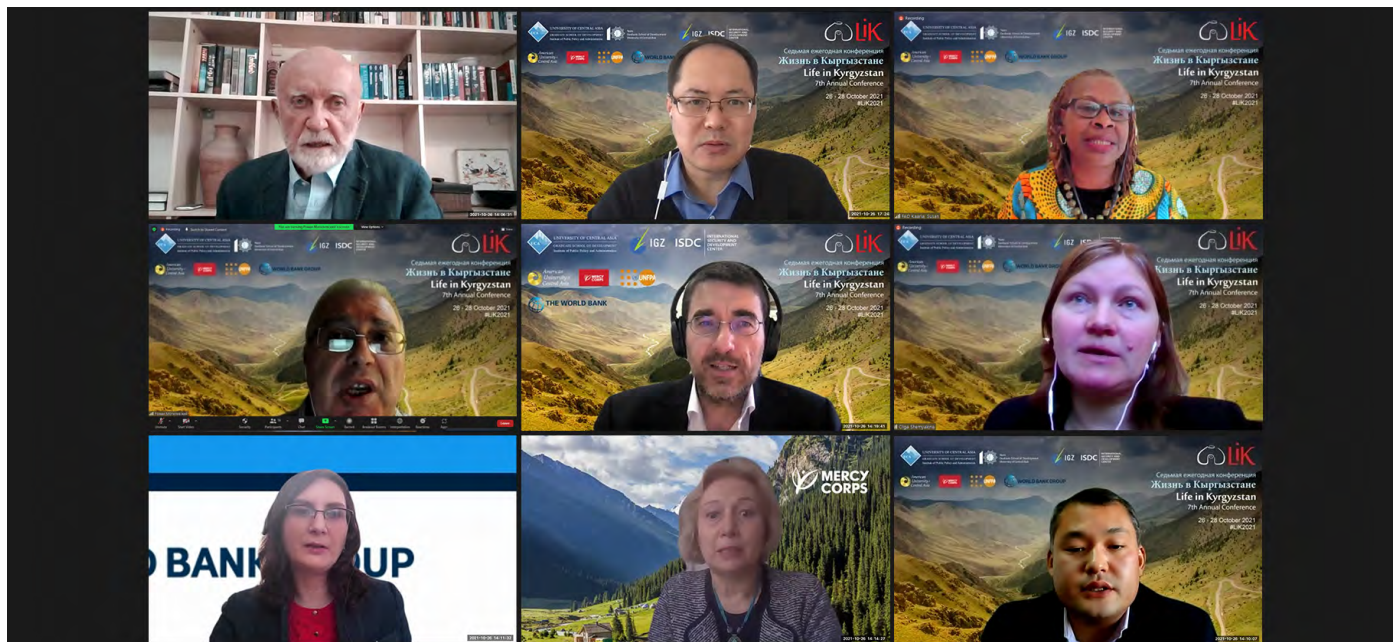


Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Highlights 54% Drop in Neonatal Mortality



Some presenters at the Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference.

The Seventh Life in Kyrgyzstan (LIK) conference brought together over 100 participants from around the world to discuss recent socio-economic developments in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The three-day conference was organised online from 26-28 October 2021 to share evidence-based results and contribute to an open access research database.

LIK is a multi-topic longitudinal survey of households and individuals. It has so

far tracked data from 3,000 households and 8,000 individuals in all seven oblasts of Kyrgyzstan. Amongst various topics of discussions were many valuable findings of benefit to the different sectors in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

One of the keynote speakers was Dr Zulfiqar Bhutta from the Centre for Global Child Health, Canada and Aga Khan University, Pakistan, whose research on Newborn Health and Determinants in

Kyrgyzstan: What Can Be Done? is based on the progress in newborn mortality reduction in the country. The findings suggest that though Kyrgyzstan's maternal mortality ratio decreased by only 5% over last 25 years, neonatal mortality rate declined by 54% during the same period. The study provides practical recommendations for scaling up health gains in keeping with Sustainable Development Goals in Kyrgyzstan.

Continued on page 2

UCA Signs MoU with the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan

As a further impetus to promoting digital transformation, where man and machine can interface and work together, the University of Central Asia (UCA) achieved another significant contribution in the field of Information Technology by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Enterprise "Project Development Center of New Industrial Technologies" of the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan on 22 October 2021.

Continued on page 2



Prof Sohail Naqvi, Rector of UCA, at the online signing ceremony with Mr Parviz Jabborov, Director General, State Enterprise from Tajikistan.

Continued from page 1

Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Highlights 54% Drop in Neonatal Mortality

One of several research presenters from the University of Central Asia, Dr Erkin Isaev, shared his research on Drought Detection and Modeling in Kyrgyzstan. He said, "Drought is an integral part of climate variability which often damages the arid and semi-arid regions. At the moment, monitoring and forecasting droughts is not carried out here in Kyrgyzstan." Thus, Isaev's research proposes the possibility of using remote sensing and meteorological drought indices to observe and predict droughts over the complex geography of the country.

Lik Study covered a wide range of topics including migration in Kyrgyzstan, impact of Covid-19 on Kyrgyz women, education and child nutrition issues in the country, food insecurities, taxes and trade, typological characterization of livestock-based farming systems, and extreme weather coping strategies in rural Kyrgyzstan.

"The Purpose of the Conference is to connect experts who care deeply about human development and want to understand how people shape their lives and livelihoods. Whether you are a practitioner, policymaker, journalist or researcher, it doesn't matter as long as you have the

same interest in how people live, organize their lives, and care about their welfare," said Professor Tilman Brück, Founder and Director of the International Security and Development Center, and Principal Investigator of the LiK Study.

The Conference was organised by UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA), the Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops (IGZ), and the International Security and Development Center (ISDC), in partnership with the American University Central Asia, Mercy Corps, the World Bank, and the United Nations Population Fund. Almost 13 presenters from the University of Central Asia participated in the Conference, of which five were UCA alumni and students from the School of Arts and Sciences.

"Together with our partners from Germany, Prof. Dr Tilman Brück and Dr Damir Esenaliev, UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration is one of the founders of Life in Kyrgyzstan panel household survey and the Conference. IPPA serves as a local partner contributing to the design and implementation of the survey, and analysis of research data," said Dr Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director, IPPA at UCA.

Continued from page 1

UCA Signs MoU with the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan

The MoU recognizes efforts of both parties in the field of IT and encourages future joint projects within existing initiatives to enhance collaboration and explore new opportunities for development. State Enterprise and UCA aim to organize more events, such as roundtables, seminars, conferences, training programmes in Tajikistan to foster a relationship between academics, civil society, and government partners in the field of IT.

UCA and State Enterprise will also jointly support entrepreneurial ventures, and research projects at state universities to enhance computer science programmes. Both parties will also invest efforts in exploring and identifying the potential of establishing a High Technology Park in Tajikistan.

The State Enterprise is also extending support to the School of Arts and Sciences of UCA by offering 10 internship placements to undergraduate students of Computer Sciences as part of the school's mandatory Co-operative Education Programme.

It All Starts with a Dream – UCA Features in Ruslan Akun's Film

Though struggle is part of the human condition, it is often difficult for young people to face the inherent challenges with patience. Highlighting the importance of perseverance, a prominent Kyrgyz filmmaker, Ruslan Akun, has produced a TV series of 10 episodes featuring a young boy from Naryn, Kyrgyzstan overcoming conflicts and peer pressure, and eventually gains admissions at UCA's School of Arts and Sciences.

Akyrka Sabak, meaning Last Lesson, highlights the fundamental role of education in transforming the lives of young people. The episodes focus on issues of social injustice, relationship with parents, lack of role models and societal pressure on the youth.

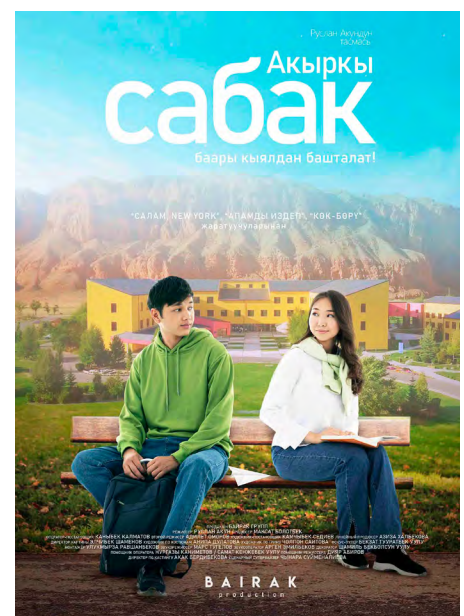
While filming Sabak in Naryn during July and August, the University of Central Asia



A marketing poster for Sabak.

provided food and accommodations for the production crew and actors.

Stay tuned for the series to be premiered on KTRK and various other TV channels across Kyrgyzstan from 30 November 2021.



UCA's Naryn campus features in one of the episodes.

UCA Helps Provide Water for Tosh Bulak District

Piped water supply has been a major need of the residents of Tosh-Bulak district, across from UCA's Naryn campus. To help resolve this issue, UCA partnered with the Naryn government and Water Services to draw water from a mountain reservoir and pipe it to the households.

For almost half a century, residents had to walk a significant distance to bring water to their homes. Though they have been appealing to the government to resolve this matter, lack of resources has remained a huge constraint. "This is a dream come true," said Clara Aliyeva, a resident of Tosh Bulak, during an interview with Naryn TV.



Sabyrkul Ashimbaev (1st from left), Governor of Naryn Oblast, tastes the fresh spring water piped from the mountains to Tosh Bulak. Residents serve Boorsok in celebration.

Governor Ashimbaev thanked UCA's contribution in solving the urgent water problem and appreciated the efforts of the residents of Tosh Bulak for providing labor.

UCA and AKF Collaborate on Academic Achievement Programme

Launched in 2012, the Academic Achievement Programme (AAP) offered at the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) of the University of Central Asia (UCA) has so far benefitted over 1,600 learners from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. To extend its reach, UCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Aga Khan Foundation in Tajikistan on 15 October 2021, to provide AAP in schools in the rural districts of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO).

AAP was introduced with a holistic approach of preparing secondary and high school students to enable them to apply to undergraduate colleges and universities. The programme is offered over a five-year period, where students study English, Information Technology, Mathematics and Science.

"With qualified teachers, quality education and a state-of-the-art learning centre, I am graduating from SPCE with an intellectually curious mind. My years pursuing AAP has not only provided me with academic education, but also equipped me with interpersonal skills that will be an asset throughout my life," said Davlat-silton, Alumna, SPCE Tajikistan.

An ideal AAP student enrolls in the programme during 7th grade and develops skills and competencies to secure admission in international universities. Students are also trained to succeed in regional and international competitions and examina-

tions, such as, Olympiads, IELTS, etc. Results from an alumni survey conducted in Tajikistan during 2019 showed that 91% of the graduate's got admission in reputable universities.

Several AAP graduates have also chosen to continue their undergraduate studies at the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Central Asia. Nilufar Sarbalandova from Tajikistan received her offer letter to pursue a BA in Communications and Media at UCA after successfully completing AAP in 2020. "My studies at SPCE left a huge impact on both my personal and professional growth. I decided to choose UCA, and I am certain that this decision will help fulfill my aspirations in life," she said.

Recognising the importance and impact of improving the quality of education in mountain communities, AKF and UCA will kickstart the project by initially delivering AAP to 11 schools in GBAO. Both parties will also provide professional development training to teachers to help them improve their skills, and in turn boost student outcomes.

"The provision of AAP in rural districts will offer an opportunity to talented kids from remote mountainous areas to learn languages, technology, math and science disciplines. These acquired skills will help them to compete with other teenagers of their age, and gain admissions in universities," said Dilovar Butabekov, Director of SPCE.



Students in Bokhtar, Tajikistan, attending an English class as part of AAP.

UCA Presents Paper on Impact of Migration in Kyrgyzstan



Dr Murzakulova (second from left) with ARGUMIG project partners and local government officials during a field trip in Moldova.

With 281 million people living outside their country of origin, migration plays a key role in reshaping the social, economic, and political landscapes of the world. Keeping in view the impact of migration, the University of Central Asia (UCA) in partnership with project ARGUMIG is conducting research on Rural Change and Migration in Kyrgyzstan from 2019 to 2023.

“Kyrgyzstan is one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world, where 30% of country’s GDP is driven from the income of migrants,” says Dr Asel Murzakulova, Senior Research Fellow at the Mountain Societies Research Institute, at the University of Central Asia.

Considering the reduction in the rate of poverty from 52% to 25% in 2021 since

the beginning of mass labor migration in 2000, Dr Murzakulova is studying the impact of migration on the transformations taking place in the agrarian sector of Kyrgyzstan.

As part of the research, Dr Murzakulova has interviewed 304 migrant households so far in three agro-ecological zones located in Naryn, Jalal-Abad and Batken oblasts. Along with Dr Roman Mogilevskii from the Institute of Public Policy and Administration at UCA, she attended the International Scientific-Practical Conference on Economic Growth in the Conditions of Globalization in Moldova during October 2021 to present their research findings.

Dr Murzakulova said, “migration is a livelihood strategy which is equally important

for all categories of farmers in the country. Remittances have had a huge impact on the livestock sector of the country. Though investments have increased because remittances are being used to buy livestock by migrant families, the natural resource management system is not developed enough to adapt to these changes. Increased investments are raising concerns about pasture degradation.”

There are a variety of issues linked with migration which should be analysed on a wider scale. Dr Murzakulova added, “migration leads to significant changes in food behavior. Our study suggests that migrant households consume more carbohydrates and meat products than fruits and vegetables. In the long term, it affects their health and quality of life.”

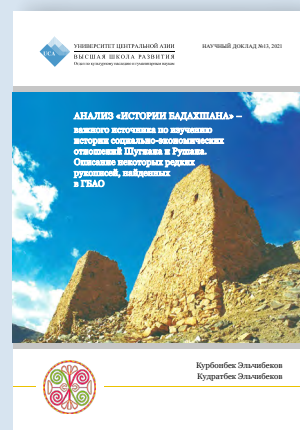
One of the many expected outputs of this project includes the establishment of a positive migration philosophy, where evidence-based government solutions will be proposed with tangible indicators and comparative analysis of agro-livelihood systems.

“Apart from the academic contributions of UCA, there are also political dialogues going on in Kyrgyzstan. Our role is to formulate recommendations and propose options to the government for adopting sustainable policies,” said Dr Murzakulova.

CHHU Publication: Free Download

Analysis of the “History of Badakhshan”: A Valuable Source on the Study of Socio-Economic Relationship of Shughnan and Rushan. Descriptions of some Rare Manuscripts found in GBAO

The paper is based on the last work produced by historians, Kurbonbek and Kudratbek Elchibekov. It was prepared for publication in the last years of Kudratbek Elchibekov’s life. The work is devoted to the analysis of the written source “Ta’rikh-i Badakhshon” (History of Badakhshan) of Kurbon Muhammad-zade (Akhund Salman) and Muhabbat Shahzade (Sayyid Shakhfutur), in the middle of the last century in the Farsi-Tajik language. According to the authors of this paper, the compilers of this manuscript were the most educated people of their time. The respective compilers had a classical Muslim education, contributed to the revolutionary activities and participated in the transformation of the educational system in the region. It should be noted that this work is limited to the analysis of socio-economic life of Shughnan and Rushan and does not focus on the political history of the entire region. Download in Russian: <https://bit.ly/3IQMVdF>



MSRI Participates at Dubai Expo on Climate Resilient Mountain Development

Global warming and climate change have created an urgent need to address issues of building more resilient communities, particularly in the mountainous regions of Central Asia.

Dr Roy Sidle, Director of the Mountain Societies Research Institute at the University of Central Asia, was as a panelist at the Climate and Biodiversity Theme Week organized by the Dubai Expo 2020. The session “Reaching for the Stars: Sustainable and Climate Resilient Mountain Development”, was arranged in collaboration with the Aga Khan Development Network, the Mountain Development Partnership of the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Government of Italy.

The panel discussion invited experts from other agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), for a discussion on their joint efforts in attaining the goal of improving the quality of life of people in mountain communities.

Combining the overarching fields of planning and academia, Bahar Dutt - a well-known environmental journalist and the moderator of the event, asked Dr Sidle about the spread of misinformation about climate change and the role of academia in informing citizens, “It is not only about fixing the problem but understanding the fundamentals of the issue. There are many generalities when it comes to climate change. We must dig down into the specifics of the community’s location. Often, we talk about global warming in mountain communities, however, if we look at temperature changes in the southwest of the Pamir mountains, it has



Dr Roy Sidle (2nd from right) addressing the importance of academic research to build resilient mountain communities.

declined in the last 20 years. Research is bringing a much-needed perspective to the overall equation, and addressing multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary issues.”

Panelists further discussed the concept of building resilient communities and providing basic necessities to avoid rural-urban migration. One of the panelists, Karim Khoja, CEO of Industrial Promotion Services, provided a historical perspective, “After the Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, infrastructure was almost non-existent or in very poor condition. In the GBAO region, less than 13% of the population had electricity for only 4 hours a day. With the establishment of the University of Central Asia by His Highness the Aga Khan there was renewed interest in the sustainability of mountain communities, which also attracted aid agency funding. Today, electricity is available 24/7 and the revitalization of the region is attracting investments, businesses, and encouraging youth to stay in GBAO rather than seek jobs elsewhere.”

Even if youth plan to stay in the region, natural hazards leave a significant impact on the livelihoods of mountain communities. Dr Sidle further stressed the importance of encouraging policymakers to do long-term planning using academic research, “Policymakers usually do not grasp the impact of low frequency high magnitude events, because they do not have a high probability of occurrence, it is difficult to foresee the value of its long-term planning. Starting with school children, we need to start talking about basic concepts of climate change to promote awareness.”

Concluding the discussion, Kira Intrator, Lead of Habitat Planning and Innovation at the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, talked about the overlapping objectives of AKDN institutions, “We work closely within our Network to bring together academic input, geographic information analysis and long-term policy changes. We co-educate the community as there is no one single solution.” Watch the [full discussion](#).

The UCA Journey Continues in Japan



Munira Malakbozova, a University of Central Asia’s alumna, has started her graduate studies at the University of Tsukuba, Japan, after graduating from the School of Arts and Sciences in June with a degree in Global Economics.

“UCA taught us how to be compassionate and responsible, not only to yourself and your families, but towards your community and the world. My faculty, student life team and classmates have left a huge impact on my life, and these five years have certainly shifted my perspective of the future.”

Munira is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in International Public Policy, “The reason for choosing this subject is to fully equip myself with an understanding of Sustainable Development Goals to benefit Central Asian countries. This programme will allow me to gain hands-on skills in both theoretical and practical knowledge to understand real-world issues and focus on building human capacity.”

CHHU Film Receives International Award



Aibek Baiymbetov, Junior Research Fellow at UCA, receives an award at the International Film Festival of Land of Short Films.

As part of the Cultural Production Series, the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) produced a short documentary Akkel (Grace) based on oral folk art of Kyrgyzstan. The film was directed by Aibek Baiymbetov, a Junior Research Fellow at the University of Central Asia (UCA).

The film features Rysbek, a man living an ordinary life in Issykkul, Kyrgyzstan, who is also an epic storyteller commonly known as a manaschi. Rysbek is one of very few human beings who is still holding onto an almost forgotten tradition of oral storytelling. "This film is important for young

people because they should know, and in fact become the transmitters of our traditions," said Baiymbetov.

The film was awarded third prize for the "Best Film" at the Snow Leopard - Guardian of the Mountains, and a "Special Mention by the Jury for Best Visual Solution" at the Land of Short Films of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic States and Georgia. The film has also been shortlisted at the IX CIS Youth Film Forum "Umut" in Kyrgyzstan.

Since its establishment in 2013, CHHU has remained focused on research, teaching, and publication of academic works on cultural and historical heritages of Central Asia. However, responding to the rapidly changing context of cultural development, researchers at CHHU have now started exploring innovative ways of engaging with cultural heritage using mass media tools and digital technology. The project Cultural Production Series aims to promote bio-cultural diversity and eco-cultural tourism in the region through the medium of creative texts, films, theatre, and music.

UCA Organizes Career Networking Event for Undergraduate Students

As part of the Co-operative Education Programme offered at the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), undergraduate students in both Naryn and Khorog participated in career networking events in October.

"If you do not share your ideas with anyone, then the chances of success decrease substantially. The need for developing networks and communicating is more essential than ever in today's world, and this event was held to connect us with rest of the world. Talking to professionals with such great ideas was intellectually stimulating and empowering," said Muniza Hashim, Sophomore at SAS.

The networking events were organised to facilitate students in understanding the required skillsets in the professional market. Students attended interactive sessions and participated in mock interviews conducted by prospective employers. Events were attended by more than 40 leading enterprises in Kyrgyzstan and 24 in Tajikistan.

"UCA interns bring a new perspective to companies that employ them, especially the University's mission to develop mountain communities. Over the past five years, UCA's internship programme has

forged mutually beneficial relationships with many Central Asian companies," said Professor Sohail Naqvi, Rector of the University of Central Asia.



HR professionals from various companies stage mock interview sessions with UCA undergraduate students.

SPCE Concludes Executive Entrepreneurship Training in Agribusiness

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education concluded the third cycle of Executive Entrepreneurship Programme in Agribusiness in October 2021. The programme was attended by 21 small and medium enterprise owners from Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Executive Education Programme is offered within the framework of Accelerate Prosperity in Central and South Asia project funded by the European Union. Agribusiness is one of the four sectors covered under the project to explore potential for growth, increase exports, enhance revenue streams and create job opportunities.

Throughout the programme, participants go through intensive training where they learn more about standard business practices, establish business linkages, formal partnerships, and develop joint ventures.

"Earlier, I used to take decisions intuitively and was often unsure about my choices, however, now I have knowledge and expertise to navigate through various options and strategically analyse business matters," said Mahinokhon Suleymanova, Co-Founder and Board Chairman of Neksigol Navovar – an agricultural technology company in Tajikistan.

As part of the training, participants also attend interactive sessions conducted by successful entrepreneurs. Earlier in October, SPCE conducted a Speaker's Day where Professor Craig Watters from Oklahoma State University (USA), Mr Aziz Hasanali from Bateleur Capital (USA), Rozik Chorshanbiev from Accelerate Prosperity (Tajikistan), and Almaz Edilbaev from Accelerate Prosperity (Kyrgyzstan) were invited to share their experiences.

During the training, participants prepared a business plan under the supervision of experts and pitched ideas to potential investors. "It is not a cliché School, where you listen to your teacher speaking. Instead, Dr Farrah, a graduate of Harvard Business School, encourages us to think, create and work on our business plans," said Altynai Anarbaeva, Owner of Balary, a honey export business in Kyrgyzstan.

Over the past 15 years, SPCE has provided a wide range of high-quality technical and

professional education opportunities to support employment and economic growth in the region benefitting over 180,000 learners.



Participants of the Executive Education Programme exhibit their business products during the graduation ceremony celebrations.

UCA Arranges Study Tour to Panj-Amu Darya Basin for Experts from Afghanistan and Tajikistan

Taking an important step towards strengthening joint efforts to protect the unique and shared mountain ecosystem of the Panj Amu Darya river basin, Tajikistan and Afghanistan have signed three Memorandum of Understandings in the last decade focusing on environmental protection.

The Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) of the University of Central Asia (UCA), in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, organised a study tour for experts from both countries. It significantly contributed to building trust and cooperation among experts from relevant government departments and other key stakeholders for conservation and sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. It also helped in improving the

understanding of environmental challenges and opportunities, and landscape and watershed management approaches to conservation. The tour helped in the sharing of regional resources including knowledge, information, datasets, skills and experience.

One of the priority recommendations for the experts from both countries was to conduct a joint rapid survey of environmental challenges and opportunities in the Upper Catchment of the Panj Amu Darya Basin.

The tour lasted ten days and concluded with a workshop at the University of Central Asia's Khorog campus, where participants developed a joint Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity Conservation.



Experts discussing ecosystem management and climate change adaptation as part of the tour.

Government Officials and Journalists in Tajikistan Graduate from SPCE



Khairisho Shonusairiev, Manager of SPCE Dushanbe, addressing guests and graduates.

Over past five years, UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in collaboration with the US Embassy has implemented various projects including teaching English language to teachers, students, journalists, and government officials. On 31 October 2021, SPCE held a graduation ceremony for 37 officials and 29 journalists from various ministries and media outlets for successfully completing different levels of the Conversational English programme.

English for Journalists programme provided learners with the necessary English language skills to enable them to access news and materials relevant to their work. It also trained them to write articles and conduct interviews in the English language. The project is focused on improving English language vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills.

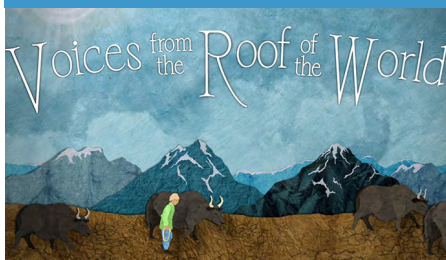
"I used to dream of moving abroad to learn English, but that dream has come

true in my own country. I am grateful to the University of Central Asia and the US Embassy in Tajikistan for providing us an opportunity to excel at English language while continuing life with our families in our home country," said Etibor Hasanzoda, Journalist at TV Channel Jahonnamo.

English for Ministries aims at providing learners with the necessary language skills to enable them to communicate with their partners from international, diplomatic, and donor agencies, and access best practices of foreign countries in fields related to their work.

"I speak from experience when I say that learning a new language as an adult can be incredibly challenging...Learning is a life-long process, and learning a language is never complete. I encourage you to keep practicing and improving your English after this course. Your English skills will open doors for you in so many areas of your personal and professional lives," said Ms. Bridgette Walker, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Tajikistan.

Announcement



A joint initiative by the Aga Khan Development Network agencies, Voices from the Roof of the World is a series of films on the impact of climate change in South and Central Asia. The first film released on October 30 talks about the effects of drought on the endangered Himalayan brown bears and golden marmots found in the Deosai National Park in Gilgit Baltistan, the impact on local communities in the buffer zone, human-wildlife conflict and eco-tourism. Watch the full films at: <http://www.aku.edu/vrw>.

CHHU UCA Publication: Free Download

On the History of Organizing Medical Help to the Pamiri Population from 1895 to 1917. Infections of the Past Century

The division of the Pamirs caused changes in many aspects of the life of the population, both on the right and left banks of the Panj River, which in particular affected the quality of the population's health in the region. Many researchers wrote about health care in the Pamirs at that time, focused on traditional medicine, local healers, and representatives of modern Western medicine, who brought the first scientifically grounded modern methods of treatment for serious illnesses. Particularly, treatment for infectious diseases, which at that time were serious issues, both in the Russian Empire and throughout the world. Download in Russian: <https://bit.ly/3bgGxWN>



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