

## Creating Resilient Health Systems in Kyrgyzstan



Participants intently listen to UCA's research findings.

Kyrgyzstan is facing a dramatic rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs), exacerbated by various factors including lifestyle, diet, and inaccessibility to quality healthcare. Due to limited resources, public programmes are often unable to combat the incidents of these diseases. Even modest assistance from the private sector could have a significant impact on the prevention and management of NCDs.

In January 2022, the University of Central Asia (UCA) brought together 36 participants, representing government, international organisations, and private sector

to discuss targeting NCDs from a variety of perspectives, including prevention, treatment, financing, and governance. At the event, UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration presented research conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Global Child Health at the Hospital (C-GCH) for Sick Children (Toronto, Canada).

According to UCA researcher, Dr Gulnara Djunushalieva, co-author of the study and postdoctoral SDGnexus Network Fellow, the study is timely because Kyrgyzstan has been disproportionately impacted

by non-communicable diseases. NCDs accounted for 83% of deaths in 2016, with half of the deaths being attributed to cardiovascular diseases and 11% to oncological conditions. All these health conditions lead to premature morbidity and disability, which result in surging health-care costs, social care, and welfare support needs. It is estimated that the total impact of NCDs on the Kyrgyz economy in 2015 was approximately KGS 17.1 billion (US\$ 245 million).

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## UCA Extends Cooperation with the World Food Programme

The University of Central Asia (UCA) signed an Agreement of Cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) to further promote hazard mapping and forecasting in the rural agrarian communities of Tajikistan. Both parties have come together to identify best approaches for disaster risks to mitigate damages in rural areas.

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At the virtual agreement signing: Adham Musallam, Representative and Country Director of Tajikistan, WFP, and Dr Bohdan Krawchenko (inset), Dean of the Graduate School of Development at UCA.



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After the presentation, participants discussed the role the private sector was playing in the provision of healthcare services and in supplementing the resources of strained state organisations. The price of treatment and services at private clinics varies, but patients often find private centers more attractive compared to public ones, because of better quality of care and infrastructure, specialized services, and shorter wait times.

According to existing state regulations, the private sector is not permitted to partake beyond palliative care in some components of NCD care, such as oncological or cardiovascular conditions. The participants of the seminar discussed potential removal of state limitations for private providers. According to the participants, this removal could drive the patients' costs down by 30 per cent.

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## UCA Extends Cooperation with the World Food Programme

UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute and the Earth and Environmental Sciences department have been conducting research on disaster risk reduction to identify effective practices for mitigating avalanche damages. WFP plans to apply best approaches to terrace for avalanche impact mitigation in Tajikistan.

Together with UCA, WFP aims to use analysis models from the Platform for Real-time Impact and Situation Monitoring to provide outcomes on forecast of climate hazards in rural areas. UCA also plans to introduce WFP's Participatory Integrated Climate Services for Agriculture approach in Tajikistan through agricultural practices.

The University aims to educate its students about food security and nutrition issues and involve WFP representatives in future lessons and teaching at UCA.

## Travelling Through Naryn's Ancient History



Caravan Serai in Tash-Rabat, Kyrgyzstan.

The Naryn region of the inner Tien Shan is a museum under an open sky. This region is an archaeological journey of several epochs, including unique petroglyphs, nomadic burials, remains of ancient cities, and caravan serais that were witness to some remarkable events of the past.

Over the course of two years, the University of Central Asia (UCA) has supported a televised expedition *Remains of the Past* devoted to the historical and archeological heritage of the Naryn region. The TV series include ten episodes that have been aired on local Kyrgyz channel with well over 150,000 viewers and is also available on YouTube.

Through voices of experts and residents, these docuseries explore the uniqueness of the Naryn region, and provides entertaining insights into life at Naryn's ancient sites, through personal stories of some of its colourful characters.

Supplementing the newly filmed footage and interviews with archival footage and photography, Mirkhamid Toktogulov, the author of the programme employs narration to create a cohesive story.

According to Mirkhamid, such projects educate modern population about the importance of preserving ancient remains. The series will play an invaluable tool in teaching the history of Naryn.

One of the leading Kyrgyz archeologists and contributor to the series, Dr Kubat Tabaldiev said, "Archeology is important because it brings us back to our roots while lighting up the road ahead. The collaboration between UCA and Kyrgyz Public Television has produced an amazing outcome."

The series has been funded by UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit in partnership with the Institute of Strategic Sustainable Development. It has been airing on the "Culture, History and Language" programme of the Kyrgyz Public TV Corporation. The programme "Remains of the Past" was launched in 2014, and over the years, the authors have explored historical and archaeological heritage of Mongolia, Khakassia, Tuva, Buryatia, Altai Republic, and Kyrgyzstan. This is the first regional television project which has highlighted the common cultural and historical heritage of these regions.

### Announcement

#### The Nomadic Image 2022 - Documentary and Short Film Festival

Within the framework of the Nomadic Image 2022 conference, UCA's School of Arts and Sciences is pleased to announce the Documentary and Short Film Festival to be held at UCA Naryn Campus in September 2022.

Learn more: <https://bit.ly/3J0CpcA>





# UCA Launches Book on Kyrgyz Melodies and Songs

Even after the collapse of Soviet Union, Kyrgyz musicians have continued learning music using Russian notated songs and melodies. Considering the rich heritage of music in Kyrgyzstan and a special request from young musicians, the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit of the University of Central Asia (UCA) initiated Project Ethnosolfeggio.

With the Project's mission of fostering the music heritage by enabling modern young musicians of the country to study best examples of Kyrgyz traditional classics, and making valuable archival records available to all music institutions in the Republic, UCA announced the publication of a music encyclopaedia, Solfeggio, based on Kyrgyz Melodies and Songs in a book format.

For over a year, UCA staff along with music experts in the country transcribed 300 original recordings from audio materials of the Central State Archive of Cinematographic and Photographic Documents, the Golden Fund of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation, and personal collections of musicians.

Ethnosolfeggio is designed to master musical material, taking into account the diversity in national style and genre of music. It is a book which covers musical fragments both from the archives of traditional and professional Kyrgyz oral music, and music of Kyrgyz composers.

The collection closely resembles the archival originals, observing artistic, stylis-



"Kyrgyz Kairyk" Musical Ensemble in Kyrgyzstan.

tic, and performing characteristics of each piece of music. It is relevant for students at all levels in professional music institutions, senior classes of children's music and art schools, music schools and colleges, and freshman and sophomore years in universities.

The book is developed within the framework of the project "Kyrgyz Kairyk". Since 2018, three international conferences on Kyrgyz traditional music have been organised, which resulted in the understanding of the need to first create a musical manual and gradually introduce Ethnosolfeg-

gio into the educational process. The new collection is the first edition and will be supplemented and enriched further with a belief that it will faithfully serve in the preservation of Kyrgyz traditional music.



Support for this Project has been provided by the Public Fund's "Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy", and the Kyrgyz National Conservatory. Other contributors include N. Nyshanov, A. Omorova, E. uulu Ishenbek, and D. Birimkulov.

Download the book at: <https://bit.ly/31NFfBw>.

## Alumni Spotlight

### UCA Graduate Joins MSRI



UCA Alumnus, Zulfiqor Khojizada, has joined the Mountain Societies Research Institute of UCA as a Junior Research Fellow. "UCA helped me to attain both theoretical and practical understanding of Geographic Information System programmes that will be beneficial for my career in academia." He graduated with a degree in Earth and Environmental Science from Khorog Campus in June 2021.

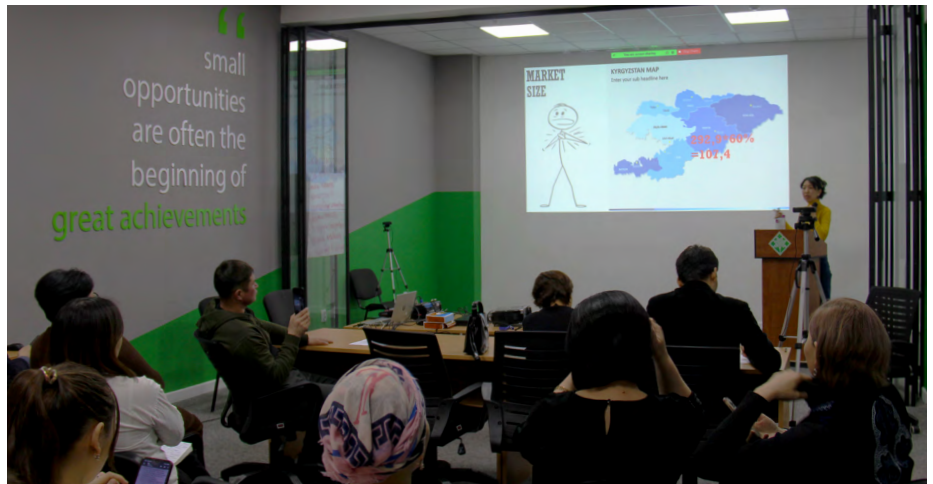
Zulfiqor has been working on an academic research project on Dynamics in the Water Towers of the Pamirs and Downstream Consequences. He is also currently involved in the project on water security in Tajikistan.

# Naryn Centre for Entrepreneurship Graduates First Cohort

The first cohort of the Naryn Centre for Entrepreneurship (NCE) held its final business pitch event on 27-28 December 2021. Concluding the twelfth module of their entrepreneurial training “Investment Readiness and Pitching”, the cohort presented 21 business ideas for establishing micro, small, and medium sized businesses in various sectors including manufacturing, sales, tourism, and education.

The Centre was established in 2021 focusing on the need of creating job opportunities in mountain communities. It provides Expert Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation programmes to teach students advanced business concepts, including leadership and management, along with providing them with a workspace, mentorship support, and networking opportunities.

Following the business pitches NCE’s



*NCE graduates pitching business proposals.*

council consisting of business mentors and administration presented graduates with recommendations to improve their growth strategies. “Over the past few months, graduates of NCE have grasped the concepts of creating, launching and improving businesses. They have modelled

and tested their hypotheses, turned their ideas into functioning projects, while some worked on improving their existing start-ups. Now, they are ready to present their prototypes and share initial sales results,” said Jomart Hudaibergenov, Manager of NCE.

# UNICEF and UCA Student Partner to Help with Hygiene Problems in Kindergartens



*UCA student, Shahnoza, presenting her hygiene project to the management of a kindergarten, and representatives from UNICEF Tajikistan, and the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme.*

Based on a 2016 World Bank report, only 38% of the population in Tajikistan have access to clean water services. Inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities play a critical role in the high numbers of neonatal and infant mortality, along with dozens of other health concerns.

Shahnoza Fazlonshoeva, an Earth and Environmental Science student at the University of Central Asia, launched an environmental project to improve the

sanitary conditions in kindergartens. The project was funded by UNICEF within the framework of “Adolescents – Partners in Sustainable Development”.

Shahnoza along with her colleagues analysed different sectors which needed attention and support and decided to work on improving the sanitary conditions of the kindergartens of Khorog, Tajikistan. “When I visited a hospital in town, one of the doctors shared some alarming

figures and concerns. She said that from January 2020 till April 2021, 894 patients were hospitalized with severe infections especially from kindergartens or primary schools,” shared Shahnoza.

As a next step, Shahnoza negotiated with higher government agencies, including the municipality, to seek permission for the implementation of the project. “When we visited one of the restrooms in a kindergarten, we simply could not use it. The room was so cold without any heating, the toilet was too big to be used by even an adult, and water was only available until 11 am,” said Shahnoza sharing conditions about kindergartens in Khorog.

The group shortlisted three kindergartens in the region, which needed the most support and provided them with soaps, towels, and other hygiene products along with training to use the products properly. “This particular age-group was shortlisted because it is easier and also important to help kids adopt healthy hygiene routines compared to adults, who have already established their choices,” said Shahnoza.



# Motor Vehicles Significantly Contribute to Air Pollution in Bishkek



The city of Bishkek under smog. (Photo credit: © Sputnik Kyrgyzstan / Mikhail Dudin).

Air quality in Bishkek is one of the most commonly discussed topics among friends, colleagues or even during a bus ride. Residents of Bishkek are familiar with the daily Air Quality Index, which shows average smog levels in the city. The IQair website often shows the pollution levels in Bishkek as “unhealthy for sensitive groups”.

Even in the absence of large-scale industrial enterprises in the city, Bishkek has recently reached high rankings in the air pollution charts. In November 2019 based on the reports from IQair website, Bishkek was ranked as having the worst air quality around the world.

Based on the findings from a [new study](#) authored by Dr Roy Sidle and Dr Erkin Isaev, researchers at the University of Central Asia (UCA), “the main sources of air pollutants in Bishkek include emissions from motor vehicles, coal-fired power plants, and heating in private homes that burn coal and other solids.”

A recently published UCA study looked at the contribution of motor vehicle emissions to air pollution in Bishkek from 2015 to 2020. The lockdown introduced in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic helped in developing a more precise picture of pollution in the city. “During these couple of months when transportation decreased significantly,” said Dr Erkin Isaev, “we received an opportunity for measurements that were

previously not possible to calculate”. During the lockdown, PM2.5 levels - fine particulate matter that is considered dangerous - decreased, along with other substances. UCA research highlights that vehicles make up a significant part of the air pollution in Bishkek.

The research also discusses the so called “heat islands” in Bishkek, urbanised areas with higher temperature. Existence of these “heat islands” contributes to temperature inversion over Bishkek, where the cold air gets trapped by a layer of warm air from above. Temperature inversions result in stagnant air that might be potentially hazardous because the population of the city breathes in a concentrate of pollutants created by vehicles, factories, and heating.

Air pollution can be kept under control, but for this to happen, the Bishkek city administration needs to ensure continuous monitoring. From 2020, the Agency of Hydrometeorology also known as Kyrgyzhydromet, monitored PM2.5 with the help of 50 air quality sensors placed around Bishkek. In the future, the agency plans to establish four more air quality monitoring stations to measure related atmospheric pollutants, including nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide among others.

All these substances are toxic and can cause bodily harm. These are formed primarily when fossil fuels are burned

and enter the atmosphere as exhaust from motor vehicles and heating units. Nitrogen oxides are produced by thermal power plants, industrial plants, and automobiles, and they lead to oxygen deficiency by directly affecting the central nervous system, resulting in a constant decrease in immunity. Carbon monoxide (CO) and sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) enter the atmosphere mainly from the exhaust gases of vehicles, emissions from industrial enterprises, and fossil fuel power stations, and considered highly toxic. Formaldehyde (HCOH) is formed by incomplete combustion of liquid fuel (primarily from vehicles) and is a strong allergen that induces mutagenic effects.

This research was conducted in cooperation with researchers from UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI), the Ministry of Emergency Situation of The Kyrgyz Republic and the Agency on Hydrometeorology under the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzhydromet). In November 2021, MSRI signed a [Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Kyrgyzstan](#) to collaborate on crucial research in the fields of global warming and climate change, disaster risk reduction, air pollution and improving air quality, glacier observation, water security, energy, sustainable development, and providing society with sound information for decision making through data integration, synthesis, scenario analysis, modelling, and other tools of development.

## Natalia's Decade at UCA



Teamwork is the hallmark of Natalia's (right) approach to work.

Employees often change employers every few years at an early stage of their careers for many reasons, including diversity of experience, and possible raise in job title and salaries. However, many people also prefer to stay with the same employer because they feel comfortable and get a chance to build on their expertise and climb the career ladder.

"I might have left UCA if it did not give me joy, but it does, and most of all it feels like home. UCA has not only witnessed my development over the past 10 years, but I have witnessed the growth of this university from a barren land to a beautiful campus and accomplished students," says Natalia Stavitskaia, Senior Finance Manager at UCA's Central Administration Office in Bishkek.

Natalia started her journey with UCA in 2012 as an Administrative Intern while she was still pursuing her undergraduate studies in Economics. "The career shift was quite stark, because I had always assumed that Finance and Economics could be merged at some point. But it is okay to take advantage of the opportunities that come your way. Even within the field of Finance, I have played several roles from managing student financial aid to accounting," she continued.

Responding to a question about the work environment at UCA, she said, "I believe it is an individual's approach to everyday life which helps create a motivated workplace environment. Since I am an optimistic individual with a positive outlook on life, I mostly feel energized taking on challeng-

ing tasks that come my way. Although sometimes I also feel helpless, when I'm unable to help my colleagues with their personal struggles."

Natalia has been part of some of the milestone moments in the University's history. "The year 2016 dramatically changed my perspective about UCA. When I saw the founder of this University (His Highness the Aga Khan) and the first Class of students at the School of Arts and Sciences at the inauguration ceremony of the Naryn Campus, I felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment, because this was the mission for which we had signed up and had been working for many years. All the extra hours we put in seems worth it even if one deserving student graduates with a life changing quality education."

Sharing her mantra for life, Natalia adds, "Your work should be more than just getting paid at the end of the month. What you do also defines you, and this University's mission to promote development and a better quality of life is my goal for life as well."

Natalia has been trusted with many important assignments. "UCA has always been my choice as an employer because my supervisors have believed in me and encouraged and challenged me to grow my capabilities. What many people achieve by changing jobs, I have done by staying at UCA but ensuring I'm growing professionally. When I look back at the last decade at UCA it gives me a great deal of satisfaction that my choices were the right ones."

## SPCE Alumnus – Student to Teacher Journey



Mohammad conducting a class for primary school students.

Mohammad Hussain Amin, an SPCE Alumnus, has started working as an English Teacher at the Aga Khan Education Services in Afghanistan.

Mohammad graduated from English and IT programmes offered at SPCE's Learning Centre in Ishkashim. He then pursued further studies in English at Farah University. He believes that as a student SPCE opened new horizons for his professional growth in life, and he is delighted to now return and teach.



## UCA Researcher Setting Benchmarks for Young Female Scientists



Dr Asel (second from left) with project partners and local government officials during a field trip in Moldova for research on Rural Change and Migration in Kyrgyzstan.

Dr Asel Murzakulova is a respected scientist in Central Asia for her work in the fields of conflicts, migration, natural resource management, religion, and nationalism. She has been awarded the International Medal of the Commission of National Education of Poland for her contribution to the development of civic education in Kyrgyzstan. In this interview she shares the value of research in improving the quality of life of people, and as a mentor for young aspiring female researchers.

“Research is not only for the benefit of institutions and researchers, but also helps participants to critically reflect on their life choices,” says Dr Murzakulova, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Central Asia. Less than 30% of the women around the world are involved in research for several reasons, including the pressure to start a family, discrimination, and unsuitable workplace environments.

“There are basic institutional and infrastructure gaps linked to the lack of women in research particularly in Kyrgyzstan. Approximately 30% of the children have access to kindergarten facilities in the country, and mostly all schools are overcrowded in Bishkek. Usually girls are the ones who are forced or expected to drop-out, and the results are visible with the lower number of women in the formal labor market in comparison to men,” shared Dr Murzakulova.

Bringing a wide range of experience from regional and international projects, she joined UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) in 2015 to study water

management practices at the border of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. “Prior to joining the University, I made contributions on this issue at various UN agencies, Bishkek Humanities University, and Polis Asia Analytical Center, but UCA allowed me to also expand my geographical interest to the post-socialist societies of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan focusing on transborder agrarian change and resource management.”

Dr Murzakulova believes that research is not just about collecting information and data, but ensuring that it benefits society. “We conduct scientific research to share findings with partner institutions, such as the Aga Khan Foundation and Mountain Societies Development Support Programme so that outcomes can reach the people as soon as possible.” She has contributed to a number of distinguished journals and has been invited to international conferences to share her expertise on a range of subjects. She recently spoke at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2021 on the issue of digital inclusion to enhance climate resilience.

“It has taken me approximately 10 years to gain expertise in conducting primary research. I am not a desk researcher and conducting field research makes me feel alive.” Dr Murzakulova has recently completed research soon to be published by Routledge. In her paper, she discusses the power of an apricot tree, and how it dictates the behavior of the residents of Isfara River Valley. Most of the conflicts in the valley originate from the need and scarcity of water for irrigation.

### Enhancing Opportunities for Women in Afghanistan



Afifa Iqbalzada from Kabul, Afghanistan, began her journey at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in 2021. She enrolled in English language courses, which helped her acquire linguistic and communications skills.

“Coming from a developing country like Afghanistan, it is easier to lose hope of achieving your dreams and goals. An institution like SPCE has given me the confidence and encouraged me to have an optimistic outlook on life. The Learning Centre has helped discover my talents, abilities and provided exciting opportunities,” said Afifa.

Afifa has received a scholarship to pursue further studies at the Asia University for Women in Bangladesh. She graduated from SPCE’s Upper Intermediate Course in English Language scoring 90% in her final exam.



## SPCE Launches Electricians Course



Programme participants at the Vocational Education and Training facility of UCA in Khorog.

In collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development, UCA's School for Professional and Continuing Education has successfully designed and launched a certified technical training programme for electricians in Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, Tajikistan.

The course is offered within the framework of the project, Local Impact: A Transformative Partnership in Asia and Africa. The goal of the project is to enhance the local capacity for design, implementation and management of renewable energy resources.

The first cohort consists of 14 participants, of which nine are from Pamir Energy, and the rest are unemployed students with no post-secondary education.

## Lessons of History in Nation Building

Communications and Media students at the School of Arts and Sciences are taking a course this semester in collaboration with one of the University's institutional partners, the University of Auckland (UoA). Thirteen UCA students have been enrolled to study the course Transnational Asia: Korea and its Neighbors with fellows from New Zealand, China and South Korea.

The course has been designed to develop knowledge and understanding of the ideological basis of nation-building in Asia, and to help students explore some of the historical events in the East Asian region that generated serious conflicts at the time and left indelible wounds for later generations.

The course is led by Dr Changzoo Song and Dr Lynne Park from UoA, along with assistance provided by Stanislav Zagorodnyev, Senior Lecturer at UCA. Dr Elena Kolesova, Visiting Faculty at UCA, is one of the lecturers of the course. Guest lecturers from around the world have also been invited to help students analyse the region from diverse lenses.

The knowledge delivered through the







UCA students along with Mr Zagorodnyev (right) during an online session with colleagues from UoA.




course is designed to help the next generation in expanding their imagination for a more reconciled future, through which countries in East Asia (and beyond the region) can overcome their turbulent history and restore friendly relations. Reconciliation in East Asia means a gigantic step forward for global peace, which should also lead to global cooperation to meet the grave challenges that today's world is facing.

"Apart from lectures, we also attend tutorial sessions where all students share ideas and discuss course readings. One of the important assignments is a research paper due at the end of the semester. Being a Media student, I have chosen to explore the influence of South Korean entertainment on Korea-Japan relationships and its impact on the ideological perspectives of its citizens. I believe entertainment can be used as a soft power in international politics, and I would like to evaluate its effect on civilians," said Aigerim Dzhaanbaeva, a senior student at UCA.

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