

Kyrgyz Youth in Human Rights Education

YOUTH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

The Youth Human Rights Group (YHRG) was established in 1995 with a mission to protect and promote human rights in general and child rights in particular in the Kyrgyz Republic and Central Asia. As a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO), YHRG undertakes human rights education and awareness-raising activities, monitoring of the **human rights/child rights situation**, legal counseling, and lobbying for legislations affecting the youth.

Education program

The educational activities of YHRG include holding classes on human rights and child rights in primary and secondary schools, publishing textbooks, making video materials, holding training seminars for teachers, representatives of NGOs, students and volunteers. The awareness-raising activities include the publication of the bulletin on the rights of the child entitled *Chaika*, radio programs on human rights, various informational leaflets and other materials.

The program started on **10 December 1996** with **pilot lessons in schools in Bishkek**. Since 1997, the educational program has become part of regular activities, and continued to develop and expand.

A number of activities are undertaken under this program, namely,

- Advanced Training Program for Lawyers on International Mechanisms of Human Rights Protection (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
- Training program for young NGO activists on human rights and capacity building, which includes local and regional seminars:

three seven-day seminars for young activists from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, followed by a ten-day training

- Human rights education training for secondary school teachers
- Development and publication of educational printed and video materials
- Education on human rights and public interest practice for young activists
- Internships in YHRG for young activists from different regions (Osh, Djalal-Abad, Batken, Issyk-Kul, Talas, Naryn, Chui) of Kyrgyzstan.

Freedom House organized the 2007 Summer Human Rights School for young activists from 25 June to 1 July in cooperation with YHRG, which provided trainers. The School brought together participants from three countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan). The participants from Kyrgyzstan underwent a multi-stage contest conducted by YHRG before going to the Summer School.

During the five-day program, the participants learned the following:

- Strategic activity planning

- International mechanisms on human rights protection
- Human rights situation in Central Asian countries
- Alternative reports applicable to Central Asian countries
- United Nations (UN) treaty bodies
- UN Human Rights Council
- Human rights monitoring and ways to obtain effective results.

The most valuable experience in the Summer School for young activists was the opportunity to meet and cooperate with representatives from neighboring countries. The discussions were heated and interesting because of the different human rights situations in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. They learned problems that were relevant to a particular country, and common problems faced by all three countries. Although they were from different countries, each of them realized how important it was to know human rights and to improve skills for their protection. The Summer School became the platform that brought together experts from the three countries and the young people who were taking the first steps to human rights protection work.

Some of the participants in the 2007 Summer School commented:

Ravshan: "... at the end of the first working day, we organized the Organizations Fair: we learned about the organizations represented by the participants and their functions. This is important for future search of partners and further cooperation."

Eler: "I very much liked the films about human rights and about the monitoring activity: how it is organized, its strategies and ways of implementation. Thanks to those films, I now have a lot of new ideas in human rights protection, especially after we discussed the presentation."

Gulsaadat: "I was very much impressed by the trainers. They were real professionals who were really into their cause. All in all, no one fell out of the wardrobe or fell asleep!"

Meerim: "Before participating in the Summer School I did not realize that the situation of human rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan could be so grave."

Lobbying for policy reform

YHRG works in the area of legislation and its development. It analyzes existing legislations and develops law proposals. The YHRG takes part in round table discussions on reforming legislation, and cooperates with international organizations, governmental bodies and parliament for this purpose.

A large number of recommendations suggested by YHRG were included in the "New Generation" National Program on the Realization of the Rights of Children in Kyrgyzstan. A representative of YHRG was a member of Constitutional Council on constitutional reform. It also participates in public discussions about Kyrgyz Republic Code on Children.

YHRG is a member of a network of NGOs working on human rights and child rights. This network was formed in 1999 to gather qualitative information and to allow specialized monitoring of situations in different areas. The network also facilitates exchange of information and education for new network member-organizations.

YHRG, together with the network of NGOs, prepared the Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2000, with comments on the Initial Report of the government of the Kyrgyz Republic on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The subsequent Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations included those proposed by the network.

Since then, YHRG (along with the network) has been preparing Alternative Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and other human rights treaty monitoring bodies. It also provides analytical information on the

human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan for the UN special procedures and international human rights organizations.

Projects

YHRG implements several projects, such as the “Youth's participation in promoting democracy and youth's politics in Kyrgyzstan” aimed

- To strengthen the potential of young people in working on their interests at the local level, and
- To involve them in developing the concept of youth politics, and applying it at local and national levels.

The project involved several activities:

- Creation of information network of youth organizations that continues to influence the formation, planning and realization of the new youth politics. It focuses on youth organizations or organizations that work with the youth in Kyrgyzstan in different spheres (human rights protection, legal consultations, crisis centers, job employment, development of business, etc.) for each region
- Holding two-day meetings in four regions with one hundred students (twenty-five persons from each region) to discuss the problems of youth politics. The issues discussed covered the new concept of youth politics and government, proposed changes in the law about youth politics, possibilities of youth participation in the realization of the proposals, lobbying about their interests at the local level, and strategic planning of their actions
- Improvement on the level of knowledge about the rights of young people in the regions
- Selection of the most active and motivated participants from among the twenty-five people in each region as members of a group

that would determine and try to work on youth issues at the local level

- Publication of a manual on protecting public interest (five hundred copies in the Russian language and three hundred copies in the Kyrgyz language) and the distribution of copies in the regions of the country
- Two-month probation period at YHRG of the three most active students from the regions that introduced them to the work of the civil society in protecting public interest.

The manual contains

- Actions in protecting public interest (information about different actions, and about strategies to plan the actions)
- Success stories of students protecting public interest during the course of the project
- Success stories in realizing public interest by the different organizations in Kyrgyzstan
- Comparative analysis of successful and unsuccessful actions undertaken during the project, and the practical recommendations in working on advocacy campaigns
- Selected essays of the students about problems among the youths in regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Another project is entitled the “Youth Initiative to Promote the Interests of Young People at the Local Level.” **The project aims to support the activities of youth groups on human rights protection and to build capacities of young people in promoting their interests in the different regions of Kyrgyzstan.** It includes two-day seminars, implementation of mini-projects, and practical training in the YHRG office for the most successful and active participants of the project. These selected participants became acquainted with the activities of YHRG and other NGOs working on human rights protection, acquired practical skills (in human rights monitoring, analysis of information gathered, project preparation), and observed court proceedings in several district courts.

YHRG monitors institutions for the youth such as orphanages, boarding schools, hospitals, and custodial institutions. The YHRG researchers report on the human rights violations occurring in these institutions such as the cruel and inhuman treatment of children in a psychiatric hospital. It also monitors other human rights issues such as the infringement of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Awareness-raising activities

YHRG has been working with teachers from the different regions of Kyrgyzstan in the field of human rights education and rights of the child from the very beginning of its activities. So far, it organized twenty seminars involving six hundred teachers.

During the 2001 to 2004 period, YHRG (in cooperation with the Canadian Human Rights Foundation¹) carried out an impressive program for teachers on teaching human rights in school. The program was aimed at forming a teacher training team composed of representatives of local NGOs and teachers from different regions of the country. **YHRG keeps contact with all team members and jointly holds a number of seminars. The training for the Kyrgyz teacher training team was done at seminars organized by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and also at working meetings held by YHRG in Bishkek. With the help of the teacher training team, YHRG worked out the training course for primary, lower secondary and senior secondary teachers. The training focused on how to assist teachers incorporate human rights into their activities using interactive techniques.**

Many teachers continued their human rights education activities after attending seminars. Some schools developed their own classes on human rights, based on the handbooks of the YHRG.

Seminars for NGOs, students and volunteers

YHRG also regularly holds seminars for the representatives of various NGOs, students, volunteers and secondary school students. In November 2001, YHRG in cooperation with the Youth Center for Human Rights, Switzerland (CODAP) and Amnesty International-Poland held a regional seminar on human rights for young human rights activists from Central and Eastern Europe, and CIS. The seminar, held in Warsaw, had twenty-three representatives of various NGOs and associations. The seminar discussed the concept of human rights, essential notions of human rights, various mechanisms for human rights protection at national and international levels, practical suggestions on how to organize the human rights activities, the role of the youth in human rights organizations, etc. The participants positively evaluated the seminar, stressing the wide range of themes discussed, and the opportunity to exchange experiences with other participants from other regions (that allowed them to know the human rights situation in Eastern Europe in general).

Classes for children in specific institutions

In 2001, YHRG started holding classes on the rights of the child in special boarding schools for teenagers who were under detention (Belovodskoe village, Chui Oblast). The classes did not only introduce information about their rights as children, and the basic documents on human rights and rights of the child, but also developed their self-confidence, and discussed ways of conflict resolution. Based on the experience in holding these classes, YHRG published a handbook in 2002 on teaching human rights to children that are detained under specific conditions.

Classes at school

YHRG started to pilot human rights education in school projects on 10 December 1996 during the International Human Rights Day. The staff of YHRG held classes in schools in Bishkek for five years. Classes were held in fifteen different schools annually for students of varying ages. From these experiences, YHRG published handbooks on teaching human rights classes in primary, lower secondary, and senior secondary levels.

Development of handbooks, films on human rights

YHRG developed handbooks for teaching human rights and rights of the child in Grades 1-3, 5-6, 9-10. In most schools, human rights education was in the form of extracurricular activities, while in other schools it was incorporated into the school curriculum. The handbooks include teaching hour schedules and additional reading materials. YHRG's own work experience shows the effectiveness of the handbook in teaching human rights in secondary school. The handbooks, originally written in Russian language, were translated into the Kyrgyz language and disseminated among schools with the Kyrgyz language as medium of instruction.

YHRG also produced several video films to accompany the handbooks. In 1998, YHRG produced a film accompanying the handbook for teaching child rights in 5th-6th grades in secondary schools. The film includes scenes of actual human rights classes, and serves as a guide for teachers.

In 2000, YHRG produced a video film entitled "The Rights Around Us" for senior secondary school level. The film, used at the beginning of the class, touches on the human rights violations in Kyrgyzstan. The themes featured in the film are discussed in the subsequent

classes with the use of the handbook.

In 2001 YHRG produced a video film entitled "Youth Human Rights Group and Heroes of Fairytales about Rights of the Child." It includes separate stories abstracted from fairytales and revised according to the child rights perspective.

Publications

YHRG has produced a number of human rights materials including:

- Collection of Human Rights Documents, 2004.
- *Human Rights and Democracy* (collection of articles), 2004
- *Human Rights – Reading Materials for Teachers*, 2004
- *Alternative report in relation to the second periodic report of the Kyrgyz Republic on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 2004
- *Monitoring of Human Rights and Living Conditions in Psychiatric Institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic* (in Russian and English), 2004
- *Monitoring Human Rights in the Work of the Commission on Minors Affairs in the Kyrgyz Republic* (in Russian and English), 2004
- *Monitoring Human Rights in Orphanages and Boarding Schools for Abandoned Children in Kyrgyz Republic* (in Russian and English), 2003
- *Chaika* - quarterly bulletin on the rights of the child (in Russian and Kyrgyz), 1997-2002
- A teachers guide on teaching child rights in Grades 1 - 3 (in Russian and Kyrgyz), 2002
- *About alternative military service; If you are arrested* - leaflets for students, 2001
- *The Convention on the Rights of the Child in Drawings* (in Russian and Kyrgyz), 2000
- *The situation of Tajik refugee children in Osh and Jalal-Abad and Batken regions*. Report for the UNHCR (in English and Russian),

2000

- *Alternative Report to the Initial Report of the Kyrgyz Republic on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2000*
- *The situation of Tajik and Afghan refugee children*. A report for the UNHCR in cooperation with "Save the Children," Great Britain (in Russian and English), 1999
- A guide book on teaching human rights in Grades 5 - 6 (in Russian and Kyrgyz), 1999.

Videofilms

It produced the following videos:

- Human rights in the provision of psychiatric aid (in cooperation with a social organization (Mental Health and Society), 2003
- Human Rights Environment in Schools, 2002
- Human Rights: The Relationship Between Individuals and Power, 2002
- Juvenile justice (video clip), 2002
- Youth Human Rights Group and Heroes of Fairytales about Rights of the Child for Grades 1 - 3, 2001
- The Rights Around Us for Grades 9 - 10, 2000
- Video course on teaching of child rights in Grades 5 - 6, 1998.

The research project²

YHRG implemented a research project during the 2004-2006 period on the policy of the Kyrgyz government on the youth and a survey of the youth on the fundamental tendencies in youth motivations to participate in civil society institutions and identify the degree of youth participation in the formation of a youth policy.

The research was undertaken in seven regions of Kyrgyzstan, covering one hundred twenty six respondents. The research outcomes

are not representative of the situation of the youth in the whole country; they have only identified major tendencies in young people's motivation to actively participate in public life, and the fundamental problems of youth and youth policy. Semi-standardized, face-to-face interview method was used in collecting data.

The research was carried out in two directions. The first part focused on the opinions and perceptions of young people who are already involved in the activities of civil society institutions; asking questions such as why young people engage in the activities of civil society organizations, how they perceive their own role, how they evaluate own opportunities to influence the situation within the state and what their plans are for the future.

The second part of the research was oriented towards young people of various social groups. It was important to find out how evident was state's activities regarding youth policy in Kyrgyzstan, what priorities were seen by the young people in youth policy, and whether they considered the state's activities on youth policy effective.

The research showed the necessity to introduce changes in the "On Fundamentals of Youth Policy," to reform state institutions' activities regarding the youth policy, and to modify approaches to the youth and their participation in the process of developing the youth policy in Kyrgyzstan. The research report includes recommendations on how to improve the implementation of the youth policy.

Summary of results

1. Awareness of youth about the realization of the youth policy

Most of the respondents were not informed about government programs for the youth. To the question on what the government organs in their area had done for young people and what programs and services were held on a

continuous basis, most respondents answered that they did not know and never encountered any programs and services organized by state organs or municipal authorities. The most informed about youth policy among the respondents were those who were involved in the civil society organizations; they mentioned the national program “Zhashtik”, and the Law on Principles of the Youth Policy. Most of the respondents thought the youth policy were mass programs and youth entertainment programs. Some respondents associated the youth policy with youth organizations such as “Kel-Kel” and “Bierge.” Undoubtedly, such results tell about the insufficient work of the state organs that are responsible for the realization of the youth policy at local, regional and national levels.

It is necessary to note that the members of the regional committees on youth affairs are themselves not always well-informed about the youth policy. During the interviews, they were unable to clearly define their vision of a youth policy and the actions that should be taken in accordance with the Program “Zhashtik” (Youth) and its implementation plan. In view of this, it is also important to observe the way in which the members of the regional committees are selected and to see whether these members have attended skill development courses so that they can carry out their responsibilities effectively.

In addition, the respondents expressed interesting views of what the youth policy should be. According to most respondents, the youth policy must be effective, functional and flexible. It should consider the real needs of the youth and create conditions for personal and professional development and growth of young people. The youth policy should be directed to solve the problems of the youth concerning unemployment, low quality of education, housing problems of young families, and so on. Also, the youth policy should be more precise and accessible and be implemented by competent specialists who are motivated by youth issues.

2. Main problems of the youth

Legal protection and awareness of their rights remain acute problems among the youth, as already mentioned. The youth have general ideas about civil rights and human rights. When listing their rights, the respondents mostly talked about the rights to education, adequate living standards, etc. However, in most cases the respondents were unable to clearly formulate their understanding of rights and to explain what they meant by specific rights. Quite often they mixed the notions of rights, rules and obligations. Based on the results, it can be said that young people do not have good knowledge of their rights, they are not well-informed about their rights. This, in turn, becomes the reason for frequent violation of the rights of the youth by law enforcement bodies, the school and university administration, which the respondents complained about. Schools and universities, that are supposed to prepare the youth for adult life, do not provide sufficient information about rights. To the contrary, they are identified as the biggest violators of child rights and human rights. This contributes to increased corruption in the field of education and declining quality of education.

The respondents identified the different problems of the youth. However, most of them were related to each other and had similar roots. According to the results of the survey the main problems are unemployment (23 percent), corruption in universities (12 percent), corruption in job hiring (8 percent) and education of the youth that should have been based on promoting healthy lifestyle, democratic values such as tolerance, peace and active civil position.

The most acute problem is unemployment and the external migration that results from it. The low quality of education complicates this problem. The quality of university graduates does not meet the needs and requirements of new employers. This leads to a paradoxical situation of the existence of need for qualified

specialists yet the university graduates cannot meet the professional requirements. In general, the current situation results in low living standards, and the corruption in the system enhances distrust of the government and forces the youth to look for other solutions to their problems. The lack of possibilities to solve the problems through the legal means makes the youth turn to their parents, relatives, or friends for help. This situation further advances the existing system that deprives the youth the possibility of finding jobs to provide for their families and to integrate into society through legitimate ways.

According to some respondents, jobs in the non-governmental sector were regarded as the most attractive as well as accessible. They stressed that this sector was different from others because it allowed young people to develop their own civil position, and widen their horizon; it also provided the possibility for self-realization. Most of the respondents had intention to continue to work in the non-governmental sector, as it provided favorable conditions for realizing ideas, plans, and encouraged productive work. A large number of young people are guided by humanistic goals in their work in the non-governmental organizations. They have the motivation to be useful to society and to influence the current events in society. Nonetheless, there were a number of respondents who admitted that they chose the non-governmental sector because they could not find job in other sectors.

Thus, in a situation of growing unemployment, the state does not pay enough attention to the analysis of this phenomenon. The state does not make enough efforts to solve this problem, wasting a great number of human resources and missing the opportunity for greater economic development of the country.

The results of the survey confirmed the government's lack of integral, all-level policy directed to the development of the youth. This survey is, by no means, representative of the whole situation of the Kyrgyz youth, but it gives

an idea of the existing situation regarding the development and implementation of the youth policy.

Unfortunately, in Kyrgyzstan there is no common and open recognition of the importance of youth participation in decision-making processes at both local and regional levels if there is an intention to build a flourishing and democratic society. Participation of the youth in state affairs should not be limited to voting or nominating candidates for elections, although these are important aspects as well. Participation of the young generation in society's life and forming an active civil position requires the availability of rights and effective and accessible mechanisms for their observance. They should be encouraged to participate in decision-making processes and to influence these processes. Participation in different forms of activities should be directed towards building a better society. To realize such participation, the local and regional authorities need to involve the youth in society's life and to provide the possibilities for the youth not only to learn the principles of the democratic state and society but also to apply this knowledge into practice. This approach should not be only oriented to the future. To make participation meaningful for the young people it is necessary that they have the possibility of influencing decisions and plans for the realization of the youth policy and other areas of life that affect the youth at present. Any strategies and measures designed to increase the involvement of the youth in society's life need to be put in practice in an atmosphere of respect towards youth and with the consideration of different needs of young people.

2. Non-governmental organizations in Kyrgyzstan

The greater part of interviews were conducted with staff/volunteers of local NGOs, and also among employees of international organizations, mass media groups, members of student councils and political parties.

The civil society in Kyrgyzstan keeps on growing.³ Non-governmental organizations, mass media groups, and political parties are actively involved in the public life of a state. There is no particular answer to question about how many organizations are functioning. Official statistical data differ from the independent one.

Between 1 January 2005 and 1 August 2006, the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic has registered (or reregistered) three thousand four hundred twenty-five non-commercial organizations, out of which eight hundred three are public associations, and five hundred ninety are public funds.⁴ The list of children and youth NGOs listed by the Department for Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth Policy counts seventy organizations.⁵

According to the Ministry of Justice, in 2004 there were six thousand thirty-one NGOs.⁶ However, NGO database compiled by the local office of Counterpart Consortium (an American non-governmental organization) counted one thousand ten NGOs, twelve percent (three hundred two) of which were for children and youth.⁷

Yet, the true extent of civil society's advancement could not be only tied to existing number of organizations. The Association of Centers for Endowment of Civil Society (ACECS) carried out a research to find out the average number of functioning NGOs,⁸ determine their priorities, and show best practice examples. According to the ACECS research, there are five hundred fourteen active public organizations that comprise six percent of officially registered public associations, public funds and associations of owners.⁹

Whether based on official statistical data or alternative sources, NGOs form a large segment of Kyrgyz society involving many young people in the country.

3. *Young people*

This research was not meant to study the

group characteristics of "youth." The terms "young person,"¹⁰ and "young people" were used in accordance with the law that defines young people as "citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic ... with the age of 14 to 35 years."¹¹

This research covered young people under thirty years old. The lowest age barrier was not strictly fixed, the youngest respondents were sixteen years old both in 2004 and 2006 surveys.

4. *How young people engage in civil society organizations*

Respondents were asked questions about how they learned about a given organization, how they were recruited or became volunteers. Throughout 2006, the amount of information brought via advertisements of civil society organizations in the mass media has significantly increased. In 2004, mass media advertisements were the main source of information for the recruitment of staff of international organizations and two years later, the basic information source for local NGOs. This form of advertisement decreases the influence of family and friends, though these ties remain as the central source of information.¹² Many young people also receive information via labor centers and human resource agencies. This indicates a growing sense of professionalism of non-governmental sectors, which can in turn, aid young people in their search for available jobs; however, percentage rates and clear conclusions are still premature.

5. *Why young people associate themselves with the non-governmental sector*

Young people tended to be interested in jobs in non-governmental sectors, yearning to do something useful in order to acquire practical experiences. Opportunities of professional careers were also an important motivation for many respondents. For young people, work place conditions such as salary, quality of work, and individual initiative were given more attention than the organization's goals, as found in

the 2006 research. Less respondents answered with general statements like “I like the job.” And a new category of answers “the desire to share own experience with others” appeared.

Respondent number	Respondents' responses
1	I like the job
2	Humanistic goals/active civil position
3	For self-realization
4	For experience and professional growth
5	Could not tell exactly
6	Necessity to do the internship
7	Desire to share experience
8	Prestigious and comfortable
9	Good team
10	Salary
11	No other place to work
12	Refused to answer

Examples of comments on the question¹³

- I had to do an internship, but entering the organization was my own decision
- I was an observer during the elections and decided to stay afterwards
- At first, I was helping my girlfriend, but I liked the job and was recruited to her position
- I was interested in the organization's program, which was a summer camp for disabled children
- It is interesting and is close to my occupation.

6. How young activists perceive positive and negative sides of their activity in the non-governmental sector

Overall, respondents pointed to the staff, friendly atmosphere, access to resources and information, and opportunity for advancement as positive aspects of working in the non-governmental sector.¹⁴

Examples of comments on the question¹⁵

- The organization endorses aspirations
- Any idea is discussed and usually supported within the organization

- Independence and creativity
- I have the opportunity to discover myself
- Practical experiences and useful ties.

During the 2004 research, major issues included lack of funds to carry out programs and poor salary.

Examples of responses:

- The atmosphere is not that good
- We are frequently prevented from doing the work
- Misunderstandings with colleagues due to poor flow of information
- Misunderstandings with the president. It would be better to have a young person as president and not a sixty-five-year-old professor.

In 2006, there was a sharp twenty-one percent increase in the number of respondents who pointed out the problem of ignorance and barriers posed by the state bodies. Twenty-eight percent of respondents stressed lack of funds and difference of opinions. Responses referring to lack of information have significantly declined to only two percent of the respondents. Thirty-four percent either refused or found it difficult to answer.¹⁶ Six percent of the respondents pointed to lack of time and four percent pointed to passivity.

7. Length of time young people stay within organizations

In the 2004 research, respondents stated that volunteers typically remained for one year and many were recruited later to become employees for an average total of three and a half years.

In 2006, the absolute majority of the respondents, about seventy-five percent, worked within one organization for a period of three to five years. About forty percent of the total employees worked a total of four to eight years and about the same percentage worked for one to three years.

Many believed that NGOs were only springboards for the youth to get into international organizations or the government and businesses; however, interviews conducted showed that in reality, young people were serious about their work in civil society sector and stayed in NGOs for long periods of time.

8. Young people discover themselves in NGOs

At the beginning of the research, there was a belief that it would be difficult for young people to discover themselves, express their opinions, and initiate and propose their own ideas within organizations due to their lack of professional and significantly long experience. However, the interviews revealed that young people felt comfortable in civil society organizations, were supported by other employees, and proposed their own ideas, which were acknowledged to a certain extent.

In 2004, the absolute majority, about seventy-one percent, of respondents stated that they felt supported by their organizations, eleven percent said that they were provided with both moral and material support, and nine percent said that senior staff members discussed problems with them. Out of those interviewed, only nineteen percent said that they did not feel any support and ten percent said the level of support fluctuated.

In 2006, eighty-seven percent of the respondents were satisfied with duties in their respective organizations. Four percent of them were unsatisfied with their roles and fifty-seven percent said that their initiatives were supported by their organizations. Thirty-two percent said that they were not always supported and eleven percent said that their ideas were of no interest to their organizations.

Of the correspondents, forty percent gave examples of their proposals that were implemented¹⁷ such as the following:

- Training of election commission members

- Programs on clinical education
- Holding a film festival
- Publication of articles
- Holding information campaigns
- Free legal consultations
- Conducting research among the youth
- Proposal to raise the salary.

Out of sixty percent of the respondents who did not have the opportunity to implement their own initiatives, fifteen percent said that they were recently employed and have not yet made any proposal, but were willing to do so in the future. Other responses included:

- Scornful treatment due to being young; being mistrusted and professional qualification being doubted (NGO staff)
- Frequent misunderstanding on issues and problems with the administration (mass media staff)
- Not allowed to do real work, only work which other members were not willing to do themselves (employee in an Ombudsman regional office).

9. Young people's perception of their future

It is apparent that about half of the respondents were planning to continue their activities in their NGOs, in both 2004 and 2006 surveys. A quarter of the respondents in 2004 associated their future with international organizations. The results of 2006 differ, as international organizations were no longer considered as prospective work opportunity with the introduction of business employment opportunities.

The number of those who were willing to be recruited by state services has increased. In 2006, twenty-one percent of respondents were willing to be recruited by state services while in 2004 only nine percent were interested in holding a career in state bodies.

10. How young people evaluate their influence on the State

In 2004, the absolute majority of respondents gave an affirmative answer to questions on personal contributions to changing the state of human rights in their country. Examples of responses¹⁸

- Yes, I contribute through my activities
- One person cannot influence everything
- Yes, we can make other people get acquainted with new information
- Yes, if I have enough strength
- Yes, but only in a determined sphere. There are cases when we can do nothing
- No, not in a human rights sphere.

In 2006, respondents were asked questions about their expectations of activities in civil society institutions, the influence of youth movements, and the role of March 2005 events.¹⁹

Thirty-four percent of the respondents expected the civil society institutions to provide educational and awareness-raising services and twenty-nine percent expected these institutions to stay useful and indispensable. Fourteen percent expected mobilization and integration of a community, eight percent expected cooperation with NGOs, seven percent wanted the promotion of democracy, one percent wanted independence from donors and two percent either refused to answer or had no expectations.²⁰

Regarding the influence of the youth, thirty percent said that young people were not able to influence societal life, twenty-five percent said that political fields could be influenced by young people, twenty percent said that culture was influenced by young people, nine percent pointed to the economy, eleven percent noted that the current youth did not have any influence, and three percent found it difficult to answer.²¹

11. Changes of March 2005

The majority of respondents believed that young people did not play any significant role in society. Sixty percent of the respondents thought that the role of young people was insignificant

and passive. Twenty percent said that there was no role for young people at all. Seven percent mentioned limited opportunities for young people as a result of high level of corruption. Eleven percent found it difficult to answer.²²

When asked about personal roles, forty-two percent of respondents said that they were passive, thirteen percent said that they did not participate “due to occurring circumstances,” thirty percent actively participated in revolutionary events, five percent said they were “against the revolution” or “were busy” and three percent refused to answer.²³

The research held about a year after the change of power in the State, showed that forty-two percent of respondents thought that the changes were positive. The respondents also believed that the youth were being given more attention; young people could lobby laws with little fear, could participate in political life, no longer have to fear the government, and have a bright future. Eighteen percent of the respondents thought that there was no feasible change and a similar percentage said that there were no changes at all. Further, twelve percent noted negative changes; they believed that the youth have become more aggressive, increasingly nationalistic, and have little respect for law and order. Five percent either refused to answer or found it difficult to respond.²⁴

The last question addressed changes in the activities of the respondent’s organizations. Twenty-eight percent said that there were no changes in their activities and thirty percent said that there were no significant changes. Twenty-five percent said that there were positive changes, two percent noted a reassessment of values, six percent said that their work situation has worsened, and seventeen percent did not answer.

The role of the youth in civil society

The survey was conducted at the time when Kyrgyzstan was going through difficulties in the aftermath of the March 2005 crisis. The

crisis resonated in almost all parts of social life, and the unstable political situation continued. During these events, the youth were given much attention and without doubt were considered as one of the main forces pushing for significant political changes. Youth issues and the youth policy became very acute and were discussed at different levels.

The respondents gave an interesting assessment of the role of the youth in the events of March 2005. During the interviews, forty-two percent of respondents agreed that the youth were an instrument of changing power during the revolution in the interest of third parties. However, thirty percent of the respondents thought the youth played an important role and acted resolutely and consciously. As for the assessment of the role of the youth before and after the revolution, most respondents agreed that the youth did not and do not play sufficient role, and do not show much activism.

Many interviewers had the impression that young people working in the civil society sector and other sectors did not see their meaningful role for the government and felt that they were unwanted. Nevertheless, as the most active part of the society, young people have the opportunity to influence the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the country. The respondents did not think there were obstacles for the youth in terms of influencing the cultural developments in the country. However, the concerns were about participation in the political life of society as they felt unsure of their influence on the situation in their regions. In particular, some respondents noted that it was hard to get the attention of the officials to their initiatives and get their support that was necessary in implementing those initiatives.

At the same time, the results of the survey proved that the youth, especially in the rural areas, do not have dependent attitudes. The youth rely only on themselves because they realized that the social services were very weak. It is notable that most of the respondents expressed their willingness to influence the youth policy

and other processes affecting the youth, but they admitted they did not know and did not see the ways and mechanisms that would allow them to participate and demonstrate their positions. Nevertheless, some of the young people who were involved in the civil society sector noted that they influenced the different spheres of the youth policy through their work.

A big number of young people underlined that traditional relations between society and the state and the youth was based on the perception of a young generation as a problem, as a group that should be quiet, be exceptionally obedient and have no criticism of the established order. The other perception was that the initiatives of young people on the local level were regarded as non-desirable.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the youth assisted to preserve the existing situation to some extent. According to the respondents, the young people in Kyrgyzstan were apolitical and were not active in promoting their interests. The reason for this is often a fear of repression by the educational institutions and local authorities. The lack of effective mechanism on legal protection and low legal literacy make young people feel vulnerable, undefended and powerless.

Endnotes

¹ The Canadian Human Rights Foundation has adopted a new name: Equitas, International Centre for Human Rights.

² This section is taken from the published report of the survey results, *Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan - Research Report* (2006) prepared by YHRG.

³ According to the report presented by the Minister of Justice M. Kaiypov during the Parliamentary hearings, the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic and its territorial organs has registered (reregistered) during January 1997 – August 2006 period 19,661 non-commercial organizations out of which there are 3,566 public associations, 3,683 public funds, 971 non-commercial communities, 1,371 association of owners, 5,999 departments, 613 credit unions, 176 frontline trade union organizations, 599 associations of water

users, 338 religious organizations, 517 condominiums, 1,698 territorial self-governing institutions, 43 associations of trade union organizations, and 87 political parties.

⁴ Report after Ministry of Justice representative attended the Parliamentary hearings in September 2006.

⁵ www.jashtik.in.kg/ngo/ngo.htm, visited on 30 September 2006.

⁶ Ministry of Justice applies legitimately codified term “non-commercial organizations” out of which under the term “non-governmental organizations”, as a rule, public associations, public funds and associations of owners are understood.

⁷ About 6% composed NGOs (146), less than 10% NGOs dealing with women issues.

⁸ Within the framework of goals and tasks of the research, ACECS has formulated the following criteria for active non-commercial organization (NCO): period of operation of NCO – not less than two years; number of paid employees – not less than two persons; total number of projects implemented for the whole period of existence – not less than three; number of projects carried out at present – not less than one.

⁹ Preliminary research results under ACECS, October of 2006.

¹⁰ Include both male and female young people.

¹¹ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Fundamentals of Youth Policy, 2000.” It is not clear why foreigners are excluded from the definition.

¹² It should be noted that respondents’ cases, who answered “employers invited by themselves”, were not always clear.

¹³ 2004 research data

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 2% among them responded that there were no problems, 19 % difficult to answer, 13% refused to answer.

¹⁷ 2004 research data

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Detailed answers on this issue are presented in the *Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan - Research Report (2006)*.

²⁰ Research Report “Young people’s role and motivation for participation in civil society,” Part 4.2.

²¹ Ibid, Part 5

²² Ibid, Part 5.1. The regional correlation is also introduced in another section of the survey report.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.