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# The Continuing Development of the NGO Sector in Kyrgyzstan: Experience from one NGO in Naryn KG

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Capstone Paper 2011

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Bradley Pribe

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## Thanks to...

I would like to thank all those who helped me complete this research and make my graduate and Peace Corps experiences great. Special thanks to the Stevenson Center and its students, Dr. Frank Beck, Beverly Beyer, and Martha ---. I could not have completed this paper without the help of Illinois State University, the staff of the Political Science Department, my research advisor Dr. Julia Webber, Peace Corps, Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan staff, the Naryn Education Center, my director Nazira Kaseeva, and my counterparts. I relied heavily upon my fellow K-17s from Naryn, Carl Beien, Anne Elliott, and Barbra McCarthy for editing, suggestions, and support. Lastly, I could not have done any of this without receiving unconditional mental and emotional support from my family, friends, and Katilyn Wallace in the U.S.

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## Introduction

Central Asia, once a part of the Soviet Union, is located between China, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Kyrgyzstan (KG) is a small country with a population of 5.5 million people, 20% of the population living within two cities, the capital, Bishkek, and the second largest city of Osh.<sup>1</sup> Mountains are the most distinctive physical feature, covering more than two thirds of the country and separating certain areas from others with only a small mountain pass as the means of travel. Surprisingly, the average American knows very little about Central Asia, much less Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, I decided to share my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) working in the Naryn Education Center (NEC) in Naryn, KG. My organization reflects a common story of the contemporary successes and struggles of non-governmental organizations (NGO)<sup>2</sup> in KG and Central Asia. This case study of one organization will provide a good presentation of how far KG has developed since gaining independence from the Soviets in 1991, and how far the country still has to go in order to develop a civil society. Additionally, I will explain how international organizations working in KG assist many of the basic financial and training needs of local organizations, increasing their dependence on outside funding and resource development. Many national and local NGOs receive international financial help. This dependency deserves intimate review to see why and how this process has influenced the development of civil society (CS) in this country.

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Fact Book (2011)

<sup>2</sup> NGO can be defined as an organization that is independent of the government and does not seek to make a profit such as a business. Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 3-4

Although Kyrgyzstan and its people have a long history, in order to understand the focus of my research one needs to understand how the end of the Soviet Union has influenced the country over the past twenty years. Many factors went into the collapse of the Soviet Union but some of the major factors were Mikhael Gorbachev *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, which led the changes to economic reform and a democratic government. These changes led to economic difficulties, a weakened state, and social protest. With the Soviet Union bankrupted and a failed coup by members in the communist party, Boris Yeltsin took power and ended the Soviet Union thus ending the seventy year rule of communism in Russia and its satellite countries.<sup>3</sup>

Before the collapse, KG was a part of the Soviet Union with virtually no outside influence or capital allowed into KG. Even though Kyrgyz people did not want to become independent of the Soviet Union, they had no choice because the Soviet Union no longer existed so the parliament voted to be an independent on August 31, 1991. KG was forced to become an independent nation, create a new political system within the country, and develop a new economy that was not dependent on the structured economy of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> In 1991, international organizations descended the country and many other newly independent states seizing the opportunity to introduce Democracy. Many of these organizations were from the western democracies, mainly the U.S. with organizations such as USAID and other organizations were from the United Nations and the International Red Cross. With them came western ideals such as democracy, civil society, and market economy. Along with western ideals came western money. Foreign aid had continued since the early 1990s and has not stopped coming

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<sup>3</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 10-11

<sup>4</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 35

into the country since. The constant aid with little accountability until recent years has created the dependency on foreign money and an inability to raise necessary funding from within is the situation witnessed today in KG.

This has led local NGOs and in my personal case the NEC, to rely too heavily on the assistance of international organizations. This capstone aims to explain the current situation in KG. Specifically, the creation of the NEC, the work the organization does, how it provides services to the community, and the influence international donors have had on the organization, including the work I have done. Finally, suggestions about the direction in which the organization should go in the future are addressed with a view to establishing the NEC as an independent organization.

## **Literature Review**

### **Civil Society**

Civil Society (CS) literature focuses on what the term means in a modern international context as well as how it has progressed in post-Soviet KG. In 1991, the collapse of the USSR granted KG, as well as four other countries, independence.<sup>5</sup> As Janice Giffen, Lucy Earle, and Charles Buxton state in their research, “The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia” it is the best approach to develop these newly created “transition” states and to support democratic ideals with a liberal market economy.<sup>6</sup> The best way to achieve these goals was

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<sup>5</sup> Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

<sup>6</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 7



through a “strong, independent civil society.”<sup>7</sup> Civil society (CS) was promoted to the countries by donor organizations, transnational organizations, and politicians from the US and Europe.<sup>8</sup> As Anna Matveeva explained, it was not just democracy and a liberal economy but the international community promoted participation from the people, good governance, delivery of basic services, and rule of law.<sup>9</sup> Other important issues supported by the international community were human rights, gender equality, and fair and free elections.<sup>10</sup>

When the international community, especially the donor community, came into Central Asia, many did not believe Central Asia had any concept of CS. Therefore, they imported their own concepts.<sup>11</sup> There are many definitions of CS in western literature. Altinay Kuckukeeva and John O’Loughin give a basic definition of CS as an “autonomous voluntary sphere that lies between the individual and the state.”<sup>12</sup> Giffen, Earle, and Buxton expand on that definition by defining it this way, “An intermediate realm situated between state and household, populated by organised groups or associations which are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests.”<sup>13</sup> Examples of CS are NGOs such as charity organizations, unions, religious organizations, professional groups, self-help groups, and social groups.<sup>14</sup> Matveeva defines CS as independent groups in a society that the state did not create. These groups

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<sup>7</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 7

<sup>8</sup> Matveeva (2008) p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Clayton, Oakley & Taylor (2000) p. 2-3

<sup>11</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 212

<sup>12</sup> Kuchukeeva & O’Loughin (2003) p. 559

<sup>13</sup> Giffen, Earle, and Buxton, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008) p. 20

represent a part of society with similar interests or goals.<sup>15</sup> Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a large global network of Aga Khan Organizations, is an agency that is present all over Central Asia, as well as other areas of the world. AKDN defines CS as different organizations and actors in a society that are not a part of the government and non-commercial with differing goals and objectives which can improve the lives of the people living within the countries they live.<sup>16</sup> The definitions change somewhat, but there is a similarity between them. However, these definitions mean little when put into nonwestern non-individualist context in a region of the world with a different historical tradition that includes collectivism and tribal communities. In the U.S., there is a long history of CS. As noted by Alexis de Tocqueville as far back as the 1830s, CS is an American tradition.<sup>17</sup> However, CS within the KG cultural did not really exist possibly because it was a tribal cultural and therefore many of the actions done by CS within an individual cultural, such as the U.S., is instead done by the larger family group or tribal group within the collective culture such as KG. But KG did have some informal groups that could be considered similar to CS such as the *ashar* and *aksukak councils* which will be explained later in the paper.

The previous CS definitions are important for understanding the framework or approaches that western donors used, and continue to use, into post-Soviet countries. Humle and Edwards describe the New Policy Agenda (NPA) as an approach of Western donors to

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<sup>15</sup> Matveeva (2008) p. 3

<sup>16</sup> AKDN Civil Society Programme Kyrgyz Republic (2006) p. 1

<sup>17</sup> de Tocqueville (1956) Focus on Chapter 1

organize CS around “neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory.”<sup>18</sup> This approach may be described as the neo-liberal or mainstream approach.<sup>19</sup> The neo-liberal approach supports the democratic process by bypassing the corrupt state and going directly to the citizens. By using this approach, citizens are encouraged to participate within CS, because it holds the state more accountable to the rule of law and ensures the continuation of social services.<sup>20</sup> Citizens are also involved in the economic process in a free market. With all citizens involved in the process, it will not lead to the exclusion of marginalized groups such as the poor.<sup>21</sup> This approach was heavily promoted by international organizations, because CS was the only way to reach a democratic and free market economy.<sup>22</sup> The CS, supported by western donors, was overwhelmingly involved in the NGO sector and not other formal and informal groups or associations traditionally considered a part of CS that existed in KG.<sup>23</sup> NGOs will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Western countries and donors specifically chose KG as the model country to follow for this neo-liberal approach in Central Asia. In the early 1990s, KG became “Central Asia’s Island of Democracy.”<sup>24</sup> KG was given this name because of the government, specifically the calls of the first President Akaev to follow certain steps. These steps were to end communist principles and authoritarian rule, peacefully reform the social structure, establish basic freedoms such as

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<sup>18</sup> Humle & Edwards (1997) p. 5

<sup>19</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 7

<sup>20</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 212

<sup>21</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 7

<sup>22</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 24

<sup>23</sup> Ibid & Shulte (2008) p.5

<sup>24</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 117

freedom of the press, move towards a market economy, and create an open society i.e. CS.<sup>25</sup>

There are many examples of successes towards these goals. In 1991, Jogorku Kenesh, the Kyrgyz Parliament, passed a law privatizing most factories, construction, land, and services.<sup>26</sup> In 1993, KG was the first Newly Independent State (NIS) to have its own currency, the Som, backed by the IMF.<sup>27</sup> When high inflation happened that same year, the IMF, with its influence, decided on restrictive credit and monetary policies, which helped to decrease inflation.<sup>28</sup> In 1998, KG was one of the first NIS countries to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>29</sup> During the early 1990s, a fairly independent media existed.<sup>30</sup> KG also had the most favorable laws for NGOs, including the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations passed in 1999.<sup>31</sup> This law allows organizations to function legally without registering with the government; KG is the only country in Central Asia that permits this.<sup>32</sup> This is important because not all organizations have the means to travel to the capital and register with the government but they can still be a legal organization albeit not formally registered.

CS was not developing as many donors hoped, despite these positive steps toward a Western style CS. As Jude Howell points out in his article, "In Their Own Image: Donor Assistance to Civil Society," there has been much discussion in political theory about the positive relationship between CS and the development of a free market thus helping to relieve

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<sup>25</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 12; Connery (2000) p. 1; & Anderson (2000) p. 78

<sup>26</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) P. 12

<sup>27</sup> Connery (2000) p. 3

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Heap, Jamanova, Osmonbetov, Salmorbekov, Shukurova & Terterov (2000)p. 18

<sup>30</sup> Anderson (Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan p. 8

<sup>31</sup> Abdusalyamova & Warren (2007) p. 11

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

poverty.<sup>33</sup> However, Howell states that there has been little empirical evidence of this relationship, because the Western style of CS when exported to other countries often ignores the difficulties in overcoming the diverse social, economic, and political conditions within a given developing country.<sup>34</sup> Given this, it is little wonder that the once promising island of democracy ran into difficulties.

One of the most difficult aspects KG ran into during the 1990s was the failure of social reforms and liberal economic policies leading to economic growth. This early model of democracy followed the rules of the Western powers, i.e. IMF and World Bank, but the promised prosperity never came.<sup>35</sup> Its neighbors, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with their authoritarian governments, have become more prosperous because of their better natural resources and not due to their democratic governments.<sup>36</sup> The previous KG President believed that liberal economic policies and commitment to democracy would make the country a more attractive place to invest, but this turned out to be false. Lack of economic success, despite pursuing liberal policies, pressured international organizations like the World Bank to continue lending and international donors to keep providing assistance.<sup>37</sup> The effects were that CS in KG during this period became synonymous with NGOs and not the various forms of CS.<sup>38</sup> NGOs had a lot of money given to them but their donors did have hold the NGOs to high standards of

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<sup>33</sup> Howell (2002) p. 121

<sup>34</sup> Howell (2002) p. 121

<sup>35</sup> Connery (2000) p. 3

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> The international Donor community had pledge almost half a billion dollars by the end of 1993. Connery (2000) p. 3

<sup>38</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008)p. 5

anti-corruption, responsible spending, and achievable missions, and meeting success.<sup>39</sup> This lack of oversight resulted in many organizations being unsustainable.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, many NGOs were created to attain money being given away by donors, and the donors had little incentive to assess the community's needs, the development of the NGO or its mission.

It looked promising during the early years of independence. However, by 1994 President Akaev was backing down from his earlier commitments to social, political, and economic reform.<sup>41</sup> In 1994 and the years following, journalists critical of the government were prosecuted with libel.<sup>42</sup> The Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 1995 were characterized by manipulation. Akaev increased his presidential powers and restricted CS using a Parliament full of his allies and a corrupt referendum.<sup>43</sup> Although social organizations that made up most of CS still grew during this period, the government divided them into two groups, "harmless or useful" and "critical."<sup>44</sup> Human rights groups were placed in the "critical category," and they faced immense pressure from the government.<sup>45</sup>

The President became increasingly authoritarian at the beginning of the new millennium, and foreign donors began to question their presence in the country thus putting international aid in jeopardy.<sup>46</sup> However, after 9/11 the US government installed the Manas Air

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<sup>39</sup> Connery (2000) p. 10

<sup>40</sup> Connery (2000) p. 10

<sup>41</sup> Anderson (2000) p. 79-80

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Cummings & Nørgaard (2003) p. 16-17

Base<sup>47</sup> making KG a strategic location in the “War on Terror” by having an airbase that supplies both troops and equipment to the War in Afghanistan and Iraq. After the installation of the Manas Air Base, donors were pressured to maintain some of their commitments. Another reason that international donors kept giving KG’s CS money was that compared to other Central Asian countries KG was still the most democratic and economically liberal despite its President increasing his presidential powers.

During the 1990s, the feeling was very hopeful among the international community. KG would become a model of democracy and free market policies, and stand as a strong example for other Central Asian countries. This led to international donors coming into KG and acting as if KG was a “greenfield site”<sup>48</sup> allowing them to use “Western blueprints”<sup>49</sup> and focus on creating entirely new context for NGOs instead of establishing the new NGOs within the existing political and cultural context. However, KG had a long history and culture before the fall of the Soviet Union, that international donors did not take into account when trying to develop CS and a free market. In this early period for NGO and CS, international donors were more interested in institutionalizing NGOs as a part of KG than creating strong NGOs with strong missions that addressed specific issues of the local population.<sup>50</sup> However, during the early 2000s up to the present, different scholars have put the western ideal of CS in question. The “alternative” approach is more open for interpretation in defining CS. The alternative approach uses “ideals of mutual support and solidarity and acknowledging power differentials

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<sup>47</sup> Now named the Manas Transit Center

<sup>48</sup> <sup>48</sup> Buxton (2005) p. 44

<sup>49</sup> Giffen, Earle & Charles Buxton (2005) p. 10

<sup>50</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008) p. 4

within civil society.”<sup>51</sup> It can include traditional and communal forms of CS. The alternative approach does not have specific paths to success; instead, it connects CS together to allow people to challenge the current path of development provided by western nations.<sup>52</sup>

Babajanian, Freizer, and Stevens examine Muslim scholars who discuss the need to reinterpret CS not as a neo-liberal approach in opposition to the state but as a more open approach that allows for the communal aspects of a culture.<sup>53</sup> This means they value a CS that focuses on developing family bonds, friendship, and neighborliness that is self-sustaining.<sup>54</sup> A trusting community would use collective action, volunteerism, and share information to create community discussion.<sup>55</sup> This would allow the community to create a condition where all people within their community can meet their basic needs to survive and prosper.<sup>56</sup>

International donors have recently been focusing on developing CS in more rural areas of KG. As previously discussed, researchers have identified the traditional CS in KG as *Aksukal* and *ashar*. The search for more traditional elements of CS have come out of the fact that during the 1990s most NGOs were located in Bishkek and Osh, the two largest cities and respective centers of the North and South. It became clear to donors that NGOs were not working with the poorest of the poor and could not accurately represent the needs and interests of the poor rural communities.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Giffen, Earle & Charles Buxton (2005) p. 8

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 212

<sup>54</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 213

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Paasiaro (2009) p. 62



An *Aksukal* is an older respected man in their area who gives advice and supports community action.<sup>58</sup> In communities that are more traditional this can take the form of *Aksukal Court*, which is an informal group of older men who provide leadership in the community.<sup>59</sup> These courts are given legal status, so their decisions can be legally binding.<sup>60</sup> However, many international organizations do not often work with them, because they do not represent the community as a whole; they exclude women, minority groups, and young people.<sup>61</sup> However, the support of the community leaders can be vital to a project, so if organizations do wish to have the approval of the court, the organization will have someone from the community to approach.<sup>62</sup>

The second, *ashar*, is volunteer work done by the community for an individual or the community usually in the form of house repair or infrastructure projects.<sup>63</sup> Members of the community come together to complete a project, typically young men provide the labor, *Aksukal* give directions, and women cook.<sup>64</sup> This practice has been on the rise since many NGOs and grants require some community contribution in either money or in-kind. Since most villages have little cash, they provide labor as in-kind.<sup>65</sup> Again, this traditional practice has encountered some criticism. The dominant leaders in the community decide what projects will be done which leaves those minority groups, such as young men and women, out of the

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<sup>58</sup> Earle (2005) p. 251

<sup>59</sup> Earle (2005) p. 252

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Earle (2005) p. 254

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p. 255

<sup>63</sup> Ibid p. 252

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

decision making process.<sup>66</sup> Strangely, the groups not involved in the decision making process are those who will be doing most of the work to benefit the dominant leaders.<sup>67</sup>

Some NGOs and experts have examined the traditional CS in KG, and have found traditional forms of CS tend to exclude large parts of the community. In order to avoid these issues, it is more popular for NGOs to directly working with women and very poor people in the rural areas. Self-help groups (SHG) have been arguably the most popular way for international donors to connect more directly with their target audiences. One study of SHGs around Central Asia carried out in 2007, originally done in 2004, suggests KG's SHG have matured into some of the most successful ways to relieve poverty in Central Asia and the number of SHGs doubled in the three years between the studies.<sup>68</sup> One of the largest programs to come out of this category is the United Nations Development Project.

Another significant event for the future of CS in KG happened in 2007. The Social Research Center (SRC) of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) and the Soros Foundation held a series of roundtable discussions led by Kyrgyz NGO leaders and scholars that included representatives of CS and NGO sectors throughout KG.<sup>69</sup> One of the main objectives was to discuss and ultimately understand the models of CS in KG and the role of NGO sectors.<sup>70</sup> Participants discussed many topics, but no solid conclusions were reached at these roundtable conferences. In the past, external donors have controlled the negotiations. This assembly was

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<sup>66</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 217

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Buxton, Abraliev, Aidaraliev, Moldosheva, Naumann & Yusupova (2007) p. 7 & 20

<sup>69</sup> Social Research Center & Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan (2008) p. 1

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

a step toward giving Kyrgyz people a say in their future. They came together to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions concerning the development of their country. These events mark a significant break from past practices. Instead of wanting to continue past practices, the participants wanted to discuss and suggest their own models for the third sector<sup>71</sup> to follow.

The neo-liberal approach of developing CS was implemented over the past twenty years as a counter to the government and a path to economic success. This model fell short of delivering the economic prosperity that initially promised. Although the international community still uses this approach, some donors and researchers have begun promoting an alternative that has spread into rural areas over the past ten years. The opinions of Kyrgyz citizens towards developing a CS are more important than those of outside parties. The 2007-roundtable meetings showed that KG academics and NGO leaders were concerned about this topic and were able to speak about the future with a purpose. Although no tangible definitions came from those meetings it does demonstrate the importance of CS to the Kyrgyz. It also shows that CS is ready to be defined by KG and not by international donors as in the past. This would mean that the international community would have to act within the framework KG provides and not the other way around.

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<sup>71</sup> In order for democracy to develop, it must have three independent sectors. The first is a public to have public capital, second is business to have market capital, and third is civil society to have social capital.

## Non-Governmental Organizations

As mentioned before, NGO as a term is interchangeable with CS in KG.<sup>72</sup> However, outside of KG there is a theoretical difference between these two terms as Clayton, Oakley, and Taylor note in their article “Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision,” and much of the literature does reflect these differences.<sup>73</sup>

“Review of the History of Establishment and Development of the NGO Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic” by the Association of Civil Society Support Centers defines NGOs using a more international definition. The article states NGOs are either public or private organizations that are non-profit, so they do not focus on profit making ventures to generate more wealth for their own businesses.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the assets of the NGO “are not in state or municipal possession”<sup>75</sup> although NGOs may work for or with the state.<sup>76</sup> Unlike the broader term CS, this definition excludes religious organizations, political parties, unions, ideological movements, and some social organizations. Another definition is that NGOs are organizations that are a part of the third sector, voluntary and autonomous.<sup>77</sup> However, some of the foundations of modern

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<sup>72</sup> Clayton, Oakley & Taylor (2000) p. 2

<sup>73</sup> Although there are other examples of CS than NGOs in KG, such as religious organization, none are more discussed than NGOs thus this research will not discuss the other minor examples and will instead focus solely on NGOs. Additionally, new examples of CS in KG such as small self-help groups or Community Based Organizations are either created and overseen by NGOs like the UNDP or run like NGOs.

<sup>74</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 4

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008) p. 83

<sup>77</sup> Babajanian, Freizer & Stevens (2005) p. 212

CS began in KG at the end of the 1980s with perestroika and glasnost. These policies allowed for some free assembly of people to create citizen initiatives and public associations.<sup>78</sup>

However, on the domestic level, NGO is not a legal term in Kyrgyz law. Instead, NGOs are defined into different categories such as non-commercial, cooperatives, institutions, foundations, unions, public funds, community organizations, political parties, credit unions, public or religious associations.<sup>79</sup> The Constitution defines these public associations as voluntary, formed by Kyrgyz citizens with common interests and goals.<sup>80</sup> Although Kyrgyz citizens have the right to assemble, they do not have the right to form an organization if that organization infringes on the rights of other citizens.<sup>81</sup>

In 1999, the Law on Noncommercial Organizations defined noncommercial organizations as organizations that do not have a profit-making goal, and any income they do generate goes toward sustainability and not to stakeholders.<sup>82</sup> Goals of the organization must be written and those goals must benefit the members and the public good.<sup>83</sup> Organizations can form without being registered. This has been particularly helpful in the formation of small SHGs in rural areas.<sup>84</sup> Finally, the state cannot control the organization.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Abdusalyamova & Warren (2007) p. 15

<sup>79</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 85

<sup>80</sup> Ibid p. 82

<sup>81</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 80-81

<sup>82</sup> Ibid p. 84

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

It is important to note the differences between the international and domestic definitions. The international definition has a western orientation, consequently it is secular in nature, but the Kyrgyz law includes religious organizations in its legal framework. The legal framework for noncommercial organizations is founded on the principles of past Soviet laws.<sup>86</sup> Kyrgyz law does not follow the international definition exactly. However, the basic principles of being non-profit and independent from other sectors of society are the same.

After the fall of the Soviet Empire, the major roles of NGOs were to promote democracy and human rights.<sup>87</sup> However, the original goals of international organizations have been expanded upon and spread out into other areas.” NGOs now operate in many different fields according to a survey done by the Civil Society Support Centers in 2006.<sup>88</sup> The most significant areas of concern/attention are social issues (42.7%), legal assistance, advocacy, and lobbying (41.6%), healthcare (24.9%), education (21.9%), gender issues (17.1%), environmental (14.5%), and NGO support (10.8%). The World Bank and UNDP have a separate categorization system that is not as pertinent to KG. The World Bank includes six categories, representative of people’s interest, information and advisory support, empowerment building, capacity building, service delivery, and social functions.<sup>89</sup> The UNDP broke NGOs down into five categories; protection of rights, interest groups, charity groups, protection of minorities rights, and developmental.<sup>90</sup> Despite the variation in terminology, the list of major areas of work in KG can

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid p. 80

<sup>87</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008) p. 20

<sup>88</sup> Schulte, Tiulegenov, Plahotnikova, Kurbanova, Baktygulov, Jeenbaeva & Matikeeva (2008) p. 20

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

also fall under the general definitions of the World Bank and UNDP. This also shows that the NGO community has continued to grow after its original expansion directly after independence.

In the article “The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia,” Giffen, Earle, and Buxton map the development of NGOs in KG.<sup>91</sup> They begin by dividing NGO development into two stages. The first stage, 1991 – 1997, begins with the development of political parties and the formation of citizen’s groups with national NGOs opening between 1993-94, such as UNDP, Soros Foundation, INTRAC, and USAID.<sup>92</sup> Most of these NGOs started in the two largest cities, Bishkek and Osh. These NGOs were only created due to the sudden influx of international money that resulted from independence.<sup>93</sup> Major events supported by this money were the Volunteer Conference in 1995 and the Women’s Forum Conference in 1996.<sup>94</sup>

This phase of NGO development was the beginning for many issues with NGOs in KG that still plague NGOs today. Many issues arose with the arrival of NGOs into the KG economy. NGOs faced a lack of trust from the government and their stakeholders because of lack of transparency, misuse of funds and improper representation of stakeholders.<sup>95</sup> NGOs did not have the experience or ability to carry out missions, strategic plans, management, and oversight of funds.<sup>96</sup> NGOs were not able to address issues within KG because they were constantly looking for new grants instead of focusing on long-term missions or goals.<sup>97</sup> In addition, NGOs

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<sup>91</sup> Giffen, Earle & Buxton (2005) p. 85

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 26

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p. 26

<sup>95</sup> Ibid p. 27

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

in this period were chosen by western donors to support western values and ideas instead of tapping into existing actors like trade unions.<sup>98</sup> During the first stage, many environmental, human rights, women's equality, and democracy NGOs were created because the donors wished to pursue these goals instead of assessing domestic priorities. Kyrgyz people eagerly created these organizations because of the availability of funding.

The second stage according to Giffen, Earle, and Buxton takes place between 1998 and 2004, and this phase saw NGOs becoming more active in lobbying the government and acting as advocates for their stakeholders.<sup>99</sup> Although the Association of Civil Society Support Centers generally agrees in this assessment, it expanded on this idea by including more indicators of development and dividing it into two phases.<sup>100</sup>

The first part of this two-phase system according to the Association of Civil Society Support Centers, 1995-1998, demonstrates a strong dependency on international donors as shown in surveys by the UNDP. Unfortunately, another problem arose out of this survey.<sup>101</sup> To show that many NGOs only last for one funded project, the UNDP was unable to locate 50% of the NGOs chosen; presumably meaning they no longer existed.<sup>102</sup> This stage also included capacity building trainings, such as grant writing, put on by the Counterpart Consortium.<sup>103</sup> Many other major international donors work on capacity building such as the Soros Foundation, UNDP, INTRAC, HELVETAS, and Mercy Corps, in the areas of accounting, management,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid p. 25

<sup>99</sup> Ibid p. 25

<sup>100</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 28

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Ibid p. 29



networking, strategic planning, and professional development.<sup>104</sup> Although these trainings brought professionalism, which are still seen today in the NGO sector, they were unable to address all the issues created by the quickly established sector. They lacked proper training on how to connect to the community and stakeholders the NGOs serve. NGOs were trained on how to research and write a grant and then carry it out, but were not trained on how to assess or communicate with a community.<sup>105</sup> More community-focused trainings were important for NGOs because nearly half of all NGOs in KG were located in one community, Bishkek, between the years of 1991 -2002.<sup>106</sup>

During the next phase, 1999-2004, NGOs developed with more promise. As mentioned before, the 1999 law for NGOs, although not perfect, was a step in the right direction. New NGOs, especially SHG and community-based organizations (CBO), were created outside the capital in rural areas. However, by the end of this stage, funding began to decrease.<sup>107</sup> NGOs were becoming sustainable and independent from international donors for the first time, with the understanding that this progression was limited and almost entirely isolated to Bishkek and Osh.<sup>108</sup> As this stage closes, many NGOs have made organizational improvements, are more professional, and are beginning to work with their stakeholders in rural areas.

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<sup>104</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 30

<sup>105</sup> Ibid p. 31

<sup>106</sup> Ibid p. 32

<sup>107</sup> Ibid p. 36

<sup>108</sup> Ibid p. 34

## Post Revolution NGO Progress

Within the past ten years, professionalism in NGOs has increased as well as knowledge of what international donors expect from NGOs. As Maija Paasiaro notes in her article, “Home-grown strategies for greater agency: reassessing the outcome of civil society strengthening in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” some NGOs are still “granter-hunters” and have little influence over their community.<sup>109</sup> However, many more NGOs now possess the skills and experience to use donor’s funds for their own goals because of the knowledge of donor language and the ability to write grants. Kyrgyz NGOs are now able to shape their proposals to donor’s requests, and still fulfill the needs of their stakeholders and communities.<sup>110</sup> This is a different picture than simply KG NGOs being co-opted by donors to serve the donor’s goals. It shows that NGOs are now developing complex strategies for gaining access to donors to use their resources to serve the NGO’s stakeholders best.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, NGOs are not entirely made up of social elites in the country following neo-liberal policies. The NGO sector is beginning to include people from rural areas of the country and activists who wish to pursue their goals in order to improve their own communities independent of international donors.<sup>112</sup>

The Tulip Revolution took place on March 24, 2005, overthrowing President Akaev and replacing him with Kurmanbek Bakiev. Although there is little research after 2006 of the development of NGOs, the installation of government was seen as an opportunity for NGOs to advance. However, it showed how weak CS and NGOs were in KG, because NGOs had little

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<sup>109</sup> Paasiaro (2009) p. 62

<sup>110</sup> Paasiaro p. 63

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Ibid p. 65

involvement with the people affected by the revolution.<sup>113</sup> As a sign of further weakness, within the first year, NGOs had little to do with the changes in government or the Constitution.<sup>114</sup> After the government ignored NGOs in the months following the revolution, major NGOs, especially those promoting human rights and democracy, set themselves as the opposition to President Bakiev. Bakiev adopted many of the negative practices towards NGOs and CS that Akaev established including limiting independent media. However, NGOs that worked with poverty reduction or provided services for Kyrgyz people, especially those outside Bishkek, were mostly left alone.

As for the most recent revolution of April 7, 2010 some of the leaders had strong connections to the NGO community but it is still too early to say what the long-term influence the new government will have on the NGO community.

## **Theoretical Framework**

John Anderson in his article “Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan” does not give a narrative of CS or NGOs, description of the current state of CS, or description of its relationship with the society in KG. This is not common practice when examining and writing about CS. Instead, he suggests a model on how to create a “modern civil society” with “five supportive contexts” to judge the effectiveness.<sup>115</sup> The five supportive contexts are “political,

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<sup>113</sup> Association of Civil Society Support Centers (2006) p. 92

<sup>114</sup> Ibid p. 93

<sup>115</sup> Anderson (2000) p. 73

economic, regulatory, informational, and cultural.”<sup>116</sup> This model can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Naryn Education Center (NEC) as a service provider in KG. Although this model was written for CS, it can be argued that it is possible to use it for an NGO, because NGOs make up the majority of CS. Through this model, a case study can be made about the NEC, as an example that NGOs have developed and are in a better position within KG than they were in 2000.

The ability for a social organization to be independent in their actions and decision-making process from outside influences such as the state or other outside influences is the political supportive context.<sup>117</sup> In this area, Anderson concludes that KG had no experience with independent organizations prior to independence. Post independence Akaev initially supported CS but after a few years began to restrict CS and become more authoritarian and corrupt.<sup>118</sup>

The second supportive context, economic, examines complex economy including both economic and social interests. The state and society are separate unlike during the Soviet Era when the state was in complete control of society.<sup>119</sup> Anderson states that the economy became liberalized in many ways thus separating it from state control. However, the interest of the economy at that time still reflects the interest of a small group of elites. Economic changes did not lead to an equal growth of wealth for the society but instead caused a large amount of

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

<sup>118</sup> Anderson (2000) p. 77-81

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p. 81

poverty in the country and put the control of the economy in the hands of the elites who were able to profit from the changes.<sup>120</sup> When the state gave up control of the economy, most people say the poor got poorer and the rich got richer, and the economy was unable to represent the social interests of the whole country.

The supportive regulatory context involves the “laws, Institutions, and conventions which regulate the life of social organizations.”<sup>121</sup> This context allows individuals and institutions the freedom of choice, offers a legal framework that protects the choices of individuals and institutions, and safeguards the general public from those individuals and institutions that want to abuse their role in society.<sup>122</sup> Anderson thinks this context was established in Kyrgyz law in the Constitution. For example, the Kyrgyz Constitution states the government’s commitment to the people of KG to develop CS.<sup>123</sup> However, political climates can change, and President Akaev began to become unsupportive of CS. He began to attack the independent media, religious organizations, and human rights groups.<sup>124</sup> Although CS was still allowed to grow, the courts were more willing to interpret laws in favor of the government interests.

The supportive informational context allocates a space in society for the free flow of ideas and actions between an individual and an institution to the public.<sup>125</sup> This can be seen most easily as the independent media. Again, President Akaev started out supporting the

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<sup>120</sup> Anderson (2000) p. 81-82

<sup>121</sup> Ibid p. 83

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

<sup>123</sup> Anderson (2000) p. 85

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>125</sup> Ibid

press, and as time passed, he became more restrictive. Between 1994 and 1997, three newspapers were shutdown for criticizing the President.<sup>126</sup> In 1997, Parliament passed a law limiting the ability of a newspaper to publish information regarding the private lives of public officials. The law also made slander and libel a criminal offense that could imprison and fine journalists and their publishers.<sup>127</sup> All contexts agree that independence in 1991 saw KG freed of Soviet rule, but by the mid 1990s that support was eroding as the President took more and more power. One should note that throughout this period, KG was always freer than its neighboring states.

Lastly, supportive cultural context encourages all persons' support of different social organizations, growth of social organizations, and recognition of the rights of individuals to join different groups.<sup>128</sup> As seen previously, the political elites were challenging social organizations that were not beneficial to them. Although, the author notes that Kyrgyz culture has a degree of tolerance in it, there are ethnic tensions that challenge CS.<sup>129</sup>

In the 1990s, many groups began to challenge traditional cultural, such as women's group and youth groups, and the reaction of the larger culture was too suspicious of these new organizations because these new groups brought different and unfamiliar ideas. There were

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid p. 86

<sup>127</sup> Ibid p. 87

<sup>128</sup> Anderson (2000) p 85

<sup>129</sup> Ibid p. 88

numerous acts of violence against non-Muslims.<sup>130</sup> However, these acts of violence were minor when compared to other countries and tolerance among most people was still present.

Each context Anderson presents reveals a part of KG's CS. There are major examples of a modern CS evolving. However, it is also very "ambiguous." KG has made strides in increasing basic freedoms and decreasing flagrant human rights abuses, but there are still signs of corruption.<sup>131</sup>

## **Revolution and Conflict in Kyrgyzstan**

A second revolution happened on April 7, 2010. It started in Talas<sup>132</sup> and quickly spread to the rest of KG. It was most violent in Bishkek leading to approximately 100 deaths and hundreds of others wounded. The Bakiev government was quickly overthrown, he escaped the country, and a new government was installed, including several representatives from the NGO community. Then in July, ethnic conflict erupted in Osh and Jalal-abad.<sup>133</sup> This three-day conflict left over 700 dead and hundreds of others wounded, mostly Uzbeks. Thousands of Uzbeks fled to the Uzbek/Kyrgyz border in order to escape the violence leaving most of them displaced for a short period. In addition to these two major events, several terrorist attacks have taken place within Bishkek and Osh.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid

<sup>131</sup> Ibid p. 90

<sup>132</sup> One of the seven Oblast in Kyrgyzstan

<sup>133</sup> Two Oblast in the southern portion of the country where most of ethnic minority of Uzbeks lived

Despite the new government quickly taking over power and the ethnic conflict being contained within a few days, the country is still in a weakened position. The Manas Transit Center was of critical importance to the US, so a larger amount of international media attention and humanitarian aid was provided to KG. . Although the long-term impact of this crisis is unknown, in the short-term it brought organizations like Save the Children into KG. The aid of international organizations is certainly required and welcomed to help stabilize the new government and conflict areas. However, the increased aid will feed into some of the problems, such as grant hunters, the creation of new NGOs for only one or two projects and dependency on international aid.<sup>134</sup> Some NGOs may gain experience in conflict management, but these events will not lead to an overall stronger CS or NGO community.

## **Naryn Education Center**

I am a volunteer in the Naryn Education Center (NEC) located at Naryn State University (NSU) in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. In order to better illustrate my Peace Corps (PC) experience, I will give a brief synopsis of my organization. I will discuss the history, funding, staff, mission statement, and my role in the organization.

## **The History of NEC**

The NEC officially opened in July 2008 after one international organization, Soros Foundation, scaled down its program in KG. In 1998, Soros Foundation had an office in the

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<sup>134</sup> As noted earlier, grants hunters are organizations that depend on grants for their survival. These organizations write grants for any project that gets them money regardless of their mission or community needs. These leads too many organizations being short lived and unsustainable.



capital of each oblast.<sup>135</sup> Each office had ten directives to conduct and manage, including such issues as education, strategic planning in villages, and women's support groups. This program ran for ten years. However, in 2008 Soros Foundation reduced the number of offices in KG. This was a policy decision of Soros Foundation throughout Central Asia as a way to reduce administrative costs, concerns about corruption, and inefficient use of funds through excess staff and offices. Additionally, many offices were not meeting the expected results of the Soros Foundation. Soros Foundation did leave one office open in the capital city of Bishkek. Soros also relies on the NEC director to set up any meetings they have in Naryn and disseminate information for them. In return, Soros assists the director with her requests such as some funding for small projects or expensive.

After the Soros Foundation reduced its program, the U.S. Embassy decided to step in and provide some assistance to the program. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funds EducationUSA, which operates over 400 educational advising centers around the world. The Embassy opened advising centers in Naryn, Osh, and Issyk-Kul. Nazira Kaseeva was the director for the Soros Foundation program in Naryn. Based on the experience and relationship she had developed with both Soros Foundation and the Embassy, the Embassy decided to make her the director of the new Naryn Education Center, a position she still holds today.

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<sup>135</sup> An Oblast is a state or province level of government

## Staff

The NEC staff consists of two people, the director, Mrs. Kaseeva, and an assistant. The director is well qualified for managing the NEC. She worked for the Soros Foundation for almost ten years, so she gained much of her relevant experience working with NGOs. She speaks English fluently, so most of our communication is in English. The director's main jobs are to assist students who want more information about international educational opportunities and to oversee all the NEC's activities and events. She prepares students for all aspects of studying abroad, from filling out applications to making travel arrangements. Mrs. Kaseeva wrote the strategic plan for the NEC. She also writes and gives presentations about different scholarships and programs available to Kyrgyz people in Naryn City and surrounding villages. In addition to presenting a monthly budget to the Tax Office in Naryn in accordance with Kyrgyz law, Mrs. Kaseeva is also responsible for administrative tasks including reports to EducationUSA and the Embassy. Unfortunately, there has been a high rate of staff turnover in terms of assistants in the two years since the NEC opened.

Much like the director, the assistant must have a good understanding of English. I work closely with the assistant, whose role is to help with daily office work, such as answering student questions about universities and scholarships.<sup>136</sup> In addition, the assistant should help

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<sup>136</sup> A counterpart is a Peace Corps term for the local person the volunteer works closely with and most volunteers have a director or some other administrative head that the PCV may not work as closely with. For example, a PCV who is teaching English the teacher is their counterpart and the principal would be the volunteer's administrative head. I will use counterpart and assistant interchangeably depending on the context I am referring to them as.

write and conduct any presentations on study abroad opportunities or outreach, write reports, translate documents and provide other support as needed.

The organization would suffer greatly if the current director were to leave. The NEC would continue to receive funding; however, the next director would essentially have to start from scratch because Mrs. Kaseeva is the organization. Mrs. Kaseeva has developed numerous professional contacts and trust relationships with the Embassy and the Soros Foundation, which would take a new director years to build. She also has personal/professional relationships with teachers, important community members, and important NGOs located in Naryn oblast. Finally, there is no written documentation or institutional memory of upcoming projects or work for the director or assistant, so if someone else took over they would not have any place to turn to in order to see what work must be completed.<sup>137</sup>

If a new director were to be hired, it would take some time for them to build their status and connections in the Naryn community. I have discussed this potential risk with the director and she stated that she has invested in Naryn and the NEC and has no plans to relocate or seek other employment. She stated that her family is in Naryn and that both she and her husband have good jobs and a home. When I asked what would happen to the NEC if she were to leave she was shocked and offended.<sup>138</sup> She has always been the director, but ironically, her frequent absences have been one of the most defining features of my work with the NEC. This discussion will continue when I explain the challenges I have had during my service.

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<sup>137</sup> During my service, I have attempted to get Mrs. Kaseeva to write down her responsibilities but have been unsuccessful in doing so.

<sup>138</sup> Kaseeva, N., personal communication (August 19, 2009)

The NEC's four assistants have all been in their early twenties and either in their last years of university or recently graduated. They do not have the same commitment to the organization as the director, which has resulted in high staff turnover. Each one stayed six months or less. For a large staff, frequent change in a position such as an assistant would not affect daily activities or the organization's ability to meet its goals. However, the NEC assistant has many responsibilities and their role is vital to the organization's structure, thus the turnover has negatively affected the quality and quantity of the organization's work. Additionally, relevant to the responsibilities and requirements of the assistant—assisting to run the office and a good command of English—the position pays relatively little. 3,000 Som (\$65) per month is a small wage for such a position. Having talked to the different NEC assistants and other people doing comparable office work in Naryn, 10,000 Som (\$217) per month would be a fairer wage. Former assistants who leave the NEC move into positions that pay \$200-\$250 per month. After each has left, the director has had to spend additional time training the new assistant. This process takes away from the director's own duties. Each assistant has different strengths and weaknesses; therefore, the office runs differently with each new staff member. For example, the first assistant, Salamat Ismakeeva, was not a strong public speaker so the director had to do all presentations, whereas the second assistant, Aizada Bekboeva, was a very good public speaker so the director could delegate presentations if she needed to. Having many different workers with various strengths and weaknesses in a short time has presented a challenge to the NEC.

The workload of the staff at the NEC is not overwhelming. At times, I have questioned the need for an assistant because the workload is certainly manageable by one person. On the

other hand, I understand that it does make it easier and when the director is away for professional or personal reasons someone else can run the office. The workload fluctuates from day-to-day depending on the preparation and execution of outreach events as well as the number of clients visiting the office. It is useful for the director to have other opinions in the office to help with events and translation. Ultimately, I respect the decision to hire an assistant, because it provides more opportunities for the NEC to do high-quality work.

### **NEC's Funding Source**

EducationUSA began its funding in July 2008. The budget was approximately \$600 per month before July 2010. Although this may not be much in the U.S., it is more than adequate in Naryn. Most of the funds (\$500 per month) pay the director's salary. This is a reasonable salary in KG for a local person managing an international NGO. For Naryn, this is a very respectable wage and enough to keep an individual with the director's level of education and experience at the NEC. The rest of the budget is divided between rent, phone, internet service, office supplies, conducting outreach events in the local area, and other incidental costs. Each quarter, the NEC must submit a budget report to the Embassy.

In March 2010, EducationUSA stopped funding the NEC. It not only stopped the funding for the NEC but also the advising centers in Osh and Issyk-Kul. EducationUSA stated that it had provided these centers with less funding because of the economic crisis in America at the time. The regional director of EducationUSA and the Embassy had an interest in the organization because each continued to work with the NEC and each tried to assist with getting funds back. The Department of State in Washington D.C. decided to stop funding advising centers that were

not located in the capital city of KG.<sup>139</sup> One major issue with being dependent on foreign aid is that the organization was extremely vulnerable to decisions made outside its country and despite the need or success of the organization, funding can be cut. Since the Bishkek Advising Center is a partner with EducationUSA, the others in Naryn, Osh, and Issyk-Kul stopped receiving funds. The regional director, Amy McGoldrick, of EducationUSA still worked with the NEC by continuing all previous communication on international opportunities through email. Additionally, she supported the NEC by providing advice on how to gain funding and worked with the Bishkek Advising Center to give the NEC funds to continue the Outreach Program.

The NEC was without a donor from that time until July 2010. Due to the ethnic conflict in the southern part of the country, Osh and Jalal-Abad, EducationUSA received more funding for KG. EducationUSA began funding all three advising centers again. Currently, the NEC is receiving the same funds for operational costs, but the director is receiving a smaller salary.

## Corruption

In Kyrgyzstan, corruption is a serious issue trickling into almost every facet of public life. In schools, teachers supplement their income by accepting bribes in return for good grades. Public officials and police also accept bribes, and the previous President stole unknown millions of dollars from the state coffers.<sup>140</sup> In fact, KG is ranked eleventh from the bottom as most corrupt in the world in 2010.<sup>141</sup> Although corruption and embezzlement are endemic in KG, I am happy to report that I have not observed any inconsistencies in budget matters or the

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<sup>139</sup> McGoldrick, A., personal communication (December 4, 2009)

<sup>140</sup> Nichol (2010) p. 3

<sup>141</sup> 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index Results (2010)

handling of money by either the NEC director or any of the assistants. The honesty of the organization is also validated through the Embassy and EducationUSA. These two organizations act similarly to a board of directors commonly found in NGOs in the U.S. by taking on advisory roles and providing financial oversight to ensure the NEC is accountable for all funds received.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, I have worked with both the director and the former assistants on grant projects and no one has ever attempted to pocket or misuse the funds. This is important to note, because it is a common problem for PCVs serving in KG.

## Resources

In addition to its human resources, the NEC possesses many of the other resources available to similar NGOs in Naryn. Being located in the oblast capital is an asset for the office, because it is the largest urban area in Naryn with roughly 20,000 – 25,000 people. The NEC is located in the main building of NSU, which includes the Foreign Language Department where English is taught, luckily, it is in close proximity to most of the students it aims to serve. This makes communication between the NEC staff and NSU students and faculty effortless. Many times students visit the office before or after class. The NEC is easy to find for both students and other community members, because the NSU building is well known in the city and the region as it currently the only higher educational institution in Naryn Oblast. Moreover, being in the university allows the office access to space, resources, and an audience.

The office itself is small with several desks and chairs, two computers with Internet access, a printer, a copier, a fax machine, and a scanner. As most people in Naryn do not have

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<sup>142</sup> Ingram (2009) p. 25

Internet in their homes, there is potential for the NEC to function as something similar to an Internet Café where service users would use the NEC computers to look up information about different educational opportunities. The NEC has a library of brochures for American colleges and universities, course catalogs, reference books about higher education and educational opportunities in America. The library also contains study guides for TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, and the SAT, as well as English grammar books and books in English for students to checkout. Since my counterpart and I rearranged the library by subject, the resources are easier to locate and are subsequently used more often by students.

Unfortunately, there have been some changes to the NEC resources. Before I arrived, the NEC was in a different office, attached to a large classroom that could be used for TOEFL and other classes, outreach and educational events and to host meetings and events for other organizations such as Soros. However, the cost became too great so the NEC moved to a smaller office.

The organization has also lost some of its technological resources. The NEC originally had six computers but four crashed beyond repair. The computers that crashed were old, did not have anti-virus software, and were not connected to the Internet. Additionally, an electrical surge broke the projector used for presentations. Internet in Naryn is slow and unreliable because of the distance from Bishkek and outdated infrastructure. Furthermore, because of the previously mentioned funding issues, the NEC is not always connected to the Internet. However, the NEC is still able to access the Internet intermittently to conduct



searchers for educational opportunities and other information. However, because of the speed of the Internet, this is very time consuming.

Overall, the NEC uses its resources effectively. The office provides an appropriate workspace and the location allows the NEC to hold all of its events in the most populated English-speaking arena. Having computers with internet does allow the NEC to get information. The two newer computers work well, because the director's brother and I maintain them and update all relevant software. The library is used by both the staff and students, particularly the study guides and informational books on universities and how to study abroad. The NEC is able to use its greatest resources effectively and those that are less than satisfactory are only minor inconveniences that can be worked around.

### **Goals of EducationUSA and NEC**

The mission of EducationUSA is to “actively promote U.S. higher education around the world by offering accurate, unbiased, comprehensive, objective and timely information about educational institutions in the United States and guidance to qualified individuals on how best to access those opportunities.”<sup>143</sup>

EducationUSA accomplishes these goals in a number of ways in KG. First, EducationUSA promotes U.S. government funded scholarships. These scholarships allow individuals around the world the opportunity to study abroad free of charge in the U.S. UGRAD and MUSKIE are examples of these scholarships. Additionally, EducationUSA uses the number of students who

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<sup>143</sup> <http://educationusa.state.gov/>

receive scholarships or entry to U.S. educational programs as an indicator of its success in meeting its goal.<sup>144</sup> Second, EducationUSA requires advising centers in KG to conduct trainings and informational meetings for groups or individuals on a variety of topics designed to assist them in the application process and prepare them to go to the U.S. Lastly, EducationUSA provides a space for individuals living in a certain region to access information about American educational prospects. EducationUSA also provides opportunities to access information via Internet, books, and consultation with an educational advisor.

Along with the stated mission of EducationUSA, the NEC also has a mission to meet the needs of the community, so it has its own vision, mission, goals, and objectives.<sup>145</sup> When I first started working with the NEC, the organization's official mission statement was "to help people." Although it is a noble cause, it is hardly a viable mission for an organization. Even though the NEC had a strategic plan, the goals and objectives were not clear, well thought out or achievable. However, the NEC director did have basic ideas for a strategic plan and we worked together to create a realistic vision and a mission statement as well as clear and attainable goals and objectives.

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<sup>144</sup> In reporting the quarterly report, it asks what government funded programs or scholarships the advising center has had individual apply for and/or was awarded. The report also asks the same question of any scholarship or program that promotes the U.S.

<sup>8</sup> According to Peace Corps, a vision statement is a general statement of what the organization wants its community to look like. A mission statement explains the issues faced by the organization and the services provided by it. A goal is long-term plan of an issue the organization is to address and an objective is a specific plan on how to achieve the goal. Power Point from Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan (7/23/2008).

## Programs the NEC Promotes

The daily work of the NEC involves assisting students, teachers, or professionals who are in the process of applying to an educational program, with their questions about educational opportunities or require assistance in preparing supporting documents such as a resume. There are specific programs that the NEC promotes and the primary mission is to publicize these U.S. funded programs to the community. This is done first by informing individuals that might be interested in an informational meeting by advertising the event via fliers and contacting individuals through phone, email, or face to face. Much advertising is also done by word-of-mouth. Although word-of-mouth might seem like an inefficient way to disseminate information, in a small community like Naryn, where most people know each other, it is highly effective.

The NEC director is excellent at filling a room. One PCV joked that, “Her biggest assist is her rolodex” meaning she knows who to call to find anyone and everyone who might be interested in the topic she is promoting that day.<sup>146</sup> Although it may not be her biggest asset, it is an important one and she uses it effectively. I have held events without her “rolodex” by just putting out fliers and telling people and have gotten low turnouts. In real numbers, she can get twenty to fifty people whereas I get less than ten. This is because I do not hold the same weight as she does in the community, and she knows more and better-connected people.

The NEC’s outreach events usually include information about the basic requirements and benefits of the programs. We also go over the application process step-by-step and offer

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<sup>146</sup> Ryan, M., personal communication (October 8, 2009)

editing assistance for those individuals who decide to pursue the program. Unfortunately, many people do not use the NEC's offer of editing assistance, but those individuals who are serious about the program often seek help a number of times throughout the application process.

The NEC promotes fully funded scholarships and training opportunities to the U.S. Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD) is a scholarship that sends students to the U.S. for one year at the undergraduate level.<sup>147</sup> MUSKIE is a similar program aimed at students between the ages 23 and 38 with a Bachelor's or equivalent degree applying for a Master's Degree.<sup>148</sup> These programs differ on specific requirements but both pay for all expenses, including airfare to the U.S. and tuition fees. Each program also provides the student with a small stipend. For both UGRAD and MUSKIE, the students apply to the program rather than a specific university. Many universities participate in these programs and the applicants have the opportunity to state a desired program of study. Once an applicant is accepted to the program, which university he or she is assigned to is based on his or her application and test scores, and the final decision is up to the administrators of the programs and participating universities.

These programs are available only to individuals living in post-Soviet countries in the Eurasia area.<sup>149</sup> Thus, each is widely known and highly competitive. Quality of education in

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<sup>147</sup> <http://www.irex.org/project/global-undergraduate-exchange-program-eurasia-and-central-asia-global-ugrad>

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.irex.org/project/edmund-s-muskie-graduate-fellowship-program>

<sup>149</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

Naryn is low which puts applicants from Naryn at a disadvantage when competing for these scholarships.<sup>150</sup>

The NEC promotes the yearlong Junior Faculty Development Program for university professors. This program allows professors the chance to take classes and assist a professor at a U.S. university.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship is for working professors who want to study at a university in the U.S. for one year.<sup>152</sup>

Although the NEC does not hold any informational meetings on the Fulbright Scholarship because of a lack interest, we do have all the necessary information on the Fulbright Scholarship. The Fulbright Scholarship allows a candidate to conduct research and earn a post-graduate degree in the U.S.<sup>153</sup>

The NEC also collaborates with the American Center<sup>154</sup> to promote FLEX<sup>155</sup>, a yearlong study aboard program for high school students as well as TEA, a program that provides Kyrgyz teachers a six-week long stay in America to observe a U.S. high school teacher. The applications for these programs are due at different times of the year, so at any given time the NEC is usually planning for an event for one of these scholarship or programs.

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<sup>150</sup> Kaseeva, N., personal communication (September 14, 2009)

<sup>151</sup> <http://www.americancouncils.kg/jfdp.html>

<sup>152</sup> <http://www.humphreyfellowship.org/page/97565/>

<sup>153</sup> [http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/fulbright\\_reseach\\_program.html](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/fulbright_reseach_program.html)

<sup>154</sup> The American Center was funded by a PCV in 2005. It is currently run by PCVs through NSU. Its main focus is English clubs and events to promote U.S. culture. It is a well-known center within NSU with over a 150 students currently attending clubs there.

<sup>155</sup> <http://www.americancouncils.kg/flex.html>

The NEC also informs students about the Opportunity Grant (OG), which is specific to KG through the U.S. Embassy. OG pays for the application process for prospective students who wish to apply to a U.S. university. It includes funding for testing such as TOEFL or the GRE, application fees, translating cost, postage, airfare, and other fees incurred during the application process, but it does not help with tuition or any other expenses once the person is studying abroad.<sup>156</sup> Grants are allocated to students based on the decision of the director of the advising center in their Oblast. If the student is not accepted to a university or fails to complete the application process, they are not responsible for repayment of the grant funds. The U.S. Embassy created this grant because many Kyrgyz people cannot afford application fees and were deterred from applying to American universities.<sup>157</sup> The NEC has given out five Opportunity Grants to individuals from Naryn. Two of the recipients have nearly completed the process and two failed to complete the process. One recipient was accepted to a private school in Indiana but did not receive enough financial aid to attend the university.

Not only does the NEC promote the previously mentioned scholarships, we also search for, are told about, or receive emails on a variety of other scholarships and programs. Usually outreach events are not held to publicize each specific program or scholarship but rather the staff informs individuals who enquire at the NEC about opportunities relevant to their particular case. For example, the NEC has informed five women about scholarships from the World Bank

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<sup>156</sup> [http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/opportunity\\_grant\\_program.html](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/opportunity_grant_program.html)

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*

for women in developing countries; one of the women applied to the program.<sup>158</sup> At times, the NEC organizes meetings for different organizations such as Soros Foundation or the American University of Central Asia when they wish to inform students, NGOs, or other individuals about specific programs or opportunities they are promoting.

### **NEC's role in the Community**

The NEC is well-known in the education community because of outreach events, location, and having a PCV, but mostly because of Mrs. Kaseeva. Her work with Soros, the Embassy, schools, and other NGOs has made her a prominent figure in the community. She also understands how to communicate effectively with other partners and organizations when it comes to promoting events. Her connections have helped to make the NEC a better organization that is capable of reaching more people.

However, I believe that at times the NEC has had difficulties sending clear messages to their clients. For example, in order to study abroad one must be willing to put in the required work. I have had many discussions with the director about why clients think that studying abroad is as simple as filling out a few short forms. Many students who can barely speak English or no English at all enquire about how they can study in the U.S. Many clients ask the NEC staff to send them to the U.S., to fill out the applications for them, or to do other work that the clients should be doing themselves. I politely tell clients about the application process, the tests they have to take, how we can help them, and then direct them to English clubs in the

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<sup>158</sup> <http://hendrasiry.wordpress.com/2007/12/21/info-scholarshipworld-bank-margaret-mcnamara-memorial-fund-education-grants/>

American Center to improve their language skills. Most lose interest at that point, but I have observed that some of the students I refer to the American Center do sign up for and attend classes there, which may not directly meet the goals of the NEC. This is because a simple referral is not something NEC can record on its quarterly reports as help prepare the student for studying in America. Inappropriate enquiries should be expected from time to time, but the staff has found it frustrating that so many clients do not understand the basic requirements or hard work necessary to study in America. Both the Director and I believe these enquiries happen because many people are uninformed about the process to study in the U.S. and what NEC seeks to accomplish. NEC is working on providing more information to the public through meetings on the scholarships and programs and the outreach program to area high schools. However, the positive is that people do show interest and have at least heard of NEC even if they do not fully know what NEC does.

It is difficult when the staff does not understand what the clients expect of them. Even some of the regular clients do not completely understand the time it takes to apply to study abroad. I view this as an obvious message to us that we need to communicate more effectively about the application process and the role that the NEC plays in assisting with this process. We have brochures available to people, but this does not seem to be enough to communicate to people what exactly the NEC is responsible for and what the clients need to do for themselves.

The services provided by the NEC do reflect the needs of those individuals interested in studying abroad in respect to the assistance they require applying to U.S. universities. The NEC clients have stated that assistance with resumes, recommendation letters, essays, TOEFL,



interview preparation and practice, applications, visas, and cultural questions are all helpful. This reflects the previous hard work done by Mrs. Kaseeva as well as an informal needs assessment of students and educators.<sup>159</sup> Mrs. Kaseeva has designed good trainings that she is able to conduct herself with the help of EducationUSA and through past work with PCVs, Since the NEC is still a young organization, successfully catering to the needs of the community it aims to serve is one of the most thriving aspects of the organization.

### **Other Observation of how NEC Functions**

Unlike many NGOs in KG that are simply chasing grants to continue their funding and not always addressing the needs of the community, the NEC has a specific function. In Naryn, a large NGO called Jashtan Akare (Young Patriots) is an example of an organization that is always chasing the next grant. It runs in part through the Mayor's office, and it has many connections in the community, but the staff and volunteers work from grant to grant, and if they do not currently have a grant, they must search for the next project opportunity.<sup>160</sup> Fortunately, the NEC has continuous work and the funding necessary for staff and other administrative costs without constantly grant hunting. The NEC does look for grants, but these are for special events that the NEC believes will benefit the community rather than a means for the organization to survive and continue functioning.

In the office, Mrs. Kaseeva is a manager. She is friendly and approachable which allows her to work well with her assistants and the clients. She knows her personal strengths and

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<sup>159</sup> Kaseeva, N., personal communication (August 25 2010)

<sup>160</sup> Beien, C., personal communication (November 13, 2010)

weaknesses well, for example, she hires assistants with better English than her so they can help translate documents that she might not be able to do alone. Since she is younger at 38, she has had training in more western-style leadership, which in Kyrgyzstan means she is more task-oriented. I have seen Mrs. Kaseeva delegate appropriate tasks to the assistant and she focuses on her own work so she can work more effectively.<sup>161</sup>

It has not always been clear what Mrs. Kaseeva expects of the PCV. This was frustrating at first, because I do not always understand what is happening because of language and cultural barriers. More importantly, as a PCV, I am supposed to assist Kyrgyz people by transferring skills and developing the organization and I cannot fulfill those goals when no one is in the office. However, I learned that constantly asking about what needed to be done or worked on elicited the response, "If that is what you want to do, then do it." In order to get around this I decided to ask fewer questions and just show her the work I had done and receive feedback from her. One should also note that I follow this credo with smaller projects that are less crucial to the running of the NEC. For example, I reorganized the bookshelf in a more logical order and removed books explaining old projects completed by the Soros foundation, because they were not books checked out by clients. Mrs. Kaseeva was very pleased, because the bookshelves were in order and the shelves looked better.

Unfortunately, the director expects a lot from her assistants, and their wages do not properly compensate them. This is a part of the reason the assistants have moved on to other

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<sup>161</sup> Buxton & Abrialiev (2007) p. 8

jobs. As previously stated, all past assistants enjoyed working at the NEC and learned a lot from the experience, but each ultimately left for a higher paying job.

### **Results of NEC**

In the past two years, I believe the NEC has become a productive organization that has met the basic requirements of promoting U.S. programs to study abroad as well as providing the skills and requirements individuals need to take part in these programs. The NEC works with about twenty individuals who visit the office several times a month during the school year. It provides a variety of meaningful and effective services. Despite the positive outcomes of working with these individuals and all the outreach events the NEC has held, the organization has still only worked with two individuals who have actually gone to the U.S. One took an ESL course in Kansas from August 2010 to December 2010, and the other is a FLEX student studying at a high school in Ohio from August 2010 to February 2011. Two members of the NSU faculty are currently applying to U.S. universities with the help of the Opportunity Grant. The NEC assisted one high school student through TOEFL classes and editing her applications for university. She is now studying at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. The NEC has helped other students through the various rounds of FLEX and UGRAD application processes. One student even received a scholarship of over \$15,000, but it was not sufficient to allow her to attend the university.

The NEC has done a good job of establishing its basic role in the community. There is room to improve its position in the community, but those tasks do not involve all the NEC's time as it once did. However, currently the NEC lacks any substantial meaning to the

community and needs to become more relevant to deeper issues such as fighting “brain drain,” bettering schools, combating school corruption, and finding a variety of opportunities for students and professionals.

## **Challenges Faced by NEC in the Community**

Although Naryn is the poorest region in KG, it has been improving with noticeable developments. The business community is the best example of this. Ten years ago, Naryn had no large restaurants, internet cafes, banks, and few *dukons* (stores). Now there are four restaurants, countless *dukons*, three internet cafes, and several banks among other new businesses opening.<sup>162</sup> Even though Naryn is economically doing better, it is still behind the rest of the country. According to Aigul Bakirova and Anar Beishembaeva in their book, “Skills Development and Poverty Reduction”:

Naryn Oblast, in the mountains, has a rate of more than 80% of rural poor, a general poverty rate of 65% and more than 40% people living in extreme poverty. In contrast, the Chui Oblast and Issyk-Kul Oblast have general poverty levels of 17% and 39%; a relatively high level of poverty of 59% can also be found in the Talas (59%), Jalalabat (58%) and Batken (51%) oblasts.<sup>163</sup>

Based on conversations with Kyrgyz people and my own observations, the area is experiencing “brain drain” particularly through dispersion to Bishkek. Bishkek is the capital of

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<sup>162</sup> Kurmanbekova, N., personal communication (September 15, 2010)

<sup>163</sup> Bakirova & Beishembaeva (2007) p. 5

KG, the largest city at approximately a million people. It attracts many people because it is an active city but it also is the center of much of the economic activity in the country. Many young people move to the capital instead of staying in Naryn, because the educational and professional opportunities are better there. I have worked with five ambitious high school students who all speak English very well. Two are currently studying in Bishkek and three are planning to study in Bishkek. I also know five other individuals who learned English well with the help of PCVs, and they left Naryn for Bishkek because of better opportunities. Although the decision to leave Naryn for Bishkek usually results in a brighter future for the individual concerned, it is detrimental to the potential of Naryn. It makes the job of the NEC more difficult, because it has a smaller pool of people to work with. I do not mean to imply that those still in Naryn are any less qualified. Some are more qualified, because they get the opportunity to learn English from native speakers whereas in the capital this is far less likely. However, the more people the NEC can work with the greater the chances are of sending someone to study in the U.S.

There are external factors that make sending someone from Naryn to study in America a challenge. Naryn Oblast it is the poorest region in KG.<sup>164</sup> Most cannot afford to study in America. In fact, not a single student I have worked with has had any money to contribute to their studies. They need full scholarships and funding for all additional expenses such as airfare and accommodation to attend an American university. The Opportunity Grant is one way people can cover the cost of applying and as it becomes better known, it will have a greater

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<sup>164</sup> Bakirova & Beishembaeva (2007) p. 5

impact on the number of people applying to U.S. universities. With more than eighty percent of Naryn Oblast living in rural areas which suffer high poverty, students often face many disadvantages when compared to more urban areas like Bishkek because of limited access to technology and up-to-date books if they have access to books at all.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, rural areas lack highly trained teachers and poorly upkeep buildings.<sup>166</sup> In addition, for several weeks throughout the school year, schools close or students miss classes because of seasonal farming.<sup>167</sup> With these factors and many more, students in Naryn Oblast facing difficulties that leave them at a greater disadvantage when competing with other areas in KG.<sup>168</sup> With programs such as Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX), in which awarded high school age students study at a U.S. high school for one year or Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA), which allows secondary school teachers to learn new teaching methods and work with U.S. high school teachers over a six-week period. These programs include people from many different countries but only people from on from KG to compete for and Naryn is under-represented. For example, the FLEX program sends sixty students each year to American high schools. Naryn has the lowest requirements to be accepted. Even with this advantage, Naryn students make up less than five of the sixty.<sup>169</sup> This educational disadvantage is even greater when applying for extremely competitive and prestigious scholarships like UGRAD and MUSKIE as the applicants compete with students and professionals from all over Central Asia.

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<sup>165</sup> UNCEF (2004) p. 9

<sup>166</sup> Ibid

<sup>167</sup> Ibid

<sup>168</sup> Ibid

<sup>169</sup> Wagener, C., personal communication (September 11, 2010)

Applicants from countries with better educational systems, like Kazakhstan, are more competitive.

## **Challenges Working in Kyrgyzstan and at NEC**

I have faced many challenges. KG is located worlds away from the United States; the Kyrgyz have a difficult language, diverse culture, and extensive history to learn. This poses problems for anyone living abroad. I have tried to understand both the differences and similarities between America and KG with varying levels of success. Language presented the first and most obvious barrier. My Kyrgyz language skills are weak. I speak well enough to have basic conversations when meeting different people, ordering at restaurants or shopping at the bazaar. I understand much more than I am able to speak. I lived with a host family for one year and enjoyed the experience and although it was difficult at times, I was generally able to communicate and understand them. I have had tutors to improve my Kyrgyz. However, not speaking a higher level of Kyrgyz has limited what I am able to accomplish. I have seen other PCVs hold trainings in Kyrgyz, and they are able to communicate effectively with their audience. If I were to hold trainings in Kyrgyz, I would not be able to get my full message across, and it would be painful for all parties involved. As my co-workers and most clients speak English, I have had limited opportunities to learn Kyrgyz on the job. I knew learning a language would be challenging for me when I entered the Peace Corps. Overall, I have found the experience of studying Kyrgyz both enjoyable and frustrating. I realize that at times, my limited language skills have been a hindrance to my work but I was still able to complete my work with my Kyrgyz.

Learning the culture and ways to work within it has presented other challenges. I have enjoyed learning Kyrgyz culture and adjusted to it well. I have become accustomed to the slower pace of life. I have noticed some similarities to my own Midwestern culture in Ohio. Culture, much like language, is difficult to understand fully; especially it is not one's own. At times I observe situations and do not understand why they transpire the way they do. Other times I do not see the subtleties of what is occurring, someone will have to explain it to me later or point out something I missed. Even other times, I begin to understand only long after a situation has happened by applying new information I have learned.

One of the biggest cultural differences I face is differences in politeness. In Kyrgyz culture, if someone is asked to do something or is asked for an opinion on something it is impolite for the person to say "no" to the other. Even if the asked person does not intend to do the task or they think, it is a bad idea they will still say "yes." For example, I had one student who stopped showing up to my TOEFL class. Two weeks later, I saw her five minutes before the class was scheduled to start. I asked her if she was coming to class. She replied, "Yes," then left the building. I was dumbfounded. It is better to say, "Yes" and save face than to say, "No" and be embarrassed. This is something that is understood between Kyrgyz people, because the person knows the other is saying, "Yes" to be polite, unfortunately for me, I cannot always tell the difference. Kyrgyz culture also places a lot of importance and respect on their elders. For example, when speaking to an older person, the younger person uses the polite form, like in Spanish, and the informal with friends or younger people. Respect for age is a cultural practice and built into the language. When working with students, the "Yes" answer can become a bit of a problem for me, because I am also older. If you ask the students a question or give them



an assignment they will tell you “yes” but in fact the answer could be no. Of course, not all people do this, but it is a common problem that causes me to question the truth of an answer. When I first arrived in Naryn, this was a very difficult adjustment to make, because it seemed like everyone was telling me, “Yes” and not doing what they agreed to do. I have also experienced this in my office. I have asked my counterpart to do something, she agrees, and then when I ask about the task later, she tells me she has not done it yet. Therefore, if I want a something done I have to do it with the person to be sure it is completed. Overtime I adjusted to this and learned how to better frame my questions. I do not always rely on the answer someone gives me as I learned to tell the difference between a “true yes” and a “polite yes.”

Another major challenge has been working with multiple counterparts. When I first visited my site in May 2009, Miss. Bekboeva was working as the assistant. Two weeks later, Miss. Bekboeva left and Nazira Mamyrbayeva filled her job. She worked there from June 2009 to October 2009. I developed a strong working relationship and friendship with her. As someone new to the community and the country, I relied heavily on her for help with professional and personal matters. She taught me about Naryn and its people as well as acting as my Kyrgyz language tutor. She and I planned a five-day camp together. Miss. Mamyrbayeva answered many questions I had. Just as I was beginning to feel adjusted, she left. She left because the director wanted her to work full-time, but she was only able to work part-time, because she was a university student and had to attend classes during work hours. Following her departure, Nazgul began assisting at the NEC. She worked there from October 2009 to March 2010. Again, we had a strong working relationship and friendship. I enjoyed working with her and we accomplished a lot together. It was not as difficult for me, because I had become much more

acclimated to the culture and work. From March to November 2010, I have not had a counterpart and my director would only occasionally stop in the office. My last counterpart began a month before I left and I was only able to show basics about how to use and maintain the computers and train her on some of the work I did in the office that she would take over. She also assisted with preparing for and conducting a teacher training. My experience with various counterparts is common to most PCVs. If the PCV is able to develop a good and positive relationship with their counterpart, it can affect the volunteer very much.

The greatest challenge I have had at my site has been the frequent absences of the NEC director. As previously stated, she is an essential part of the organization. In October of 2009, she adopted a three-month old baby girl. KG is a family orientated culture, and it is customary for the mother to spend the first year at home with her child. This is expected of Kyrgyz women, and most offices and other places of work encourage it. Most NGOs in Naryn have more than five staff members, thus the staff is able to cover for each other's maternity leave. Additionally, some offices hire temporary help when a woman is on maternity leave. Mrs. Kaseeva attempted to both take time off and still work at the NEC as the director. She was not able to work full-time, and this negatively affected the organization. The problem was not that she took the leave, but rather that she did not get a temporarily replacement. This predicament forced a new assistant and an American PCV to run the office. She had discussed this decision with the Embassy, but I do not know the details of the arrangement. She still handled the budget, talking with the Tax Office, and completing various reports, work that she could easily do from home. She occasionally came to the office for a few hours or called the office to check in. She continued to work, albeit with a lighter load, but in other instances she

was absent for weeks at a time. This was bad for the organization, because it put a lot of unfair pressure and large expectations on the assistant who was making very little. The director continued to be paid her same salary of \$500 per month but was working far less. The assistant was uncomfortable assuming all the responsibilities of a director. She looked to me for guidance and decision-making. This put me in a difficult position, because I was also not the director and was still trying to figure out my exact purpose. Understandably, the assistant felt as though she was not being paid for the work she was doing, and once she had a better offer, she took it.

Peace Corps believes that a PCV working with an organization is not a general office worker; they should not act as lone individuals. PC wants PCVs to transfer skills and knowledge to the organization staff, so that projects are sustainable once the PCV has left. Meaning the work done by the PCV can be reproduced after they have completed their time with the organization. When my director left, I lost the ability to work with her on capacity building. I have been able to do small skills transfers such as teaching her how to redesign informational brochures or other small tasks. However, I have been unable to work with her on the more complicated capacity building assignments, such as office management, following a strategic plan, or expanding the mission of the organization. From October 2009 to March 2010, I worked with the assistant, Nazgul Kurmanbekova. I transferred many useful skills to her, such as computer training. However, she was only a temporary staff member. She was always looking for other jobs. At one point, at the end of November 2009, she left for a job but came back after two weeks. I was always aware of Miss. Kurmanbekova other job prospects, and I knew that anything I taught her would be useful for her future, but would not stay with the

organization. She would leave, and my own director would not have the skills that I had taught the assistant. This was a great challenge and disappointment.

From March 2010 until November 2010, I was more or less working alone. It is not unusual for volunteers to have bad sites with little work, to the point that they decide to move to a new organization. However, I feel that I do have a unique situation, because I have a functioning organization and an adequate workload, but no one else is there. Often Kyrgyz people come into the office and give me curious looks when they discover I am the only person working there. Then they ask for the director, and I tell them she is not in the office, or I give them her home phone number. On several different occasions, people have kept asking me why no one else is in the office, and I have to tell them that I do not know. It is well within my contract with the NEC to leave, because I have no counterpart, and my director does not come to work very often. It is, in the very least, unethical to have a PCV who is not paid by the organization running it on a daily basis. This has been a definite challenge that has limited my ability to develop the NEC and transfer skills. I had wanted to do certain projects with the organization during my service, such as holding trainings or working with Mrs. Kaseeva directly but was unable to do so. I have been able to do some of the work I had originally set out to complete, and I have enjoyed the work in the office with the students. Peace Corps offered to change my site, but I declined. Moving sites would force me to start all over again, which I did not want to do. In addition, there was no guarantee I would have stayed in Naryn, and I did not want to leave the city I had become adjusted to. Even if I stayed in Naryn, but moved to a different organization, I might not have been able to work with the same students. I decided that although it was not a perfect situation, I enjoyed the work. Additionally, I did not know

what would happen to the organization if I left, because than there would be no one working there.

I do not personally agree with Mrs. Kaseevas' decision to work and take the leave, because there were better solutions available. I respect and understand that she had both family and work obligations, and I know that Kyrgyz women deal with the triple burden of labor when it comes to working, running the household and raising children. However, getting someone else to work there temporarily would have been a better decision. In October and November, Mrs. Kaseeva was in America for an educational advising training. Since her return in November, she has been in the office every day and appears to be showing a better work ethic as she did in the past. We were able to complete two grants, an embassy grant for new equipment including three computers, projector, and camera and a Peace Corps SPA grant for a teacher training on assisting students who want to study aboard and teaching methods. She was also able to hire a new assistant before I left. We opened the internet café. We rearranged the office to be more compatible with the work done in the office by providing a workspace for the staff, library area, computer area, and table with a white board for classes.

## **My Experience Working at the NEC**

Now that the status of the NEC has been explained and the work environment is established along with my general observations about the NEC and its staff, I will discuss the work I have been able to accomplish during my service. Included in the summary of what I have accomplished there will also be an assessment of the successes and failures of those projects. As I will explain in each of these sections, the organization would have been able to conduct

each of these duties and projects without my assistance but the projects would have surely turned out differently.

### **My role in the Community**

Most of my time in KG has been spent within the university community and at my office. I put a lot of effort into understanding this community by making observations and being active within that community. Although being an American PCV in Naryn makes a person stand out, I believe the actions I have taken have made me not only a recognizable face but also a well-integrated member of this community. I go to work every day. Some days many people visit the office and other days no one comes. However, I knew I needed to understand how this community functioned and be seen as an active member so I could be an effective volunteer. In addition, I am active within the American Studies Center, teaching classes and assisting with events meeting both university and high school students that attend American Center classes and activities. I also attend university events that are not directly related to the NEC or the American Center, such as quiz bowl tournaments and cultural events. Many students know me by name even if I do not know them, and I know much of the staff. What also surprises me is when people I have not met previously come to my office or calls me with questions about studying abroad, writing a grant, or other enquiries relevant to my work. These people are from different parts of the community, and I often have no idea how they found me. I have integrated into my community.

## My Daily Role in the Center

When I first arrived at the NEC, I took over some of the work and roles that had been developed by other PCVs who had worked with the NEC as a secondary project.<sup>170</sup> The director was very open to the idea of expanding this role by staying in the office every day 10-5, observing how the office works and how I could help. With some work already in progress, I first filled the role of teacher. This was helpful, because as soon as I started I had to work. I began by teaching a TOEFL class that I still hold. Many PCVs do not have the luxury of having real work when they start out and so they spend a lot of their time trying to find work to do. The director's past experiences with PCVs and Americans in general helped her to understand how important it was to have work for me to do, but also to allow me to figure out what I wanted to do during my service. This along with the fact that we could communicate easily with each other helped me to become an integral part of the office.

The role that I most often fill is that of a native speaker of English. I have done this by editing and helping translate many documents in English, including reports, grant applications, emails, resumes, university applications, and essays. Because both the NEC staff and students are often communicating in Kyrgyz and Russian, I am the person in the office that looks over everything to be translated into English.

As well as being a native speaker, I am the only one in the NEC that has attended American universities at both the undergraduate and master's level. I am able to answer many

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<sup>170</sup> A secondary project is a general term used by Peace Corps as any short-term or long-term work that is not a direct part of your primary work site.

questions from both the director and students about what studying in America is like, including workload, student life, and class structure. They have benefited from hearing a firsthand account of what it is like to study in America.

As I have spent more time in the office, I have been able to gain the trust and respect of my co-workers. I have been able to fill more important roles, such as talking about how things work, what I think of them, possible positive changes, and possible ways to expand. With that trust, I have also been able to help plan and conduct numerous events. Additionally, this has allowed me to do different secondary projects, because the director knows that I am actually working, and it is not an issue if I am out of the office for an hour or all day.

Overall, my other daily work includes being in the office for 7 hours, talking to students, answering questions, assisting with any work being done in the office, teaching, or possibly working on a secondary project. As I mentioned early, one unfortunate role I have grown accustomed to is being the person in the office when the local staff is not present.

## **Media Campaign**

When I first came to the NEC in June 2009, I talked with my director about what kind of tasks she wanted me to work on. We decided that I would create new materials to advertise the organization. Before I started the task, I knew I needed to understand the organization, people's perception of it, and what image the director wanted to portray to the public. Mrs. Kaseeva told me all about the organization and how it was still new and most people did not know what it did or even that it existed. She wanted the public to see a professional



organization that would give people hope that they were capable of studying abroad at the best universities with the assistance of the NEC.<sup>171</sup>

I approached the media campaign with two goals. First, we decided that sustainability was a major issue for the organization, because it is dependent on a foreign donor for its funding. The NEC is vulnerable to EducationUSA and could lose funding at any time. One way I could help was to create a media campaign, because the more people that are aware of the NEC the more people visit and apply to the programs. The thought behind this media campaign was that the NEC would look better to the donor if it had more clients and was successfully assisting more people in studying abroad. Thus, the donor might be less likely to pull the funding. Additionally, the more people who visit the office the more opportunities the NEC would have to find more funding options for students to study abroad in the U.S. Second, we wanted to produce professional looking materials to advertise the NEC and the services we offered.

I also knew that I needed to create documents that could easily be altered in the future, as I would not always be there to recreate or change them. With all projects, I took into consideration the potential and ability of the director or an assistant to recreate them. I always showed the director and assistant how to modify the files and provided them with the software to make changes if they needed to.

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<sup>171</sup> Kaseeva, N., personal communication (June 15 2009)

Before I came to the NEC, it did have a logo, brochure, and bulletin board outside the office. The director created them, but she knew the quality could be better. She did not have the computer skills or programs to make better quality products and was excited to see them improved.

My first target was the logo, because it is the symbol of the organization. The original was a green circle with a clip art picture of the globe and the name of the organization. The picture itself was made with Paint, and it had large pixels and looked unprofessional. We talked about what the symbol should say about the organization and decided we liked the idea of the globe, because the NEC is partly about giving people the opportunity to travel. Then I came up with the idea of putting the globe in a book to show that the NEC is also about learning. I found a free clip art picture of an open book, took the same globe, and put it on one page, adding the name of the organization on the other page. Another PCV with good computer and Photo Shop skills cleaned up the image picture to give it smooth edges for a more professional look. The file is resizable to be either large or small and keep the quality of the image so the NEC can use it for any reason without worrying about having to change the image. Now this logo is on the brochure, website, and hanging on the wall outside the office.

Second, I redesigned the brochure. It was a three-fold brochure with information about the NEC: services provided, contact information, mission statement, and the old logo on the cover. Again, it did not look professional, because the spacing was poorly done, and the folds inside did not line up with the folds on the outside, so when it was folded the words on the inside were on different pages. Mrs. Kaseeva did the brochure in Microsoft Word, which is not

a good program to use to make brochures so I created a new brochure using Microsoft Publisher. I did not change much of the information. I added the new vision and mission statements we had rewritten together as well as the mission of EducationUSA as it is the donor organization. I added the new logo and EducationUSA's logo, a photo of the office, the flags of the U.S. and KG, and lines to frame it. I saved this file as both a word document and PDF, so it is easy to change and print. The office now has Microsoft Publisher in Russian and PDF creator,<sup>172</sup> so the staff will be able to change the brochure in the future. I also revamped the bulletin board, which hangs outside the office. It is a 4'ft by 7'ft board. Originally, it was bare wood with different sheets of paper taped to it. With my counterpart, I put red paper for the background and "Naryn Education Center" in yellow letters to represent the colors of the Kyrgyz flag. We added headers for the mission, services, news, and events and placed them in clear plastic paper holders so they could be replaced when necessary. It stands out much more than before and has easy utility with the paper sheet holders.

I suggested changing the email from the director's personal e-mail address at a Russian website to a Gmail account, using the organization's name. This would give the NEC a more legitimate way to be contacted. I selected Gmail, because both Americans and Kyrgyz can easily recognize it and Gmail has better features than the Russian account.

Overall, the success of the media campaign was mixed. The first goal of getting people to come into the NEC has been achieved, and the profile of the NEC has risen in the community. However, I cannot credit this to the completion of the media materials for two reasons. First,

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<sup>172</sup> A free software program to convert files into PDFs

more people come to the NEC simply because it has been around longer, so more people have heard about it. Secondly, having a PCV work at the NEC has made more people aware of the organization. The Naryn community is small and homogeneous, so PCVs are well known in the community, because we are foreigners and easily identifiable. In addition, people seek out PCVs because of our English skills. They want help learning English or need help editing or translating a document or grant. This has brought many people into the NEC. Many individuals have come into the office specifically because they did hear an American works there and is able to help them go the U.S.<sup>173</sup> But, the second goal of producing more professional and changeable products was fully achieved. The media campaign was a success despite mixed results. The NEC will have those materials after I am gone, and it is sustainable, because the director is able to change as the organization grows and changes.

### NEC Website

When I first arrived in Naryn, I told Mrs. Kaseeva that I was able to make websites.<sup>174</sup> Before the NEC had no website, because no one had the skills to create one, and she was excited at the possibility of having a website for the organization. I included the director in all the major decisions on design and content. First, I knew that the content had to best display the NEC's information. I had some ideas of my own, but I asked her what kind of information she wanted on the website. We agreed to include the mission statement of the NEC as well as

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<sup>173</sup> I regularly ask people how they heard of NEC

<sup>174</sup> Although the website was a part of the original idea for the media campaign it was such a large project that I decided to discuss it in its own section

EducationUSA for the first page to clearly state to anyone looking at the page what we do.<sup>175</sup>

The website would give a brief description of specific U.S. study abroad opportunities and training programs. It would have many additional sites listed to help people who are interested in learning about study abroad programs, scholarships, and advice on how to study abroad. The website would also include the services the NEC provides to clients, how to contact upcoming events, photos, and us.

Once the content was decided on, I began on the design of the website. I first looked at other websites from other advising centers around the world to get ideas of what others had done. Most did not look very good, and I wanted to produce a better site. Both Mrs. Kaseeva and I wanted the website to look like a professional website, unlike the others I had seen. Unfortunately, my knowledge of HTML and website design is limited. Before this, I created one site. However, on the Internet there are many free templates and guides on how to build websites. I searched for a good free template to use. I had specific criteria for the design of the template. I wanted a blue menu bar and white background with black font because this is the easiest color scheme to read for a website. Additionally, it had to be a simple design that did not use many graphics, so it could load quickly, because Naryn has a slow internet speed. After a lot of searching, I found a template that met these criteria. I had to alter the original template slightly to make it better for the NEC site. The director was pleased with the look of the template. Then I added the content and used some online help guides to make the website look and do what I wanted it to do. For example, I had to look up HTML text and guides on how

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<sup>175</sup> [www.naryn.edu.center.from.kg](http://www.naryn.edu.center.from.kg)

to enlarge the pictures on a separate page. It took three months to create the site. After I completed the English version of the website, our assistant translated it into Russian. We added Russian, because many Kyrgyz people are able to read Russian, and if they do not fully understand the English or are simply interested in the organization and unable to read English, they will be able to understand the site.

Once the website was completed, we launched it on the internet. First, the website needed a web server to host the site. Through searching for a web server, I found that many companies are either free or charge at least a \$5 monthly fee depending on the size and requirements of the site. Because the website was simple and not large, I suggested that a free web server (giving it a .com address) should host the website. If it were a free web server, it would not cost the NEC any money. However, Mrs. Kaseeva wanted it to have a .kg address, so people would know the NEC was a Kyrgyz organization. Kyrgyztelecom<sup>176</sup> hosts the websites for a small fee of a 100 Som (\$2) a month. The cost was well within the budget of the NEC, so I did not argue to put it on a free server. The only problem that has arisen is when the NEC pays the phone and internet bill late. When this happens, the website is unavailable until the bill is paid. However, I was able to upload the website on November 15, 2009.

The director has been very pleased with the outcome of the website. It has many resources for people looking for study abroad help. Several PCVs have used the site to help students. Despite this, few people actually view the website on a regular basis. As of

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<sup>176</sup> Kyrgyztelecom is a communication company in Kyrgyz provides phone and internet services.

November 20, 2010, less than 150 people have actually viewed the website.<sup>177</sup> Although this is not many views, I was not expecting many people to view it. As of now, Naryn is not well connected to the internet. Most people in Naryn City do not have internet in their homes and must go to an internet café if they wish to go online. With few exceptions, people living in villages in Naryn oblast have no access to the internet. I have observed widespread computer and Internet illiteracy. Only a few organizations in Naryn even have websites. It is easy to understand why people in Naryn would not be looking on the internet for information about an organization. Instead, they would just go to that office. Since my time is limited, I wanted to get a website up and running so my organization could have one. The website is easy to update and provides the NEC with all the necessary software and training to keep the site current. Internet is starting to get easier to access since I arrived. . Now the cell phone providers have “USB internet sticks.” These sticks can access the internet by connecting through a cell phone signal. They are still somewhat expensive but are becoming more common and allowing more people to connect to the internet. In the near future, more people will have access to the internet and begin to use it on a regular basis. The NEC site will be a more valuable resource.

### **Summer Camp**

As I mentioned before, a previous PCV wrote a SPA Grant to fund a summer camp. The SPA grant only financed \$584 of the total costs. Mrs. Kaseeva wrote a project grant to EducationUSA in which the NEC was awarded an additional \$1700 for the camp. Aga Khan

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<sup>177</sup> According to the View Counter attached to the website.

Development Network,<sup>178</sup> through its English in the Village (EIV)<sup>179</sup> program, contributed \$500. Total expenditures reached \$2784, most of which was spent on transportation and room and board at the resort, *Bar Chin*, the remaining funds went towards snacks for breaks and supplies. The camp targeted high school students in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade who wanted to study at university in the U.S.<sup>180</sup> Lessons taught at the camp focused on necessary skills needed to complete an application to a university and “Life Skills” from the *Peace Corps Life Skills Manual*.<sup>181</sup> It included both students from Naryn City and students who participated in the EIV program. Issyk Kul was chosen as the site, because it is a popular vacation destination for many Kyrgyz people. It has a renowned lake with many beaches and warm weather, so people can go swimming. Having the camp on the lake would attract more students in comparison to having it in snowy mountainous Naryn City.

The summer camp had several goals. The first was to teach high school age students necessary skills, such as resume writing and interview skills to apply to U.S. universities. This is because many students do not learn these skills while in school. Second, was to teach them how to make goals for the future and how to achieve those goals. The third goal was to give students a chance to practice and learn English. The fourth goal was to advertise the NEC to

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<sup>178</sup> The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is an international organization that focuses on “health, education, culture, rural development, institution building and the promotion of economic development.” <http://www.akdn.org/about.asp>

<sup>179</sup> The EIV program is a program design by the University of Central Asia to reach out the area villages. They select students and teachers from area villages and provide materials and training to teachers, material, and classes to students. This is to increase the language ability of village students to give them better opportunities to attend the university.

<sup>180</sup> This are last two year of high school in Kyrgyzstan

<sup>181</sup> The Peace Corps Life Skills Manual is material given to Peace Corps Volunteers as a resource to education young people about HIV/AIDS. This is done by supplying lesson plans for PCVs to use with local young people.



the community especially the high school aged students, because they were going to university soon, so the NEC wanted that age group to be aware of the opportunities they would have when they started preparing for their future. Not a directly stated goal but still a hope of the NEC, was that a few students would apply to U.S. universities.

This summer camp was originally set for the end of June 2009. However, there were issues with the reservation at the resort, so the date had to be changed to August 5-10, 2009. The original idea was that I would work with fellow PCV Martin Ryan and my director in planning the camp. However, both went on vacation in July. This left the assistant and I in charge of the camp. Neither one of us had organized a camp before, but we had an idea how to accomplish the task. She had attended camps put on by PCVs, and I had some prior event planning experience. Therefore, the PCV and the director felt comfortable leaving us in charge of the planning.

The first task I did was to choose the students to participate in the camp. The total number of students who attended the camp was twenty-two. I read over sixty applications. Their essay, "Why do you want to study in the U.S.?" answer was the most crucial piece in determining their acceptance. I chose ten students and five alternates from Naryn city. The program director of EIV, Gulzana Kurmanalieva, chose the remaining camp participants from the villages. Next, the assistant and I had to buy all the supplies. We had to get notes, pens, printer paper, folders, nametags, tea, cookies, and other necessary supplies. Next, I wrote out lessons plans for three days of teaching. I wrote lesson plans on topics like, writing a resume, statement of purpose, recommendation letter, how to conduct an interview, and how to fill out

an application.<sup>182</sup> All the lessons first explained what the topic was and how to do it and then used examples so the students would get practice. For example, I would explain what a resume was, show an example, and then have the students write their own resume. At which point I or someone else would help the students write their resume and explain anything they did not understand. I chose three lessons from the *Peace Corps Life Skills Manual* all focused on how to set and achieve goals. I knew my assistant would be teaching these lessons, so I worked with her on how to teach them and what students should get out of the lessons. She had seen these lessons taught before, so the task was easy. I planned for the day and Miss. Kurmanalieva planned the evening activities for the student.

Once the camp was planned and all the items purchased, we were ready to go. I chose another PCV, Carl Beien, to go to the camp with me to help teach and provide any other help that might be needed. With the twenty-two students and six adults,<sup>183</sup> we conducted the camp. I mainly taught the educational lessons with the help of the NEC assistant, as my translator. We did the camp in both English and Kyrgyz, so the students would use their English skills, and the English was translated to make sure everything was understood. Mrs. Kaseeva did lessons on the programs available to students and explained the process on how to apply to a U.S. university. One of the presenters, Talibek Karpekov, studied in America at Montana State University for six months in the 1990s through the Fulbright Scholarship. He explained what it

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<sup>182</sup> Many people including teachers do not know how to write recommendation letter because they are not necessary for university applications or jobs. The goal was to teach the students so they could assist the people they have writing the letters.

<sup>183</sup> The five adults included Nazira Kaseeva, Talibek Karpekov, Nazira Mamyrbayeva, Gulsana Kurmanalieva, Carl Beien, and Bradley Pribe.

was like for him studying in the U.S. Miss. Kurmanalieva did several short fun activities with the students. Carl did a lesson on how to give a successful interview. The assistant surprised me with many little games to play with the students between the lessons. This kept the students' energy levels high and helped them stay interested in the lessons. Including the swimming time and meals, each day was filled so the students learned and remained active.

The camp was very successful. All the students were wonderful to work with. Despite some minor changes to the schedule, all the important lessons were conducted. Because the students had to practice what was taught in the lesson, it was easy to evaluate what they had learned. Any misunderstandings were addressed by myself or one of the other adults assisting with the camp. The director had all the students fill out a survey with several questions, such as, did they learn, what did they learn, did they have fun, and what was their favorite part? The reviews were positive with the only negative being that some of the Life Skills lessons were repetitive. Mrs. Kaseeva, Miss. Mamyrbayeva, Miss. Kurmanalieva, Mr. Beien and I also evaluated the camp in a conversation after and all of us thought it went well. The only negative remark was that some of the lessons were difficult for the students, and I suggested that any training or camp in the future should build up from writing the resume, application, interview, recommendation, and finally to the statement of purpose. I believe that doing it in that order would make more sense. This was something I did not think about when I was making the schedule. After the camp, five students started to come regularly to the office for classes and assistance and one is now currently studying at AUCA. This was the first large event that the NEC ever had, so it was successful because of the students who came after that and the lessons the other students learned.

The camp was a huge success and a great learning opportunity. It gave me a lot of confidence to see a camp come into fruition and be successful. I was able to work well with and teach Kyrgyz people. This was something I had not really done before. It was a chance to build relationships with both the other people who work on the camp and the students. I was able to learn a lot about Kyrgyz students, which is important because, I still work with many students in that age group. I learned how to shop in the bazaar (market) and how to plan in KG. Lastly, I had a great time at the camp.

This is an example of what many organizations do in KG. They write a grant for training hoping to be provided with donations from international organizations. The three donors of the camp, EducationUSA, Aga Khan, and Peace Corps, are all international organizations that contributed a total of \$2,784. However, why did the NEC write a grant for a summer camp? It could put on a camp for local high schools, and hold it in Naryn City at a school and pay for the lunches and snacks and do the lessons on its own. It probably would have been shorter due to the cost of the food. However, it was more effective with those international donors, because the camp was able to get students from a broader area (Naryn City and surrounding villages). With the help of two PCVs, the experiences and lessons focused specifically on the skills, because each one of us had actually gone through the process of applying to American universities. I believe that grant money is not necessary for a summer camp. Mrs. Kaseeva often talks about how she wants to do another camp. I suggest the NEC holds it in Naryn on its own, which would greatly reduce the cost. However, she only thinks it will be possible if a grant pays for it, so it can be in a nice location, and the students will not have to pay for anything. If

the NEC had its own small source of funding from a micro-business, it would be able to raise the money or spread some of the cost burden on the students going to the camp.

## Strategic Plan

A strategic plan is vital for an NGO, because it gives the organization goals to achieve and a plan on how to accomplish those goals. There are different ways, but the basic parts of a stretch plan go as follows: it should include the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the organization, followed by strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. The strategic plan should address the prospects of the organization, maybe a year or several years in the future, depending on the organization. It should include an action plan, which is a general outline of the steps the organization needs to complete the action and who is responsible. Finally, it should have a basic budget for the organization. Lastly, the strategic plan should be achievable.

The NEC had a strategic plan before I arrived. I talked to Mrs. N. Kaseeva about rewriting the strategic plan, and we agreed that her sister, Gulnaz Kaseeva, would assist in rewriting it. Mrs. G. Kaseeva works at a consulting organization, Agrolead, in which one of her responsibilities is to assist with writing strategic plans. My director and I had a meeting to talk about the strategic plan before her sister came to discuss it. I gave my view of the plan using the sandwich method of feedback.<sup>184</sup> I made the positive observation that the strategic plan included many important parts such as the mission, threats of the organization, and goals.

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<sup>184</sup> The sandwich method of feedback means you discuss positive aspects followed by negative and end with positive again to make it easier for the person and more receptive to the suggestions.

However, it was missing important elements such as the strengths of the organization and that it was not clearly organized and somewhat unrealistic. I ended the meeting stating that it was good that the NEC had a strategic plan written out, because most NGOs in KG do not. The negative overshadowed the positive remarks, because she felt the strategic plan included all the important points and was realistic.

When Mrs. G. Kaseeva arrived on September 14, we decided to work on the strategic plan for the next two afternoons. Over the next two days, we went through the entire plan together. First, Mrs. G. Kaseeva made several of the same criticisms I made of the plan. She said it was unorganized, unrealistic, more information needed to be added, and some information should be taken out. She had an outline for a strategic plan already provided as a suggestion to follow.<sup>185</sup> It began with the mission statement, goals, and objectives. We each wrote a suggestion for every angle and then we agreed on the final version. This process happened with the SWOT, action plan, future plans, and budget plans. We had the greatest success while writing out the vision, mission, goals, and objectives. As I stated earlier, the director is the epitome of organization and this is another example of that. This was her plan for her organization and despite the best intention of someone helping her, her sister was not going to change what she thought was right. She wanted the strategic plan to extend over three years despite the persistent suggestion it should only be for one year. She took a defensive position when her sister suggested taking out the unrealistic plans of increasing the staff and getting off international funding without a solid plan to raise the money. At this point,

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<sup>185</sup> Some of the names in her outline were named differently than what I have used here but for simplicity I use the names I have here but the ideas behind each is the same.

I did not wish to further offend Mrs. Kaseeva, because her sister was suggesting changes I had already made. I felt no more progress would be made on changing the strategic plan, and those other changes and suggestions could be made later. However, Mrs. G. Kaseeva did not completely fail in changing Mrs. N. Kaseevas' mind about some parts of the plan. She was able to convince her to reduce the number of employees from ten to three and adjust the plan of reducing international funding from zero to fifty percent.

Overall, the strategic plan is a better document than it was before. When it came to adding information the director was more than willing to do so but when it came to taking it out she was reluctant. I think the strategic plan could improve more. I was hoping by working with the director for the past year and half that I had gained enough trust and confidence that I could help change the plan more. However, when I asked her if she wanted to update the strategic plan again this year, her response was that the plan was for three years so it did not need updated yet.<sup>186</sup> I worked with Mrs. Kaseeva on creating a strategic planning training for two organizations, and she had worked with strategic planning trainings when she was employed by the Soros foundation. Having had several discussions with her about strategic planning, I know she understands why they are important and how to create them. However, the NECs strategic plan does not reflect the knowledge she has displayed. Furthermore, she does not use the strategic plan as a tool to lead where the NEC will go in the future. If she were in the office more I could have shown the importance of the strategic plan. I could have kept going back to the strategic plan and asked her how this action fits in with it, asked her if the

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<sup>186</sup> Kaseeva, N., personal communication (November 15, 2010)

NEC is following the plan and looking for necessary changes, and if so, what changes need to be made. However, with her absence this was impossible.

## **TOEFL**

I teach TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) for the NEC. I have structured this class around the requirements for passing the TOEFL. This test is based on the English skills required to be successful at a university in the U.S. These skills include reading, writing, speaking, and listening. I have taught this class since I arrived at the NEC.

Over the course of two years, I have worked with classes of up to six students for a semester as well as conducting individual tutoring sessions for promising students. I mainly work with advanced English speakers to improve their skills in order to do well on the TOEFL, because it is a requirement of scholarship programs as well as admission requirement forms for most universities in the U.S. This class has been successful for me, because I have had the opportunity to meet the best English students in NSU and the local high schools. Additionally, I have had several of my students get promising scores on the TOEFL and other English tests for universities within KG.

This class is an important service for the NEC, because it gives students a better chance of doing well on the TOEFL and furthering them in the application process for universities and scholarship programs. Even more importantly to the NEC is that the offering of this class attracts the most motivated and best English students. By meeting with those students twice a week, the NEC has many opportunities to give the students information about unique scholarship programs.



Even though this class benefits from having a native speaker teach the course, it is definitely not a requirement. In both Bishkek and Osh, there are organizations without native English speakers teaching the course. It would be more sustainable for the course to have a local teacher, even if that teacher only teaches that course. It would be expensive and difficult but not impossible to hire a teacher for the entire semester, because only a few students are actually interested and able to take such an advanced course in Naryn.

## Outreach

The Outreach program is a continuing effort by the NEC to get out to the villages in Naryn Oblast and spread knowledge about the prospects of studying abroad. The goal is to give information to high school students and teachers about programs available to them as well as make students aware of the NEC. The primary information given is directed at high school students to motivate them into applying for university. This shows a lot of forward thinking by the NEC, because if a student from a village plans to go to university he or she will mostly go to NSU. Therefore, if the NEC spends just an hour at an area school in a village it is possible that those interested will visit the NEC in the future. This program has been going on for nearly three years, but in my time at the NEC, I have yet to meet a student from a village. However, as teachers improve, their teaching methods and students in the villages improve their English; this program will begin to pay off. Additionally, the program is very inexpensive, costing only a few hundred Som for transportation to the villages.

I do not play a main role in the Outreach Program. My director presents the information and speaks with the students and faculty. My main job was to answer questions

like who I am, what I do and what the United States is like for a student. This program will be sustainable when I am gone, because it only requires a person to show a Power Point slideshow and give a small presentation on information and opportunities.

## **Conclusions**

As this paper has shown, the environment has changed over the past twenty years since independence and since Anderson suggested this new model. Anderson focused his study on those organizations that deal with the government more directly in the area of human rights or democracy and are therefore in more opposition with the government. Thus, these areas of CS would be located in the capital. The recent political changes in KG and lack of recent research make it difficult to judge the current state of those more oppositional NGOs located in Bishkek. Although Bishkek still has the highest concentration of registered NGOs, the landscape has gradually changed; NGOs are now scattered throughout the country and even in rural areas.

I would not rate the current stage of CS as ambiguous as Anderson once did. Although he does not give a full ranking scale, I will say that CS in KG is developing. This is especially true for the organizations that provide services for poverty reduction and have spread in recent years into rural areas and other smaller urban areas. These organizations have much different experiences than those described in Anderson's study.

The experience within the political supportive context of the NEC has been positive. The NEC can survive independently from the state and the national or local government. These government agencies do not impose upon its functions. Although many analyze the current

Kyrgyz laws dealing with noncommercial organizations, the government does allow free association of its members and permits the NEC to act independent and without interference.

The economic supportive context has improved over the past twenty years with the GDP growth in KG. KG has seen GDP growth and a more stable currency.<sup>187</sup> From the discussions I have had with Kyrgyz people, Naryn has improved economically in the past ten years, so more people than just the small elite that Anderson saw have seen economic growth. However, this growth has been seen more in others areas of the country and the lack of stronger economic growth in Naryn does put some pressure on the clients of the NEC, because students are unable to afford the cost of studying abroad and the NEC cannot pay for the entire venture. This makes it difficult for even the smartest students to be successful in their goal of studying aboard.

The regulatory context has both positive and negative aspects. The NEC members are not blocked or discouraged by the national or local government. The NEC is not abusing its role in society by using nepotism or being corrupt. However, the tax laws do impose some financial burdens on the organization although they are not overwhelming. Charity Laws do not encourage businesses or individual to donate money, which if changed could at some point help funding for the NEC.

The supportive informational context is positive for the NEC. As far as reaching out to the community to convey the goals, programs, and services provided by the NEC it is not

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<sup>187</sup><http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/KYRGYZEXTN/0,,menuPK:305786~pagePK:141132~piPK:141109~theSitePK:305761,00.html>

prevented by either the national or local government. Bear in mind this is supported by the US government which does not always garner the full support of the KG government or its citizens, despite this the organization is still allowed to function and reach out to the public of Naryn.

The positive ways the NEC is allowed to function within KG as a CSO and NGO is not outweighed or balanced as Anderson concluded in his study. Although the environment is not fully developed or robust as some CSs in other countries, the picture in KG has improved especially for service providers and poverty reduction NGOs. Therefore, I conclude based on the development of the NEC and my experiences working within the organization there have been both positive and negative aspects. I still state that CS is upgraded from ambiguous to developing.

## **Limitations**

Although I have given a thorough account of literature on the topics of CS and NGOs in KG, this country is multilingual, Kyrgyz and Russian being the two official languages, and English being the third spoken language, and the one most vital to the NGO community. I am unable to read the literature that most certainly appears in Russian, the academic language in the country, or any research that might appear in Kyrgyz. In addition, I had only access to journals or books that appear in PDF form on the internet and very limited access to books and articles that appear only in published form. Much of the research conducted is several years old and was taken under the first President. However, the country has changed a great deal, because two revolutions have happened and it is economically better off than it was ten years ago. Additionally, information and communication is much easier than it was just a few years ago

with the mass distribution of cell phones and the internet. The ways NGOs used to communicate were affected by regional and global isolation. However, much is also still present in the country and in NGOs and I fairly represented what was relevant for today. Despite these limitations, I can accurately represent the most recent arguments in the literature.

I have presented a detailed account of the NEC in this paper, and it provides some useful insight. However, it is difficult to generalize NGOs all over KG. The NEC shares many of the same pros and cons and faces many of the same difficulties as other NGOs. However, only observing one NGO does limit the scope of the research.

Some other general limitations to the study are that most of my personal reflections on my experience come from observations and informal interviews. As I previously explained, I found this to be the best method of researching. This is due to the amount of time I was a part of the NEC, two years. Two years is plenty of time to understand the nature of the organization. However, I am a foreigner in this country with a limited understanding of Kyrgyz and virtually no understanding of Russian. Since both of these languages are spoken in the NEC, I could have certainly missed or misunderstood some observations. Additionally, as a foreigner, I most certainly misunderstood cultural variances despite my best efforts to understand the culture of the NEC and KG.

## Recommendations for NEC

At the time of completion of this research and my Peace Corps service, the NEC had just opened the internet café. Having a small business is important for several different reasons for NEC. First, the NEC will have a source of extra income that will make the organization more appealing to its founder, EducationUSA, because it will not be completely dependent on EducationUSA for funding. Second, the profits could allow NEC to invest in savings, purchasing new books or equipment, contributing to summer camps or other projects, paying for employee salaries, pay for general office cost, and pay for the internet. However, the amount of money NEC will make off the internet café is unknown at this time and it is unlikely to be enough to make large investments over a few hundred dollars a year.

Although the profits from the internet café most likely will not be enough to make the organization sustainable, it will put it in a stronger financial position. Once the business is fully running, NEC needs to learn how to run the new business and how to plan for and spend the money. First, NEC needs establish a fair price to the internet users but also make enough of a profit to reinvest into NEC. Then, it needs to find out how much it can expect to make off the internet café. Once an expectation of money is estimated, it must establish weekly or monthly sales goals to insure that it will make the estimated amount. Finally, it must spend the money in an effective way to benefit both the organization and its clients.

However, I recommend the NEC to save the money for a long period to make larger purchases or help fund future summer camps. Depending on the amount of money the internet café brings in it could also be possible to hire a qualified English teacher to teach the

TOEFL class. This is because the individual cost to a student taking the class would be too great and the high cost would not attract enough students but if the internet café could help ease some of the cost for students, it may be possible.

Assuming the internet café is a good experience and is profitable, the NEC should seek out other profit making business ventures. Some other areas of profit making the NEC could expand into are using the English expertise in the office to translate documents for other organizations. Alternatively, researching and writing grants in English for organizations, because many organizations in Naryn do not have a qualified person to write in English. It is possible for the organization to take time to focus on social enterprises, because the workload is not full time or year round for the NEC. So doing this would not take away from the original mission of the organization, and may help increase its impact by allowing it to do more to fulfill its mission. It could help the organization complete projects it would otherwise have to find a grant to pay for such as camps or meetings.

The NEC should do more research around Naryn Oblast to see what scholarships or programs could be most beneficial and what scholarships or programs people would be most qualified to receive. Currently, the NEC focuses on university students in Naryn City, because it is the only university in Naryn Oblast. However, there are many potential people to serve in Naryn Oblast. For example, there are programs for young professionals to study in America. The competitions for getting into these programs are less, because the person is competing against other people in KG and not all of Central Asia like the scholarship programs. Therefore,

the NEC may find more people interested and see more success than sending the occasional student to America.

NSU also has an international department that helps students study abroad. This department mainly focuses on a few programs in Europe it knows well and keeps sending students to them. EducationUSA in no way limits the NEC to only promoting U.S. exchange programs and in fact encourage NEC to promote other programs. China, Japan, Europe, and Canada are all other potential countries to find exchange programs. For example, Mrs. Kaseeva sent an application to study business practices in Japan for a month. One of the individuals, a young professional in the local government, was accepted to this program. Considering the limited knowledge of international programs and the interest people express in exchange programs, there is great potential to help in this area.

The government and business sectors could be potential partners for the NEC, because these sectors could greatly benefit from having individuals working for them that have international experiences or specialized training. Currently Mrs. Kaseeva is working on reaching out to the business sector by planning roundtable discussions. I have had discussions in the past with her about reaching out to other sectors. Through those discussions, we believe there is a strong potential for partnership between the business communities, especially the larger businesses who could help fund students to study abroad and stand to benefit from their experience, and current NGOs. Mrs. Kaseeva must keep pursuing this goal, because these could be beneficial to the business sector, the NEC, and most importantly to the students.



NEC should continue with media projects to explain further, what it does to people in Naryn. They can continue with media campaigns such as informational meetings, outreach, and create more ways to connect with the people. Also, maintain the website because the internet is gain access and importance especially to young people in KG. The more people know about NEC the more people will come into the office and seek help and learning. Then the greater chance NEC has to assisting people with their goals of studying aboard. Additionally, the people in Naryn will begin to see opportunities in their local area instead of automatically going to the capital for help or information.

Continue finding new programs that students can apply for so they have more options for students to apply for. Additionally, do surveys of students and local professionals to gain greater knowledge of expectations, goals, and interest of those interested in studying aboard to better serve their clients and increase successes by focusing what clients want and what NEC can do to assist them.

As for the future of the organization can at times are uncertain it is one of the stronger organizations In KG. NEC does have its weaknesses and will continue to experiencing difficulties with new staff members, different influxes of clients, and financial troubles. It may have a possible future for growth in branching out into more areas such as translating, internet café, or other small business ventures. Mrs. Kaseeva is a strong leader for the organization with a desire to see successes not only for the organization but also for its clients. Much like other organizations in KG, NEC has its shares of strengths and weaknesses, but it is improving and certainly has a good chance of not only surviving but also being successful. Finally, I am glad to

say that I believe my time spent at the organization, with NEC staff, and NEC clients have had a positive impact on them.

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