

Giving people a voice: Community radios, cross-border exchange and participative media productions in Kyrgyzstan

External Evaluation Report | Executive Summary
Kyrgyzstan

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Background

Kyrgyzstan is the only country in Central Asia, which is on the way to a relatively stable parliamentary democracy. Around 64 per cent of the approximately 5.7 million inhabitants live in rural areas. However, their issues and problems receive little attention from the decision makers in the capital. Placed at 85th out of 180 countries on the “Reporters without Borders” press freedom list 2017, Kyrgyzstan occupies the best position among the Central Asian countries. Compared to other countries in the region, freedom of the press is of greater importance in Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, the country’s media is still divided into those that are loyal to the government and those in opposition. Since the end of 2016, the situation for both the media and journalists in Kyrgyzstan has changed. Journalists and even Internet users are being increasingly penalized when they freely express their opinions on websites and on social media. In 2016, a committee to protect freedom of expression was set up to. Additionally, an independent journalist network on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border has been giving balanced reports on the situation and problems in the border area since 2015, and is, thus, providing well-researched information and has contributed to media diversity.

The aim of the DW Akademie project (2015-2017) is to enable disadvantaged sections of the Kyrgyz population to enforce their rights through participatory journalism. In order to achieve this, sustainable structures are being created so that the public, in particular disadvantaged groups, including women, can be involved in media production. The project strengthens the cooperation of community media and public service broadcasting to improve rural reporting and participatory programming. Finally, the work in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region promotes the exchange of local journalists to provide credible information to the population from the border area.

The following project objectives were set in three working areas, aligning to the following DW Akademie strategic areas: social participation, qualification, and professionalization and economic sustainability of the media sector: 1. Young women and men from rural areas inform themselves on issues that are important to them (in particular the labor market, women’s rights, health) through programs by community media and public-service broadcasting, and are

actively involved in program production. 2. Central Asian farmers and small business owners are strengthened in their freedom of information through comprehensive information on rural development in their regions. 3. The people in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border area receive well-balanced and professional information on current developments in the region, based on a permanent information and exchange process by local media.

The target groups include young women and men in rural areas aged between 18 and 30, local journalists in the border area between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, journalists from Central Asia, as well as farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan.

Partners in this project are the association of the Kyrgyz citizens'/community media, OTRK, OSCE Academy Bishkek, and the Public Association of Journalists of Kyrgyzstan.

The aim of this evaluation, which was carried out by an external consultant, is a constructive assessment of the project results after completion of the first funding phase (2015-2017). The evaluation is based on the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and uses a method mix, including document and literature analysis and interviews with project managers, project partners, and target groups on site. The recommendations made at the end do not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of the project team. Nevertheless, all suggestions were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.

Conclusions of the project evaluation

Through the strategic work with community media ("participation in society" of DW Akademie's strategic model), a wide range of opportunities have arisen for the civilian population (particularly the rural population, women, and youth) to be involved in existing information flows of mainstream media, and articulate their interests. The establishment of media centers and community radio stations has led to increased access to external information and, in turn, relevant information, topics and problems from rural areas are able to flow back to the capital and the mainstream media. Qualification initiatives for both actors from community media as well as young journalists are relevant for improved reporting, especially in rural areas. The measures in the strategic area "Professionalization and economic sustainability of the media sector" are relevant because they enable improved and conflict-sensitive reporting in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border area. The criterion **relevance** has therefore been evaluated as "comprehensively fulfilled."

In order to evaluate the DAC criterion effectiveness, the project's logical framework impact logic and its indicators was examined based on the present strategy and the impact matrix. Project objectives 1 and 3 are expected to be achieved by the end of 2017, or at least intermediate results which are target-oriented. In the case of project objective 3, however, the work was greatly delayed for reasons due to external political influences. Nevertheless, good results have now been achieved. Target outcome 2 will not be reached within the current timeframe. Yet, since content-based elements of the field of work have been very positively evaluated, there should possibly be a rewording of the goal setting. The criterion, **effectiveness**, was therefore evaluated in total as being "generally fulfilled."

DW Akademie's project partners have confirmed the funds which were made available were efficiently used. Measures are conscientiously calculated; funds are used cost-effectively and settled transparently. The project achieves synergies through cooperation with other stakeholders. The criterion **efficiency** has been evaluated in total as "comprehensively fulfilled."

Particularly when analyzing project objective 1, it is clear that the project has contributed to the increased social participation of the population (in certain regions) through providing relevant information and participatory cooperation. In the long term, the project can contribute to the strengthening of target groups in their rights of freedom of expression and freedom of information. The increased professionalism of local media and the transparency of the reporting are, hence, showing the initial positive effects on the conflict-laden co-existence in the border regions. The potentials of the positive influence on the media and the constructive exchange of media producers/representatives can contribute in the long term to an improvement of the relations between the Central Asian countries (Project objectives 2 and 3). The criterion **impact** has been evaluated in total as "generally fulfilled."

Over the two years of implementation the project partners have already developed strong and visible ownership of the project. However, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the DAC criterion of sustainability after such a limited period. Due to the shortness of the intervention period, one cannot fully identify a comprehensive institutionalization of measures and financing concepts in the responsible institutions. There are, nevertheless, approaches on dissemination strategies that allow for the sustainability of the measures, e.g., through the implementation of the new citizens'/community media law. Furthermore, the ownership of all project partners has received very positive appraisal after two years of project duration. Taking into account the short implementa-

tion period and the limited opportunities to deeply embed long-term impacts the criterion **sustainability** has still been assessed in overall as “generally fulfilled.”

The project is very active in the donor harmonization process and tries to produce synergies. There are numerous potentials for cooperation and additional financing possibilities and these are being utilised by the project management. The criterion of **coherence, complementarity, and coordination** has been evaluated in total as “comprehensively fulfilled.”

Key recommendations

1. The community media and its umbrella organizations have a high potential to bring the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan into the information flows of the country; it is thus recommended to continue the intensive support in this field. The newly established independent journalist network in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border area should also continue to benefit from funding so that in future it can contribute even more to information and media diversity - especially in this sensitive region. Conflict sensitivity and security for journalists should continue to be the focus of attention.
2. The Summer Academy for Central Asian journalists has proven to be a successful instrument for a central Asian exchange and information flow beyond borders. The relatively small number of graduates per year should be subject to an efficiency check (cost-benefit ratio). Despite the small numbers, the impact of the participation and former network appear to be relatively high; here a shift in focus should increase efficiency. Conflict-sensitive journalism and other current joint central Asian issues could be focused on. Further possibilities are the positive influence of the media landscapes in the respective countries through the graduates, and improved communication as well as a more intensive constructive and conflict-sensitive exchange between the central Asian countries.
3. Within the framework of the summer academy (project objective 2), the importance of the alumni network was repeatedly raised locally. This network (and its presence on social media) could perhaps be utilized more intensively, e.g., for “career tracking” of graduates. This would certainly provide interesting information and case studies which could also be processed in the media. Such stories and examples could serve as role models for young people (also within the scope of community media commitment or schools).
4. The consultant recommends targeted and selective provision of partner institutions with necessary technical equipment. Through conceptual embedding and appropriate grants, community media, in particular, can with this equipment realize their work and are encouraged to achieve their goals. The equipment that has been provided to date has been used effectively.
5. Within the phase of the project concept development, parallel to creating the impact matrix a gender-sensitive Peace and Conflict Assessment should be carried out which presents both risks at target and output levels (differentiated according to general, institutional, and personal risks) as well as analyzes possible unintended impacts. A brief and concise human rights analysis and a description of the degree of media/freedom of expression can be included in the PCA. The PCA matrix serves as an orientation for the project and can be modified/adapted during the course of project implementation.
6. The offer of further education/training in the different areas could be enriched with modules such as ‘conflict-sensitive journalism,’ or ‘freedom of expression and the media’ so that awareness of restrictive measures and how to deal with them can be developed. This can apply to both measures in the area of community media as well as the work with the different media institutions. The extent to which direct support to the committee is possible and appropriate should be checked/assessed by the project.
7. It is recommended that the project management carry out a more intensive documentation of the developments and successes. Within the framework of the project implementation, various learning processes have developed, and innovations have been successfully implemented (e.g., the Kyrgyz-Tajik border journalism project). These processes and innovations should be processed and documented in terms of knowledge management.
8. At the same time, monitoring procedures and results should be better presented and made accessible. It is recommended that for a subsequent evaluation of the individual monitoring procedures and results, brief summaries – available in Russian – should be prepared in English or German.
9. Project management is further recommended to counter focusing on one single person (coordinator) regarding knowledge of sequences, relationships, monitoring, etc. The absence of this person can lead to sensitive knowledge gaps.

10. For future evaluations it is recommended that the evaluation team have in place a system of double task assignment, i.e., two team members performing the tasks together. The composition, in particular, of internal (media and DW expertise, journalism experience) and external (evaluation experience and instrument routine) team members has been very positive. The doubled capacities allowed for a wide range of different issues to be covered; results/problems were highlighted by different parties, and discussions and results were reflected together.

DW Akademie

DW Akademie is Germany's leading organization for media development and Deutsche Welle's center of excellence for education and knowledge transfer. As a strategic partner of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development we strengthen the universal human rights of free expression, education, and access to information.

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