies embedding equity and decent work principles, rather than just focusing on traditional "Good Jobs," signifies a move away from potentially ineffective standard models towards politically conscious, state-supported frameworks that prioritize inclusive and sustainable development in this new era of opportunity.

Dedicated to exploring novel, new approaches to development, the Chai Talk fosters inclusive and interdisciplinary exchanges that bridge academia and policymaking. It provides a platform for collaboratively examining economic theories, cultural analyses, educational reforms, and social justice concerns. This dialogue aligns with the region's aspirations for economic and social progress and enriches broader global conversations on development alternatives and justice-focused economics in the Global South. Through such inclusive, cross-disciplinary dialogues, the region can chart an evolutionary course blending heritage, innovation, and equity for the benefit of all its people. Against this backdrop, the Chai Talk brings together academics and policymakers to explore alternative, heterodox approaches to development across multiple dimensions—including economics, culture, education, and social policy—that better reflect the region's unique institutional, historical, and cultural fabric.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuat Akizhanov, Ilhom Abdulloev, Erin Watson, Alma Kudebayeva, Lia Goderdzishvili, Mubinzhon Abduvaliev, Sandjar Babaev, and Aibek Kadyraliev (2026). Addressing Socio-Economic Inequality: Decent Work in CAREC's Green and Digital Transitions. CAREC Institute Research Report. <https://www.carecinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Published-Final-Report-Addressing-Socio-Economic-Inequality-Decent-Work-in-CAREC-Region.pdf>

**Modality of the event:**

The CAREC Institute Chai Talk event provides a platform for experts from the region and partner organizations to gather and openly discuss trending topics while enjoying a cup of tea or coffee. Consistent with this focus, the CAREC Institute will be hosting a Chai Talk event on 1 July 2026, beginning at 15:00 Beijing time. The discussion will center on new approaches and opportunities for development within the CAREC region. The online event will feature experts who will share their views, insights, knowledge, and practical experiences on how CAREC countries can navigate these twin transitions in an inclusive and sustainable manner. Policymakers, experts, development partners, and other stakeholders will come together to discuss the challenges and opportunities in promoting decent work, reducing inequality, and fostering regional cooperation, contributing to a collaborative dialogue on advancing inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

**Please, register here**

[https://carecinstitute-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_ZIHIndSBTay-U5viJUPFSg](https://carecinstitute-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZIHIndSBTay-U5viJUPFSg)

## Draft Agenda

1 July 2026 (Beijing time)

**14:50-15:00**            **Virtual Connection to the Webinar and Speakers' Group Photo**

**15:00-15:10**            **Opening Remark**

Dr. Kuat Akizhanov, Deputy Director 2, The CAREC Institute

**15:10-15:15**            **Introduction of the Speakers by the Moderator**

Sukhdelger Sosorbaram, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, CAREC Institute

**15:15-16:15**            **Discussion by Speakers**

**Lead discussant** Dr. Kuat Akizhanov, Deputy Director 2, CAREC Institute

- **Sharing key findings from research report, "Addressing Socio-Economic Inequality: Decent Work in CAREC's Green and Digital Transitions**

Invited Experts (*TBC*):

Dr. Balihar Sanghera, University of Kent, UK

Dr. Serik Beimenbetov, Kazakh-German University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Dr. Elmira Satybaldieva, University of Kent, UK

Dr. Franco Galdini, University of Birmingham, UK

Dr. Galym Zhussipbek, Suleiman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

**16:15-16:25**            **Q&A and Discussion:** Moderator will pick up questions from the audience and engage in discussion with panelists

**16:25-16:30**            **Concluding Remarks**

### Notes:

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