



Pitching competition where entrepreneurs are presenting their business ideas, and will receive feedback on their potential, as well as gain access to networks of potential business partners and investors. (UNV, 2017)

Développer l'emploi des jeunes au Tadjikistan par la promotion de l'esprit d'entreprise

In Tajikistan, where 70 per cent of the population is under the age of 30, it is essential to enhance entrepreneurship and create more decent and fulfilling jobs for young people. The Start-Up Choihona project, initiated by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, is a joint initiative of government, development and private sector partners to support innovative entrepreneurship to increase youth employment.

One international UN Volunteer, ten community volunteers, and one UN Online Volunteer are running the Start-Up Choihona project, which has so far organized two national entrepreneurial competitions promoting innovation and youth employment. Quarterly

competitions offer an opportunity for new entrepreneurs to present their unique business ideas to a panel of judges. Given the chance to pitch their ideas, Tajik entrepreneurs have the chance to get feedback on whether their business ideas could work and gain access to valuable networks of potential business partners and investors. The events are for many participants, a chance of a lifetime.

Since the launch of the project in November 2016, over 100 entrepreneurs have pitched their business ideas and shared their marketing skills to a wide audience in competitions that covered the sectors of agriculture, ICT and small production and services. Quarterly trainings are also organized by partners for the winners of each of the pitching competitions.

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At least 300 start-ups across Tajikistan will be supported within two years through trainings on marketing, legislation, regulation and taxes, among others. The objective is that at least 200 small entrepreneurs will be self-employed at the end of the two years.

“The project enables young people to get feedback on their business ideas so that they can further refine them. The final goal is to encourage youth to be more self-reliant and to promote the entrepreneurship mindset and attitude. UNDP in Tajikistan is happy to support this initiative together with our partners in 2017 – the ‘Year of Youth’ as proclaimed by the President of Tajikistan,” explains Sanja Bojanic, UNDP Deputy Country Director in Tajikistan.

Increasing economic growth and productive employment (SDG 8)

The initiative is specially designed to respond to the need of involving the young people of Tajikistan in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8, which is to increase economic growth by promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

"Start-Up Chohona project is meant to support anyone who wishes to become an entrepreneur by offering equal opportunities. However, the road to becoming a successful entrepreneur is not easy. The beginning is particularly tough. You need to have a competitive idea, seed funds, marketing skills, and a network, among other things," says Heli Nykaenen, UNV Programme Officer in Tajikistan. "Therefore, the Start-Up Chohona project is here to support people in their attempt, hoping that in the future there will be a well-built small entrepreneurship ecosystem for all those who are willing to take the

economy of Tajikistan forward."

The entrepreneurs will get publicity for their new businesses, meet partners and investors, get exposed to a wide audience and mass media, and have access to business incubators and entrepreneurship schools. The project can also be expanded and replicated in other countries. So far, Uzbekistan has been invited to attend the next Start-Up Chohona event, which will be organized in a city bordering the two countries.

Joint project with participation from the private sector

Aside from UNV and UNDP, the key partners of the project are Accelerate Prosperity (AKDN), which provides prizes for entrepreneurs, the School of Young Entrepreneurs and the Club of Young Entrepreneurs, which provide prizes such as scholarships for entrepreneurial schools.

Accelerate Prosperity is part of a network of Enterprise Growth Accelerators in Central and South Asia – an initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network designed for grassroots inclusive economic development to catalyse or support start-up or early growth economic enterprises through inspiring entrepreneurial culture, promoting self-employment amongst youth and potentially creating jobs in the areas where economic opportunities remain insufficient.

During the project's second pitching competition, Ozodkhon Davlatshoev, Executive Director of Accelerate Prosperity (AKDN), said, "Today we are delighted to host the Start-Up Chohona event at our first state-of-the art enterprise accelerator and co-working space in Dushanbe, and are hopeful that this competition will spark new enterprises to contribute to the economic prosperity of Tajikistan, its entrepreneurs and the youth in this country."

The Start-Up Chohona project will continue to build a sustainable ecosystem of small entrepreneurs to support the growth of the economy of Tajikistan and to give everyone an equal chance to income generation.

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• youth • Tajikistan • Start-Up Chohona project • entrepreneurship • UNDP • Private sector

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth**