Social innovation and volunteerism in Uzbekistan

Last July UNDP and UNV in Uzbekistan joined forces to launch a two and half year project supporting volunteers and other young enthusiasts who want to make a positive impact in their communities. We are pleased to say that nine months later the project is bustling with activity.
Young people participate in an interactive Q&A on youth employment challenges in Uzbekistan during one of the ?MDGs and Volunteerism? discussion club meetings. Panel members from left to right: Aziza Umarova (Head of Good Governance Unit, UNDP), Bakhrom Radjabov (project member of Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan) and Mirsaid Uzakov (Y-PEER Fellow, UNFPA). (UNV, 2013)

Last July, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in Uzbekistan joined forces to launch a two and half year project supporting volunteers and other young enthusiasts who want to make a positive impact in their communities. We are pleased to say that nine months later the project is bustling with activity.

The first pillar of our activities centres on helping to establish an enabling environment for volunteerism in Uzbekistan. We are working to launch a website, code of conduct as well as a volunteers’ toolkit. These will help to facilitate the interaction between volunteers and their organisations as well as establish their respective dos and don’ts. To achieve our goal of promoting and supporting volunteerism throughout Uzbekistan, we are also setting up an unprecedented nationwide network of UNV regional representatives.

Our second cluster of activities aims to assist young enthusiasts in increasing their skills, capacities and social capital. In short, their ability to come up with innovate ideas and solutions to local needs.

At the heart of our activities lies a mini-grants project whereby up to 50 local initiatives will benefit from funding opportunities. In order to enable successful applicants to get their projects off the ground effectively, we will provide grants as well as training in project development.

Additionally, we are pioneering the concept of social innovation for the very first time in Uzbekistan, which is Central Asia’s most populous country. Building on success stories in other CIS countries, we plan to hold a Social Innovation Camp where ideas on how to tackle social needs with the help of
creative thinking and new technologies can be developed, perfected and put into action.

In parallel, we will also be establishing a permanent Social Innovation Lab with the help of a partner university in Tashkent. This will serve as an open space providing access to the necessary equipment and expertise to see social innovation projects all the way from ideation through to implementation.

Further to all this, in order to promote critical thinking skills, we are supporting the nationwide proliferation of discussion and debating clubs. Together with our partner organisations, we help out where we can with training courses or the production of instruction material. Also well under way is a social media contest on promoting the touristic potential of those regions of Uzbekistan whose delights are yet to be discovered by a global audience.

Bio: Andreas Karpati is an international UN Volunteer working as Community Outreach Specialist for the UNDP/UNV Project 'Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan'.

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