

“Lifelong learning for all through Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in Kazakhstan”

Report for the Regional conference “Lifelong learning for all through Community Learning Centers (CLCs)”

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1. Effective literacy education programmes in Kazakhstan

1.1. Basic information of the programme

Improvement of education is one of the priorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan Development Strategy 2030. Present educational policies and practices are regulated by the State Programme of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020. Among other, key goals and objectives of the Programme include formation of an intelligent, physically and spiritually mature citizen of Kazakhstan; provision of education ensuring success and social adjustment of youth in a rapidly changing world; creating conditions for lifelong learning for all.

Current education policy fosters high literacy rate of population in Kazakhstan. That is proved by the results of the previous (1999) and the most recent Kazakhstan population census in 2009, which indicate literacy rate of people aged 15 and older is 99.7%¹. According to UNDP (2009), Kazakhstan has 14th general literacy rate among 177 countries in the world. The issue of the literacy has been successfully resolved in Kazakhstan in the latter half of the last century.

However, significant progressive changes in the socio-economic development of the country and international trends of widening definition and concept of literacy in the information society have conditioned a need to change the education policy on literacy. According to the Message of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the people of Kazakhstan in 2012², education should provide knowledge along with the practical skills how to utilize it in the process of social adaptation. In this regard, the special emphasis was put on the need for consistent measures for development of functional literacy of school students. Moreover the results of the international PISA³ and TIMSS⁴ researches in Kazakhstan have shown that school teachers provide children and young people with strong subject knowledge, but do not train students to use this expertise in real-life situations. In other words, integrated core skills of our school students to perform various activities in new situations are developed insufficiently.

Therefore, in spite the general guidelines for the development of functional literacy are defined in the above-mentioned State Education Programme, the special *National Action Plan for the development of functional literacy of school students for 2012-2016*⁵ was adopted in Kazakhstan this year. It contains the package of measures in concessive, regulatory, academic and informational areas, systems of training and professional development of teaching staff, aimed at training functionally literate people. The Programme links the main result of functional literacy development to possession of the key competencies that enable young people to effectively apply knowledge and skills in practical situations in the process of social adaptation. The following key competencies of school graduates are identified: managerial, informational (including lifelong learning skills), communicative, social, personal, civil, and technological. It is planned to focus educational standards and training programmes on the development of functional literacy, core and subject competencies of school students.

¹ “Results of the National population census of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2009”. Analytical report. Astana, 2011, p. 35.

² “Socio-economic modernization as a principal development vector of Kazakhstan”, 27.01.2012

³ Program for International Student Assessment

⁴ Third International Mathematics and Science Study

⁵ Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 25.06.2012 #832

1.2. Innovative points of the programme, particularly linking to lifelong learning

For the first time in the practice of education strategies development, a separate section on "Creating conditions for lifelong learning and education for all" was included into the State Programme of education development of RK for 2011-2020. Realization of the measures planned in this section will be made by providing people with various opportunities for meeting their educational needs at all levels of education. Already in this decade conditions for LLL will be created, regardless of age, educational level and professional qualifications of people.

Opportunities were identified for obtaining and improving core skills-on-demand at the labor market in variety of both formal and non-formal education structures, including technical and vocational, higher education and private providers of educational services (distance learning, short-term retraining courses, inclusive education, etc.). On-the-job training in cooperation with educational institutions and social partners is also envisaged.

Educational organizations would create friendly conditions for training people with disabilities and develop modular educational programmes.

Measures for authorization of education certificates (training outcomes) of the state and private training institutions are planned through the independent agencies assessing and certifying obtained competencies and expertise of graduates.

Lifelong learning will include education of people of all ages, from their early childhood to post-pension age, encompassing wide range of formal and non-formal forms of education and inclusive education.

1.3. Challenge lessons learnt from the programme

There are challenges in the two-year course of the new State education programme implementation. Disparity still remains in access to quality educational services and additional education (because of the place of residence (urban / rural, remote areas), low income of families, child health, language of training and other factors). Non-formal / additional education including life skills and functional literacy courses for young people, especially in rural areas, is not easily accessible. Pre-school institutions and schools (especially in rural areas) experience shortage of qualified teaching staff. There is an urgent need for constant improvement of professional skills of teachers including their expertise in functional literacy training.

Policies on children from vulnerable groups are still being designed using traditional approach which implies rendering specific educational services rather than promoting inclusive education concepts.

Stated differently, Kazakhstan has created only minimum needed conditions for education for all and transfer to quality lifelong education of every citizen of the country. Further implementation of the State programme will ensure equal and fair access for all children and young people to comprehensive secondary education regardless of material wealth of a family, residence, ethnicity and health status.

2. New trends and Innovations to reduce poverty in Kazakhstan

2.1. 2020 Employment Programme

Since 1991 poverty reduction policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan is being realized through labour market and employment sphere regulation in the framework of special employment programmes, such as Poverty and Unemployment Control Programme for 2000-2002; Kazakhstan Poverty Reduction Programme for 2003-2005; and Kazakhstan Employment Programme for 2005-2007.

Kazakhstan Employment Improvement Action Plan effective in 2008-2010, was aimed at unemployment prevention, promotion of productive employment growth, improvement of labour quality and protection of the national labor market.

However, since the fall of 2008 Kazakhstan experienced loss of production, inflation escalation, deterioration of employment and, consequently, household income reduction driven by the global financial crisis. In this scenario, by the Presidential order the Government of Kazakhstan has developed a special Strategy for employment and staff retraining (the Roadmap) aimed at employment protection, restraint upon the rate of unemployment, preservation and creation of new jobs. The Roadmap has not only prevented a rise of unemployment, but also reduced its rate from 6.9% in the second quarter of 2009 to 5.5% in December 2010. Employment growth has led to an increase in household income and poverty reduction. Percentage of population with substandard income has reduced from 46.7% in 2001 to 18.2% in 2006 and 6.9% in 2010.

Though, despite positive changes, the national labor market is not balanced. Even when there unemployed, there still remain vacant jobs, and there is no objective forecast of demands for professionals in different sectors of economy. There is shortage of manpower, especially, skilled workers in technical and service industries. About a third of the employed population has no vocational education.

In this scenario, Kazakhstan has piloted the world of practice of adopting active labor market programmes. These programs are implemented through the development of human resources (training and retraining), the increase in demand for labor (subsidy assistance in wages / employment, welfare activities), the improvement of labor market regulation (creation of employment services, information support), the combination of enhanced labor efforts with the system of the ongoing state social support ("rights and duties" or "mutual obligations" strategies when the state commits to provide high quality employment and training services, and program participant agrees to intensively search for a job).

Last year the Government of Kazakhstan adopted three-phased **Employment Programme 2020**. The first phase is pilot (2011); the republican budget expenditures amounted to about 300 million USD. Launched in 2012 the second phase is planned till 2015; and from 2016 to 2020 the Programme will be passing its final stage. At least 100 billion Tenge per year (about 700 million USD) will be allocated for the second phase realization.

Employment growth has driven increase of household incomes and poverty reduction in the country. Thus, in 2001 46.7% of population had substandard income, and in third quarter of 2011 this rate has decreased to 5% (823.0 thousand people). According to the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 8.5 million people were employed in the national economy at the beginning of this year. Compared to the same period last year, this number has raised by 360.5 thousand people, or 4.4 percent.

The employment issue is one of the key Government objectives, as in January 2012 number of unemployed in the Republic amounted to 490.4 thousand people with the unemployment rate of 5.5 percent. Programme realization will contribute to education and employment of unemployed, working up and expanding their own businesses in the community, or in the absence of such opportunities programme activities would promote voluntary relocation from communities with low economic potential to the localities with high economic potential and centers of economic growth.

2.2. Innovations and new approaches through CLC to reduce poverty

In 2002 under the support of UNESCO Bangkok and UNESCO Almaty, the Association "Education for All in Kazakhstan" implemented the project "Creation of community learning centers (CLCs) in Kazakhstan". 8 CLCs were created in three regions of Kazakhstan: 2 in Taraz and Karaganda cities,

and 6 in the villages of Almaty and Zhambyl Oblasts. Another CLC in Otegen village of Ili Rayon was launched under the polytechnic college "Progress" in 2010.

Considering the needs of youth and adults, the Centers provide services of non-formal general and vocational education, and conduct variety of cultural, recreational, environmental, legal and other events. CLCs' target audience include single women, mothers of large families, unemployed adults and youth, repatriates, persons with disabilities, elderly people, children and teenagers. Besides these, services of CLCs are utilized by the representatives of working population, farmers and farm employees, local students of secondary and vocational educational institutions who wish to advance / update their computer literacy and entrepreneurship knowledge and skills.

Different years monitoring results show that the annual average of about 1.5 thousand of young people and adults are enrolled in CLCs courses. 50% to 80% of trainees find a job or open a business after graduation. Target groups representatives trained in different programs become more interested in educational activities, communicative, actively participate in cultural, recreational and many other activities carried out by the Centers. Once people obtain useful information and skills, they try themselves in new career fields and plan for the future.

For example, over 3,000 people with disabilities live in Ili Rayon of Almaty Oblast. Majority of them are unemployed and survive on state pensions. Serious physical abnormalities hinder some of disabled people from training or employment. However, many of these people are quite capable of working and want to be wage-earning but not to live only on welfare. Given these characteristics, "Progress" CLC have organized sewing courses and opened a sewing shop for people with hearing problems in Otegen Batir village, Ili Rayon. During the first phase of the project over 30 people with disabilities have been trained and employed in less than a year. A group of newly enrolled students has taken their places.

We associate further potential of CLCs with the strengthening of social orientation of the programmes, and their focus on poverty reduction. It is known that market conditions suppose that people can be trained in additional education centers on a remuneration basis. In this regard, Community Learning Centers and their free-of-charge or low-cost life skills development programmes could continue to provide strong social support for local communities, especially in rural areas, where people cannot afford quite expensive educational services in other training centers and, therefore, address their issues. But CLCs themselves require assistance of local authorities and community.

3. New Contents of Life Skills/Skill development in Kazakhstan

3.1. Current contents of Life Skills/Skill development in Kazakhstan under formal education and non-formal education

Currently, the country adopted the State Compulsory Standard for 11-year general secondary education (SCS), which provides for the assessment of academic achievements on the base of students' knowledge of key competencies. Competence-based approach involves the formation and development of general, applied subject skills and life skills during learning process. Thus, one of the SCS's tasks aims to provide each student with "opportunities to make independent decisions and act in different real-life situations, make judgments and communicate with others, to assess the ongoing social events."

In addition, schools and institutions of additional / non-formal education realize a number of educational programs based on a life skills concept. The first programs of such kind were training courses "Self-development", "Valeology (Healthcare Science)", "Basics of Life Safety", "Civics (civic studies)", "Healthy Lifestyle", preventive programs against drug abuse, AIDS, smoking and alcoholism. Also the National Computer Literacy Programme is successfully functioning.

Prevention techniques based on the development of life skills, such as resistance to the negative group pressure, conflict mitigation, stress resistance, and ability to take adequate independent decisions, are used also. Initiatives undertaken by the program "Equal to Equal," "Project Hope", and others demonstrated positive results as well.

Certainly all programs running in the country greatly contribute to development of life skills of children and young people. However, most materials of this kind do not encompass the whole range of negative real-life, social, economic and other factors and appropriate preventive and protective measures. Primary function of these manuals to form sustainable and adequate behavior strategies in risk situations is underperformed. Domestic (national) programs do not have enough training sessions to improve "media literacy".

Very few programs are dedicated to working with a family. *In this context, a significant effort was a project of UNESCO Bangkok "Introduction of the "UNESCO Manual for pedagogical education of parents" implemented by the Association "Education for All in Kazakhstan" under the support of UNESCO Bangkok and UNESCO Almaty in the current year. Its main objective is to improve the quality of preschool education through training of trainers of formal and non-formal preschool education and training institutions to work with parents and teachers on the basis of the named Manual. Therefore, all materials were adapted to Kazakhstan conditions and group of facilitators was trained, who have approbated the Manual on-site and received high evaluation of the workshops and wishes to continue their education from the participants.*

There are many other international projects contributing to life skills development; however most of those initiatives are carried out and adopted only in pilot regions providing no opportunity to track their efficiency and impact.

3.2. New contents of Life Skills/Skill Development required for future in Kazakhstan

As teenagers and young people make one of the most vulnerable layer of society in relation to behavioral risk factors, it is necessary to develop from an early age a responsible attitude to their own lives, ability to make adequate, "healthy" life decisions, high resistance to negative forms of influence and pressure, and minimize harmful behaviors. Nearest future supposes such abilities as creative thinking, ability to process knowledge, problem-solving, generation of new technology and innovation, along with communication skills as highly topical and important.

According to sociologists, ten most popular occupations in the nearest future would include engineering, IT professions, nanotechnology, intersection between electronics and biotechnology, marketing and sales, service industry, logistics, environmental, medical professions, focused on life extension, and chemistry.

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan has designed a list of the most highly-demanded professions in Kazakhstan. Today this rating include professions of an engineer, designer, production technologist, crisis manager, IT-security specialist, internal auditor, financial director, logistics specialist, corporate lawyer, procurement manager, production media specialist. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, there is a high demand for technical builders, engineers of different specializations, concrete workers, plumbers, tractor drivers, electricians, wiremen, electrical mechanics, plasterers, painters, drivers, masons, mechanics of various specializations, nurses.

Experience shows that success in any profession and social sphere is closely linked to life skills development. In this connection, it seems more than ever relevant for Kazakhstan to implement an effective strategy for life skills development which has to be designed in accordance with the age characteristics of children, youth and adults, and be relevant to the needs of society.