AKDN Partners with Prince William to Launch Earthshot Prize

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is partnering with His Royal Highness Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, to launch The Earthshot Prize. The prize aims to find new solutions to environmental crises and the improvement of living standards, particularly for communities who are most at risk from climate change. The goal is to incentivise environmental change while helping repair the planet over the next ten years. The Aga Khan Development Network is a Global Alliance Founding Partner.

Prince Rahim, eldest son of His Highness the Aga Khan, and Chair of AKDN’s Environment and Climate Committee said: “The Aga Khan Development Network is proud to be a Founding Partner of The Earthshot Prize. It is our collective responsibility to be good stewards of the planet. At this critical moment, we must all nurture and invest in solutions that can repair our planet before it is too late.”

Sixth Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Explores Actionable Solutions Amid COVID-19

The Sixth Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Conference brought together over 300 thought leaders and stakeholders from 30 countries to examine social and economic life amid-COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan and offer recommendations to address some of the immediate challenges. This four-day virtual event was held from October 27 to October 30.

“The Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference is a unique international forum. This year, despite all the difficulties posed by the pandemic, 55 papers were presented by stakeholders!”

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“The AKDN has been working for over a century in Asia and Africa to improve quality of life - through education and healthcare, livelihoods and infrastructure, and long-term institutions of civil society. Decades of progress now hang in the balance: environmental degradation and climate change will wipe out these gains entirely unless we act now with urgency and conviction.”

“To do its part, AKDN has a net-zero carbon target for its operations and will mobilise its agencies to mitigate the effects of climate change and help vulnerable communities to adapt. We are excited to partner with The Earthshot Prize which, over the next decade, will identify fifty solutions with the potential to keep our planet habitable. Working together, we can and must help ensure a future for life on Earth.”

Taking inspiration from President John F. Kennedy’s Moonshot, which united millions of people around an organising goal to put a man on the moon and catalysed the development of new technology in the 1960s, The Earthshot Prize is centred around five “Earthshots” – simple but ambitious goals for the planet which, if achieved by 2030, will improve the quality of life for all. The five Earthshots unveiled today are: protect and restore nature; clean our air; revive our oceans; build a waste-free world; fix our climate.

Every year from 2021 until 2030, Prince William, alongside The Earthshot Prize Council, which covers six continents, will award The Earthshot Prize to five winners, one per Earthshot. Sir David Attenborough became the first member of The Earthshot Prize Council last month and spoke with a global list of leaders from the environmental, philanthropic, business, sporting, and entertainment worlds.

Nominations will open on 1 November 2020, with over 100 nominating partners from across the world. Prizes could be awarded to a wide range of individuals, teams or collaborations – scientists, activists, economists, community projects, leaders, governments, banks, businesses, cities, and countries – anyone whose workable solutions make a substantial contribution to achieving the Earthshots.

An awards ceremony will take place in different cities across the world each year between 2021 and 2030, at which five winners will be awarded one million-pound prizes each year for the next 10 years for each of the Earthshots selected from 15 finalists. The first awards ceremony will take place in London in autumn 2021.

Sixth Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Explores Actionable Solutions Amid COVID-19

During the four days of the Conference, national and international researchers and experts exchanged evidence, knowledge, and experience on recent socio-economic developments in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, and beyond. Plenary sessions of the conference addressed a range of topics, including effects of COVID-19 in Central Asia and worldwide. Among the topics discussed were social cohesion, household finance and investments, advancing access to justice through digital transformation, education, employment, intra-household decisions and demographics, migration and remittances, livelihoods and agricultural market access, new technologies in local development, nutrition and health, and tourism development.

“The topics discussed during this 2020 Conference ranged from micro-level anthropological observations of mountainous communities to rigorous economic analysis of micro and macro-level developments,” remarked Dr. Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director of UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration. “LiK conference serves as a bridge connecting researchers with policy makers who actively participate in the Conference as presenters and attendees.”

The Sixth Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference is organized by UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration of the Graduate School of Development, the Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops (IGZ), and the International Security and Development Centre in partnership with the American University of Central Asia, Mercy Corps, the World Bank, and support from the Aga Khan Foundation.
Community Volunteers Stem Covid Tide in Khorog

Volunteers have been playing a vital role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic globally. Before the pandemic picked up momentum in Tajikistan in April, in response to an urgent request from the Central Regional Hospital in Khorog, the University of Central Asia donated medicine and related supplies, including health screening equipment, sanitizers and masks.

UCA students and volunteers distributed educational posters on symptoms and precautions of the Covid-19 virus, and much awareness was created among the local population. UCA employees established a Covid-19 Solidary Fund, and over 100 employees donated one or more day’s salary to provide food and medical supplies to families and hospitals in dire need as a result of the pandemic. To help mitigate against the spread of the virus, UCA set up facilities for 50 observation beds on the grounds of Khorog campus. With rising cases of patients testing positive for Covid-19 in Khorog, and increased risk to front line health workers, UCA also arranged personal protective equipment (PPEs) for doctors and nurses.

The pandemic brought many people and communities together to fight the global virus. The volunteers from the Khorog Community played a pivotal role in controlling the spread of Covid-19. During the peak of COVID19 outbreak in Tajikistan (May- July) the Khorog community volunteers managed one of the largest COVID19 response campaigns in the region.

They facilitated the purchase, packaging and delivery of 3,600 kg of food, 67 pieces of medical equipment, 84 high-quality hospital beds, essential medicines and other vital commodities worth over USD 22,000. These were distributed to the remote areas of Bartang Valley, Roshqta and Ishkashim districts and Khorog city. The two-month fundraising project, which started in May 2020, was initiated by the Badakhshan community living abroad and fully implemented by young people from Khorog community.

Oraz Yokutkhonov, a 22-year-old medical student played a leadership role among the volunteers from Khorog. “12 years ago, I was severely injured and lost both my legs below the knees in a car accident, a group of our community volunteers helped me to get back to a normal life. I was deeply inspired by their dedication and passion and I decided to become one myself.”

Oraz and his dedicated team not only found all the essential supplies but also managed to purchase them at a considerable discount. His wide-ranging connections with the local medical equipment providers helped him to find and purchase the necessary medicines and appliances in large quantities even during months of severe shortages in May-July 2020.

Although the pandemic has thankfully subsided in Khorog, the volunteers stand ready in case of any new flare-ups. This dedication has received accolades from the local population and inspired the formation of volunteer groups in neighbouring villages and towns.

Climate Change Documentary Series Launched

In a bid to spotlight the dire consequences of climate change in Central and South Asia, the Aga Khan University, the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, and the University of Central Asia have launched a film series focusing on the catastrophic impact of the rapid melting of the world’s largest repository of ice outside the polar regions. Echoing the call to action of the #EarthshotPrize, Voices from the Roof of the World (VRW) will help local filmmakers produce impactful documentaries about the consequences of global warming for the wildlife and the 240 million people living among the world’s highest mountains and the almost two billion people dependent on the great rivers that all begin here.

“The future of South and Central Asia will be decisively shaped by environmental conditions in the mountainous region stretching from Nepal to Kyrgyzstan,” said the Aga Khan University’s President, Firoz Rasul. “We believe it is crucial to draw attention to what is happening, what is at stake, and what can be done to address this looming crisis. We aim to reach millions of people through Voices from the Roof of the World, and build support for efforts to protect the region’s environment both for its inhabitants and the countless people who depend on its waters.”

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Climate Change Documentaries

“The people of the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Pamir mountains live on the frontline of climate change, much like Pacific islanders and residents of the Bay of Bengal,” said Onno Rühl, General Manager of the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat. “The Aga Khan Agency for Habitat works with them to protect their habitat and ensure that they can thrive, even with the mounting danger. By developing solutions and studying climate change adaptation, our work will benefit other people under similar threat, now and in the future. Not only will this project give vulnerable communities a voice, it will help others feel the starkness of the climate-change challenge.”

“Global warming is not coming. It is already here, and the University of Central Asia, through its Mountain Societies Research Institute, is uniquely placed in the region to respond to the challenges of climate change,” said Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of the Graduate School of Development at the University of Central Asia. “Voices from the Roof of the World” can help in creating urgently needed awareness of issues such as water management and food security, and the potentially devastating impact of climate change on mountain communities.”

Voices from the Roof of the World (VRW) is based on an award-winning series of 52 half-hour documentaries called Giving Nature a Voice, created at the Aga Khan University’s Graduate School of Media and Communications in Nairobi, Kenya (https://www.aku.edu/gnv/Pages/home.aspx). The series has already prodded policymakers, business leaders and citizens to take action, including banning plastic bags, stopping new coal fired energy plants, and passing legislation to protect unregulated fisheries. VRW will now use this proven model on the roof of the world.

“We are literally seeing the earth’s future go up in flames. Only by working together across borders and cultures can we hope to stop this impending disaster. From farmers to filmmakers, from scientists to students, we can all play an important role in saving our planet,” said Andrew Tkach, director of the Voices from the Roof of the World project.

Covid Spurrs New Opportunities for Museums

In an age of technology and information, museums are facing new challenges, and Covid-19 has become a vivid illustration of the need for a modern museum to be highly adaptable and responsive to the needs of its audiences.

UCA’s Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) organized a seminar on "New Narratives in Working with Museum Audiences" for museum professionals to explore new approaches to attracting and expanding museum audiences in Kyrgyzstan. The seminar took place on October 28, 2020 in Issyk Kul and was hosted by the Centre for Nomadic Civilizations.

Among the issues the seminar addressed were: What needs to be done to make museums more accessible to communities? What do museums need to do so that local communities are not silent spectators, but creators of museum content? What does it take to rethink colonial narratives and create new ones? How can museum professionals make content interesting for all kinds of visitors? What needs to be done to make museum sites an educational platform?

During the seminar, museum curators and attendees discussed global and local practices of creative approaches in working with museum audiences. Artists shared their views and ideas for developing the culture of museums by expanding categories of visitors and attracting new groups of museum members, including tourists, local populations, and children. They also shared their thoughts on how to involve local communities in museum activities. An important topic of discussion was the growing potential of on-line events for museum visitors, which has gained more relevance because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
In October 2020, Raiha Samen Ahadi, a 22-year-old SPCE alumnus launched her restaurant business, Menue Shuma, in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. Samen attended a three-month intensive Entrepreneurship Programme at UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Faizabad last year. Passionate about her dream to open a unique restaurant and serve her community, Samen wrote a business plan, applying the knowledge and skills she obtained at SPCE. Her business pitch impressed the Aga Khan Foundation’s representative, who provided her with the necessary equipment to start the business. The Foundation’s Economic Inclusion Department encourages female entrepreneurs.

Hamdam Davlatmamadov from Vomar, Tajikistan, now manages five greenhouses on 1016 sq. meters. Business courses from UCA’s SPCE empowered Hamdam to realize his big dream, and within three years the greenhouse business owner has increased his yield from 3500 kg to 12000 kg. Hamdam began his journey by attending SPCE’s English courses from 2009 to 2012. Five years later he took a Business Course. This combination of skills encouraged Hamdam to write a business plan for starting a greenhouse enterprise. He found financial support from the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and launched his first greenhouse on 50 sq. meters in 2017.

One year later, when the fruits of his efforts were visible, a private investor from the US made an offer to Hamdam to extend his business by another 466 sq. meters. In 2019 Hamdam signed another agreement with a Public Organization “Runda-ra” for establishing a new greenhouse on 500 square meters. Currently, Hamdam owns five greenhouse facilities covering a total area of 1016 sq. meters. So far, the greenhouses have produced 6000 kg of vegetables, and during the peak season, he anticipates 12,000 kg of vegetables.

Hamdam has three full-time employees and plans to hire more. Over 9000 people in Vomar village benefit from his ecologically clean and natural products. His next goal is to extend the greenhouses another 4800 sq. meters, and is negotiating with Accelerate Prosperity for an investment of $50,000. With this expansion, the business forecasts a production of 80-90 tons of vegetables annually.

SPCE Graduate Quadruples Greenhouse Business

SPCE Student Opens Restaurant in Badakhshan

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Apart from the Entrepreneurship Program, Samen also took English Courses. “I decided to learn English, as it is crucial for my development as an entrepreneur to work with international organizations and customers.”

Samen is among 60 women who are part of a community-led Economic Stability Project (ACES) by SPCE in Afghanistan. She urges other young people to enrol in UCA’s SPCE courses as a life-changing experience.
Kyrgyz Government Applauds SPCE in Naryn

The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic awarded UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education in Naryn a Certificate of Honour on October 14, 2020. The Governor of Naryn Oblast presented the Certificate which acknowledges UCA’s supportive role in the Naryn community and encouraging the youth to strive for knowledge and leadership.

The Governor highlighted the substantial role UCA and SPCE have been playing during the Covid pandemic by mobilizing students and town volunteers and providing 500 needy families in Naryn town and Alysh Village with care packages, including masks, hand sanitizers, and antibacterial soap. He also appreciated SPCE’s Mobile Library, which is bringing knowledge to students in villages, especially to children affected by the flood which damaged over 60 homes in June.

Kazakh Journalists Learn to Simplify Science at SPCE

The global public health crisis caused by Covid-19 has also given rise to fake news, mistrust, and disinformation from formal as well as informal media sources. With the demand for information on pressing topics related to the pandemic, there is a risk of publishing false information when journalists are not properly trained in reporting science related issues in a manner which is accurate and can be effectively communicated to the general public. Science based journalism in Kazakhstan is particularly underdeveloped with most news outlets copying the science based stories from western or Russian news outlets. As a result, there is always a risk of spreading misinformation due to inaccurate translations or publishing stories which already contain false information.

Recognising this need for capacity building of journalists in Kazakhstan, UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education is partnering with the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Kazakhstan to train 24 journalists to build their skillset in science journalism, including covering research on Covid-19, and other topics on research and science. The online course titled “Science Communication Skills for Journalists” developed by scidev.net will be facilitated by UCA’s SPCE with the addition of providing local context and cover other issues facing Kazakhstan and the region.

The goal of the project is to help journalists gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers of reporting science based news in Kazakhstan. The course will cover many topics including how to simplify the science without compromising its meaning, how to understand statistics and present them in a clear manner, and how to find credible scientific sources. Participants will be given examples of science journalism that impacted the understanding of scientific issues by the general public.

The online course will be conducted in two groups. The first group of 12 journalists will study online from November 1, 2020, until the end of January 2021. The second group will be announced in January 2021. The Course is free of charge for all 24 participants, and is funded by the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Kazakhstan.

SPCE has adapted its programming to an online teaching platform due to restrictions for in-person training as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. UCA and SPCE have invested in resources and infrastructure to ensure that staff is prepared to make the shift to online teaching platforms and can continue to deliver high-quality courses to students. UCA also has experience in promoting accurate news reporting, and recently hosted an online public lecture titled: “How to Spot Fake News, and Trends and Developments in Multimedia Journalism”. This lecture falls into UCA’s broader agenda of promoting accountability in journalism and building capacity of local journalists.
UCA and DAAD Offer Doctoral Scholarships in Germany

The University of Central Asia (UCA) in partnership with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), is pleased to announce forthcoming scholarship opportunities for Doctoral studies in Germany.

The scholarships are for students wishing to pursue their Doctoral studies in the following fields: Computer Science, Engineering, Communications and Media, Business Management, Earth and Environmental Sciences, or Economics. The fields reflect the taught majors and research interests in the School of Arts & Sciences, the Graduate School of Development and the School of Professional and Continuing Education.

Applicants from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan are strongly encouraged to apply. Students from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and northern Pakistan are also eligible.

While the application and selection process for these scholarship programmes may vary based on discipline and institution of choice, all applicants are required to meet UCA’s eligibility criteria and eventually confirm admission at a German university. The application will therefore follow a two-step process. Applicants may wish to informally discuss their interest by sending their documents to UCA by December 13, 2020.

Selected candidates will then be required to apply and upload their full PhD application and documents on the DAAD portal, details of which will be available soon on UCA and DAAD websites. Admission to a recognised German university for their doctoral studies starting in 2021 will also be required for the final DAAD submission. The final DAAD submission deadline for applications is January 31, 2021.

These scholarships are part of UCA’s ongoing Central Asian Faculty Development Programme designed to ensure that scholars from the region are strongly represented in UCA’s faculty. Scholarship recipients will be required to work for four years at the University of Central Asia after the completion of their studies in Germany.

For more information, please email cafdp@ucentralasia.org.

Call for Applications
Grow Your Business Acceleration Programme in the Kyrgyz Language

Has your business been adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic? Are you looking for ways to revive and grow your business? Would you like expertise and support in the Kyrgyz language? Then Grow Your Business acceleration programme may be for you.

The programme will be delivered by PEAK Bishkek Business Innovation Centre, funded by UK Aid of the Government of the United Kingdom, in partnership with the University of Central Asia’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE).

Over the seven weeks of the virtual programme, you can enhance your skills in business strategy development, marketing & sales, pitching, digitalization of your sales channels, bookkeeping & finance, business plan development, and communication with potential partners and investors.

Participation in the Grow Your Business acceleration programme is free of charge and targets small enterprises across Kyrgyzstan.

To apply, you should be an owner, general/senior manager of a small enterprise that meets the following criteria:

- Enterprise has been operating for at least 12 months and is generating revenue;
- Enterprise has less than 15 employees (full or part-time), and revenues of no more than 8 million Kyrgyz Soms annually;
- Enterprise is registered (individual entrepreneur or LLC);
- Enterprise’s activities are not related to alcohol, tobacco, gambling, or cause environmental harm;
- Whilst the programme is not sector-focused, we are particularly interested in businesses operating in the following economic sectors: food processing/agribusiness, apparel, education and skills development, healthcare and wellbeing, wholesale and retail, and small scale manufacturing.

The deadline for applications is 5 pm, November 9, 2020. Please click this link for an application form.
Apply for Admission to UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences

Admissions are now open for UCA’s undergraduate programme at the School of Arts and Sciences for the 2021-22 academic year. UCA offers an international standard of education, dedicated and qualified faculty, full scholarships and grants, and a vibrant student life.

The University offers undergraduate programmes in Communications and Media (BA), Economics (BA), Computer Science (BSc), and Earth and Environmental Sciences (BSc). Depending on the major, students attend classes in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) or Khorog (Tajikistan).

Interested applicants are encouraged to apply by March 15th 2021. Click here for more information.

LOGO Contest for Centres of Entrepreneurship

- 1st place winner will receive Samsung Galaxy Tab A7 10.4 LTE, 2020
- 2nd and 3rd place winners will be announced and receive valuable prizes from SPCE!

Eligibility: All SPCE students and alumni of all ages and of any gender can apply.

How to submit: Please send your proposal ideas/sketches to: Nazgul.osmonalieva@ucentralasia.org

The deadline for proposals has been prolonged until November 30, 2020.

UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education announces a contest among its current students and alumni from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan to design a LOGO that will represent the newly established Centres of Entrepreneurship across various locations.

The first Centre of Entrepreneurship will be established in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan under the Local Impact Project, and thereafter in Khorog, Tajikistan focusing on the socio-economic development of the region, refinement of business ideas, and support of the regulatory framework for the support of business service delivery. The Centres aim for creating an open public dialogue with potential entrepreneurs for the development and launch of new businesses. The goal of the Centres is to inspire and transform the community into entrepreneurial thinkers and business creators. It will be an innovation hub where ideas, resources, and technology meet to create the future.