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Giving Youth a Voice in Youth Policy

Bishkek, July 2010

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Zaure Sydykova
Bolot Dikanov
Cholpon Nogoibaeva
Marina Glooshkova



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people, particularly young men, occupied centre stage during the 7-8 April 2010 events in Bishkek. Their involvement in direct action was unprecedented and their emergence on the political arena was a clarion call to elites and broader society that something must be done to address the grievances of this mobilized sector of society.

In June 2010, the University of Central Asia, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), organized a project aimed at obtaining a better understanding of the needs of youth in and around Bishkek. The project organized seven focus groups involving 113 young people drawn from various socio-economic backgrounds. Participants spent days debating issues of *education; employment; values, culture and leisure; and social and political mobilization*. The perspectives of youth from secondary schools, vocational training institutions and universities; employed and unemployed; the politically active; and youth from the *novoistroiki*, or informal settlements outside of Bishkek, are analyzed here.

This report, compiled by a team led by Zaire Sydykova, head of SBDC Consult (Small Business Development Centre, Bishkek), summarizes and discusses the issues raised by young people. The forthcoming supplement – Transcripts of Youth Voices – provides extensive quotations from the discussions that offer a firsthand view of how youth formulate and discuss the issues they face. In addition to these documents, the project also generated a database of some 150 youth organizations active both formally and informally in Bishkek and surrounding areas.

This report highlights the discussions of young people about the everyday issues they encounter. It illustrates their understanding of their lives and how they see their future in Kyrgyzstan. According to the youth who participated, Kyrgyzstan faces a historic opportunity to move forward, and young people feel ready to participate in discussions of how to resolve the existing problems in a constructive way. With 39 percent of the country's population between the ages of 14-28, youth represent the most mobilized sector of the country.

Based on the views and perspectives of the youth, this report outlines these issues and highlights potential steps forward to strengthen approaches to youth policy.

INTRODUCTION

Youth issues are among the most frequent themes in current political discussions. Active participation of youth groups in the April events, both constructive and destructive, and the latest developments in southern Kyrgyzstan reinforce that youth are the most mobile part of society in Kyrgyzstan. To date, the need for an adequate youth policy has been focused primarily at channeling the energy of young people into creative goals and to involve them in the development of the country's socio-economic life.

This document is a description and analysis of the current problems facing young people in Bishkek and the surrounding informal settlements areas (*'novoistroiki'*), using information obtained from young people firsthand as the main source. Young people, from various socio-political backgrounds, discussed a number of issues based on responses to a series of questionnaires, focus groups, and working groups organized within the framework of the University of Central Asia project 'Giving Youth a Voice in Youth Policy' with the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Who were these young people? Participants included representatives of secondary schools, pupils and students of vocational lyceums and universities, the employed and unemployed, and youth who have joined various organizations as well as those who are not active in any groups or organizations. Focus groups were designed to identify the list of issues/problems relevant to each of the groups of young people and their ranking in order of importance from their perspective. Once identified, these issues were discussed among participants to identify the systemic causes and barriers within their microenvironment, and to debate the opportunities and possible changes needed to address such issues. Another key goal of these discussions was the identification of the reference figures and values of young people, and the identification of what main factors guided such views.

Analysis of the collected data reveals both positive and negative phenomena within the emerging trends and tendencies in the lives of young people in Kyrgyzstan today. This data helped to identify what influences their feelings and views, their conscience and behavior, their thoughts and actions, and their concerns and needs at present. In order to develop youth policy, government and society must address these issues as the first step toward identifying concrete solutions.

While a great deal of information presented serious challenges to young people today, several positive developments were also noted. It should be emphasized that these positive findings represent areas that can be channeled into the development and implementation of youth policy in the country. These include the following:

The April events led to a rise in positive expectations and an emergence of hope for a better life in the country. A view among many youth emerged about the possibilities for resolution of the numerous problems faced by young people through a collaborative effort with the government. This also led to a growth of activity and self-awareness motivated by a view that there may be changes for the better. According to young people, the country faces a historic choice, which it will either implement at this historic moment, or will fail to implement, leading to frustration and decline of social activity among youth.

Young people are able to single out problems and to identify strengths and weaknesses of arguments; they also show a desire and certain willingness to work to resolve the existing problems they face. It must be noted, however, that many youth demonstrate this desire at an emotional level, and lack the abilities and capacity to solve such problems with the necessary knowledge and skills.

During the focus group work, young people described a number of fundamental and important spheres, which shape their outlook and attitudes, shape their values and motivations, and impact their behavior. In particular, the core areas are: education, employment and access to jobs; leisure and culture, and social and political organization and activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE YOUTH

The following recommendations should be integrated into the development of a contemporary youth policy. This policy must answer the real problems that young people have, by using their energy and initiatives. It must also engage them to actively participate in implementing such a policy.

Education

- Implement changes in the curriculum and teaching methods at all levels of the education system with a focus on quality outcomes;
- Raise the professional level of instructors and implement new education standards;
- Introduce a subject in school on ‘How to Select a Future Occupation’ and include aptitude testing in the National Scholarship Test, allowing young people to think about future career paths;
- Establish a ‘Student’s Bill of Rights’ for a quality education to be advocated nationwide;
- Eliminate corruption in the higher education sector by improving teacher salaries and punishing students and instructors engaging in bribery;
- Promote Early Childhood Development (ECD) so that children enter the school system more well prepared;
- Develop a nationwide system of education credits;
- Promote internship programs for students in their areas of specialization, providing young people better opportunities to gain practical work experience before graduation.

Recruitment and employment

- Stop the brain drain by creating incentives for young professionals to remain and work in Kyrgyzstan;
- Create merit-based programs that give all young people a chance to achieve their goals, regardless of socio-economic status;
- Establish or improve upon existing organizations in place to deal with youth employment and assist in the job search;
- Develop a contract between the state and the youth to send young people abroad to develop prospective personnel for all industries;
- Arrange short-term courses on entrepreneurship and draft a program for the development of youth enterprises;
- Encourage employers to evaluate job candidates on the basis of knowledge, and not merely the possession of a college diploma;

Culture and leisure-time activities

- Promote parental involvement in their children’s education through Parent-Teacher Conferences and other activities;
- Introduce sex education courses into the secondary school curriculum;
- Promote physical education and healthy lifestyles within the school curriculum
- Prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages and tobacco near schools and limit the influence of computer game clubs;
- Hold discussions, trainings, meetings and other activities with school students dedicated to discussing the harmful effects of smoking, alcohol consumption, addiction to computer games and gambling;
- Conduct joint juvenile counseling sessions involving school administration and faculty, parents, and law enforcement and student leaders to make clear the punishment for engaging in such crime; explore greater security at schools by hiring security guards and installing security cameras where possible;
- Open free and all-inclusive youth community centers, fine arts schools, and libraries throughout the country and make them appealing to the youth;
- Develop a sense of patriotism among the youth by promoting the stories of the Kyrgyz Republic’s cultural heroes;

- Create conditions for the development of sports so as to make them more accessible, especially team sports;

Activity and self-organization

- Prohibit the mandatory engagement of university students in electoral campaigns;
- Develop various forms of student unions and implement legal awareness and public policy programs;
- Create youth teams from which the Minister for Youth Affairs receives information about the real problems of young people;
- Develop a national platform to unite all youth initiatives;
- Introduce new cultural and educational TV and radio shows for youth;
- Create a merit-based system for identifying and selecting political appointees;
- Implement a program for social protection of vulnerable youths.

Section 1: Youth and education

*“Everyone thinks that education is about getting a diploma.
The main purpose of education is broadening of horizons.”
(Quote from speech of a focus group participant)*

1.1 EDUCATION AS A SYSTEM OF STANDARDIZATION AND PREPARATION FOR LIFE

The current system of public school education in Kyrgyzstan, in general, is based on the former Soviet system, represented by classroom- and lecture-based educational lessons, with the mass cultural activities aimed at including students in all-school and extracurricular activities. The system functioned due to its complete compliance with the governmental and social systems, which were an inseparable whole. Educational institutions rather successfully coped with the tasks assigned to them, i.e. building-up knowledge, skills and mastery needed for a Soviet society with a planned economy.

Contemporary socio-economic, political, social and cultural realities, however, have created new requirements, rendering the old education system less effective. Attempts to preserve the status of this model are perceived as increasingly losing validity and causing dissatisfaction among young people. One young person commented: “The Soviet education system was designed so that every person, every citizen should be equal, and if we talk about more in detail, a person should be, say, like a well-turned screw. That is, they should not be different from other such screws. They should be identical, one to one, because it is easier to manipulate people and there is less social tension. Everyone was supposed to be on the same level, regardless of their level of intellectual development, or vice versa.”¹

This type of educational institution is viewed by students in two ways. First, young people see it as a mandatory system which is inescapable. Second, young people look at it as at an institution which gives knowledge that for the most part will never be applied in life. “School teaches a life which no longer exists ...,”² said a participant. “It is better to teach people how to be human, instead of what is no longer useful,”³ added another. As these examples indicate, school pupils sometimes perceive school as a certain system of rules and relations, in which students are immersed and required to follow the rules, not because a student believes in them, but because it is what the system requires. In particular, the existing system of teacher-student relationship is based on the paradigm of ‘dominant-dominated’, which allows for the emergence of informal, unspoken rules of communication and cooperation with teachers. Such rules benefit instructors and help students to avoid possible problems. This is especially evidenced by the mechanism of tutoring aimed at improving school performance, which has become a means for teachers

1 Transcript ‘School Youth’

2 Transcript ‘School Youth’

3 Transcript ‘School Youth’

to earn extra money. As one student noted, the old system of evaluating knowledge does not encourage a student to learn. “It’s just teachers who want to earn extra money. And this, I think, is natural.”⁴

For some student, social activities are an additional burden, which significantly affects their performance and creates difficulties in their learning process. This is particularly problematic when teachers do not approve of student involvement in mass cultural school events.

These issues are particularly prominent in the system of primary vocational education, which appears as if it had been frozen in time, preserving Soviet schemes and communication with students. Young people who study at vocational schools were the most ‘closed group’ in comparison with other focus groups in the identification and assessment of existing problems. It is precisely in this group that the ‘dominant-dominated’ paradigm was most widely observed. This group of young people is of no interest to politicians, as most have not reached the voting age (18 years of age) and is also of little interest to the higher education system, as they are enrolled in a different educational level altogether. In many ways, this group represents a certain parallel social and educational reality, reproducing to a greater extent a more conservative model of training and education. In these models, there is little individualization of choice and free will. On the contrary, patterns of conformism are clearly observed, including the rapid adoption of someone else’s position, coming from an older person (either by age or status).

In addition, the student youth emphasized low quality of teaching at universities, where young professionals know little more than their students, and in many cases much less. One participant said: “The worst problem in education is, I think, the low quality of education among young professionals who teach at higher educational institutions.”⁵ Another student echoed this view, stating that “At our university there are teachers who do not teach courses based on their educational background, and ... I think this is the most significant drawback.”⁶ The roots of this problem are deep, linked primarily to the fact that training for the teaching professions in higher educational institutes and vocational schools is based on a ‘residual principle’, i.e. those who were not able to enroll onto courses at more prestigious universities go to into the teaching profession. The lack of knowledge and poor teaching skills was highlighted by one student, who stated: “Young teachers download all information from the Internet and do not hesitate to bring in leaflets, which then they read out to us. Then what’s the advantage to us as students, when we can go and download this information.”⁷

1.2 EDUCATION AS THE SPHERE OF TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONAL WORK

It should be noted that students of vocational schools emphasize that the current labor market is more receptive to graduates of their level of education, rather than of higher education system. The knowledge and skills at the level of initial vocational education are sufficient to start labor activities. At the same time, it is not clear that the knowledge obtained at vocational institutions fully meets the needs of the labor market. The issue is related to the investment of time needed to obtain the requisite knowledge and skills. Within one to three years at a primary vocational institution, a student has enough time to fully master the primary set of knowledge and skills for entry into the labor market. In the higher education system the first two years are devoted to general education and basic sciences, while the remaining three years focus on an area of specialization. Students who have received a secondary vocational education and then enrolled into a higher educational institution noted that much of what is being taught in higher educational institutions had already been taught to them at the secondary vocational schools. Thus it appears that the functions of the secondary vocational education are often duplicated, rather than deepened, by higher education institutions.

4 Transcript ‘School Youth’

5 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

6 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

7 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

University education, accordingly, has acquired a symbolic character and is intended only for getting a diploma. Higher education standards have declined, however a university diploma still serves as a symbol of achievement, regardless of how it was obtained. At the same time while employers are interested in the practical skills obtained by a student through experience, for a student the formal indication of higher education is important. “It is necessary to have a diploma. Without a diploma, no one will hire you,”⁸ said one student.

From the perception of students, higher education is a system which gives a diploma but does not realistically prepare young people for professional work. Instead a diploma is seen as a symbolic status label. At the same time, high tuition fees create high expectations for future employment among students; students expect that upon graduation they should receive high wages, comfortable labor conditions, and other privileges. One participant stated: “The problem of our education system is that it has turned into a kind of business where, with minimum investments, they are trying to get maximum profit.”⁹ Such expectations increase the desire to migrate and search for jobs abroad.

When talking about their future professions, young people see themselves primarily serving in managerial positions or engaged in creative work, or as entrepreneurs who start their own enterprise. Little mention is made to occupations that involve manual labor. Personal and professional successes are associated with promotion in social standing; high expectations for promotion and wage increases are inherent in these views, reflecting a certain idealized future. Occupations not perceived as prestigious are not included in the personal vision of the future and were absent from the discourse, indicating a slight bias towards ‘white collar’ work. Young people discussed the need for professions of chefs, electricians, seamstresses, agricultural workers, but these were not orientated to their views of themselves.

Students view the knowledge they receive in school as, in the words of one student, “50/50, i.e. 50 percent is necessary and useful and the other 50 percent is not necessary or useful.”¹⁰ A lack of good material and technical base hinders the teaching of practical subjects such as chemistry, physics, and other related areas. Participants drew special attention to the fact that at all levels of education there is an absence of training in interpersonal or social skills, including the ability to channel information and skills to build working relationships with others, gender communication, study of gender and age issues, self-presentation skills, time management, and the ability to make decisions and to follow through on such decisions. In the eyes of the youth, the knowledge that is taught can be divided into two types: substantive subject-based fundamental knowledge and more informal knowledge passed from older students to younger students that aids them in adequately adapting to and navigating the school system. The majority of student comments relate to the failure of secondary school, vocational and higher education institutions to prepare students for adult life in obtaining necessary competencies, both substantively and socially.

It should be noted that the situation in some of the so-called elite schools and expensive educational institutions (e.g. American University of Central Asia) is relatively better than in the public educational institutions which are supported from the state budget. This does not give grounds to believe, however, that the elite schools fully meet the needs of students. The most significant distinction lies in the nature of learning environments within the two types of institutions. At those universities perceived as elite, a more prosperous learning atmosphere combined with the presence of more qualified instructors create an environment more oriented towards education achievement and mentorship.

1.3 EDUCATION AS AN ENVIRONMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Educational institutions strive to create a field of communication that shapes students’ attitudes towards themselves, others, society, and the world at large. Existing school problems relating to material and

8 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

9 Transcript ‘School Youth’

10 Transcript ‘School Youth’

financial support, however, contribute to the creation of informal hierarchies at school that teachers cannot control. On the one hand, schools try to implement mentoring functions; on the other hand, schools often cannot cope with the systems of school racketeering, which have created a second space within the school system with tougher requirements and relationships. One participant explained: “School children are divided into districts where they live and there are constantly fights. Every child knows who he depends on, apart from their parents, and how much should he pay for his membership in this group.”¹¹

The system of school racketeering described by participants is said to take two forms: 1) students’ hierarchy: violence against newly enrolled students or those who are younger or weaker which involve initiation procedures that introduce youth to a new internal structure of relationships among students. This system remains at the school level and is limited by age boundaries which a student ‘outgrows’ with time); 2) as a built in ‘zone’ at school relating to the reproduction of criminal rules in school communication, from which money is collected and sent to penitentiaries. The second context reveals a serious social problem – the spread of the racket outside of relatively controlled school space and influence of criminal groups and leaders on the impressionable youth. Such activities threaten to sow the seeds of criminal activity among a whole generation and affect the social system. While law enforcement agencies are working to regulate crime outside of schools, they should also join preventative efforts to combat such crime inside schools.

Vocational schools today also create a certain communication environment, specifically in its closed, carefully protected boundaries of its influence on students, where the teacher or leader is rarely questioned or criticized. This system allows for good control over this age group, which “are no longer children and not adults,” and those who are less tied to their parents. Yet, its strict and reserved nature complicates the communication of this group with other, more liberated groups in social dialog. Both vocational schools and universities, however, must reform their curriculum to include modern teaching methods that foster more open communication.

A positive observation is the presence of well functioning dialog within some higher educational institutions between university administration and students, as well as a system of student councils. One student said: “In our Law Academy we have an incentive to participate in student council. We participate in the social life of students, we get badges ‘Azamat’ (‘Well done’), we get 10 percent discount [on tuition fees], and the Academy sponsors our trips to the Issyk-Kul Lake.”¹² In other educational institutions such participation is treated as a mere formality. One student noted: “A person from the Academy staff is heading our student council, and all our actions are controlled by the Dean’s Office.”¹³ At the same time it is interesting to note that student councils, whether run by students or by administration, are primarily perceived by students as a source of power. According to many youth, the councils regard serving the interests and needs of students and providing meaningful communication with teachers and instructors as of secondary importance. This creates a vertical management structure where common dialog is eliminated. It appears that the traditional model of vertical power, which has operated effectively in the past, is being reproduced within the school structure.

Thus, we can build the following paradigmatic relations, which reflect the problems identified by students.

1.3.1 ‘School – student’ confrontation

An educational institution is perceived as unable to meet the needs of contemporary society in knowledge, competence and personal development. It, instead, turns into a kind of gaming space with its own established ‘rules of the game.’ An understanding of such rules helps students find a comfortable niche and protect themselves from potential communication problems with teachers or other authorities. This perception of educational process by students exposes not only purely communication problems at the student-teacher level, but also systemic issues, where an educational institution cannot prepare a student

11 Transcript ‘School Youth’

12 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

13 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

for their future life and fulfills the function of simply filling their free time in order to keep them engaging in negative, destructive types of activities. In this respect, it can be said that educational institutions often serve merely as deterrents from destructive behavior, rather than institutions that encourage creativity and constructive behavior. In this context, there is a complex set of ‘teacher-student’ relationships, in which trust and openness disappear and a division into ‘us’ and ‘them’ is observed.

1.3.2 ‘School-family’ confrontation

Students describe how the family unit, previously intended to influence the development and growth of young people, has ceased to perform its functions by transferring them to the school. Financial problems and the need to make money becomes a familiar justification for parents not to devote time to raise their children. This problem is most acute at the level of school education. School and family no longer help youth to form values and develop positive social skills that enable them to develop their educational and spiritual identity. Students are aware of the lack of consistency in their up-bringing, both at school and at family level. At the same time, they are aware of the school and family confrontation, where both justify failures as a result of the complicated financial and material situation they face. As one student said:

“Due to the fact that our country is in a difficult economic situation, parents spent much of their time on earning money and they have no time left for their children. Primarily, the family should teach children how to behave in society. Many parents come to school and complain when something happens to their children: ‘Why did it happen? You had to explain the children what is bad and good.’ Well, what is a family for? Is it just to give birth and put a child in school?”¹⁴

In general, the failure of educational institutions and families to positively socialize a student creates an open dialog, which is then filled by destructive elements, in particular by criminal groups. This creates a ‘risk space’ in which young people form their system of values and social hierarchy on the basis of criminal rules. Based on the discussions in the groups ‘School Youth’ and ‘Youth Social NGOs’, it was noted that students have close ties to criminal leaders in particular and the criminal world as a whole, and perceive this criminal world (informal organizations engaged in illegal activity) as a sort of a model system for social relations that allegedly reproduces principles of fairness, honor, and duty. The danger of this situation is in substituting the idea of social stability in the minds of youth with the idea of a criminal structure, engaged in distribution of resources and with criminals serving as models of leadership.

Certainly, not all students are considering the criminal world as a positive model, but the identified link between school students and criminal groups indicates that the value vacuum can easily be filled with destructive structures. The influence of such groups undoubtedly affects students’ attitudes to each other and their attitude to society as a whole.

1.3.3 Confrontation between traditional up-bringing and vital needs

Traditional up-bringing is more associated with ethnic norms and traditional patterns of behavior. Young people today, however, are aware of the dynamic and ever-changing socio cultural context in which they live, which require different social skills. One of the major issues of concern is sex education, which not only covers the relation between sexes, but also formation of notions of masculinity and femininity. It should be noted that in this matter some students are captives of stereotypes regarding the need to separate boys and girls in the learning process. Most likely, this stereotype is imposed by adults, because in the experience of the students this view was not widely supported.

Another confrontation between traditional stereotypes and modern realities lies in the views of young people toward the former Soviet society, school, and state. Such views tend to focus on the difference in societal structure under Soviet times which guaranteed certain social benefits that are no longer provided by the state. The stereotypical perception of the Soviet system has dual characteristics. On the one hand it is seen as a society without any opportunities for individual expression, yet on the other hand it is still seen as a kind of ideal society. Since age differences mean that today’s students did not experience

14 Transcript ‘School Youth’

Soviet life, we can assume that they are often reproducing the stereotypes of their parents, who may experience a nostalgia for their past.

1.4 Education as a form of leisure

One notable problem of students' perception of the education system lies in the fact that education is often no longer regarded as a type of activity requiring personal and mental effort, time, and a willingness to be involved in the learning process, all of which are considered essential to the personal and social development of an individual. Young people have begun to perceive education as a form of filling free time – a time filled with some kind of activity. The main explanation students offered was that they “are not interested their studies.” One participant noted: “We had 26 students in a group in the first year. Now only 8 students attend the classes. And 90% of student lost their interest because we repeat the same material.”¹⁵

Efforts by the education system to increase the independence of students and encourage self-motivation, as well as attempts to set forth increased academic requirements do not always achieve the desired result. Students have become accustomed to viewing education as a means of filling time, of which there is a great deal that needs to be ‘killed.’

1.5 Corruption in the education system

Corruption is considered by students from two different vantage points. First, it represents a kind of necessary evil that is justified by the low wages of teachers or instructors. Second, corruption in the system of higher education is perceived as a tool that allows students to free up time they would prefer to use for other types of activities by paying a bribe to a teacher, whose course is of no educational interest to them. One student described the situation as follows: “There is corruption in our university, too. Moreover, I will say that it is a very useful thing. It solves problems. For example, there are things that I don't need in my profession, and there are also teachers who won't give me the grade I pay them. It is no problem for me to pay because I don't want to waste my time on unnecessary things. My time is more important for me than money.”¹⁶

Thus in many ways corruption is perceived in a useful, if not somewhat positive light: it serves as a tool to free up time and energy. In the context of university education, corruption can also be described as a consequence of the inefficiency of the higher education system, which requires a period of five years of attendance.

1.6 Transformation of a language barrier (lack of linguistic fluency) into inter-ethnic confrontation

One of the problematic issues in the system of both higher and vocational educational institutions is the lack of common fluency in one language. It is most often due to the fact that there are a large number of schools in which the language of education is in Kyrgyz, while the language of instruction in higher education system is primarily in Russian (with the exception of ‘Manas’ and ‘Ata-Turk’ universities). There is an alarming trend noted in the transformation of student attitudes towards their linguistic competence or lack thereof. Rather than view this as a necessary skill to develop, youth report its use as a tool to generate inter-ethnic opposition. Many students do not view their lack knowledge of Russian as a problem of a purely educational nature from the view of language as a skill or educational tool; instead it is transferred into the sphere of ethnic identification and justified on these grounds. One student described their situation: “It's just that we have a lot of Russian teachers; more than Kyrgyz. And they openly give Russians higher marks. That is just not fair! When you ask: ‘Why did you give that person a higher mark, while I received a lower one?’ they answer ‘They know the answer and you don't.’”¹⁷

In this context, fluency and linguistic competence in Kyrgyz is seen as a manifestation of citizenship and associated with patriotism, leading to disagreements or minor clashes of an inter-ethnic nature on

15 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

16 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

17 Transcript ‘Students in Professional Lyceums’

a day-to-day basis. The danger here is the extension of this logic to the socio-political level. One focus groups member stated: “Young people are so ambitious nowadays and everyone is pushing each other. We now face a great rise of nationalism! If we all start to say ‘We are Kyrgyz, Kyrgyzstan is for Kyrgyz’ the consequences will be deplorable.”¹⁸

Unfortunately, it must be noted that this bias towards knowledge of the Kyrgyz language as a manifestation of patriotism is the result of what can only be described as the excessive politicization of the Kyrgyz language; the idea of national pride, dignity, and spirituality are now be identified by only one instrumental skill: knowledge of the state language.

As a result of this politicization of language, it is easy to identify a number of latent issues and potential conflicts that may arise in the future. Namely, these could include: the proclamation of the mono-national state (i.e., citizenship based not on the idea of belonging to the state, but on the idea of belonging to the titular ethnicity); the search for ‘enemies’ among other ethnic groups, labeled as ‘guilty’ of certain socio-economic situations that then leads to potentially violent ethnic conflict; the loss of the idea of patriotism as a spirit and behavior of individuals contributing to their communities; and the focus on purely ethnic-based patterns of social behavior and communication, regardless of being obsolete in a contemporary context; among many others. Such potential issues would almost certainly hinder the development of society and should be identified as potential areas of concern.

18 Transcript ‘Interest Clubs’

Section 2:

Employment and job placement

*“Previously, everyone had a duty to work, currently only the right to work remains.”
(Focus group participant’s quote)*

2.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK

According to the survey, young people identify material benefits and job security as the main factors determining their attitude towards work. The majority of young people mention that work should generate material wealth. Of particular note is the view of the role that government should play in providing jobs to youth. This was reflected in the comments of one participant, who stated that government “should make sure that we live well.”¹⁹ Recommendations or policies on what exactly needs to be done, and what measures should be taken were not suggested by young people. Expectations are linked to mandatory career growth and high wages. Those young people who discussed these issues appeared to lack the idea that employment at a certain place, albeit for low wages, can allow for the accumulation of social skills, acquiring new technologies, and overall, increases young peoples’ experience working in the real world. Among students, the motivation to search for jobs is not necessarily linked to realize their professional capacity, but rather motivated by the need to generate income, in particular for pocket money. It is important to note that individual employment is perceived by young people not as an activity aimed at self-improvement and creative transformation of the world, but rather as a set of specific skills to master.

2.2 JOB SEARCH

To help them find employment, young people are more inclined to turn to friends, acquaintances and relatives, and use information obtained from mass media. One participant stated: “I soon will graduate from university and I have already began looking for a job. I have e-mailed my CV to different organizations. My specialty is international banking. And I realized that without acquaintances it will be very difficult to find work.”²⁰ As young people mature they are increasingly turning to employment services, labor exchanges, and personnel agencies. With age, job searches become more burdensome, as the average duration of job searches increase. Another student noted: “There is a problem to find employment after graduation from higher educational institutions. Each student, when enrolling in a certain higher educational institution knows what kind of education they will get. This problem has always existed; it did not exist only in the USSR. In our country it has always existed and it will continue to be. The strongest win. Everyone gets what they deserve.”²¹ Market infrastructure is not sufficiently active. Students emphasize the poor work of career centers and educational centers. In students’ opinions, these centers offer work with low salaries and do not meet young people’s expectations.

19 Transcript ‘Working Youth’

20 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

21 Transcript ‘Student Youth’

2.3 SALARY LEVEL

As mentioned above, the level of wages is a determining factor in deciding where to work. According to the focus groups, the minimum monthly wage for young people, below which they would not agree to work, is 8,000-10,000 som (or about \$250). Students who combine work with studies earn about 5,000-6,000 som.²² Meanwhile, the average wage in the country in 2008 amounted to about 5,200 som.

The evaluation of real wages of young people is difficult due to the difficulty of breaking down incomes and consumption of young people into two different groups. The majority of employed young people spend almost all their incomes only on family needs and their own consumption.

2.4 FACTORS PREVENTING EMPLOYMENT

Young people noted that it is difficult to find work in general and especially suitable work corresponding to their expectations (in terms of wages, job security, etc.). The main reasons cited were low pay, lack of jobs in their neighborhoods, and lack of information on existing vacancies. Among the subjective factors indicated was a shortage of professional and vocational knowledge and skills, a lack of professional experience and on the job training which are required by employers, and an inability to sell oneself on the labor market.

2.5 LABOR MARKET

There is a surplus of some specialties, such as economists and lawyers. The quality of their professional skills, however, is low. For example, economists lack knowledge of quantitative methods, mathematical formulas, and other key skills. At the same time there is an obvious shortage of technology and IT specialists. There are universities that produce them, but the quality of their education is low. One of the participants said: “The problem is that the educational system does not meet market needs. Theoretical knowledge is insufficient to make students able to work well. The curriculum does not meet the requirements of the present day.”²³

The requirements of an employer for a ‘good’ job are: a diploma, extended experience/number of years of work, and professional-level skills. Also a number of social and career skills (teamwork, punctuality, ability to write, clearly express thoughts, etc.) are required. There are some challenges to this. Young people may not have work experience given their young age. Other students lack relevant professional skills from the existing system of vocational education. In addition, social and career skills are simply not developed by the higher education system. For example, there is a big problem with the organization of internships to supplement classroom instruction in higher education. Those internships that do exist often do not allow for the improvement of professional skills; students are frequently used as auxiliary labor force in other positions. Students express an interest in finding a place to do an internship; however those that do frequently find that the work does not correspond to their professional education.

2.6 ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT

Young people identified areas of alternative employment, or work that falls outside of the traditional model. The three types of alternative employment identified include the following:

22 From individual interviewing of young people

23 Transcript ‘Working Youth’

2.6.1 Projects

While the possibility to participate in project work exists, particularly for international organizations and NGOs, this requires perseverance. People usually start with volunteer work, then part-time assignments, and only then participate in projects.

2.6.2 Criminal sphere

Young people are attracted by the presence of people who keep their word, as well as by an opportunity to make quick money. “Young people join criminal structures in pursuit of easy money,”²⁴ said one student.

2.6.3 Business

What is encouraging is that a large number of young people stated that they would like to start a business. Among the students, however, there are myths associated with the need to get a higher education degree in order to become an entrepreneur. Some noted obstacles to opening their own business, such as fear and uncertainty, an absence of start-up capital, and access to borrowed funds is limited due to the requirement of collateral. There are also no available incentives for start-ups (tax holidays, interest-free loans, etc.). At the same time, it is difficult to find training courses for entrepreneurs. While there are clearly niches where businesses could be developed, particularly with information technology, young people do not appear to be aware of such opportunities.

Low wages and outgoings on family needs prohibits speaking about the availability of significant amount of own capital among the youth to engage in independent income-generating activities. Access to borrowing capital is very limited due to the impact of financial crisis, high interest rates and young peoples’ lack of marketable collateral. This fact negates the desire for about half of young people who participated in the focus groups to engage in income-generating activities.

The effectiveness of income-generating activities makes a significant impact on the level of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, which are quite low among youth. One participant asked: “Who gives us jobs? Only businesses give us jobs. When a business is being developed, then jobs will be available. Young people do not open their businesses because their level of education is low. To start a business, knowledge, and capital are necessary. This is because taxes and customs duties are high.”²⁵

24 Transcript ‘School Youth’

25 Transcript ‘Working Youth’

Section 3: Values, Culture, and Leisure

*“Basically it is necessary to develop culture and education, i.e. to acquire knowledge it is necessary to have mentoring. Knowledge without mentoring is like a crazy person with a sword.”
(Focus group participant’s quote)*

3.1 MYTHOLOGIZATION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

It is evident from the discussions that young people carry certain myths about their power and ability to dictate the future. Such views are built upon the contrast in age between youth and the older generation, rather than more tangible criterion of education, skills or accomplishments. It seems that this myth was first established at the political level, where the youth were sought in periods of election campaigns by politicians seeking to capitalize on young people’s age and perceived naiveté. In part, young people are aware of the weakness of their capabilities, but they do not always link them with their skills.

3.2 CHANGES IN VALUE SYSTEMS

Problems of organizing and spending free time, as demonstrated in the focus groups’ discussions, is closely related to issues of value orientation, culture, and morality. If young people have nothing to do, if they are not motivated to spend their time usefully, then this gap is often filled with drinking, smoking, drugs, computer games, and participation in criminal and semi-criminal youth groups. In addition, when older people organize young people’s leisure time, without regard to the views of young people themselves, it causes apathy and resentment against adults and authority, which they perceive to be suppressing their will and rights to their own interests. One student noted commented about their extra-curricular activities: “We just have too many of these programs. Every Wednesday we have one program: the best pupil in the school, the opening of the record books, inviting veterans to tea. We invite all the elderly people in our areas for a discussion, we go around to orphanages, and advertise our school. I, for example, was probably not in class for 500 hours. Teachers tell students to do these performances and activities and the students do them.”²⁶

Young people spend considerable time searching for answers to questions of morality, culture, ideals and moral values, tolerance, national identity and patriotism. One student said: “When I start to tell my peers about my ideals they say I’m crazy. For example, when I say that I am doing charity work my friends tell me that it is better to spend money on myself. The main motivation for me is religion. First of all, it gives moral values. To increase the number of religious people it is necessary to promote moral values. For example, I begin with my own environment. I will promote values among those whom I

can reach²⁷.” Another participant said: “The national consciousness will be developed if we would be inspired by general human values from childhood.”²⁸

There are a number of questions that require clear answer to young people responses:

- What is patriotism, citizenship, activeness (constructive and destructive activeness)?
- What is freedom and justice in a democratic society?
- What is market and market relations?
- What is national dignity?

Young people’s understanding of these issues at different levels within the educational system is being filled with various views, largely associated with existing social and ethnic stereotypes.

This situation is a direct reflection on the destruction of the old system of values presided over by years of strong state authority and corruption. The prolonged paralysis of (governmental) power and the strengthening informal power institutions (morals, traditions, customs, religion, as well as illegal institutions of power, represented by criminal organizations, groups, leaders) is related to the lower levels of trust in society. Such shifts in Kyrgyz society have led not only to the deterioration of traditional community structures, but also to the erosion of traditional values. For example, in the minds of some young people, crime is seen as a legitimate outlet, granting young people confidence and recognition, and serving as a means of imposing justice and supporting social order. One person commented: “The state and the crime are interlinked. As one prosecutor told me that now we need crime in our structure. ... They simply will control each other.”²⁹ Another participant noted: “The criminal authorities are trusted by everyone, this is because they behave fairly. One person is, for example, Ryspek [Akmatbaev]. He helped poor people to return their businesses when somebody took them away.”³⁰ Former values such as ‘patriotism’, ‘fatherland’, ‘good’, ‘justice’, ‘freedom’, ‘the people’ are filled with ethnic, religious, and criminally-oriented content. At the same time, the boundaries of social imperatives and personal moral boundaries, determining permissibility or impermissibility of certain actions, are increasingly blurred.

This change in value systems is seen in large part as the result of the collapse of the Soviet system, in which values had been prescribed and reproduced through the governmental ideology, education and culture, and mass media. One of the signs of change that occurred was ‘a failed coordinated system,’ under which clear guidance is being blurred the boundary is moving between ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

Another sign appears to be the fragmentation of value categories, clearly illustrated by the example of patriotism. This category is not only formerly associated with citizenship, but also with the inclusive ideas of class solidarity and internationalism. As youth described, such views of patriotism and national pride have since been transformed, and are now defined more narrowly by more exclusive notions of ethnic, regional or tribal patriotism. “I would support the idea of preserving the national identity. It is very difficult to defend our identity and individuality in the era of globalization.... We lose identity that we are Kyrgyz,”³¹ said one participant.

The degradation of power and its visible use as a tool for financial and material capitalization was also influential in the perception of young people. Young people also identified problems such as public passivity, school racketeering, lack of competitiveness and persistent shortage of money as negative trends influencing the decline in values.

27 Transcript ‘Working Youth’

28 Transcript ‘School Youth’

29 Transcript ‘Youth Social NGOs’

30 Transcript ‘Youth Social NGOs’

31 Transcript ‘Youth Social NGOs’

This process of transforming the entire system of values has most painfully affected young people who are without institutions providing guidance in values and social life, against the background of a confusing picture of the world, and their place and role in it.

The discourse ‘problems – money’ is a dominating topic in the minds of young people, that is, a lack of money was identified in all youth problems: such as lack of family communication, low level of education, corruption in the education system, lack of jobs, a lack of competitiveness, a lack necessary skills, involvement in criminal space, etc.. In this context, one can clearly see a distorted picture of the perception of the world, where money is central, while spirituality, family, education, government, and interpersonal communication are of secondary nature.

This perception of the world is a disturbing signal of the fact that there is a dominance of material over spiritual values in the discourse of young people (except for a small part of young people, who believe in progress and development).

3.3 POPULAR FORMS OF LEISURE

The analysis shows that for various reasons, young people prefer to relax and spend their leisure time at home. The most common forms of leisure activities are watching TV, playing computer games, and more often doing nothing, just ‘killing time’. A young person becomes unable to exercise an active social life outside the home. Activity will only begin when increasing the range of leisure activities through cultural, recreational, social or other significant activities are made available.

There are qualitative typological shifts in respect of young people’s free time and its value. Young people demonstrate the highest activeness in the development of ‘new’ opportunities and forms of leisure time. Two opposite trends are observed. First, the amount of free time for many of the younger generation is reduced due to the increased educational load and responsibility for a future career. Second, with increasing duration of classes, young people have much more free time, disregarding school demands, which affect their lifestyle and their habits. But there are fewer public recreational organizations for young people as they get older.

The assessment of young people’s interests and the analysis of the content structure of their free time indicate they spend their time in three areas: sports, religion and criminal activity. New suburban areas of squatters and the regions where young people fill their free time in the three above mentioned areas are of particular concern. Developing sports clubs are mainly those related to martial arts. Sports clubs develop team building skills, cooperation, and creativity. Martial arts, as such, contain a profound philosophy, but what kind of philosophy is being formed within the sports clubs is not being monitored. Sports clubs are often toys in the hands of criminal groups or individual leaders, trying to establish their local ‘rules’ in the field. There is a close relationship of sports with the criminal world, which uses sports as a disguise for their activities.

According to the focus group participants, the problem of school racketeering is not only connected with the socio-economic situation, but also with a crisis of moral values. The participants noted that racketeering is typical in secondary schools. This problem has a clear gender dimension and is considered more of a ‘male’ problem.

Young people ranked sports, KVN (*Klub veselikh i nakhodchivyykh* – a comedy performance), and clubs sessions as their preferred leisure activities. Reading, in this regard, is not as important, although many young people said that books helped them to establish their identity. At the same time young people talk about the need to make libraries more attractive places to go to. It was also noted that sports is not af-

fordable for all because of the high cost of using sports facilities or due to the lack of gym equipment. Many of them believe that preferences in leisure depend on the material possibilities. One student said: “I sing with my friends. It was the 9 May, the 65th anniversary of Victory Day. We met many veterans. We went to three or four schools and sang there. Afterwards,

Among their idols and role models, respondents gave names from the classics of the Kyrgyz, Russian and foreign literature, contemporary politicians, famous historical figures, film actors, athletes, pop stars, their fathers and grandfathers. Young people find role models also among peers and friends, and even among mafia leaders.

3.4 GROWING INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND CRIMINAL GROUPS

Religious organizations and criminal groups have filled a gap in the system of values and present new models, different from unpopular political and social organizations, to young people. They actively recruit young people primarily from families experiencing physical and financial difficulties into their activities.

The criminalization of the youth environment is one of the most dangerous problems requiring the government’s immediate intervention, even by the weak system of public administration bodies and governance in Kyrgyzstan.

Filling the free time with religion is dangerous, because of the concerns over the quality of religious education. For example, most Islamic preachers do not speak Arabic and are unable to read the Koran and other scriptures in the original language. Instead, they just reproduce scriptures produced by someone else, which may be misleading. An increasing number of religious institutions are, in fact, a consequence of the inability of secular education systems to meet spiritual needs of young people who actually equate religiosity, morality, and spirituality. One participant noted: “I am planning to wear a *hijab* soon. I have been influenced by books and my parents. My parents say that a religious person can do only good things. Take these people who participated in the looting, if they were religious, they would not have done it.”³²

At the same time, there is a complete lack of understanding of the concept of religious direction, the history of its origin, the causes of rules and regulation embedded in it. In the perception of many students, religion is viewed as a tool that can change the world, while at the same time they overlook powerful, destructive charge of religious fanaticism, which contradicts Kyrgyzstan’s secular status, where religion is separated from education and politics.

As leisure times does not offer rich diversity of affordable entertainment forms, religious, criminal and semi-criminal and semi-sports clubs and groups have a powerful shaping impact on young minds. It should be noted that government has transformed from carrying out regulation, coordination, and control functions into instruments of personal financial and material enrichment. This has caused the loss of stability and continuity, which allows religious, criminal and semi-criminal organizations to offer youth a supposedly unbreakable, unchanging system of values, backed by some material support, making it particularly attractive.

In addition, despite that for many young people, leisure is an opportunity for social and cultural integration and attainment of personal goals, the current situation offers very few forms of leisure for working youth, hence the proliferation of passive forms of leisure activities (watching television, computer games, household work, or simply ‘doing nothing’).

32 Transcript ‘Working Youth’

3.5 HARMFUL HABITS

The problem of how to spend leisure time is closely related to harmful habits (smoking, alcohol, computer games), which show up noticeably in middle school. One respondent said: “Students begin drinking alcohol and smoking in the sixth grade. When I studied in the sixth grade, half of my classmates drank vodka at parties. However, not many people smoke at this age.”³³ Another student noted: “Alcohol is such a problem. It all begins with a beer, and then you move to stronger drinks. Parents give money to their children to buy food, but students hoard it all and on Friday they drink.”³⁴ Yet another focus groups member complained: “Why do children play these computer games? It is because they have a lot of free time. They do not go in for sports or hobbies.”³⁵

Their rapid expansion of these bad habits among young people is largely due to their low cost and the inaccessibility to other, more expensive activities. For example, one hour of swimming costs 150 som, whereas the same amount is the daily price to play on slot machines, and a pack of cigarettes costs 20 som. The choice of many students in this financial situation becomes apparent. Raising the prices for cigarettes, alcohol, and computer games may not be a solution to this problem, as there immediately emerges a probability of young people becoming involved in more dangerous activities and health substances.

The problematic link is not only in the absence or high cost of alternative forms of leisure activities, but in linking this problem only with financial considerations. Highlighting this viewpoint, one student said: “even literacy requires money.”³⁶ There is an urgent need to demonstrate forms of work or ways of spending free time, which do not require money, but demonstrate creativity, wit, and the use of personal abilities and talents. One student said: “For me the main thing basically is to offer an idea. Yes, you can go in for jogging, it’s free, I really liked this idea. Previously, no one told me about this, and I myself did not think to do it. If you say ‘sports’, I imagined a club where few people come and a coach is training them. And if you jog, you learn at the same time.”³⁷

33 Transcript ‘School Youth’

34 Transcript ‘School Youth’

35 Transcript ‘School Youth’

36 Transcript ‘School Youth’

37 Transcript ‘School Youth’

Section 4:

Social and Political Activity

*“Politics is interesting. Politics involves communication with people”
(Focus group participant’s quote)*

The main niches for youth public organizations are the education system and the sector of NGO. Independent political youth groups usually form in moments of violent change of power and there is very limited time for it. In view of the availability of youth quotas for elections into parliament, political parties have youth wings, whose activities are limited only to limited functions, determined by the adult members of the party. Additionally, in recent years, religious organizations and criminal groups have become the institutions that are actively shaping the youth environment in Kyrgyzstan.

4.1 POOR SELF-ORGANIZATION AND SUBORDINATE POSITION OF YOUTH NGOS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

School, vocational school and higher educational institution youth groups, for the most part, are a continuation of the administrative apparatus of educational institutions. They poorly target the interests of pupils and students. Instead, they tend to perform administrative functions of learning processes, and to a lesser extent, of mentoring. “They are ‘cutting off the oxygen’, and the dean’s administration is not giving any work. We have a student council which is headed by a member of the Academy, and our activities are controlled by the dean,”³⁸ said one participant. Even direct self-governing institutions, such as school students’ parliament or students’ councils, are poorly institutionalized and do not have broad support among students, which often leads to a formal observation of duties.

This situation reflects the current state of the education system as a whole, where strict vertical control continues to exist, based on control on behalf of the administration of both students and teachers and instructors. The availability of boards of trustees at schools does not alter the substance of the case, as for parents, despite the fact that they pay for their children’s education there is no norm or habit to act as a client, requiring both high-quality educational services and opportunities for students to organize govern their activities.

It should be noted that pupils and students also reproduce the model of a rigid hierarchical system, which demonstrates their perception of self-governance institutions. For young people the value of self-governance is that they view it as a source of power rather than a service function in relation to pupils and students.

There are various initiatives that do not receive further institutionalization, but play an important role in the socialization process of youth, acting as those promoted by the society, including by peers. Activities take on a special role in the social life of students.

In general, the existence of public youth organizations within a rigid hierarchical system of education determines their subordinate position and gives little impetus for the development of their activities.

4.2 NGO SECTOR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

The emergence of youth NGOs is a relatively new phenomenon in the civil sector of Kyrgyzstan, which has not yet acquired its proper niche among non-commercial services, but has already demonstrated its readiness to join the fight for resources. The NGO sector has had little opportunity to develop purely youth organizations, but the range of possibilities can be extended when choosing a specialization, for example, human rights or the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

A restriction for youth organizations' access to funding and training, particularly in rural areas and among internal migrants, is insufficient knowledge of English and Russian languages, which are the vehicles of communication between the donor community and NGOs. At the same time, the willingness to become involved in political and public activities on behalf of young people from among the domestic migrant workers is much higher than that of the indigenous inhabitants of cities.

Underutilized opportunities for the development of youth organizations is volunteerism, which can combine the desire to do charitable work and needs of other segments of the population, especially vulnerable groups. A survey conducted within the framework of the project 'Voices of Youth', confirms young people's positive attitude towards volunteering, which is an important argument for the development of the volunteer movement and its support from the state and the donor community.

4.3 YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACTIVITIES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Engaging youth in political parties was a requirements of the national legislation (the latest version of the Election Code), but also reflected a need to expand work with the electorate in the regions. With few exceptions, youth wings of political parties play an auxiliary role, and their use by party leaders increases during election periods.

Youth wings play an important role in developing expectations for qualitative changes within the parties, transformation of the parties from the parties of an individual to membership-based parties. They also increase the outreach level of political parties, especially in the regions. Young people should be involved in improving quality of program strategies and other party documents through innovative proposals. In general, the arrival of young people in the party structures could be described as the expectation of progress, both in party building and in the development of the political system as a whole. To date, however, no visible changes in the activities of parties associated with the arrival of young people have been observed. Most of the youth wings duplicate the activities of the main part of the party, and are not able to influence party development.

4.4 ABSENCE OF A COORDINATING CENTER WITH HORIZONTAL CONNECTIONS

A major problem identified by the focus groups is the lack of a single coordinating center that could help them to connect their creative efforts, starting from the local level to the national level, and then to the global level. Currently religious institutions and criminal groups are taking over this functional role of coordinating centers.

In Kyrgyzstan, there are no large-scale youth movements or associations that could reflect the interests of a half million young people. The newly established Ministry of Youth Affairs, in the same manner as the old Committee of Youth, does not have close links with 'real' young people, who in turn do not

perceive this body as capable of solving youth problems, coordinating various interests or becoming a focal point in development. One student said: “I have participated in most organizations, and was in the Department of Youth Affairs. I can not say with certainty, but I assume that there is no definite direction in shaping youth policy. And if such attempts are made, and, moreover, if such a policy exists, then why do I, a fourth year student and president of my university, do not know about it? I was invited several times, and I tried to participate in all meetings. I was invited by UNDP to participate in shaping the ‘Green Book’ and so on. Where is the youth policy formed, and the rights of young people are read aloud? Probably somewhere at the top, they have developed and heard it, and did not say anything about its adoption. Youth politics in Kyrgyzstan is not developed, it is almost absent, and what does it lead to?”³⁹ Another student noted: “I do not know what a huge ministry will do, when even the Department of Youth did not know what to do. Could you explain to me, what is the Ministry on Youth Affairs? We must all understand and know what youth policy is about, and formulate a normal single definition that everyone understands.”⁴⁰ This fact allows us to talk about broken ‘power - youth’ systems, in which ‘power’ cannot undertake the function of a consolidating center. Young people do not perceive this body as really operational, and views it at a certain distance from their lives. In addition, there is certain political speculation on the interests of young people during election campaigns, when the emerging youth movements exist for a short period of time and are often formed by private political interests, which result in alienating young people from the government, or builds in a protest attitude towards them. Youth is aware of its puppet role in the period of political change, but this situation negates the possibility of there being a progressive nature among youth movements.

A lack or undefined system of values for a young person is causing them to confuse goals. A system of values is not provided in the family (except for few families), school, vocational school, higher educational institution, or in society in general. In addition, an uneven socialization of urban and rural youth takes place, the emergence of marginalized strata with blurred value imperatives, insufficient language skills, which makes it more complicated to join different groups of young people.

Young people have high expectations of the state and higher authorities that can ‘instruct top-down’ methods and solutions to existing problems. There is no difference between higher authorities and local self-government bodies in the views of young people. In addition, there is a perceived need to demonstrated civil initiatives in the rural areas, without instructions from the center, but the lack of this is indicated in the passiveness towards civil duties.

For the most part there are ambivalent views about the effectiveness of educational and social systems. Some protest against the Soviet schemes, while others do not understand other, better forms and patterns. As a consequence, there is a desire to revive the former Soviet forms, which were effective in their historical period of time.

4.5 ACTIVE PERSONALITY

A serious gap in the education system today is the absence of a model of a socially active person, which could be a kind of benchmark for young people. Developing such a model would help the education system clearly define its objectives on formulation of a personal-civil core of values.

Some elements of such a socially active person are discussed by young people. In particular, they have a positive attitude towards volunteering, which indicates availability in their representations of some active person, but they are not yet integrated into the existing realities, and are associated only with individual skills (ability to present oneself and communicate), and are not of a conceptual nature.

³⁹ Transcript ‘Student Youth’

⁴⁰ Transcript ‘Student Youth’



Conclusion

The focus group activities revealed several underlying and relevant areas of life for youths that form their worldview and opinions, and affect their behavior and actions. What areas are these? These include education, recruitment and employment, leisure-time activities and culture that affect young people's ability to organize and adapt themselves to the current situation.

Education plays a major role in the life of a contemporary person. Today, people spend a third of their lives obtaining an education. This has become almost a required norm in society, a condition without which any further successful career building is rendered impossible, according to young people. Education problems take root in the secondary schools, especially at the junior high level. The society has formed a stereotype that is well supported and reproduced by both the adult and younger generations that the most important aspect of education is the diploma. Poor motivation to obtain an education has become ubiquitous. Young people admit that today the quality of education is poor. Teaching is not aimed at providing practical skills or knowledge and fails to provide solutions to young people's problems. Education fails to communicate to young people such ideas as the value of knowledge and that such an asset is achieved through hard work. Today, education is too commercialized and mostly aims to teach something that will not be useful in real life.

Young people were able to adapt themselves to the new situation in the education system. Money and connections solve almost all their problems, they think. Young people are actively involved in searching for money, thus studying becomes a secondary issue. Being able to stay enrolled in education institutions and continue to study is secured by the corruption that has emerged and solidified in the education system.

As a result, education problems in the future will transform into recruitment and employment problems. First, young people driven by the idea of obtaining a diploma rather than knowledge will enter departments that offer specialization that serve no future purpose.

Young people's current education needs do not correspond to labor market trends. As a result, Kyrgyzstan boasts an excess of certain occupations and a shortage of specialists in others with high unemployment rates among youths.

Second, young people have unreasonable expectations with respect to both work and salaries. Material benefits have become one of the most dominant aspects of motivation in the search for and selection of employment. Very few young people today are willing to work for the sake of self-improvement and gaining additional skills and abilities. In many ways, young people's expectations are tied to career growth rather than the realization of their performance and employment potential.

An alarming situation is emerging with regard to culture and value benchmarks among young people. They are witnesses to the double standards of adult's lives, and they being to blur the distinction between good and evil, and, in effect, the criminalization of ideals and behavior of youths takes place. As very young people say, criminal circles and crime provide support to ordinary people and helps to resolve their problems, that is, technically, supposed to come from government. It is alarming that certain young people are inspired by local gang leaders and career criminals. A common feature of school life is now racketeering (criminal bullying and extortion). Each school student faces this problem. In addition, the age of alcohol consumption and smoking has drastically decreased. These phenomena are now widespread. Parents and schools are not longer able to curb these trends.

With respect to leisure time activities, many young people have noticed that there are fewer opportunities for them to be engaged in something due to financial problems. Leisure time is limited to homes and the street. Young people lack alternatives to accessible and affordable activities. As a result, young people choose the most affordable activities, such as computer games, alcohol, cigarettes, and just doing nothing.

It is important to note that the ever-increasing affect of criminal circles and religious organizations is felt through sports clubs (especially martial arts sports clubs) and religious and cult-based institutions (e.g. mosques, churches, etc.).

In the area of youth social and political activity, it is clear that there are certain issues which mark young people's experiences. The public life in education institutions, according to young people, is not build on their initiatives, but rather is imposed on them by the administration. Increasingly young people join high school and university self-governance institutions, but with the focus on gaining power instead of the promotion and protection of students' interests. Youths tend to join political parties for the very same reasons.

The country development strategies that young people suggest contain more strategies aimed at reverting back to the past, to historical and cultural archaisms of the past. Innovations and modernization strategies are virtually absent. Youth policies are even more closed and create even more stereotypes in society.

Young people do not see their engagement in various political and public organizations as a way of creating a benchmark or model for young people to follow and apply their skills, abilities and competencies to contributing and improving such efforts.

The description of youth problems and the possible methods for resolving them by young people must form the basis of youth policy. Examining their interests allows not only to create an effective state policy, which could resolve young people's real problems, but also motivate the active part of the young to participate in achieving their goals.

