

«Country Paper» - Kyrgyz Republic
**«Development of Social Work in the Kyrgyz Republic in the period of
transition to market economy»**

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In 1991 the Kyrgyz Republic became an independent state. This was followed by transition to market economy as well in social and political area- by ratification of principles of democracy.

The transition entailed changes of living standards of significant number of the population. Crisis in economy and social area was followed by drastic decrease of living standards, growth of unemployment, criminality, and increase in number of socially vulnerable groups of population which needed a social protection, support and provision of special services. Those who appeared to be in most difficult situation were children, families with many children, handicapped people, unemployed people, living lonely retired citizens, peasants having small plots of land. Poverty especially stroke people from rural areas, who are more than a half of the population of the country. This situation unfavorably influenced mentality of large part of the population of Kyrgyzstan. If it was improbable in the past to imagine that Kyrgyz women would abandon their children, nowadays there are lots of cases when young mothers shamelessly leave their newly born children in orphanages. In the past was a quite difficult to find prostitutes among Kyrgyz women, nowadays hundreds of prostitutes look for their clients near the restaurants, hotels and other public places in cities of Kyrgyzstan. If in the past respect to parents and elder people in general was a point-blank norm of Kyrgyz morality, so nowadays there are

cases when young people neglect their elderly parents, and send them to residential homes for elderly people. The number juvenile delinquents and homeless children is also increasing. This reality demands changes in system of social work, new approaches and methods, innovation technologies that should be possessed by social workers. New type of social institutions and specialists having a command of new technologies and developed skills are necessary in this situation.

Though the area of Kyrgyz republic is not so large and its population is only about 5 million of people, regional distinctions are very significant, so it is necessary to take them into consideration in development of social work. For instance, people living in Naryn oblast, some regions of Jalal-Abad, Batken, Osh oblasts and some other regions are resided in high mountainous areas and are mainly involved in agriculture, there is no industry, developed infrastructure and medical services, poor communications and bad transportation. In Chu oblast and some areas of Jalal-Abad, Osh oblasts where population is residing in valleys, there are with developed agricultural production industrial enterprises and agricultural manufactures available as well as in rural areas. The infrastructure and communications are much better there.

Growth of poverty is a negative peculiarity of transition period. At present about a half of population of the country lives below the poverty line. And 163 800 families with 560 000 members go on the dole. According to UN assessment the living standard in our country is one of the lowest in the world. It is about 7 USD per capita. From one and a half million of children 853 525 of them live in extreme poverty. This situation in the republic demands establishing of mechanisms of social protection.

The goals of our work are:

- to promote development of social work and social service by means of community, based on paramount principles of democracy, security and equality. It means rapt attention to the development of society and critical comprehension of its influence to personality and groups of population;
- contribution in forming, development and improvement of medical and social, psychological, social and legal, prophylactic, common, cultural and other kinds of help and support provided to all people who need them;
- active participation in establishing in Kyrgyzstan of integrated social complex, creation of its new component- public system of social protection and support to families, youth, children, poor people, disabled people, veterans and military people;

At all levels of territorial subdivisions; there were created institutions of social protection. Our country was one of the first among CIS countries to reform the system social protection and

social service. Neither Russia nor republics of Central Asia had the experience which could be used in Kyrgyzstan

The situation was even more complicated because we started transformation of the system without having professional social workers. We had to educate them in the process of reforms.

The notion of “social work”, which was interpreted as an assistance provided to elderly, living lonely people at their homes became obsolete and did not fit in that definition. In generic sense, the goals of social work are nowadays interpreted as regulation of legal, economic, social relationships between people or groups of individuals with the society, provision of assistance in solving personal, family or other problems. Ideally, social work is to become “social umbrella” protecting each member of society from different difficulties of life. In 1998 a new profession a “social worker” was officially registered in Kyrgyzstan!

We must mention about the assistance provided in period of 1995-1998 by the World bank together with technical support of British Council, that implemented a project on development of state regulation of network of social protection of population. As a result of the project there was introduction of new targeted social protection model. In the process of project implementation social workers from Kyrgyzstan visited the United Kingdom where they got acquainted with the system of social work of UK and activities of association of social workers United Kingdom. with the help of World Bank and Russian-European Trust we established Association of social institutions of Kyrgyzstan.

August 15, 1997 was the date when the unique institution of our country – Association of social institutions of Kyrgyzstan started to function. It was the beginning of professional consolidation of those working in the area of social service. Our Association deals with the most topical problems of people. After the profession of social worker was registered the Association of Social Institutions was incorporated as Association of Social Workers of Kyrgyz Republic. Now it includes more than 4 000 members, more than 40 NGOs, 58 city and rayon departments of social protection, about 20 stationary social institutions.

Considering peculiarities of the situation in Kyrgyzstan the aim of social work development was not only to introduce innovations, new approaches, establish institutions for support of poor, disabled and socially vulnerable groups of people, the objective also was social, psychological, occupational, and medical rehabilitation. This could not be possible without assistance (that was comprehensive, training and organizational) provided by international organizations.

We received targeted assistance from our partners for development of the main trends of social work and activities of Association of Social Workers. Currently the Association is carrying out its work in four main directions:

1. Establishment of NGOs- for development of public system of social protection and support.
2. Development of social policy in the Kyrgyz Republic targeted to help people by development of draft laws and legislative acts
3. Development of social work through training and re-training of social workers.
4. Social mobilization on problems of disabled and elderly people, children, families, women and youth.

In establishing NGOs throughout the country for creating public system of social protection and support we were supported by German Society for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), Counterpart Consortium, embassies of Netherlands, Canada, Japan and others. The International Federation of Social Workers, Russian- European Trust, Soros-Kyrgyzstan Foundation, associations of social workers of Denmark, Russia, Sweden and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and others participated in training and retraining of our social workers. In development of social policy through development of draft laws and legislative acts we were very actively helped by “Counterpart Consortium”, Association of Workers of Social Services of Russia, Association of Social Workers of Korea, and Association of Social Workers of Denmark. In implementing work on social mobilization on problems of disabled and elderly citizen, families, children, women and youth great support was and is still provided by Russian- European Trust, National Charity Lottery of United Kingdom, German Society for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), charitable organization “Adra”, UNDP, embassies of Netherlands and Japan, Agency on International Relations Development of Canada, United States Agency of International Development (USAID), International Mercy Corps and others.

Without such regular and disinterested help it would much more difficult and in some aspects not possible to develop social work in our country.

At present hundreds thousand Kyrgyz people need social protection, services and rehabilitation. At present 50% of 5 million population lives below the poverty line. Those are 800.000 retired people (single, having health problems, getting very poor pensions), hundreds thousand of disabled people of different categories including 43.000 people being disabled from common diseases, about 6.000 got disabilities as a result of professional injuries and occupational diseases, 30.000 of handicapped children at age up to 16, thousands of people who

became disabled after war or military service and others. At the moment there are about 70.000 people in the country who need prosthetic and orthopedic treatment.

Social workers work in 20 institutions of permanent residence to take care of single elderly people, people with mental disabilities (including children). There are several thousand of people being taken care.

These traditional institutions of social protection also get help from international organizations, local charitable organizations and sponsors as the funds allocated from the state budget are insufficient.

Social workers serve single elderly people, disabled people who stay home (helping them in their everyday life, with food and meals, medical service, providing psychological support). Those social workers work in all regional departments of social protection all over the republic. There are 700 of them but they serve more than 10.000 people who need help at home, that is to say each social worker has 14 clients to help.

Social workers from departments of social protection in oblasts, cities and rayons make social passports of families with low incomes for development of regional programs for targeted social assistance and poverty elimination. They entitle benefits, privileges envisaged by legislation.

Our social workers work local self-government bodies in villages (there are 468 of them in the country), social workers determine poverty level of families by making social passports, mobilize residents of villages to take joint measures for poverty elevation, to raise employment, to provide social rehabilitation of disabled people, children and families who violated law.

A number of Laws, Presidential Edicts, and governmental Decrees concerning social protection of people were enacted since our Republic proclaimed independence. Among those were: The Law on Social Protection of Disabled in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, The Law on Provision of Social Services to Disabled and Elderly Citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and Association of Social Workers together developed draft of the “Law on the Basis of Provision Social Services to the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic” which was enacted in 2000.

The important document, determining the state policy on disabled citizens and directed to provide quality improvement of the situation of disabled people is “The National Program of State Support to Disabled” approved by the Edict #157 of the President, dated June 29, 1999. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic developed the plan of implementation of Program. By Edict # 363 of the President, dated November 28, 1999 the Council on Affairs of Disabled People under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic was established. Members of our Association are included into the Council.

“The Complex Basis for Development of Kyrgyzstan up to year of 2010” and “The National Strategy of poverty Alleviation for the period up to Year of 2003” which were approved recently to also determine objectives for further development of social sphere in Kyrgyzstan, first of all on poverty alleviation, employment issues, and provision support to vulnerable groups of population, including handicapped people. Association of Social Workers, NGOs, and social institutions participated in process of development of the programs.

Within the framework of the “The Complex Basis for Development of Kyrgyzstan” and “The National Strategy of poverty Alleviation” programs Ministry of Labor and Social Protection with the help of local state authorities and local self governments carried out activities on making social passports of indigent families and citizens in order to:

- to know real economic situation of families, real level of their poverty
- To motivate indigent families to look for their own ways of poverty alleviation through maximization of their incomes.
- to establish the basis for scientific approach to the problem of poverty alleviation, considering peculiarities of each region of the country.

Analysis of provided social passports showed that each oblast is of specific character. Basing on social and economical situation and data written down in social passports each rayon and each village local administration draw up a map of poverty for certain region and develop a regional program for poverty alleviation.

Making social passports for people made possible to draw the picture of poverty and to determine target groups. By December 1, 2002 there were 565.000 households surveyed it makes 50% of all households in the country (1123. 700). One third out of the surveyed households are below the poverty line, 36 % of households do not have own land, 30 % do not have any cattle , most of people are unemployed.

Social workers of rayon departments of social protection implemented a new way of creating jobs, when people were paid a yearly amount of their benefits, which they could use a capital to launch their own business. For instance, in village of Aravan 6 women established a Group of Mutual Assistance named “Omat” Local administration provided them with a room in an empty building of local club. Having studied the needs of people in the community, they found out that there was a demand for new clothing and services for restoration of used clothing. By this moment those women have doubled their capital and increased salaries.

Mrs. Teshebaeva from village of “Saray” of Kara-Suu rayon for the amount of money equal to 3.933 soms she got as benefits managed to purchase 51 meters of colorful velour, 12 meters of velvet, 10 skeins of threads and made 16 blankets and pillows. She sold them for 5.287

soms. Received money was used for purchase of sewing-machine and materials for sewing goods.

Mrs. Alieva from Ak-Suu rayon received her benefits at the amount of 2.671 soms. She bought sunflower seeds and grew one hectare sunflowers. She made a profit of 5.080 soms.

Currently we try to support and improve traditional forms and institutions of social protection (such as benefit entitlement, support of boarding homes for elderly and disabled people, special medical commissions, etc.) We also try to develop rehabilitation approach in social work (we have already given examples on job creation), to establish new types of social institutions, to introduce innovation forms and methods.

One of the already implemented ways of social work is social rehabilitation, adaptation and integration of disabled people into the society. In May, 1998 the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, and the Association of Social Workers together with representatives from Russia and Great Britain conducted in Bishkek the International Conference on social rehabilitation of disabled in Kyrgyzstan.

In 1999 the Center for Social Rehabilitation of Handicapped People started to work in Bishkek. The Center was founded with active support of Russian-European Trust, in partnership with the Association of Social Workers, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Bishkek City Council and the national Committee of Red Crescent. Know-How Fund, the Embassy of Netherlands and a range of local sponsors also took part in establishment of the Center. By present time the Center helped to hundreds of disabled people and it also turned out into the training and methodological institution where specialists and students have training and practice on rehabilitation and occupational therapy. It is also a facility where students of social work have their practical training as well. The Center has received 263 pieces of rehabilitation equipment for those purposes. Russian-European Trust provided 2 special vehicles for transportation of disabled people.

For some years Russian-European Trust, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, and our Association were implementing the joint project on development of occupational therapy in Kyrgyzstan. Project was funded by National Lottery of Great Britain. During the period from 1998 up to 2002 inclusively 4 specialists were trained in England, 24 in Russia, 122 people in Kyrgyzstan were trained by specialists from Great Britain. The training was on rehabilitation and occupational therapy for disabled people.

At seminars conducted in residential homes dozens of specialists got training. Several textbooks were published. There were methodological classrooms established at several boarding homes. Special attention is paid to handicapped children. Due to efforts of parents and local authorities in 1999 in At-Bashi rayon of Naryn oblast on the basis of former kindergarten there

was established NGO “Center of Social Support and Job Placement of Disabled” named “Ak-Bayrak” About 30 children with disabilities are having rehabilitation at that NGO. It provided jobs (seamstress, guard, teacher, nurse, worker and others) to parents of children. Their wages are used to pay maintenance and support to children.

In May 2002 at Bishkek Humanities University there was International Scientific and Practical Conference with participation of directors of Russian-European Trust. At the Conference they reviewed results of Project on Development of Rehabilitation and Occupational Therapy of Disabled in Kyrgyzstan and set objectives for future. At the Conference it was announced about establishing of Union of Occupational Therapists.

One of the most important activities of social workers in Kyrgyzstan is an intensive support to elderly people and children. Because of the difficult financial position of many elderly people who get very small pensions and live below poverty line there were established 6 mercy centers where elderly people can get help. The first center was established in Leninski rayon of Bishkek city with financial support from TACIS, and assistance from Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Association of Social Workers, city administration and Russian-European Trust.

Joined together their possibilities several dozens of enterprises and farms in Kara-Suu rayon of Osh oblast with active organizational support from local department of social protection were able to open Mercy Center where many single elderly people, families having many children and people in need get help and support. Local state administration also allocated funds from state budget. Dozens of individuals from socially vulnerable groups of population got assistance at the Center. 20 disabled and single elderly people permanently stay in the center. In total there are 25 rehabilitation centers providing assistance to disabled in the country.

In view of the new approach to social work one of the most serious issues is education and training of new social workers and retraining of already working specialists. The Association of Social Workers initiated training of new specialists in social work in Bishkek Humanities University. In accordance with the agreement between Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, our Association and Bishkek Humanities University there was organized training of students to new profession “social worker-practical psychologist”.

Organization of social workers from Denmark, Russia, Russian-European Trust helped in establishing teaching and material basis for training to new specialization. Foreign educational institutes as University of Hawaii, Social and Technical University (Russia) helped in organizing of teaching process. Representatives of mentioned universities conducted classes on social work for students and teachers at the Bishkek Humanities University. There are already 96 graduated social workers. At present the University also educates social pedagogues. Students of social

work now are having their practical classes in institutions of social protection of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and NGOs that work in social field.

Social workers, workers from local self-governments, and officers from Ministry of Internal Affairs who deal with children at risk have trainings on the basis of Bishkek Humanities University within the framework of Kyrgyz-Swedish Project “Training. Development of social work with children at risk”, which is implemented by Association of Social workers of Kyrgyzstan and financed by Swedish Department of International Co-operation Development (SIDA). Training consisted of three components: training of social workers and inspectors on juvenile affairs from different regions to methods of work with children; training of medical workers to the issues of rehabilitation of handicapped children; application of alternative punishment measures to juveniles in prisons. More than 150 specialists have been trained.

Together with training of social workers to methods of rehabilitation, adaptation and integration of disabled people into society (we mentioned that above) there are other ways of training of new social workers, retraining and improvement of qualifications of now working specialists. .

That all lets us to make a conclusion that there were changes in social work in our republic in accordance with on-going political and economical changes in the country. Those changes help to have state authorities, management and public formations more involved in implementing programs of social and economical development of the country, building trust and agreement, and growing economic potential.

We expect that as a result of our activities there will be a further development of social services, especially in rural area, where more than 70 % of population resides, there will be a better activity of poorly protected groups of population on solving their own problems, improved training of social workers in Universities of the republic, and their work will be more concrete and differentiated, their professionalism will grow and this profession will be in high demand.

Scheme of main directions of work of the Association of Social Workers of Kyrgyz Republic is attached