



**UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT**  
**Civil Society Initiative**

# **CAPACITY-BUILDING OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS THROUGH TRAINING AND UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES IN CENTRAL ASIA**





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**Civil Society Discussion Paper No. 1**

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The Civil Society Initiative (CSI) was established in 2017 to foster an enabling policy and administrative environment for civil society in Central Asia and assist the development of a broad spectrum of civil society actors. CSI promotes the building of domestic institutional and leadership capacity, under three over-arching pillars of skills, knowledge and resources.

The Civil Society Initiative is part of the Graduate School of Development of the University of Central Asia. The University of Central Asia (UCA) was founded in 2000. The Presidents of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan, and His Highness the Aga Khan signed the International Treaty and Charter establishing this secular and private university, ratified by the respective parliaments, and registered with the United Nations.

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# INTRODUCTION

This report looks at situation in three countries of Central Asia in regard to the needs and possibilities for capacity building of civil society through organizing training and developing university programs. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have some common issues in this regard as well as different contexts which would affect how a proposed Civil Society Institute can approach working in these countries.

While countries differ on many aspects of their capacity related issues, yet they share many common problems, and this may affect programming for capacity building in the regional and national levels. This report presents consecutively three countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) in regard to the general situation of civil society, capacity needs and conclusions with country specific recommendations. This is followed then by the overall conclusion and overall recommendations.

The table below shows capacity building indicators from the USAID Sustainability Index for the last year in which this report was produced – 2014<sup>1</sup>. First the overall CSO sustainability rating is given, then three other key capacity indicators. In this rating system, 1 is highest and 7 is lowest.

Capacity Building indicators from USAID 2014	KZ	KG	TJ
CSO sustainability index - overall CSO sustainability	4,1	4,1	4,8
CSO sustainability index - organizational capacity	4,2	4,4	4,5
CSO sustainability index - financial viability	4,5	5,3	5,6
CSO sustainability index - infrastructure	3,6	3,7	4,6

Three countries vary regarding their economic and political situation and how these contexts affect the needs and possibilities for capacity building of CS. The table below was adapted from the Capacity Building paper and shows key development indices for 2014 for the three countries. It will be seen that Tajikistan presents a more challenging environment for civil society development than Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The latter two countries are more similar in some and differ on other aspects.

**Table. Selected national indices for the three countries (2014)**

	KZ	KG	TJ
Population	17,948,816	5,604,212	8,051,512
GDP per capita (PPP)	\$24,100	\$3,600	\$2,700
Human Development Index	70	125	133
Freedom in the World, 2018 <sup>2</sup> (aggregate score, 100 - best)	22	37	11
V-Dem Core Civil Society Index, 2017 <sup>3</sup> (1 - best)	0,41	0,27	0,15
V-Dem Civil Liberties Index, 2017 (1 - best)	0,54	0,64	0,27
O sustainability index country score, 2014 <sup>4</sup> (7 - worst)	4,1	4,1	4,8

Notes: 1) On the economic and human development indices, Kyrgyzstan is much closer to Tajikistan. The per capital income gap between Kazakhstan and the other two countries is 6 to 8 times. 2) On the civil society, democracy and freedom indices, Kyrgyzstan is top and Kazakhstan closer to Kyrgyzstan than to Tajikistan.

The USAID Sustainability Index data gives a detailed picture of CSO capacity levels, brought together by CS experts in each country. However, firstly, it leaves certain categories of CSOs out of the analysis, and secondly, the scores by themselves give little idea of the very different character and colour of the CS sectors in each country – or of key events that have affected CS development. Sometimes this can be found in the detail of the USAID reports but not always. Perhaps there is an opportunity for UCA CSI to develop a new system of reporting on CS development in the Central Asia countries.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/europe-urasia-civil-society/2015>

<sup>2</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/analysis/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/europe-urasia-civil-society/2015>

# KEY FINDINGS

## **Major efforts by international donors and INGOs to provide capacity building in the first 15 years after independence -**

During the past two decades civil society organizations have grown in numbers in all three countries. It has happened largely due to the engagement since the 1990s of foreign donors who invested into development of new types of organizations throughout the post-soviet space, including organization of trainings and other capacity building programs.

There are different players that were active capacity building in each of the country. First of all international and bilateral aid agencies were active in the initial support provided to civil society. In some countries, such as Kazakhstan, the governmental agencies and the private sector were also engaged in capacity building process, which was not the case in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with much poorer economies. There were also network organizations and resource centers from within civil society (or international projects, such as Counterpart Int'l spinning off into CSOs) which worked on training programs for civil society organizations. Some of these organizations provided generic capacity training suitable for all kind of organizations, and later on some networks specialized in some issue areas (e.g., health environment, etc.) were providing capacity building support to their own members. Then there were also occasional engagement of civil society organizations that provided training or peer support depending on their specific expertise.

**A variety of capacity building / training interventions** - Engagement was along various thematic issues depending on which needs and when were deemed the most urgent and feasible to be satisfy. First and foremost, donors supported organizational capacity development as a starting point. Such generic programs were provided massively by Counterpart International, INTRAC and others from the mid-1990s, though in the mid-2000s they stopped operating in this sphere - despite the need for newly emerging CSOs to develop themselves organizationally.

In terms of format, capacity building programmes were and are still dominated by conventional forms of trainings and peer support. However with advancement of new technologies new forms have emerged as well. Webinars in recent years become more popular and cost effective ways of training CSOs. Some of the basic needs for organizational development are satisfied through access to online tool kits or through development of online courses.

Regarding specific needs for capacity building, many themes are perennial and among them are strategic planning, fundraising, project management, monitoring and evaluation, taxation and financial regulation of CSOs' activities. Some themes emerged relatively recently, along with the maturing of the sector itself and with the change of technologies. Engagement in public policy, better skills in advocacy, using ICT for communications are among those needs which emerged relatively recently.

**Remaining challenges in the design and provision of capacity building programmes** - Certain issues can be identified as cross-cutting in the history of capacity building in these three countries. There is an issue of language which should be taken into account while developing training programs. There are an increasing number of CSOs emerging in rural areas and they need capacity building in local languages; otherwise their will remain capacity low, and there is a risk of estrangement between two segments of the sector – Russian/local languages and center/periphery organizations.

The sector is ageing and it has become more difficult to attract young people to work in CSOs due to competition with the private sector and the more fluid labor market. The “concept” of a CSO as an organization should be re-thought in this regard. Effective engagement of volunteers, more flexible organizational structures, the ability to attract youth become vital skills.

Another issue which came up in this assessment is cultural sensitivity, i.e. adaptation of international (or western) training materials to local context and perceptions. Ignoring this has led to the formal reporting of training results when sometimes no deeper learning of substance was achieved, or at worst it may lead to xenophobic sentiments and the rejection of anything foreign when it comes to capacity building.

University programs have been scarcely present in various initiatives and it has been difficult to sustain them. One exception is the still ongoing efforts to offer courses on non-commercial law in universities in Kyrgyzstan.

All three countries have experienced in various ways and degrees pressure from governments for stricter regulation of civil society. The sector did not always have sufficient capacity to withstand these challenges and the lessons from this could be used to understand how to develop capacity for effective advocacy to defend the sector itself.

On other hand there are emerging opportunities in the light of rising expectations in all three countries for their states to perform better. In countries like Kyrgyzstan expectations are growing along with a better facilitating environment for civil society engagement with the state.

## **COUNTRY STUDIES**

In each of the three country studies that follow, there are five main headings:

- ▶ 1. Country background
- ▶ 2. Main civil society actors
- ▶ 3. Training needs, delivery and impact
- ▶ 4. Barriers and opportunities
- ▶ 5. Conclusions

# KAZAKHSTAN

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## **Country background**

The concept of ‘civil society development’ has evolved since the early days of Kazakhstan’s independence. While the concept initially focused on funding and technical support for non-governmental organizations (NGO), it is now understood more broadly to mean the development of an ecosystem with favorable conditions for all citizens to have voice in the decisions that impact their lives.<sup>i</sup> This paper examines the current state of NGO training and capacity-building activities in Kazakhstan, and includes recommendations for future capacity development planning based on research and best practices in the field.

Training and NGO capacity development has been a critical part of foreign donor support since the early days of civil society development in Kazakhstan. In the years immediately following independence, a number of volunteer and initiative groups emerged to respond to the urgent social needs of that period.<sup>ii</sup> The limited experience and capacity of these burgeoning organizations, as well as the absence of a legislative framework to regulate their activities, limited their ability to work in partnership with the government.<sup>iii</sup> By 1993, an estimated 400 NGOs had emerged to address human rights, education, and environmental issues, among others. This period also saw the entry of foreign and international organizations and donor agencies, offering support for civil society organizations in Kazakhstan in the form of grant funding, training, and network development for new civil society organizations. Early donor organizations included INTRAC, USAID, UNDP, Soros Foundation, Counterpart Consortium, TACIS, and the Eurasia Foundation, among others.

The influx of funding and growing political awareness contributed to a surge in the number of registered NGOs; between 1994-1997, the total number of NGOs grew to 1,600.<sup>iv</sup> In response to the growing number of organizations, the Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network (CASDIN) was established in 1994 to provide the growing NGO sector with informational resources and training on organizational management and fundraising.<sup>v</sup> Additional networks were soon established, with the goal of organizing individual organizations into alliances and associations with the potential for greater social impact. The law “On Public Associations” was passed in 1996, providing the first legal framework for the work of NGOs.

NGOs continued to multiply over the next decade and began to gain visibility and recognition from the broader public as key partners in the resolution of social challenges. Organizational capacity development activities were largely directed by donor organizations during this time, and included trainings, seminars, and ‘round tables’ on NGO management practices as well as technical expertise in various social spheres. Two of the largest capacity development initiatives were coordinated by the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) and Counterpart Consortium:

### **In the late 1990s-early 2000s,**

INTRAC emerged as one of the most prominent international players in Kazakhstan’s civil society development; the organization’s Institutional Development Program included trainings for individual NGOs as well as research on civil sector development in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Bishkek-based INTRAC team developed a training series for NGO leaders and NGO Support Workers, conducted sector-specific research, and coordinated events designed to strengthen NGOs networks. In partnership with UNDP, INTRAC also coordinated a consortium of donor organizations to ensure alignment of civil society development activities and to encourage donors to advocate for NGOs to the national government. A separate Analytical Skills Training Program aimed to increase the capacity of non-governmental agencies to conduct small-scale research and analysis of community needs.

### **Starting in the mid-1990s,**

Counterpart Consortium established a network of civil society development supports in Central Asia with financial support from USAID. Counterpart contracted with local trainers to lead training modules for a select group of NGOs, and established a network of regional civil society support centers with the goal of supporting organizations located outside of major cities. As one observer notes, “As a result of its outreach, the organization has become one of the principle ‘messengers’ in the region about the expectations associated with the development of civil society.”<sup>viii</sup> Many of the organizations which participated in Counterpart training programs have since risen to become nationally prominent NGOs. Enhanced networks and strengthened fundraising capacity allowed these organizations to become more competitive for donor funding and partnerships. Though Counterpart closed its operations in Kazakhstan in 2014, NGOs which successfully completed Counterpart training modules continue to play a significant role in supporting newer organizations through training and technical support.<sup>ix</sup>

## **NGOs in Kazakhstan today.**

According to data from the Ministry of Finance, there were 19,680 NGOs registered in Kazakhstan as of April 2017; 13,879 of these were estimated to be functioning. Other sources estimate the number of registered organizations to be closer to 30,000, placing the number of functioning organizations between 15-20%, with the number of effective NGOs estimated to be much smaller.

The majority of active organizations are based in Almaty and Astana, with local organizations based largely in regional centers. With few exceptions, these regional organizations have less access to financial and technical support resources than their urban counterparts. In addition, research demonstrates that people living outside of Kazakhstan's major cities have a low level of awareness about the roles and functions of non-governmental organizations in their communities, which contributes to low levels of public trust and limited support from government agencies and local residents alike.

**USAID's 2014 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia – the last index for which data on Kazakhstan is available – gives Kazakhstan a score of 4.2 (“sustainability evolving”) on the organizational capacity measure (on a scale of 1: sustainability enhanced, to 7: sustainability impeded), noting that there were no significant changes in the score from the year before.**

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**A similar ‘overall’ civil society capacity assessment conducted by CIVICUS among 170 CSOs for the period 2008-2010 gave Kazakhstan a score of 48.4% - a “moderately health level of organization.”**

Scoring was based on criteria of international linkages, financial and technological resources, human resources, sectoral communication, infrastructure, and internal governance.

### ***Main Civil Society actors***

Capacity-development training activities for NGOs in Kazakhstan are delivered in a wide range of formats by a large number of agencies, organizations, and private companies. The majority of trainings are coordinated or delivered by the following groups:

#### **International Organizations:**



These trainings may be led by staff members or consultants for international organizations, often within the framework of a large awareness-raising or advocacy initiative that encourages a specific action or position from NGOs. The OSCE Program Office in Kazakhstan, for example, regularly holds thematic workshops for stakeholder groups, including NGOs, on issues as diverse as economic empowerment, migration, youth development, and media freedom, among others. Smaller-scale trainings may also be held for an organization's grant recipients to ensure that project teams have sufficient capacity to manage, monitor, track, and communicate project activities and outcomes. The European Union in Kazakhstan, for example, holds program 'kick-off' trainings for local grantee organizations in the first months of program launch.

#### **National Government:**



While NGOs may be invited to attend thematic seminars, conferences, and events organized by any number of national agencies, ministries, and departments, engagement between NGOs and the national government has primarily taken the form of state social contracting for public service provision. While state contracting previously included a capacity development component for all contractors, it appears that capacity development resources were limited to select contractors starting in 2014. The Civil Initiatives Support Center has also emerged as a new resource; the Center was launched in Astana in 2016 to be the primary liaison between the government and the civil sector and to coordinate government grants and awards to NGOs. The Center awards grants to NGOs on a competitive basis for the implementation of social projects and initiatives, and allows grant recipients to use a percentage of grant funding for institutional development.



### Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan (CAK):



CAK is a national network of more than 500 NGOs, each members of their regional Civil Alliance affiliate organizations. The organization disseminates information and resources to member organizations through its regional affiliates. While CAK is well-placed to serve as a channel for communication and engagement between government and NGO representatives, the structure is widely perceived to be closely tied to government interests. For this reason, some organizations question CAK's ability to adequately represent the views and interests of the NGO community.

### NGO Resource Centers<sup>5</sup>:



NGO Resource Centers can be found in each of Kazakhstan's 14 regions and in the cities of Almaty and Astana. As outlined in Kazakhstan's first Concept for Civil Society Development (2006-2011), NGO Resource Centers are tasked with providing policy information, supporting public-private partnership development, supporting the NGO registration process, and organizing trainings and capacity-building opportunities for local NGOs. Regional Departments of Internal Policy award social contracts to local NGOs to take on the NGO Resource Center role. Many Resource Centers, however, are themselves often poorly equipped to provide the resources needed to adequately support other NGOs in their regions. In addition, the annual nature of the contracting process raises questions about the long-term consistency and sustainability of the Resource Center role in each region. While there are currently no updated or aggregated public data on NGO Resource Center activities, the Resource Center network is thought to be the largest support system currently in place for rural NGOs.

### Local NGOs:



A small but growing number of local NGOs have developed organizational development training and/or technical trainings and peer support services as part of their program and service offerings. Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA), Civil Society Development Organization ARGO, ZUBR Consulting, KAMEDA Research & Consulting Center, MediaNet, Decenta, Information Resource Center Almaty, and the International Center for Nonprofit Law (ICNL) are among the most prominent. These organizations or their representatives can lead trainings and other capacity development activities for other NGOs as part of their own projects or programs; or be contracted by donors, other NGOs, local government agencies, or even the private sector to develop and/or deliver trainings for diverse audiences.

### Private Sector:



A number of private companies and consultants provide training services for NGOs on a contractual basis, frequently in topics like project management, coaching, and teambuilding. These include, among others, Thunderbird Worldwide, Kazakhstan Project Management Association, and Step & Grow Coaching Academy.

## Training needs, delivery and impact

**Training Needs.** There is currently no system for the tracking of training and capacity needs across the NGO sector. The type, frequency, and intensity of training and capacity-building support needed within Kazakhstan's NGO sector not only varies widely across organizations, but also changes as internal program priorities and external forces shift over time.

Specialists, however, have identified a number of consistent capacity needs across organizations in Kazakhstan based on their level of development:

- ▶ New organizations need additional support for *strategic planning, long-term vision, and fundraising*
- ▶ Established organizations need additional support to *increase accountability and ensure that their organizational management structures are open and transparent.*<sup>xvi</sup>

A number of organizations, including INTRAC, Counterpart Consortium, and EFCA, among others, have adopted their own versions of NGO capacity assessment tools.<sup>6</sup> A number of NGOs and training organizations offer a comprehensive "School for NGOs" training module, designed to introduce new and potential NGO leaders to key concepts, tools and resources for NGO management based on the outcomes of capacity assessments.<sup>xvii</sup> These training packages for new NGOs often include such training sessions like *project management, monitoring and evaluation, communications and visibility, fundraising and financial management, taxation and financial reporting, and NGO policies and legislation*. A review of recent press releases on thematic training for NGOs demonstrates that there is a high level of interest in the following topics, among others: *human trafficking, environmental protection, human rights, and children and family issues*.

**Training delivery.** The most common format for NGO training and capacity-building activities in Kazakhstan continues to be in-person group training sessions, in the form of a seminar, workshop, round-table, or conference. Some programs may also include post-training consultations, feedback sessions, and or continued mentorship with a trainer or specialist. It has become increasingly common for training materials to be published online or distributed electronically.

<sup>5</sup> Note, some regional NGO Resource Centers are also regional affiliates offices of Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.



However, the last three years have seen increased popularity in online trainings and webinars, which may be live or pre-recorded. Focus groups and consultations held by ARGO in partnership with the Public Opinion Research Center indicated that NGOs are interested in expanded opportunities for online learning.<sup>xviii</sup> In addition to NGOs and training organizations, an increasing number of independent consultants and trainers are offering both free and paid trainings through online platforms.

It should also be noted that NGO representatives consistently report that the value of in-person trainings and events lies not only with the formal training content, but also with the opportunity to interact and network with other NGOs.

**On Language.** The vast majority of training and capacity development resources and tools available are in Russian language. While there have been a number of recent pushes to improve the number and quality of Kazakh-language resources for NGOs, including EFCA's Russian-Kazakh Glossary of NGO Terms, the question of language remains a barrier for primarily Kazakh-speaking NGO leaders and staff members, who tend to be represent rural areas where the need for effective NGOs is especially important.

Not surprisingly, the majority of NGO trainers and consultants provide services in Russian language. While the number of Kazakh-speaking trainers is on the rise – due in part to recent ‘Training of Trainer’ initiatives targeting a primarily Kazakh-speaking NGO population – the need for highly-qualified, Kazakh-speaking specialists in the field of NGO development remains unmet. Some trainings offer spoken translation from Russian into Kazakh for a dual-language audience, but this requires additional time and resources.

## **Maintaining Relevance**

Research on NGO capacity development in Kazakhstan reveals a longstanding debate about the relevance of the certain methods and approaches. Researchers Tamara Nezhina and Aigerim Ibrayeva suggest that the growth of the NGO sector in Kazakhstan has not been well-aligned with key cultural dimensions of contemporary Kazakh society, including power dynamics and collectivism vs. individualism, which has ultimately reduced the relevance, visibility, and sustainability of the work of NGOs.<sup>xix</sup>

When European and North American donor organizations brought financial and technical support to Kazakhstan’s burgeoning civil society, they also brought their own conceptual frameworks, values, and expectations about the very nature and process of civil society development. “Frequently, foreign conceptual frameworks and methods promoted by donors are adopted uncritically, with little adaptation, by Central Asian CSOs,” writes INTRAC consultant Mia Sorgenfrei. “Some organizations do not fully understand the worldviews and theories underpinning these new imported approaches. Others may not apply the tools in the ways originally intended by those who developed them.” Ultimately, the responsibility falls to donors, trainers, and organizations themselves to think critically about how international best practices in civil society development can be adopted – and adapted – most effectively to meet the needs of local communities.

What’s more, as the role of NGOs in Kazakhstan evolves, so too must training needs and capacity-building processes. Whereas the NGOs of the early 1990s were not well-positioned to work in partnership with the government, contemporary NGOs are working closely with government agencies to deliver critical social services through state contracts. This shift is a positive indicator of increased trust in the capacity of non-governmental organizations to manage quality services effectively.

**The Question of Impact.** The answers to many critical questions regarding the short-term and long-term impact of NGO capacity building – *How effectively has training been delivered? To what extent have training topics filled knowledge gaps? What is the civil sector capable of achieving now that it couldn’t achieve 5-10-15 years ago?* – can only be speculated, due to lack of aggregated data and consistent tracking. Some of the most comprehensive data available on the overall state of the sector indicates that NGO capacity in Kazakhstan experienced moderate decline in the period from 2004-2014. Additional research is needed to compare current capacity outcomes with initial learning objectives.

## **Barriers and opportunities - Recommendations**

Analysis of the current status of NGO capacity development demonstrates that while Kazakhstan has experienced considerable success in the development of a civil sector, much work remains to be done to ensure that CSOs represent the interests of their constituents effectively and remain relevant in the context of shifting realities.

A recurring theme in the existing literature is the challenge of financial sustainability among NGOs in Kazakhstan. Organizations need training that goes beyond grant-writing to consider alternative funding models, including social entrepreneurship, commercial services, crowd-funding, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, [Participatory Self-Assessment of NGO Capacity](#) (INTRAC 1995); [Organizational Capacity Assessment for Community-Based Organizations](#) (USAID 2012).

Many international donors and trainers aim to be apolitical, instead focusing on developing critical skills within the civil sector.<sup>xxii</sup> However, both local and international partners must recognize that the work of NGOs is closely intertwined with the interests and priorities of government and community stakeholders. Training which prepares NGOs to engage with external stakeholder groups more consistently and effectively will not only contribute to more 'mutual wins', but also increase visibility and trust among key partners.

By extension, NGOs need additional guidance on improving their relationships with mass media channels. In a country where media outlets describe NGOs as "foreign agents"<sup>xxiii</sup> with growing frequency, training on strategic messaging and proactive media engagement could go a long way towards effectively managing public opinion, soliciting resources, and building community trust. The last three years have seen a tightening of regulations and government oversight on the work of NGOs in Kazakhstan. In this context, all NGOs – not just those focused on human rights or governance reform – should be equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate for themselves and their work.

NGO leaders and staff members *train* the way they have *been trained*. Unfortunately, not all past trainings have been engaging, interactive, or framed by clear objectives. Greater investment in high-quality train-the-trainer activities will help ensure that future generations of NGOs receive effective, relevant training tailored to their capacity needs. NGO partnership and network-building, done effectively, could foster peer learning and exchange. Training and capacity-building opportunities should give participants the time and space to establish relationships with each other on their own terms, while facilitating professional connections, additional opportunities for shared learning, and follow-up.

Many NGOs rely heavily on their personal knowledge of an issue, their intuition about changes needed, and perceptions of what has improved. However, effective program design, risk mitigation, and communication of outcomes requires data-based evidence. Stronger knowledge of monitoring and process/impact evaluation tools and skills will improve the overall effectiveness of Kazakhstan's NGOs. NGOs across sectors are well-placed to monitor the quality and accessibility of state service provision, hold government agencies accountable for service delivery, and, where necessary, advocate for improvements. Additional training on public service monitoring and analysis could increase the capacity of participating NGOs to catalyze systems change.

The current relationship between governments and their non-governmental social service contractors is largely transactional. However, as NGOs gain capacity and autonomy, they will be poised to take on a larger role in the *design* of social service delivery. NGO capacity-development trainings should push NGOs to reimagine their roles and prepare them to lead decision-making processes. It is important to recognize that government stakeholders may also face capacity issues and knowledge gaps which limit their ability to engage effectively with civil society. Research conducted by CASDIN more than ten years ago demonstrated that government agencies themselves recognize the benefit of multi-stakeholder collaboration and training and are interested in opportunities for joint training and experience exchange.<sup>xxiv</sup>

It is critical that support for NGO capacity development does not stop with technical training. Sustained support – in the form of mentorship or follow-up consultations and assignments – is needed to ensure that participants have the skills and tools to operationalize their learning and put new skills into practice.

## **Conclusions - A Final Note**

Future decisions regarding NGO training and capacity-development needs must consider that, ultimately, the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the work of NGOs in Kazakhstan is not solely related to institutional capacity and/or lack of sufficient training opportunities. A number of factors – including the political climate, lack of public awareness about the work of NGOs, and lack of financial sustainability – have also limited the ability of many organizations to fully achieve their stated goals. Capacity development can only go so far in an external environment unfavorable to NGO development. For this reason, it is critical that capacity development activities consider context as well as opportunities for NGOs to maximize their sphere of influence.

# KYRGYZSTAN

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## *Country background*

The Kyrgyz Republic has been the most liberal among post-soviet Central Asian countries. It has liberalized its economy as well as its political life which gave rise to the growth of independent public associations. The third sector has been partially transformed from the soviet style organizations, but largely it was developed by active engagement of foreign donors. The overall Civil Society Sustainability Index puts Kyrgyzstan in the category of evolving sustainability, as of 2014<sup>xxv</sup> (the last time the country was measured) it being relatively better in the overall score than all other Central Asian countries except Kazakhstan.

## *Main CS actors*

**Civil society – venues of activities, opportunities and capacity.** For a long period of time CSO functioned largely as implementers of projects substituting for the deficiencies of the newly independent state in providing basic social benefits to its citizens. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, civil society has started to engage in both political and policy debates in the country. These two venues of activities were new for many organizations.

The civil society sector in Kyrgyzstan has long history and many of its organizations have more than a decade of experience. Some civil society organizations (CSOs) have been working since as early as 1993. There are no regular studies of CSOs, but according to one recent study, as of 2013 there more than 14 thousand legally registered non-commercial organizations in the country. Yet the same survey noted that less than 800 of these organizations were currently active working.

The way civil society developed organizationally was informed by best international practices, adapted from the mid-1990s by the efforts of various actors, such as Counterpart International and INTRAC. ON the training side, INTRAC's multi-module Education and Training Support Programme provided key knowledge and skills for CS support workers, and the multi-module Analytical Skills Programme was adapted for development and conflict prevention priorities. INTRAC also designed leadership programmes for NGO leaders, youth, and people with disabilities.

The most common legal form of CSOs came to be “public associations” which by now by account for some 65% of all organizations<sup>xxvii</sup>. The second most common form is “public foundation” with 23%. This indicates that civil society organization have most been formed through collective efforts.

The help received from foreign donors led to growth of CSOs though it also created a risk of dependency on foreign funding. Donor support helped create an initially very significant segment of civil society, though later organizations emerged which were supported from other sources, for example, through indigenous funding (e.g., *Elim Barsymby*, a charitable CSO created and funded by the Young Entrepreneurs Association) or from non-western sources, mostly religious organizations.

This is a trend that signifies the slowly changing public attitude towards civil society. Overall, public attitudes have been changing towards more a negative view of civil society (as reflected in the annual polls by the International Republican Institute ) as being a sector made up of non-governmental organizations with liberal views and funding from western donors. This trend along with the decentralization of power in Kyrgyzstan, has made the sector vulnerable to whims of populist politicians whipping up public sentiments against NGOs and the causes and norms they are struggling for.

These new times create new challenges and new civil society actors are emerging without any experience of functioning as organizations. Civil society has grown in size and its organizations have learned how to develop and run projects. Yet in the new challenging environment, project related skills are not the only ones on which success depends.

Over time there has been emergence of new organizations many of which were created relatively recently – a significant portion of them according to the ACSSC survey were created after the 2010 events as a response to the popular revolt and interethnic clashes in the country's south.

Yet one of the major issues with capacity of civil society is not the advent of new organizations or how to provide them with the same skills as older organizations. The challenge is with the difficulty of sustaining conventional forms of organization. Only relatively few CSOs can thrive as organizations with regular staff and continued sources of funding. Many organizations exist on a stand-by mode: whenever funding is available they resume working. Thus, while service delivery projects need to learn the traditional ways of CSO organizing, many other activities are often embedded in the more fluid structures and segments of civil society – and need a different kind of capacity development.

## ***Training needs, delivery and impact***

**Venues of activities.** Political activities, i.e. identifying the normative standards for country's developments, were already a major mission for some organizations such as human rights who were promoting the universal normative framework which was often challenged by their opponents from the government as well as from other public organizations. Yet the complexity of the changing political and social context in the 2000s put forth new challenges for organizations that were not engaged so far in political activities – e.g., organizations working in areas of health, gender, community development, etc. increasingly had to justify their cause in light of rising conservative movement in the country.

From 2006-11, the Association of Civil Society Support Centres carried out a NGO certification programme, funded by the AKDN. Just under 50 NGOs underwent an organization assessment that identified training and other support needs. A group of national experts gained experience in this programme and continue offering organization assessment, now tailored to the needs of larger and smaller NGOs.

With the rise of populist politics since 2010, the need for civic education skills has increased not only to persuade society, but also to tackle politicians keen to exploit the conservative sentiments of their constituencies. In the 2006 survey of NGOs by Association of Civil Society Support Centers, more than 40% of respondents claimed they are engaged in some sort of human rights activity. In the 2013 survey that proportion was only 20%.

Engagement in policy discussion has been a novelty for organizations that were set up as service delivery actors. Some of them progressed to this naturally, complementing their projects on service delivery with policy related activities in order to gain wider and more sustainable effect. In the 2006 survey<sup>xxx</sup>, more than 40% of NGOs identified advocacy and lobbying as a major part of their activities.

Advocacy is shown as the best dimension in the CSO Sustainability Index (3.0 in 2014, the best score in the post-soviet period) compared not only to other dimensions, but also it is the best across the whole post-soviet space (the score is surpassed only by Ukraine in 2014). Besides that this score was consistently improving since 2004, which indicates that civil society was perceived as getting better at undertaking advocacy.

CSOs are present in a quarter of all the working groups created by the cabinet of ministers between 2005 and 2015<sup>xxxi</sup>. The fact that every fourth working group has at least one person from civil society and shows, on the one hand, the openness of the government to engage CSOs in some of its decision making, and on the other hand, the increasingly significant role of civil society in policy making.

**Organizations.** The CSO Sustainability index shows variation in scores for Kyrgyzstan between 3.9 and 4.4 since 1997. The latest measure done in 2014 shows the worst score – 4.4.

In the 2006 survey, two thirds of respondents noted that their organizations have less than five staff. Organizational size is one of the major factors affecting the sustainability of civil society organisations. The mid-2000s were the “heyday” of activity for many CSOs, whereas now only a relatively small number of organizations can afford constant activities supported by regular funding. The CSO Sustainability Index for the financial viability dimension shows a constantly low rate (at 5.5) for the last few years.

Most CSOs are registered and function in Bishkek. According to the most recent survey 53% of actively working organizations reside in the capital city. A gap between Bishkek based and other organizations rests on differentiated access to resources, decision making and to human capital. This also creates a different need in types and level of capacities that need to be developed. This also could be addressed by the new communication technologies which enable to bridge that gap. It also may help to address the long-standing issue with various training programs – what is in demand. It is becoming more difficult to engage civil society organizations and activists in trainings, so ICT may help to design online programs and courses that are demand driven and accessible in different languages and in different locations.

## ***Barriers and opportunities***

**Current opportunities.** In recent years various mechanisms of engagement of the public with the government were developed which could be utilized in the work of civil society. Some of them relate to possibility to engage into the governmental decision making.

Civil society actively participates in the work of public councils which were established in 2010 by the presidential decree at state ministries and agencies. Having largely an oversight function council serve as an important venue for society to engage with the state institutions to ensure that the government remains accountable. Some data show that at least 40% of the councils' leadership (chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries) were comprised of CSO representatives since this initiative started

in 2010. Yet effectiveness of utilizing such possibilities as access to the government through the councils remains relatively low and the recent survey<sup>xxxiii</sup> shows that only a bit more than one third of respondents ever contacted public councils. In the fall of 2017, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in Central Asia to join the Open Government Partnership, creating another venue for civil society to work with government using this transparency instrument. While at the moment the bylaws for this initiative are in the process of development, they envision significant participation of civil society.

Advancement of new technologies is another opportunity that relates to both how CSOs are working with their target groups and how capacity building of CSOs can be approached. Youth is increasingly becoming one of the major target groups for CSOs. In the 2013 survey, 44% of respondents indicated young people as their primary target group.

There are also opportunities presented in laws *On Normative Legal Acts, On Regulations of Zhogorku Kenesh of Kyrgyz Republic* and in some other legislation which stipulates requirements for citizens' engagement in governmental decision making. There are possibilities for CSOs to engage in discussing draft laws or parliamentary hearings, or to organize their own hearings and invite government or municipal decision makers. As a rule, CSOs view participation in parliamentary hearings or organizing their own hearings as an effective strategy (Tiulegenov, 2016).

During the next two years there will be many possibilities for developing capacity in policy making and advocacy, given the ongoing official rhetoric about the need to continue moving towards parliamentarism, the ongoing power transition after presidential elections held in fall of 2017, and during upcoming the parliamentary elections in 2020. All these factors provide opportunities to engage with the government.

There are not so many civil society related courses at universities. The only exception is the noncommercial law course developed by ICNL and some elective courses designed with the help of East West Management Institute (funded by USAID) – so is a big niche not yet filled properly by anyone.

## Recommendations



Develop online training courses for CSO staff as well as for volunteers and activists as well as repositories of these materials in Russian and Kyrgyz



Support ongoing activities related to the study of the noncommercial law and civil society related subjects in universities



Consider engagement in civic education curricula at the school with the aim of building connection of civic education between secondary and tertiary education



Support development of skills of civic engagement and advocacy of professionals since many of these people are inadvertently drawn into civil society activities



Target capacity building for specific types of organizations by building on their strength and overcoming their weaknesses – helping membership and professional associations to be more policy active and helping advocacy groups to become more sustainable



Develop capacity building programs that help to develop skills to utilize specifically various existing mechanisms of engagement with the government on policy making, transparency and accountability

## Conclusions - A Final Notes

Civil society in Kyrgyzstan has grown and its organizations have learned how to develop and run projects. It is considered by various indices as one of the most vibrant in the post-soviet space. CSOs have developed organizational capacity and learned how to run projects. Yet in the new challenging environment, project related skills are not the only ones which determine success. Many these organizations are developing skills of advocacy and policy engagement.

Recent social and political developments present new challenges as well as new opportunities. There is a growing non-liberal segment of civil society and this intensifies normative discussions where capacity to engage in a new form of civic education and ability to communicate your own ideas matter much more than it used to be before.

There is also the natural turnover of organizations within the sector itself which creates a need to go through a basic organizational capacity development process. Over time there has been emergence of new organizations many of which were

created relatively recently. Yet one of the major issues with capacity of civil society is not advent of new organizations and the challenge is not so much about them having the same skills as older organizations. The challenge is to sustain conventional forms of organizations - only relatively few CSOs can thrive as conventionally understood organizations. There is also variability among types of civil society and depending on the aim of capacity building efforts there could be different approaches to different types of organizations – e.g., some are advocacy driven some are membership based, while the first produce potentially immediate impact the latter is more sustainable in the long run.

Civil society understood in broader sense is not strictly and only necessarily attached to legally registered organizations. The space of civil society in Kyrgyzstan is quite broad and has ad hoc groups, activists, professional and young volunteers, and CSOs can tap on various resources of various groups of people whose capacity also needs to be developed.

The development of new technologies presents possibilities for new ways how capacity can be built, not only of civil society organizations, but also of various stakeholders who are connected to CSOs. This could make capacity building more sustainable, more demand driven and more equal.

Yet there are various opportunities for civil society which require development of an aptitude to work closer with the government on various decision-making processes. Public councils, the open government initiative, budget transparency, elaboration of a draft laws, public and parliamentary hearings – these are all possibilities which can be utilized by CSOs if they have the necessary capacity.

**University courses.** The AKDN 2006-11 programme mentioned above also had a civic education component, led by the Social Research Centre at the American University of Central Asia. The aim was to promote civic education within the school, university and adult education sectors. Eight universities in Kyrgyzstan piloted the civic education programme as an elective course and some of them passed it on to other universities in their oblast. At the President's Academy of Management in Bishkek, over 200 students took this course each year.

Nonetheless, much more could be done at university level. Since courses appear sporadically and only cover a small portion of potential themes and organizations, there is a niche to fill here as well as the option of continuing the legacy and complementing the work of previous programmes.

# TAJIKISTAN

## *Country background*

**Introduction.** In Tajikistan, the notion of civil society is often treated as a synonym of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This association of NGOs with civil society has its roots in the development aid that the country has been receiving since the first years of independence in 1991. Like other Central Asian republics, following the Soviet collapse, Tajikistan has been undergoing political and economic transformations, which were, however, aggravated by the civil war (1992-1997). In the early 1990s, the country started receiving foreign aid from mainly western international organizations, international NGOs and national development agencies. In this context, “neoliberal” civil society,<sup>7</sup> namely donors-supported NGOs, started flourishing in the country, initially with the aim of distributing humanitarian aid, and later implementing donor-funded projects.<sup>8</sup> As a result, up till now capacity-building of civil society actors is usually understood as trainings for NGOs.

In this document, we broaden this definition to include other actors, both related to traditional or “communal” civil society, such as local leaders at *mahalla* and *jamoat* levels, as well as groups which represent more recent forms of civic activism in the country, such as female leaders, journalists, active youth and university instructors.

**Legal background.** Tajik legislation does not include specific regulations or restrictions concerning capacity-building for various civil society actors, including trainings and university programmes. Some relevant references, however, can be identified.

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<sup>7</sup> Freizer, S. (2005). Neo-liberal and communal civil society in Tajikistan: merging or dividing in the post war period?. *Central Asian Survey*, 24(3), 225-243.

<sup>8</sup> Karimov, Sh. (2008). *Роль НПО в формировании гражданского общества в Таджикистане. Историко-политологическое исследование*. Dushanbe.



### Law on Public Associations

Activities of NGOs are regulated by the **Law on Public Associations** (Russian: *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan ob obshestvennyh obedineniyah*, Tajik: *Qonuni Jumhuri Tojikiston dar borai ittihodiyahoi jamiyati*) from 2007, with last corrections from 23 November 2015, under the number 1242. In the law, public associations are defined as 'voluntary, self-governing, non-profit associations of citizens united based on a community of interests with the aim the achieving goals specified in the charter of the public association.' (Art. 5). The law spans upon the following types of public associations: public organisations (Russian: *obshestvennaya organizaciya*, Tajik: *tashkiloti jamiyati*) which are commonly known as NGOs, public movements (Russian: *obshestvennoe dvizhenie*, Tajik: *harakati jamiyati*) and public initiative bodies (Russian: *organ obshestvennoy deyatelnosti*, Tajik: *makomoti hudfaoliyati*,) (Art. 7). The law does not include any specific indications regarding capacity-building of public associations, however, art. 24. indicates rights of public associations.

### The Law on Periodicals and Other Media

The **Law on Periodicals and Other Media** (Russian: *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan o periodicheskoy pechati i drugih sredstvah massovoy informacii*, Tajik: *Qonuni Jumhuri Tojikiston dar borai matbuot va digar vositahoi akhbori oмма*) from 2013, with last corrections from 24 February 2014, under the number 1407, does not include any articles which would even broadly refer to capacity-building of journalists, and state and private media agencies. However, the **Programme of Preparation of Qualified Mass Media Cadres for 2013-2017** (Russian: *Programma podgotovki kvalifitsirovannyh kadrov sredstv massovoy informacii*, Tajik: *Barnomai tayor kardani kadrhoi balandikhtisosi Vositahoi Akhbori Omma baroi*) recognised that Tajik journalists working on the radio, TV and in printed media are not enough trained to provide the public with information on domestic and international affairs (Art. 8) and included the aim of training 123 students and 32 professionals in 9 foreign countries.

### Law on Self-Governing Bodies

Similarly, the **Law on Self-Governing Bodies** (Russian: *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan ob organah samoupravleniya poselkov i sel*, Tajik: *Qonuni Jumhuri Tojikiston dar borai makhomoti khudidorakunii shahrak va ddehot*) from 2013, with last amendments from 30 May 2017, under the number 1431 does not regulate capacity-building initiatives for *jamoat* and *mahalla* leaders.

### Law on Education

The **Law on Education** (Russian: *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan ob obrazovanii*, Tajik: *Qonuni Jumhuri Tojikiston dar borai maorif*) from 2013, with last amendments from 23 July 2016 under the number 1346 does not include articles which would regulate capacity-building trainings. Article 45, however, talks about different kind of state scholarships available for e.g. university students for academic achievements, first-year students studying at the expense of the state budget (so-called *byudzhethniki*), PhD students (*aspiranty* and *doktoranty*).

### Law on Self-Governing Bodies

As for the **Law on Education of Adults** (Russian: *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan ob obrazovanii vzroslyh*, Tajik: *Qonuni Jumhuri Tojikiston dar borai tahsilot kalonsolon.*) from 2017, with last amendments from 2 January 2018, under the number 1486, it indicates that the government supports acquisition of additional competences and skills by professions, with the aim of improving quality of work. Art. 5 states that the state support partnerships with the non-governmental sector in the field of education of adults. Art. 6 indicates that adult professionals have a right for an unpaid leave from their workplace to undertake courses which raise their professional competences.



## Main CS actors - Mapping of capacity-building initiatives of civil society actors

### International agencies



The 1990s were dominated by numerous capacity-building initiatives shaped by, as put by Buxton, ‘the free-market, politically conservative ideologies in power in Western governments and international agencies.’<sup>9</sup> Seen in this lights, in the aftermath of the civil war, in the so-called post-conflict stabilization phase (1997-2005), in addition to provision of services to the population on behalf of donors and peacebuilding activities,<sup>10</sup> capacity-building of local actors in Tajikistan included socializing them with international paradigms guiding development aid, such as free market and democratization, through trainings and seminars, usually provided by international trainers. Big international organizations present in Tajikistan, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Open Society Institute (OSI) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), trained hundreds of NGOs on gender and human rights. Importantly, the demand for these trainings came from donors themselves, rather than from NGOs themselves. Fischer notices that the over-emphasis on training was detrimental to the institutional development of the NGO sector, since trainings focused on civil rights rather than the practical skills necessary to run NGOs, such as management and IT skills.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, the intergovernmental funding agencies outsource capacity building work to bigger civil society organizations receiving their grants (an exception was INTRAC’s training programmes). Due to their mode of functioning, these large international donors neither run resource centers, nor offer advisory services for civil society. Instead, a number of international non-governmental organizations working in Tajikistan fill this institutional support gap for local civil society. Organizations such as Mountain Societies Development and Support Programme (MSDSP, a Aga-Khan Foundation affiliate), Open Society Foundation (often referred to as the Soros Foundation), Eurasia Foundation in Central Asia, Counterpart International, Mercy Corps, Welthungerhilfe, International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL) and others implement organizational capacity building for local civil society on a more systematic basis. Capacity building is often part of their core activities and these organizations provide resources in key organizational management competencies (e.g. communications, fund-raising, and advocacy).

From 2006-11, two local NGOs, EHIO Farhang Van Tariqot and Manizha, carried out a NGO certification programme, funded by the AKDN and in partnership with the Ministry of Justice. Both national and local NGOs undertook an organization assessment, led by local trainers and consultants, that identified training and other support needs. However, once the funding concluded, the certification process came to an end.

### Local NGOs



The mid-2000s brought more independence to local actors, however, mainly those based in the capital city, Dushanbe. They had already been introduced to donors’ priorities, and now could become trainers for NGO activists in rural areas of the country.<sup>12</sup> Despite that, the priorities of capacity-building initiatives continued to be determined by donors and included topics such as small entrepreneurship or gender equality. Local researchers, often related to the NGO sector rather than academia, were involved in internationally funded research projects in Tajikistan. Often, however, their role was limited to data collection in the field, rather than providing an analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In mid-2010s, with the tightening of the space for NGOs in the political scene, capacity-building initiatives included transfer of more tangible skills related to the IT field (e.g. social media, websites, videos). Furthermore, a decrease in donors’ funding for NGOs in Tajikistan created an interest among NGOs and an urgent need for trainings in fundraising and project writing. While NGOs might have good ideas how to improve social and economic condition in their communities, they do not know how to frame them in the language of donors.<sup>14</sup> Often, they also struggle to prepare projects documents in English, which is more and more often a requirement of donors. To address this problem, between 2016 and 2017, the Tajik NGO Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA)-Tajikistan conducted a series of one-week trainings for recently opened NGOs across the country informing them about Tajik legislation regulating work of NGOs and teaching them how to apply for grants from donors present in the country and abroad.<sup>15</sup> In 2017, OSI has conducted a similar series of long-term trainings for local NGOs, focusing on financial management and budgeting.

<sup>9</sup> Buxton, C. (2011). *The struggle for civil society in Central Asia: crisis and transformation*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> Mullojonov P. (2001). *Civil society and peacebuilding*. In: Abdullaev K. & Barnes C. (Eds.) *Politics of compromise: The Tajikistan peace process*. Accord Issue 10. Conciliation Sources. London. 60-63.

<sup>11</sup> Fischer J. (2013). *Importing Democracy. The Role of NGOs in South Africa, Tajikistan and Argentina*. Kettering Foundation Press. p. 123  
Interviews with local NGO leaders, August 2016-August 2017

<sup>12</sup> Bahovadinova, M. (2018) 'Academic freedom in Tajikistan: Why boycotts and blacklists are the wrong response. Open Democracy.' 21 February, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/malika-bahovadinova/academic-freedom-in-tajikistan-boycotts>

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the leader of a Dushanbe-based youth NGO, 19 March 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Kluczevska, K. (2017) *Module: Developing project proposals: A guide for Civil Society Organisations in Tajikistan how to do fundraising, design projects and write proposals*. Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia-Tajikistan.

## Journalists



After the civil war, the Open Society Institute, British Embassy and USAID began supporting independent newspapers through e.g. sending journalist abroad for training.<sup>16</sup> Since the early years of independence, the National Association of Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan (NANSMIT) has played a big role in facilitating training for Tajik journalists in other Central Asian countries.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, local and foreign media associations based in Dushanbe have organized regular trainings for journalists, once again with the financial support of foreign donors. The most active organizations include NANSMIT, Internews, Homa, the Centre of Journalistic Investigations and Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). All of these organizations are led by respected Tajik journalists with long practical experience. Between 2016 and 2018, NANSMIT conducted trainings on digital security and new technologies with the financial support of Reporters Without Borders.<sup>18</sup> In the same period of time, IWPR has been training journalists from the regions of the country how to conduct journalistic investigations. IWPR has been also collaborating with a Tajik NGO Dast ba Dast to teach young people aged 12-25 years the basics of journalism.<sup>19</sup>

International organizations present in Dushanbe regularly organize trainings for journalists on specialized topics related to their own activities or projects. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been providing trainings journalists on labor migration and human trafficking, and Chemonics International on issues around land reform.

Moreover, in the recent years, the German organization Deutsche Welle has been involving Tajik journalists in capacity-building trainings in the Central Asian region. Starting from 2010, Deutsche Welle has been running a summer school for journalists, in collaboration with the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.<sup>20</sup> The initiative brought together journalists from border regions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to work on articles regarding conflict situation on the border. In the next stage of the project, Deutsche Welle has been providing incentives (contests with prizes) for journalists from both countries to jointly write articles on the topic and provide perspectives from both countries.<sup>21</sup>

## University teachers and staff



International programmes raising capacities of Tajik universities are a relatively new phenomenon. In 2014, the European Union (EU) launched the Erasmus + programme for the period 2014-2020 with the total budget 17.4 million Euro, which allows European universities to enter in partnerships with Central Asian universities, including Tajikistan.<sup>22</sup> A number of Tajik universities participated in the scheme, mainly by sending university teachers and staff for short stays in partner universities abroad, in order to familiarize them with new teaching methods and approaches. Currently, the Tajik-Russian Slavonic University participates in Erasmus + exchanges with the Davgavpils University in Latvia and Salzburg University in Austria; is a member of EU project aiming at familiarizing students with European research (together with the Tajik National University); and participates in the MIND project aiming at improving management and increasing innovation at universities.<sup>23</sup> Another EU-funded project, the Central Asian Network of Economics and Management financed by Erasmus+, provided study and travel opportunities for 150 Central Asian nationals.<sup>24</sup> Tajik participants included: Kulob State University after name Abuabduholi Rudaki and Khujand State University. Finally, in 2017 the Tajik National University launched an English-language MA course in European Studies, in collaboration with the Philipps University in Marburg and with the EU support.

Another recently launched international project which includes the Tajik National University is COMPASS (Comprehensive Capacity-Building in Eastern Neighborhood and Central Asia: research integration, impact governance and sustainable communities). The project started in November 2017. It is financed by the Global Challenges Research Fund and Research Councils in UK and the led by the University of Kent and the University of Cambridge. The project aims at helping local partners become 'regional hubs of excellence' in knowledge production and transfer.<sup>25</sup> At the moment, little information is available about its planned activities.

<sup>16</sup> Fischer J. (2013). *Importing Democracy. The Role of NGOs in South Africa, Tajikistan and Argentina*. Kettering Foundation Press. p. 136

<sup>17</sup> Idem, p. 154

<sup>18</sup> Interview with an employee of NANSMIT, 31 March 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with an employee of IWPR, 20 March 2018.

<sup>20</sup> See: Deutsche Welle Academy in Kyrgyzstan, <http://www.dw.com/en/dw-akademie-in-kyrgyzstan/a-18496675>

<sup>21</sup> Interview with an employee of NANSMIT, 31 March 2018.

<sup>22</sup> See the website of Erasmus+ in Tajikistan: <http://erasmusplus.tj/?lang=en>

<sup>23</sup> See the website of the Tajik-Russian Slavonic University: <http://www.rtsu.tj/ru/international-activities/>

<sup>24</sup> Website of the project: <http://www.canem.ulpgc.es/canem/description>

<sup>25</sup> See the COMPASS website: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/gcrf-compass/>

In 2018, The World Bank signed an agreement with the Tajik Ministry of Education and Science to launch a two-year, 280 thousand USD project titled 'Automatization of Education System' (Russian: *Avtomatizaciya sistemy obrazovaniya*). Five Tajik universities will be awarded grants, based on their projects proposals, to visit identified Russian and British universities to learn their experience in modernization of higher education.<sup>26</sup> At this stage, little information is publically available about this project.

## Female leaders



International donors turned attention to women during the Tajik civil war, utilizing women's capacity for conflict prevention and peace-building. Consequently, many rural NGOs led by women have been receiving funding for projects addressing conflict and social issues on the local level. For example, between 1997 and 2008, the National Democratic Institute highlighted the role of women as potential democracy brokers and trained female leaders across Tajikistan in election observation. In 2008, however, the Tajik government closed the office of the organization in the country, terminating its activities with women.<sup>28</sup> In the mid-2000s the American Embassy, Open Society Institute and the Dutch Embassy in collaboration with local NGOs in the regions (e.g. NGO Manizha) trained thousands of women leaders on democracy, conflict prevention and resolution.<sup>29</sup> Currently, OSCE continues working with women politicians, promoting participation of women in politics e.g. through organizing study tours by Tajik female members of the parliament to Macedonia and Albania to learn their experience in this field.<sup>30</sup>

In the recent years, however, with a shift in donors' priorities, there have been less initiatives to support women-led NGOs and female leaders at local level. Currently, most women-oriented projects support women from vulnerable groups of the society, such as migrants' families. There has been an increase in projects promoting small entrepreneurship among women in rural areas - within such projects, women are taught how to run business and obtain micro-credits.

New innovative forms of women empowerment include the activities of the NGO Women Rock in the Pamir region, which supports activism of women by training Pamiri girls to become mountain guides.<sup>31</sup>

## Youth



Capacity-building initiatives for youth in Tajikistan can be divided into three categories: programmes available in Tajik universities, programmes offering opportunities to study abroad, and smaller initiatives supporting youth activism around the country.

With regard to capacity-building programmes offered at universities in Tajikistan, within the aforementioned Erasmus + (2014-2020), students from a number of Tajik universities involved in the scheme can participate in exchange programmes abroad. In practice, however, the Tajik Technological University has been the only active institution to facilitate travel by Tajik students abroad. Within the project titled Central Asian Network of Economics and Management they went to the University of Gran Canaria in Spain.<sup>32</sup> Already before the EU project, starting from 2011, students of this university participated in exchanges with a number of universities abroad, including Italy, South Korea, Kazakhstan. As for the programmes abroad, Russia remains the main country of destination of Tajik students. In total, about 20,000 Tajik students study at Russian universities,<sup>33</sup> many of them relying on allocated budget places for Tajik citizens. For instance, in the academic year 2013-14, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science allocated 1.133 places for Tajiks, in 2014-2015, 800, and in 2015-2016, 3.180.<sup>34</sup> Other opportunities for studying abroad include scholarships offered by European countries and the US, which, however, target a small number of young people who have already demonstrated leadership skills and gained some working experience, usually in international organizations. They include DAAD Master's level scholarships to study in Germany, Chevening Master's scholarships to study in the UK, OSI Master's scholarships for European and American universities, as well as Fulbright scholarship to study in the US. The American University of Central Asia in Bishkek and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek have been providing scholarships for Tajik citizens at the bachelor's and master's level respectively. China and India have also been providing short-term and full-degree scholarships for Tajik students, through their embassies in Dushanbe.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with a Tajik university employee coordinating Erasmus Plus, 31 March 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Mullojonov P. (2001). Civil society and peacebuilding. In: Abdullaev K. & Barnes C. (Eds.) *Politics of compromise: The Tajikistan peace process*. Accord Issue 10. Conciliation Sources. London. 60-63.

<sup>28</sup> Fischer J. (2013). *Importing Democracy. The Role of NGOs in South Africa, Tajikistan and Argentina*. Kettering Foundation Press. p. 136

<sup>29</sup> Fischer J. (2013). *Importing Democracy. The Role of NGOs in South Africa, Tajikistan and Argentina*. Kettering Foundation Press. p. 149

<sup>30</sup> Interview with an employee of OSCE in Tajikistan, 6 March 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with an activist of the NGO Women Rock in Pamirs, 26 March 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Idem.

<sup>33</sup> Sputnik, Более трех тысяч таджикистанцев выехали на учебу в Россию в 2017. 09 February 2018. <https://ru.sputnik-tj.com/country/20180209/1024694605/bole-treh-tysyach-tadzhikistancev-vyehali-uchebu-rossiyu-2017-god.html>

See the facebook page of the Russian Embassy in Tajikistan: <https://www.facebook.com/russianembassyintajikistan/posts/590170724476373:0>.

Smaller initiatives available for Tajik youth include: the University of Central Asia's Aga Khan Humanities Project, which offers courses strengthening critical thinking and academic writing; American, Korean and Chinese corners, which promote learning of foreign languages; debate clubs organized both in the Ismaili center and with support of American donors; human libraries organized by the Tajik NGO Free Market Centre with the aim of preventing intolerance and prejudice among the youth; US-sponsored Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) programmes for secondary school students; and summer schools for young leaders organized by the OSCE.

The limits of capacity-building opportunities for the youth include cases of corruption involved in mobility programmes administered by Tajik universities. As for the coverage, opportunities involve mainly youth from the capital city or district centres, which excludes youth from distant regions of the country.

## ***Training needs, delivery and impact***

In the aftermath of the civil war, community-based organizations and local self-governing bodies such as mahalla and jamoat attracted the attention of donors because of their potential for bottom-up democratization. For instance, OSI has been extensively training local leaders in public policy, and the National Democratic Institute in democracy and election monitoring. Other international organizations that worked with local leaders and community-based organizations include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).<sup>38</sup> Over time, however, many western donors lost interest in community-based organizations because of their 'resistance' to the emphasis on individual freedoms.<sup>39</sup> Despite donor efforts, mahallas and jamoats remained highly hierarchical, with authority placed upon elders and men – with younger community members and women not included in decision-making.

### **Training delivery**



Trainings for local NGOs are conducted mainly in Dushanbe and often do not include smaller NGOs operating in distant areas. As a local activist put it: 'In trainings you usually see the same faces from the biggest NGOs based in the capital and some key NGOs from the regions. They have institutional connections with international organizations and are always invited for trainings. Other, smaller NGOs often are not even aware of these events.'<sup>40</sup> Besides the geographical scope, another serious obstacle to trainings for NGOs concerns the language in which trainings are conducted. Nowadays, local NGO leaders, particularly from rural areas, do not have a good command of Russian, which continues to be the main language of trainings conducted in Dushanbe. As a result, participants do not fully understand the content of trainings or are shy to ask questions in Tajik language.<sup>41</sup> Finally, there is a common problem regarding training modules. Modules are often translated or/and adapted from materials developed abroad and contain material which either misses the needs of participants or ignores socio-cultural and local specificities.<sup>42</sup>

### **Impact**



However, the coverage and funding of existing programs are limited and cannot meet the rising demand of civil society organizations around the country for capacity building, trainings and technical assistance (USAID, 2014). The gap could be partly bridged through certified training programmes offered through public education institutions. The advantage of this would be the chance to offer content (guidelines, manuals, texts, etc.) in Tajik language, which is in high demand among community-based and new emerging civil society organizations.

The limited impact of support programmes for civil society in Tajikistan can be seen from the current capacity and activities of Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs) across Tajikistan. These centers played a crucial role in creating infrastructure for NGO-to-NGO capacity building and training. However, in 2004 USAID funding ended, leaving the newly established centers struggling to maintain their own sustainability and to continue to provide support to emerging civil society organizations. By 2015, only four of seven Civil Society Support Centers were active, including "Fidokor" (in the southern Khatlon region), "Shahrvand" (in the southern Kulyab town), "Qalam" (in the eastern GBAO province), and "Association of Easter Women" (in the western Zarafshan valley) (USAID, 2014). Of these only "Fidokor", "Shahrvand" and "Qalam" still operate large project-based resources that allow them to provide regular institutional development to new and experienced civil society organizations. However, the capacity of these three centers cannot meet existing demand for institutional support. There are also other large civil society organizations that act as resource centers to newly emerging organizations, for instance, Association of Scientific and Technical Intelligentsia (in the northern Sughd province), Bonuvoni Fardo (in the south of the country), Madina (in

<sup>40</sup> Interview with an active Tajik NGO leader, 14 March 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Participant observation in various trainings in Dushanbe, 2013-2017.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with an active Tajik NGO leader, 14 March 2018.

GBAO province), etc. But the consultancy and assistance they offer does not represent a systematic effort to train citizens in operating a civil society organization.

## **Barriers and opportunities - Barriers to capacity-building of civil society actors**

### **Barriers and opportunities for CSOs**

Civil society organizations have limited opportunities to get qualified institutional assistance for their daily and strategic operations. Whereas newly emerging organizations recognize the need for continued trainings and specialized advice on a range of organizational management issues, more experienced civil society organizations often lack skills and knowledge on strategic planning, financial management, advocacy, communications, partnership building, innovations, etc. Only well-established civil society organizations can afford hiring qualified specialists to meet their institutional development needs.

### **Barriers and opportunities for journalists**

Overall, the mapping of trainings available for journalists shows that there are many opportunities for them to raise their professional qualifications. There are, however, limits to Tajik journalists' participation in available trainings. In the first place, journalists often do not speak English, and their level of Russian does not allow them to participate in events abroad. With the increasing importance given to the national language in Tajikistan, the number of Russian language media outlets in the country has been decreasing in the last years. With the exception of the newspaper and radio Asia Plus, media agencies are not looking for journalists writing in Russian. The language barrier is, in particular, an obstacle for journalists in rural areas of the country.<sup>43</sup>

### **Barriers in university programmes**

Because programmes raising capacities of Tajik universities started only recently, there are numerous obstacles to their implementation. In the first place, it is difficult to collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Science, both for international partners and local universities, because of a lack of understanding of the aims and benefits of international projects among Ministry staff. Second, the administration and finance departments of Tajik universities find it hard to manage international projects, because of their lack of familiarity with the project budgeting and log-frames, as well as limited experience in administering large amounts of money related to projects. Third, there is a problem with double taxation of international projects, both in the country where the leading university is based and in Tajikistan - which significantly lowers the amount of funding for project activities. Fourth, universities lack qualified staff who could develop new proposals and who know English on a sufficiently high level to manage international partnerships. In practice, project writing at Tajik universities relies on single individuals with long experience in the NGO sector. Sixth, with the exception of the new University of Central Asia, based in Khorog, international programmes are mainly concentrated in Dushanbe. Finally, as a result of the above-mentioned obstacles, university staff who have participated in exchanges abroad usually do not share their experience with colleagues and students and there is no internal monitoring of projects at Tajik universities.<sup>44</sup>

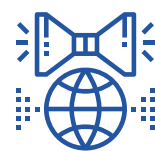
### **Limitations**



Risk of brain drain: Often recipients of international scholarships are not interested in coming back to Tajikistan, where salaries remain low and the number of prestigious working places (mainly in international organisations) is limited;



Language barriers: Often Tajik students, university staff, journalists and NGO employees are not enough fluent in English and Russian to participate in trainings abroad



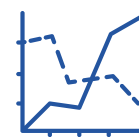
There is little coordination between international organisations on trainings offered to local NGOs, which leads to duplications



Capacity-building opportunities for students, university teachers and NGOs are mainly located in Dushanbe, which limits participation of people living outside the capital



International trainers often are not familiar with local specificities, which limits usefulness of trainings for local civil society actors



Younger NGOs are often excluded from trainings and opportunities abroad, because of the monopolisation of the NGO sector by a small number of NGOs operating from the early 1990s

<sup>43</sup> Interview with an employee of IWPR, 20 March 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with a Tajik university employee coordinating Erasmus Plus, 31 March 2018.



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