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YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN KYRGYZSTAN: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to identify what youth development programs are needed for the socio-economic development of Kyrgyzstan, and how such programs can be built effectively for the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan. Since their independence from the Former Soviet Union, virtually all Central Asian countries have faced complex socio-economic challenges in their transition from a command to a market economy. As a consequence, social instability has increased to the level of serious threat to political stability and national security. Particularly, Kyrgyzstan has had people's revolutions twice since its independence. In those two Kyrgyz revolutions, even though all patriotic Kyrgyz people were parts of relatively peaceful demonstrations against dictators and their corrupt governments, young people who were teens and early twenties made the difference at the critical moments during those two revolutions.

Now, Kyrgyz people seem overconfident in believing that they could change anything they don't like. Especially after the second revolution, many people, especially young people, in Kyrgyzstan have a wrong and dangerous perception that they could have another revolution any time when they feel their demands are not satisfied. However, unfortunately, such demands could not be satisfied completely in a shorter time of their tolerance.

If young people's beliefs about their future will not be realized soon, there will be social chaos virtually everyday continuously, which hurts its socio-economic development in Kyrgyzstan. As the Kyrgyz young people seize more socio-political power than ever in Kyrgyzstan, angry and frustrated young people in Kyrgyzstan will make lots of noise politically as well as socially. However, history tells us that radical movements, such as revolutions, are not the ultimate solutions in most times for building a healthy society or a prosperous nation. Revolution could sweep the past, but they could not promise a bright future automatically. Building a promising future needs well-developed plans, including youth development programs, by the knowledgeable and competent leadership with visions, and those plans should be carried out one by one in right ways. However, little attention has been paid to such programs in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan should establish well-focused youth development programs and implement them according to its national priority in strategic development of its country.

The objective of this paper is to identify what youth programs/activities are needed for socio-economic development in Kyrgyzstan and how to develop such programs/activities effectively in the current situation, and to make some suggestions for successful operations of those programs to encourage all the Kyrgyz youth to play constructive roles in building their country as a socio-economically well-respected country in the world.

OVERVIEW OF KYRGYZSTAN AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

In Kyrgyzstan, almost 68% of the population still lives under the poverty limit (in 2012 up from 62% in 2006), and about 60% of the children suffer from chronic to acute malnutrition (USAID, 2010). The unemployment rate of the young generation under 30 years old in Kyrgyzstan is so high with an estimated figure of 35%, and young women with their children are the ones who have suffered the most from deprivations subsequent to those two revolutions in the last decade. Impoverished youth are particularly vulnerable, which makes them an easy target for a variety of subversive and religious propaganda. Even if some young businessmen are among the most successful Kyrgyz entrepreneurs, access to resources is socially restricted and even discouraged by the nation-wide corrupt systems.

More importantly, most young people think that there is no hope in their country. Most of the well-educated young people, who tend to be moderate politically, have left Kyrgyzstan

for a better life abroad. Most young people from poor families, who are usually radical politically, become angry easily, and are a main source of social instability. So, developing youth programs/activities for the Kyrgyz youth is urgently needed for strategic development of economy in Kyrgyzstan. In 2010, a research project conducted by Lee (C.Y. Lee 2010) uncovered the lack of youth programs and activities even though there have been strong demands of such programs for all aged youth nation-wide in Kyrgyzstan.

Youth development programs prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a structured, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them obtain social, emotional, ethical, physical, and cognitive competencies for their future. They address the broader developmental assets all children and youth need for their well-being and better life in the future, such as caring relationships, safe places and activities, mental and physical health, marketable skills, and opportunities for service and civic participation. Rather than only seeking to stop young people from engaging in risky behaviors, positive youth development, in addition, aims to mobilize societies and communities to create positive goals and outcomes for all youth.

Youth development organizations are nonprofit youth-serving organizations with a major emphasis on providing youth development programs. **Youth-serving organizations** are organizations with a primary focus on providing youth development, health and fitness, educational, substance abuse prevention, child welfare, child protective, psychological, parenting, vocational and training, teen pregnancy, rehabilitative, or residential services to youth.

Youth development programs usually work on three levels: helping individual youth build these four characteristics; ensuring that there is at least one caring, consistent adult in each young person's life; and developing a sense of security in the lives of all young people. So, **youth development services** should provide guidance and support; safe places to live, learn and play; and a variety of opportunities that will contribute to the healthy development of young people. **Youth development programs** should be designed to meet the human development needs of youth and to build a set of core assets and competencies needed to participate successfully in adolescent and adult life. Finally **youth development programs** must assist young people in developing competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills and become healthy, responsible and caring youth and adults.

KOREA AS A MODEL COUNTRY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Human resource is one of the most important infrastructures for socio-economic development in any country. However, it is more critical for developing countries to build youth development programs for a self-sustainable economy as an important part of national HRD (Human Resource Development) programs.

An excellent example for this case is Korea. Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world until the 1960s. It had no resources at all – virtually no natural resources with a minimum level of human resources. According to the data, the GDP per capita in Korea was less than \$100 in 1962 while it was about \$220 in Thailand and about \$200 in the Philippines. Many countries in Africa had a better economy than Korea with a higher GNP per capita in 1962. Furthermore, in 1970, a UN report about the Korean economy said that even though Korea and Ghana were almost identical in terms of economy, Korea seemed to have no future while Ghana would have a bright future in terms of economy. Actually these two countries had almost the same amount of GDP per capita, the same level of HDI, the same structure of economy, and the same amount of international trade, etc. until that time.

Today everybody knows that the UN report mentioned above is wrong. The actual outcomes of these two countries' economies today is completely opposite of what was predicted by the UN report. The Korean GDP per capita was about \$28,000 in 2012, while Ghana is still one of the poorest countries with a GDP per capita less than \$2,000. More

importantly, the Korean economy today is regarded as one of the most dynamic and competitive in the world. Many experts wonder how Korea could become one of the first countries to recover from the current global financial crisis. The answer is simple and obvious: Korea's human resources are extremely competent based on its well-developed educational system, including many excellent youth development programs. With highly developed human resource, Korea has been able to develop highly competitive technology-based industries even though it has little natural resources.

The most important decision Korea made at the beginning of its economic development process was to develop its nationwide HRD programs immediately as its top priority when Korea was so poor. Most of those programs were for youth development. Korea has established a well-sequenced educational system for developing the human resources needed for its sustainable development. The Korean government established: (1) vocational training programs; (2) technical high schools; (3) science high schools for talented students; (4) national higher educational institutions specialized in engineering, sciences, and technology with advanced graduate programs in addition to its well-designed national athletic programs for youth.

At the beginning of its sustainable development, Korea decided to develop a well-designed educational system that focused on developing each individual person's competence from his/her early age according to personal interest and talent. Even though Korea was a very poor country during that time, it invested its financial resources in the creation of specialized high schools, colleges, and universities for training technicians and craftsmen and educating engineers and scientists for the future, unlike other developing countries. Also, Korea has established one of the most effective national scholarship programs for young scholars, engineers and scientists to go abroad for their higher degree education and training at world-class institutions and research centers. This was one of the most significant decisions the Korean leaders made in the early stages of the economic development process.

The following youth development programs suggested to Kyrgyzstan are selected based on Kyrgyz's priority as well as lots of valuable lessons learned from youth development programs in Korea and other model countries.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS RECOMMENDED FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN KYRGYZSTAN

1. The "Manas" National Scholarship Program

This is the national scholarship program for outstanding talented youth in Kyrgyzstan to study abroad for their higher degrees. It recognizes national importance of educating its most talented youth at the best universities of the world, and thus enables them to acquire necessary knowledge, skills and experience to lead the country into its prosperous future. For the strategic development of Kyrgyzstan with sustainable growth, there is an acute need for cadres with advanced western education, and so, it is now necessary to send the most qualified youth to study at leading educational institutions in foreign countries.

The program is designed to train future leaders in natural sciences, technology, engineering, mathematical sciences, and other key fields for the strategic development of the Kyrgyz economy. Upon completion of their programs, scholarship recipients return to Kyrgyzstan to help advance the nation by their service of making contributions in their fields. Also, it is the national scholarship program to improve the national competitiveness mainly in the STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematical Sciences) areas for the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan by supporting Kyrgyz youth to study abroad at world class educational institutions for their graduate degree programs in those areas.

The rigorous criteria for selection of the scholarship recipients and the highly competitive nature of the selection process assure that only the best students/youth and young scholars, who represent Kyrgyzstan's most promising young leaders, are named "Manas"

Scholars. There should be no discrimination at all during the entire process based on ethnic/tribal background, religion, gender, and geography. Students/youth as well as young scholars living in Kyrgyzstan who are exceptionally talented in their fields are all encouraged to apply for the scholarship regardless of their ethnic/tribal background, religion, gender, and geographical background.

2. National Human Resource Development Programs for Youth

Human resource is one of the most important infrastructures for socio-economic development in a country. It is more critical for developing countries to build national HRD programs for youth for a self-sustainable economy. Especially, for sustainable development, it is critical to help young generation develop its potential as human resource for the future. Developing such nationwide HRD programs for youth is one of the most urgent national agenda with the top priority for economic development. It includes the creation of vocational training programs, technical high schools, specialized science high schools, colleges and universities for training technicians and craftsmen and educating engineers and scientists. It will give the Kyrgyz youth lots of opportunities, jobs, eventually hope in the future.

Usually, developing countries do not have enough finance and face the common problem of a lack of financial resources. Under such conditions, it is more important and critical to set the right priority for many programs and projects especially in the early stages of economic development. Thus, the knowledgeable leader (or government) should select the areas or programs/projects the country needs to develop most urgently before all others in order to maximize the effects of the chain reaction that will follow, and concentrate his or her efforts to them with the allocation of scarce resources. This is the principle of “*selection and concentration*”!!

Generally the national economy, as well as its competitiveness for sustainable development, depends on the country's level of technological development, especially in engineering, the sciences, and high-tech areas. The level of technology determines the overall power and competitiveness of a nation and its economic development. So, for sustainable development, it is critical to develop technology in engineering, sciences, and high-tech areas through a well-sequenced education system. Consequently, a nation's economic development is a matter of human resources development in those areas.

3. National Athletic Programs for Youth

There are two categories of national athletic programs for youth: (A) *Sports and Athletic Programs for Youth*; and (B) *Elite Athletes Development Programs*. The first one is the programs for all kids/children and students in Kyrgyzstan while the second one is the programs of identifying, selecting, training athletes who represent Kyrgyzstan in international sports event or competitions.

(A) Sports and Athletic Programs for Youth

There is a tremendous need for after-school care for children and youth. Far too many families are unable to find safe, quality programs for their children, and are forced instead to turn to makeshift arrangements or leave their children unsupervised. In Kyrgyzstan, lots of children are left without any programs/activities involvement every day in the hours after school. For some of these latch-key kids, the hours after school may be dangerous, children and youth are the most likely to try something bad for them, such as alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, and more likely to experiment with sex. All of these risks greatly increase for low-income children in urban communities as well as villages. For many other children, the afternoon hours are simply wasted; time spent watching television or doing nothing could be used instead to participate in positive activities or to connect with responsible adults. Research indicates that children who attend high quality after-school programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustment, conflict resolution skills, grades, and behavior in school than peers who are not in after-school programs. Students who spend more hours every day

in extracurricular activities are less likely to use drugs and less likely to become teen parents than students who do not participate.

Sports programs can also promote healthy development for youth. Examples abound of successful sports programs that build character, responsibility and leadership skills, help children and youth improve school performance, and nurture relationships with adult mentors. Many researchers found that participation in sports programs helps children and youth achieve better performance in their standardized tests and improve their academic skills overall; their enthusiasm for schoolwork is rivaled only by their ardor for sports programs.

Therefore, it is critical for the government to support after-school sports and athletic activities through a broad array of national programs. Some may help working families pay for child care with sports programs, including after-school sports programs for school-age children. Others may attempt to prevent delinquency and crime by providing positive alternatives to risky and criminal behavior. Still others could be designed to improve health and fitness. The government must find the major funding sources for after-school sports and recreation programs and discuss current legislative or executive action related to these programs. So far there are not enough funding sources which are not specifically geared toward sports and recreation, but can be and are being used to support these programs -- to promote access for low-income children and youth to sports and recreation opportunities, build infrastructure, provide links to other important services, and improve the quality of programs.

(B) Elite Athletes Development Program

Virtually all countries from all over the world assemble their best athletes and send them to the Olympics and other international athletic competitions all year round. For many of those countries and their citizens, the simple fact that their athletes participate in those events offers them a sense of success, furthermore it gives their people some opportunities to feel the national unity and pride. However, for some other countries, success is not achieved unless their athletes reach the medal podium or get medals. Especially for developing countries, this is more important since they don't have lots of opportunities of showing their national pride. Such is the case with Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan needs all kinds of success in any international sports events for its national unity since one of the most serious challenges Kyrgyzstan faces is the problem of division of North and South spiritually, which hurts its national harmony and unity. After the second revolution in April 2010, this problem has showed that its national identification as one nation is in deep trouble and easily vulnerable. One of the most peacefully effective and efficient approaches to solve this nationally urgent problem is to make all people and citizens in Kyrgyzstan feel the national pride by showing them the outstanding performance in international athletic competitions and sports events. For this, developing elite athletes program is crucial in Kyrgyzstan. Obviously, developing elite athletes program usually takes a while with well-allocation of necessary resources as well as the government support.

The important element of the mission statement of such a national program should be the notion of sustained competitive excellence. It means that the ultimate goal of developing elite athletes program is winning medals at every Olympic, Paralympic, Asian Games and other similar major international sports events through the provision of the best resources to every athlete with the hope of building a pipeline of future athletes to continuously and consistently bring the success to Kyrgyzstan. This intention then flows through the organizational structure to each National Governing Body (NGB) and to the athletes themselves. It is at the NGB level where the foundation of sustained competitive excellence lies and where the creation of an athlete development system truly takes shape.

For the purposes of this, an elite athlete development system should be defined as the organized group of interacting elements required to progress an athlete from the introductory level to Olympic level. The Kyrgyz Olympic Committee (KOC) was established as soon as

Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, and has done outstanding jobs of sending its best athletes to those international events and showing lots of impressive outcomes in spite of shortage of resources since then. However, for all the continuous success in those international sports arena in the future, it is necessary now to discuss in detail those elements that are necessary to the infrastructure of the athlete development system. These include funding, facilities, and personnel.

4. National Vocational Job Training Programs for Youth

The unemployment rate of the young generation under 30 years old in Kyrgyzstan is so high with an estimated figure of 35% in 2012, and young women with their children are the ones who have suffered the most from deprivations subsequent to those two revolutions in the last eight years. Impoverished youth are particularly vulnerable, which makes them an easy target for a variety of subversive and religious propaganda. More importantly, most young people think that there is no hope in their country because they don't have any jobs. They become angry against the government and society easily, and are a main source of social instability. So, developing vocational and job training programs for the youth is urgently needed for the social stability, which is very important for economic development in Kyrgyzstan.

Vocational education or vocational education and training (VET) prepares trainees for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-[academic](#), and totally related to a specific [occupation](#), or [vocation](#). It is sometimes referred to as technical education as the trainee directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or [technology](#). Vocational education may be classified as teaching [procedural knowledge](#). This can be contrasted with [declarative knowledge](#), as used in education in a usually broader [scientific](#) field, which might concentrate on [theory](#) and abstract [conceptual](#) knowledge, characteristic of [tertiary education](#). Vocational education can be at the [secondary](#) or [post-secondary](#) level and can interact with the [apprenticeship](#) system. Increasingly, vocational education can be recognized in terms of [recognition of prior learning](#) and partial [academic credit](#) towards [tertiary education](#) (e.g., at a [university](#)) as credit; however, it is rarely considered in its own form to fall under the traditional definition of [higher education](#).

However, as the labor market becomes more specialized and economies demand higher levels of skill, governments and businesses are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training organizations and subsidized apprenticeship or traineeship initiatives for businesses. After completing secondary education, one can enter higher vocational schools or universities. It is also possible for a student to choose both technical college and vocational schooling. The education in such cases last usually from 3 to 4 years. Vocational education is an important part of the education systems in most of developed countries.

In Korea, vocational high schools typically offer programs in five fields: agriculture, technology/engineering, commerce/business, maritime/fishery, and information technology. In principle, all students in the first year of high school (10th grade) follow a common national curriculum. In the second and third years (11th and 12th grades) students are offered courses relevant to their specialization. In some programs, students may participate in workplace training through co-operation between schools and local employers. The government is now piloting Vocational Meister Schools in which workplace training is an important part of the program. Although there are many private vocational high schools, the public schools are the backbone of the vocational education and job training in Korea. Private and public schools operate according to similar rules; for example, they charge the same fees for high school education, with an exemption for poorer families.

5. Computer and IT Skills Development Programs for Youth

This program will create enriched learning environments in which the appropriate use of technology affords opportunities for marginalized people, particularly youth. It envisions

a world in which they are equipped with adequate tools and resources that prepare them to confidently compete for 21st century opportunities. It recognizes that technology is not going to solve the problems of these communities, but it is a tool that can be used to help bridge social and economic obstacles. To this effect, this program teaches participants first to recognize and speak out about what challenges exist in their community and then demonstrate how to research, document, and disseminate information about these challenges. During this process, technology is identified as an enabler, it is introduced.

This program's main theme is, **“Bridging the Digital Divide”**. This theme is made out of an aspiration to empower people, in communities that we work in, to sit in the driver's seat of their development while accessing the networks, tools and information to make positive change. **Poverty reduction is about developing people, their experiences and their potential. It is about capacity building, about acquiring life skills enabling them to become better educated and more productive.**

For the successful outcomes, it is strongly recommended to have one of the most urgently needed national movements, “A Computer to Every Kids in Kyrgyzstan” with establishing an advanced wireless telecommunication network system. It is obvious that computer and information technologies (CIT) have become a significant factor in development, having a profound impact on the political, economic and social sectors in any country.

The proliferation of CIT presents both opportunities and challenges in terms of the social development and inclusion of youth. Young people often use the Internet to access entertainment and news sites and as a personal meeting space through chat programs. There is also an increased emphasis on using information and communication technologies in the context of global youth priorities, such as access to education, employment and poverty eradication. Yet questions remain as to whether information and communication technologies can empower young people and improve their lives or whether they are deepening the already existing inequalities and divisions in the world. The important concerns of a global "digital divide" apply as much to youth as to any other age group.

Although progress towards basic education regarding information and communication technology, beginning with computer literacy, has been made in Kyrgyzstan recently, the number of computer illiterate youth will continue to grow nationwide in Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan, like many developing countries, is likely to fall short of necessary education regarding information and communication technology. Three main concerns regarding the current situation of digital divide in Kyrgyzstan are analyzed. The first is the inability of many parents in Kyrgyzstan to provide necessary resources, including computers and their access to telecommunication networks, such as Internet, to their children because of local economic and social conditions in Kyrgyzstan. The second concerns easy access to an effective information and telecommunication network at a reasonable cost. The third concerns the quality of computer and information technology education, its relevance to employment and its usefulness in assisting young people in the transition to full adulthood, active citizenship and productive and gainful employment.

6. Youth Leadership Development Programs

Youth Leadership activities build skills relevant to young people's personal development, as well as their role within a group. On a personal level, youth who participate in these experiences gain insight into themselves. This helps them analyze their strengths and weaknesses and set personal and vocational goals. On a group level, youth develop the ability to work with others to create a shared vision and to draw on the talents, skills, and energy of others.

Today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Too many of the current problems in societies stem from youth education that is ill prepared to deal with present complexity. This is not just a matter of inadequate training in the realities of global change but a lack of human resourcefulness – youth living out of a field of awareness that limits their abilities to deal with their world. An interdependent vision of the whole is lacking. A new approach to leadership

education and training for youth is urgently needed. The vision of a planetary civilization that offers equity, education, sufficiency, and the ability to live on this planet in a way that encourages the possible human and the possible world is essential to this approach.

Youth development is a process that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve his or her full potential. Youth development is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies. **Youth leadership** is part of the youth development process and supports the young person in developing: (a) the ability to analyze his or her own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully participate in community life and effect positive social change); and (b) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and serve as a role model.

The youth of today need to develop leadership skills in order to enjoy greater success in their lives. Therefore, it is important there be programs that can help them cultivate their skills. By investigating successful programs and other relevant activities, the excellent customized programs fit into the situation in Kyrgyzstan should be developed.

Well-designed and well-run youth development programs promote youth leadership by involving youth in needs assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. A growing number of organizations include youth on their boards of directors. Effective programs engage all participating youth in constructive action through activities such as service learning, arts, and athletics; and emphasize common values such as friendship, citizenship, and learning.

In order for youth to be prepared to work in partnership with adults, they need to develop and/or enhance their leadership skills. Leadership training prepares youth to manage time, work as a team, set goals, start conversations, facilitate meetings, and make effective presentations. Promoting youth leadership development is a great way to promote positive life skills learning.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is important to understand that building a promising future for a society, a community or a nation is a long process of strategic development of many areas. Youth development is now accepted as an important area for building a promising future politically, culturally as well as socio-economically.

Youth development and economic development should work together to maximize the synergy effect for each other. Youth development programs should serve economic development and economic development should help develop more youth programs. Both youth development and economic development must be a nation-wide endeavor that should be initiated, planned, supported, and monitored by the governments, local communities and NGOs. Actually, they are very similar in nature because they both require a nationwide mobilization of all available means and resources with government supports as well as local communities' participation in the development process. At the same time, young people should play all important roles as future leaders, workforces, and followers in such a process. They should understand their roles and responsibilities as well as expectations from their communities and societies. They should be prepared to do right jobs in the process of strategic development of their country before they are called to do their assignments later.

Youth development programs help youth deal successfully with the challenges of adolescence and prepare them for the independence and responsibilities of being leaders, workers, and citizens, by attempting to help youth develop competencies. Most of **youth development programs** apply accepted theory and empirical evidence through interventions designed to help youth build personal resilience. A resilient individual has these attributes: (1) social competence; (2) problems-solving skills; (3) autonomy (sense of self-identity and an ability to act independently and to exert control over his or her environment); and (4) sense

of purpose and of a future.

There will be lots of challenges and obstacles in youth development. Although there are many great youth development programs planned in the strategic development process, they can't be implemented all together at a time and can't be finished completely just for overnight. It usually takes a while to see meaningful progress when they are implemented. Leaders of those programs should work diligently towards their goals with patience according to their well-designed plans.

In conclusion, building a promising future in Kyrgyzstan needs well-designed youth development programs as well as the knowledgeable and competent leaders with visions who could carry out all those programs as planned even when they face barriers and obstacles. Unfortunately so far little attention has been paid to such programs in Kyrgyzstan. Few Kyrgyz leaders know the importance of youth development programs in the strategic development process of Kyrgyzstan. It is now critical to establish those youth development programs suggested to Kyrgyzstan, support them by providing necessary resources, and implement them according to its national priority in the strategic development of Kyrgyzstan. In many ways, the success of strategic development of Kyrgyzstan will heavily depend on the success of those youth development programs.

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