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The young generation in Kyrgyzstan – the key to development

The challenge – providing education and work

Akylai, aged 21, and Chynara, aged 20, have the same wish. ‘We need more understanding and more opportunities,’ the two students agree. ‘You always hear that we young people have no ideas. But that’s simply not true. Society needs to believe in us and listen to us.’ To date there has been far too little of this in the Kyrgyz Republic. Twenty years after the Central Asian state gained its independence from the former Soviet Union, it is still going through a transitional period. The standard of living is low, unemployment high. Many people feel they have no prospects of a better life.

This is particularly true of the 14-28 year olds who account for about one third of the population. They face unemployment, poverty and an education and training system that is ill equipped to meet their needs. The youth promotion structures in place during the Soviet era have collapsed. In the ensuing vacuum young people have few opportunities to become involved in the country’s political and societal life, and to insist on their rights. The true extent of the frustration this has fuelled became clear in 2010, when young people played a prominent role in violent clashes. The events were a wake-up call for politicians. A Ministry of Youth Affairs was created. It has since been renamed the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth. The aim is to build youth work structures in the regions, establish youth centres and actively foster the involvement of young people in the societal and political life of the country. The ministry, however, does not have nearly the technical and human resources it needs. Coordination between state and non-governmental stakeholders is poor and throughout the country there are too few youth workers with the requisite pedagogical training.

Project name:	Prospects for Youth
Commissioned by:	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Lead executing agency:	Kyrgyz Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth
Project region:	Kyrgyzstan
Duration:	2012 – 2015

The goal – sustainable youth work

The programme aims to establish sustainable youth work in Kyrgyzstan. To this end, GIZ not only works directly with young people, but also cooperates with state and non-governmental partners in Kyrgyzstan to put in place permanent structures in the youth promotion sector. GIZ experts are helping develop the technical expertise required within the ministry. They support the programme’s partners in devising the infrastructure needed for youth work and improving cooperation between those responsible at national and local levels and on the state and non-governmental sides. The GIZ programme also provides training for specialists working in the public sector and in youth promotion organisations.

Training courses and workshops give youth officers and youth leaders the fundamentals of modern, inclusive youth work. This includes certain standards such as social integration, gender-sensitive approaches, intercultural skills, and violence prevention. In addition, participants learn how to develop youth strategies and plan and realise youth promotion programmes. The programme is also supporting the ‘Youth Work Organiser’ course, which has been taught at the Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transportation and Architecture (KSUCTA) since 2007.



‘We have ideas.’ – young people in Naryn



Left: Aigul Jeenbaeva, youth officer in the village of Mayevka, in Chui Province

Right: Students taking the Youth Work Organiser course

Learning from the experience of others

Learning methods are interactive and participatory – mirroring the way participants are expected to work with young people once they have qualified. This is something quite new for many Kyrgyz participants. ‘Our professor was every bit as involved in the exercises as we were. I’ve never seen anything like it,’ reported one student, Jypara, enthusiastically. She hopes to work at the Ministry of Youth herself once she qualifies. To ensure that youth work is in future genuinely adapted to the conditions on the ground in Kyrgyzstan, the GIZ programme also makes the most of the advantages offered by South-South cooperation. Trainers come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, another formerly socialist state that has faced similar economic and social crises and conflicts.

Along with state and civil society stakeholders, including the non-governmental organisation Dostoyanie Respubliki, pilot projects are also being devised in the field of modern, needs-driven youth work. The local authorities have a particularly important part to play, because they are best placed to know what local youth really need. One example is the self-governed village of Mayevka, which is about thirty minutes’ drive from the capital city, Bishkek. Mayevka has a youth officer who works directly with the mayor. With her help the youth centre is soon to offer a wide spectrum of attractive events and services.

The greatest impact – getting people to rethink their ideas

The project is still in its infancy, but already those responsible within government, the administration and relevant organisations are much more aware of the concerns of young people, and they are starting to rethink their ideas. The young generation is seen as the key to economic, social and political development in Kyrgyzstan. Young people are both the target group and active stakeholders in youth work. It has also become clear that it is not enough to organise an occasional party or football match. Good youth work cannot operate on a one-off basis, but must be sustainable and based on permanent structures. Developing this fundamental modern understanding of youth work is the project’s most important concern.

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