

Graduate School of Development Celebrates 10 Years of Success



GSD faculty and staff celebrating 10 years of a vibrant centre of research and professional education, with new and exciting challenges on the horizon.

The Graduate School of Development (GSD) celebrated its 10th year of being at the forefront of research in Central Asia in 2021. Considering the growing impact of climate change, GSD's Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) extended its partnership with the Kyrgyz Government to conduct joint research to help develop resilient mountain communities. MSRI also concluded its two-year investigative study on juniper forests of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The Civil Society Initiative (CSI) of GSD launched a School for the Advancement of Gender Equality with a workshop with participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajik-

istan. CSI also concluded a Covid project: Voices of the Kyrgyz People documenting the pandemic's impact on personal lives.

The Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) extensively supported museum conservation initiatives in Kyrgyzstan throughout the year. CHHU staff also visited Pakistan to promote cultural heritage along the silk road. In 2021, a CHHU film Akkel (Grace) won national and international awards.

The Institute of Public Policy and Administration organised the Seventh Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan conference gathering more than

100 participants to share evidence-based results discussing socio-economic developments in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

The Aga Khan Humanities Project launched an Interactive Ethnographic Map providing detailed information about migration, economic and ecological indicators.

GSD also published 12 publications on various topics, and conducted a number of public lectures. Research fellows contributed to international journals, and were invited to important events, such as, the Dubai Expo, and the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

UCA and MegaCom Build Park in Naryn

Parks and gardens bring people together to enjoy the outdoors and appreciate nature. They provide a refreshing space for reflection, exercise, education and leisure. With an aim to create a better quality of life for the people of the area, and provide a safe place for children to play, the University of Central Asia (UCA) in partnership with MegaCom, a state operated cell phone company, have built a park adjacent to UCA's campus.

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Despite snow and the bitter cold of Naryn, children play in the newly built park. Photo: Mubashir Artas.



UCA and MegaCom Build Park in Naryn

Welcoming the guests at the opening ceremony of the park on 9 December 2021, Dr Maxim Khomyakov, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at UCA said, "This Park is a great example of public-private partnership in establishing projects for the benefit of local communities. While UCA has built the park, and MegaCom donated the play equipment, both the city of Naryn and the Tosh Bulak Association have pledged to maintain the park." Earlier in the day a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the four parties to formalize the responsibilities for the Park's maintenance and upkeep.

Speaking on the occasion, the newly appointed Mayor, Janysh Abdyhalilovich Kurbanov, said, "This park built by the University of Central Asia in partnership with MegaCom is great news for the city of Naryn. I would like to urge its users to take care of it and keep it clean. I also look forward to working closely with UCA for the benefit of the people of Naryn."

MegaCom's Commercial Director, Subakozhoev Elnar, said, "I would like to thank the University of Central Asia for giving us an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of Naryn's community. We

are happy to present this Park with safe play equipment as a gift to our children."

Conveying gratitude on behalf of the Tosh-Bulak community, Azamat Kudaibergen Uulu, Head of the Tosh Bulak Association, thanked UCA and MegaCom for making this Park possible. A 72-year-old resident of Tosh-Bulak, Kamila Abdrazakova, added her gratitude for building the park, "I live across the street of this newly-built Park, and will be happy to watch over the children when they come here to play, and ensure they are taking care of it."

MSRI Investigates Juniper Forest Systems in Tajikistan

The Pamir-Alai system is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, extending its reach into Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Considering that forests play important ecological roles, juniper forests are among the dominant ecosystem niches within the mountainous region of Central Asia. However, since the beginning of the 20th century, the proportion of wooded areas in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have declined. With structural problems in the forestry sectors of both countries, the remaining juniper forest fragments are not being sustainably managed.

Together with local collaborators and international partners, the University of Central Asia's Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) conducted a detailed investigation of two juniper forest systems and their use in western Zerafshan valley in Tajikistan and Kyrgyz-Ata National Park in Kyrgyzstan during the past two years. In December 2021, MSRI organised a symposium to share their findings from Zerafshan valley as the final deliverable in this German-funded project. Researchers from both MSRI and German universities conducted biomass and yield analysis, including dating tree rings, studying forest conditions and distribution using satellite data, and surveying local socio-economic and cultural conditions of forest use. These detailed investigations included research on stand structure and diversity, stem volume, its function, and annual increment growth, regeneration dynamics, and other indicators. This research is intended to serve as



At a symposium on Juniper Forests, participants share their findings.

a field guide for forest practitioners.

The research noted that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, government subsidies for electricity and fossil fuels ended abruptly. As a result, rural communities shifted from fossil fuels to local biomass, mainly firewood and dung. Tajik forests in 1990s and 2000s were an open access resource for the general population, and wood was used for most energy-intensive activities. Later, as a result of the introduction of a national energy policy, Tajikistan's production of coal and hydro-electricity has now increased, and the use of wood has declined.

The research team also proposed a stand growth model, which supports the development of policymaking for forests and its sustainable management. The model

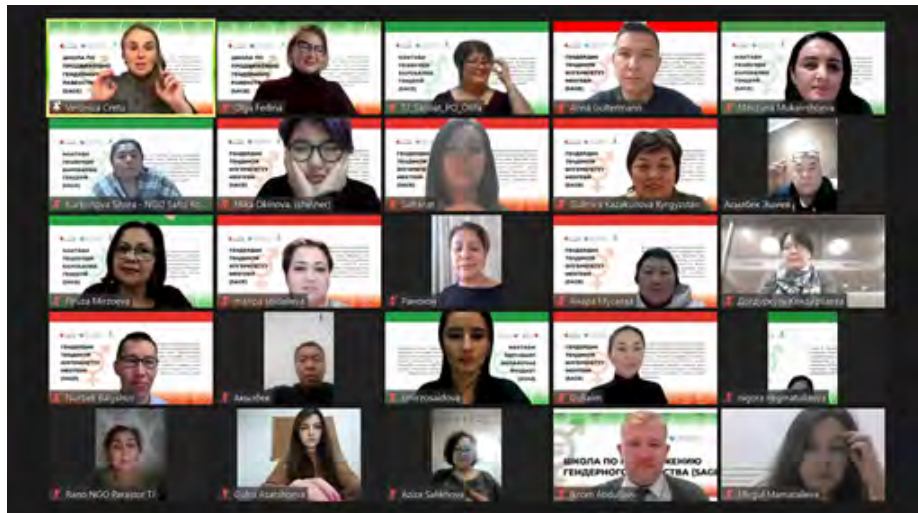
employs a dynamic, statistical approach, which can help simulate future stand development for effective assessment of proposed policies.

MSRI conducted this project in partnership with the Department of Forest and Environment at the University of Applied Sciences for Sustainable Development Eberswalde (Germany), and the Institute of Landscape Planning and Ecology at the University of Stuttgart (Germany). The local collaborators are the Forestry Agency under the Government of Tajikistan, Welthungerhilfe – Rural Development Programme (Tajikistan), Osh State University (Kyrgyzstan), and Sary-Chelek Biosphere Reserve (Kyrgyzstan). Funding for this research came from the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany.

UCA Launches Gender Equality Workshop

Is there a connection between gender equality and snow removal in cities during wintertime? Apparently, on the day of a snowfall, a male member of the family is likely to take a car to get to his office, while a female would walk to take a child to the kindergarten or school, or help her elder relative to the hospital, or run to the nearby store. While the male's movement is a direct line from point A to point B, the female often moves in a zigzag pattern. Moreover, a woman who is likely to use pedestrian roads, is also more likely to receive trauma from falling on a slippery pavement. The current urban planning, possibly unintentionally, prioritizes the needs of drivers over pedestrians and the needs of men over women. This was only one of multiple examples discussed during the three-day online workshop of the School for the Advancement of Gender Equality (SAGE) organized by the University of Central Asia (UCA).

The workshop brought together 60 participants from two Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In both countries, women experience inequality when it comes to access to formal employment or income distribution. The Workshop participants from diverse walks of life, including representatives of women's urban and rural NGOs and the mass media, were urged to contribute to changing these inequalities.



Participants virtually attending the SAGE workshop.

According to Dinara Musabekova, the director of UCA's Civil Society Initiative, over the next year SAGE plans to support organisations advancing gender equality in the region by helping them with advocacy at multiple levels. Gender advocacy helps to promote gender aspects in urban planning, puts gender on the political agenda, and brings it into legislation.

During 2022, SAGE participants will participate in advanced advocacy courses and educational trips. They will implement their advocacy projects and present outcomes at the SAGE regional forum. In addition, high performing school graduates would receive small grants to address

gender issues in their communities.

The first UCA SAGE workshop was conducted from December 7th to 9th, 2021. SAGE is funded by the Government of Canada, through Advancing Gender Equality through Civil Society (AGECS) under the Foundations for Health and Empowerment (F4HE) program. AGECS has contributed Canadian \$500,000 to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations, women's groups, and community leaders to advance public good, especially gender equality, provide greater access to health care, and improve child protection in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Alumni Spotlight

UCA Alumna Continues Journey at AKAH



The University of Central Asia (UCA)'s alumna, Jonbegim Mukhtor, has joined the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Tajikistan as an Organisational Delivery Analyst. Jonbegim graduated from the School of Arts and Sciences in June 2021 with Magna Cum Laude in Global Economics.

"Upon graduating from UCA, I received various job offers. Since the Aga Khan Development Network has invested in my education to a great extent, it is now my turn to utilize the acquired skills and knowledge to help improve quality of life in mountain communities," said Jonbegim.

As a recipient of the Best Graduate of the Year award, Jonbegim has showcased immense promise throughout her undergraduate studies at UCA. She believes that education at UCA has prepared her for success in professional life. She is responsible for various duties at AKAH including compliant execution of the organisation's strategic plan, tracking progress of ongoing projects, and producing monthly reports for the CEO.

Programming Bootcamp on Naryn campus



Students in the IT lab at UCA attending the programming bootcamp.

The Computer Science degree at the University of Central Asia (UCA) combines the mathematical building blocks of theoretical knowledge with applied programming skills. The concepts of hardware and computer architecture are taught in addition to advanced software topics to create comprehensive preparation for students to enter the world of information technology.

Three students from UCA's School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) - Eldiir Dzhunusov, Aktan Tursunbaev and Tilek Toktorov, have been qualified to enter the Northern Eurasia Finals to be held in February 2022 in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

To help them prepare, Nurlan Shaidullaev and Dr Mukhammadmuso Abduzhabbarov, faculty members at SAS, organised a programming bootcamp for CS students

during the winter break. Ten students from the Naryn campus attended the workshop.

Three visiting instructors were also invited from Bishkek to conduct sessions. Kylychbek Uraimov, Head Coach of Informatics at Sapat Olympiad Preparation Centre, conducted the sessions. Two of his students also facilitated the workshop: Omurbek Dzhamalov (Bronze Medalist at the International Olympiads in Informatics (IOI)), and Mirbek Bakirov (Two Bronze Medals at the International Zhautykov Olympiad).

The topics of the workshop included Time Complexity Sorting and Searching, Data Structure, Dynamic Programming, Graph Algorithms, Range Queries and Number Theory.

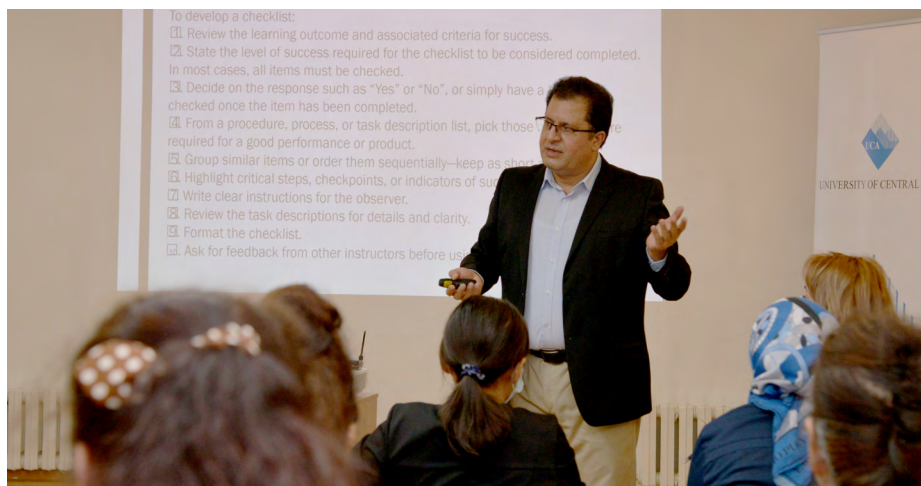
"It was an intensive but important experience. We were studying for 12 hours a day from one of the best coaches in programming. Nine of Kylychbek's students have so far won medals at IOI. We are grateful to UCA and our faculty for organising this bootcamp," said Ilkhomzhon Sidikov, a Freshman at UCA.

UCA Conducts Training for School Teachers

As part of an Outreach Programme at the University of Central Asia (UCA), the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) and the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), in cooperation with the Bishkek City Education Department organised professional development training in December for over 100 school teachers from the Oktyabrsky, Sverdlovskiy and Leninsky districts of Bishkek.

One of the participants, Aelita Zholchieva, Senior Specialist at the Department of Education in Bishkek's Municipality, remarked, "Public school teachers need support, and we are grateful to have UCA's cooperation that benefits our country's educational system. The trainer, Dr Hamid Ali Khan (Assistant Professor at SAS), had an excellent approach to meeting the needs of both experienced and new teachers."

SPCE also conducted Training for Teachers from Baytil Ayil Okmoti village in Chui Oblast with generous support from the



Dr Hamid Ali Khan conducting a session for teachers.

Public Foundation for Excellence in Education. The participants were given training in English, Information Technology, and Mathematics.

"I learned new pedagogical methods throughout the five-day of training, as the trainers taught us effective ways of interacting with students. The workshops itself

were an example of how to successfully deliver quality education," said Gulbara Yisaeva, English Teacher from Kashka-Suu Secondary School.

The SPCE Learning Centre in Bishkek donated seven computers to two schools in Baytik Ayil Okmotu village – Orto Alysh and Baygeldi.

UCA and CERP to Enhance Evidence-Based Policymaking in Central Asia

The University of Central Asia (UCA) commenced partnership with the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on 9 December 2021. Both parties came virtually together to share their mission and objectives and agreed to collaborate on furthering evidence-based policymaking in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

With expertise in conducting quality research, UCA and CERP intend to strengthen a culture of informed decision making in government, not-for-profit, multilateral, and academic organisations. CERP undertakes economic research in Pakistan and builds capacity through training and policy dialogues, and is seeking to expand its outreach and network in Central Asia given a similar socio-political climate.

Mr Maroof Ali Syed, CEO of CERP, noted that, "Our cultural and traditional links go back for centuries, and I believe that by working together, we can harness a significant relationship between both organisations for the benefit of our communities."



Prof Sohail Naqvi at the virtual MoU signing ceremony with Mr Maroof A. Syed (third from right on screen).

The MoU aims at building capacity of policymakers in the region by using research and evidence-based rigorous data for informed decision making, and conduct training and policy-relevant analytical work for knowledge generation. This will include conducting needs assessments, designing capacity building engagements, producing localized knowledge products, and a long-term engagement between

the two organisations.

Prof Sohail Naqvi, Rector of UCA, said, "Executive education is a new and exciting area in this part of world, and through our experience we have realized that it leaves a long-term impact. UCA looks forward to helping mobilize technical, financial and human resources for such a significant project."

UCA Celebrates Sarmerden with a tribute to Chingiz Aitmatov



UCA students sing Kyrgyz songs and recite proverbs during Sarmerden.

A renowned Kyrgyz writer, Chingiz Aitmatov was commemorated at the University of Central Asia (UCA)'s Naryn Campus followed by a Sarmerden on 9 December 2021. Sarmerden is a Kyrgyz national competition of national songs, proverbs and tongue twisters.

Students, faculty, management, and several guests from Naryn and Bishkek gathered to celebrate the author's birthday. The celebration was organised by Meerim Tursunaliyeva, Kyrgyz Language Instructor at UCA.

The event also hosted a cultural fashion show by a young fashion designer from Naryn, Jiye Sydykova, where students dressed and walked down the catwalk in glorifying Kyrgyz outfits. Busurman Oduraev, a professional actor, who played the role of Ismail in a film based on Aitmatov's novel *Face to Face*, and Nurgazy Sydygaliev, who played the role of a child in *The White Ship* also attended the event.

UCA Researchers Identify Drought Surviving Beans



The Research Team hard at work at the bean research plot in Yaawlang District in Bamyan.

Scientists working at the University of Central Asia (UCA) have recently published a paper about common beans that can adapt to harsh climatic conditions.

The UCA study will help farmers cope with agronomic challenges presented by dry, high elevation mountains prevalent in Afghanistan, and are especially relevant to the looming food crisis. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) [projections for 2022](#), 23 million people or about half of the Afghan population will experience acute food insecurity and suffer from hunger in the next six months.

Beans along with other legume crops play an important role in the diet of the Afghan people. Common beans are rich in antioxidants, minerals, and vitamins, and contain chemicals which are associated with reducing the risk of cancer.

In recent years, the production of common beans has increased on Afghan farms. However, the production of these plants has also introduced a serious challenge: common beans are more prone to water stress. For example, research from Brazil, Chile, and Iran shows that severe water shortage significantly reduces the productivity of bean plants.

Afghanistan is known for its arid and semi-arid climate with very little rainfall during the summer. In the past decades, the droughts leading to a shortage of water have had adverse effects in dry mountainous areas. These droughts led to a significant reduction of cultivated lands and worsened the harvests. Low rainfall presents an additional challenge for food security issues faced by Afghan families, particularly children.

The University of Central Asia research was conducted in cooperation with Bamyan University in Afghanistan. Both men and women, who represented members of the local faculty, young research assistants, and students developed and contributed to projects based on food security, livelihoods improvement, and environmental resource conservation in Bamyan province, in the western part of the Hindu Kush mountains known for their cold winters and restricted irrigation.

To account for any environmental stress, researchers implemented a set of studies with common beans over the course of two years. In 2018, they planted several varieties of common beans, including pied, red, white, black, and motley beans. At the end of the first year, UCA scientists identified two types of beans – red and

pied beans – that adapted to dry conditions and were harvested in early season. Early harvests avoid the water deficit that might happen in the late growing season.

During the second year, red beans demonstrated higher grain weight and yield production. Higher grain weight is an indicator of the plant's ability to resist diseases, insects, or environmental conditions that reduce nutrient density. Higher grain weight usually results in higher energy values of the bean.

Yield production implies the mass of harvest crop product in a specific area, which is another critical factor for any agricultural product. Moreover, yield production is also important in potentially generating higher incomes for farmers.

UCA research, recently published in *Agronomy*, says that “red bean plants are the best option given the dry and harsh climate patterns associated with this mountainous region of central Afghanistan, particularly when irrigation water is in limited supply”. However, both varieties – red and pied beans - should be considered as suitable for agriculture in the region.

Fieldwork in Afghanistan has been realised within the framework of the UCA's three-year Pathways to Innovation (P2I) Programme to promote knowledge and analytical skills in mathematics, science, and economic policy in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The programme was funded by the International Development Research Centre and the Aga Khan Foundation Canada.

From 2017 to 2019, five applied research projects were implemented in Bamyan province. They covered a range of agricultural and horticultural concerns, including cost-benefit analysis of crop variants; approaches to increase productivity and land efficiency of traditional or new crops, including off season crops; the identification of drought resistant crops that are better adapted to the drastic and unpredictable changes in weather patterns and rainfall associated with climate change; and strategies to maximize other mainstays of community livelihoods, such as tourism or water management.

Best Partner Recognition for SPCE Naryn



Nurbek Nisharapov with the Awards.

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education was recognised as the Best Partner Organisation throughout the Naryn region at an annual award ceremony organised by the Naryn Mayor's Administration, Town Council, Naryn Youth Parliament, and Naryn Youth and Sports Department.

The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) inaugurated its first Learning Centre in Naryn in 2006 and has graduated over 30,000 learners during past 15 years. The Centre offers a range of courses in various fields including lan-

guages, tourism, computer literacy, and accounting. SPCE Naryn has also recently established a Centre for Entrepreneurship in November 2021 with the objective of creating job opportunities and extending its reach to the marginalized youth of rural communities.

During the ceremony, Nurbek Nisharapov, Country Head of SPCE Kyrgyzstan, was also given the Best Young Manager award. Nurbek joined UCA as a Communications Intern in 2011 and is now heading SPCE activities in the country.

UCASA President Initiates Life Skills Workshop



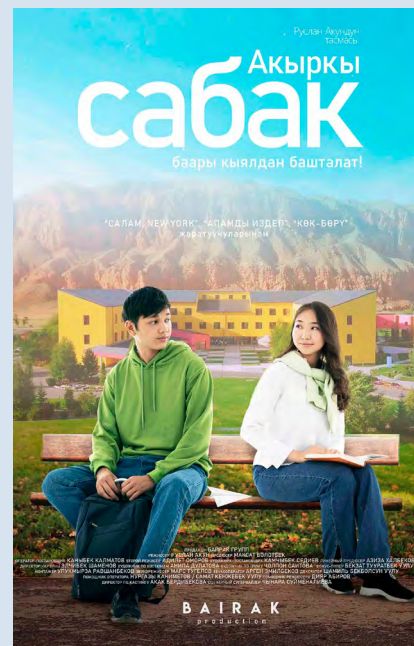
Aqila Hassanzada conducting a session on Resume Writing for UCA students.

Although millennials have access to high levels of education, they are often lacking in life skills to survive in the real world. To help students balance academic achievements and learning necessary life skills, Aqila Hassanzada, the University of Central Asia Student Association President at

the Naryn Campus, has initiated a series of workshops.

The topics of the workshops include resume writing, job interviews, cooking skills, financial literacy, and other related subjects.

UCA Features in Ruslan Akun's Drama Series



One of the posters of the Final Lesson has the UCA campus in Naryn as a backdrop.

"When I saw the Naryn campus and learned about the undergraduate curriculum, I fell in love. If the University of Central Asia had been there when I was growing up, I would have certainly applied for admission. I am thankful that my hometown was chosen for such an amazing project," said Ruslan Akun, a renowned Kyrgyz filmmaker.

In Ruslan's recently produced TV series, *Akyrky Sabak*, meaning Final Lesson in Kyrgyz, the University of Central Asia (UCA)'s School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Professional and Continuing Education are featured in the story.

Akyrky Sabak is a story of a young boy who overcomes considerable peer pressure to enter a life of crime, and eventually gains admission to the University of Central Asia. The series has captured the imagination of the youth in Kyrgyzstan as they wait eagerly every week for the next episode of this 10-part series to be broadcast on national television. Its premier on 16 December 2021 in Bishkek was attended by high profile dignitaries and the media.

[Watch TV Series Online](#)



Study at UCA

University of Central Asia (UCA) is looking to admit bright young applicants to its undergraduate programmes with a demonstrated record of academic achievements and extracurricular activities. Admissions to UCA is purely merit-based, and lack of financial resources is not a barrier. UCA offers its students a unique opportunity to acquire state-of-the-art knowledge and skills, a vibrant student life, and hands-on work experience leading to outstanding career opportunities.

The deadline to submit the application form and relevant documents is 15 March 2022.

Undergraduate Programmes

TAJIKISTAN KHOROG

- **EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES**
[Bachelor of Science]
- **GLOBAL ECONOMICS**
[Bachelor of Arts]

KYRGYZSTAN NARYN

- **COMPUTER SCIENCE**
[Bachelor of Science]
- **COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA**
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Solfeggio Based on Kyrgyz Melodies and Songs (Ethnosolfeggio)

The collection of Ethnosolfeggio is an addition and alternative to the textbooks existing in Kyrgyzstan. The book is designed for mastering musical material, taking into account the diversity in national style and genre of music. Ethnosolfeggio serves the purpose of enabling young musicians of the country to study music using best examples, and making a valuable contribution to all music institutions by providing archival records. Within the framework of the Ethnosolfeggio project, 300 original recordings were transcribed from the audio materials of the Central State Archive of Cinematographic and Photographic Documents, the Golden Fund of OTRK, and personal collections of musicians. Download in Kyrgyz: <https://bit.ly/31NFFBw>



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