

A partnership between formal education and rural industry to introduce modern farming systems in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract: As part of the GTZ Capacity Building Project for Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Conflict Mitigation, Batken Oblast, southern Kyrgyzstan (2003-2007), a farm management resource book was written between July and September 2007, for grade nine school students. The objective was the planning, establishment and management of a household kitchen garden to contribute to family food security, health and hygiene while introducing market economy skills. This book introduces students in their last year of compulsory schooling to: (i) the rights and obligations of citizens of a market economy (ii) basic business principles, (iii) modern marketing, (iv) accessing advice and using micro-credit, (v) planning, budgeting and business monitoring, (vi) basic horticultural technology, including composting to improve soil and aid community hygiene and health, (vii) basic animal husbandry.

The rationale is to achieve sustainable social and attitudinal change in Kyrgyzstan while providing meaningful employment for school leavers, who are vulnerable in communities with high levels of unemployment. Young people with technical and business skills make considerable contributions to their communities and to the development of Kyrgyzstan. Provision of this GTZ educational programme for the economic and social development of young Kyrgyz people involves engagement of teachers, village advisors, business people, and informs the whole community.

The objective is to establish a base for lifelong learning, business planning, entrepreneurship and engagement in the market economy through self employment and social responsibility, while improving household nutrition.

Keywords: sustainability, kitchen gardens, resource book

The Farm Management Resource Book

GTZ realised early in their programme in Kyrgyzstan that the key requirement for a prosperous Kyrgyzstan is enhanced agricultural skills in the rural population. Kyrgyz people need to productively use their often limited, but available natural resources (Gunther, 2007). Farmers must acquire an understanding of the operations of a market economy before rural households can fully avail themselves of its opportunities. The resource book *My Prosperous Farm* (ISBN 978-9967-24-588-4) for students in their last compulsory year of the Kyrgyz school system, aims to begin social and attitudinal change processes, essential in an emerging economy. The book is being made available to each student as their personal possession. The advantage of providing education and training to school students means that the information becomes available to all members of the student's household through the resource book. Students can plan the use of their gardens and begin generating income in their immediate post school years. Rural advisors, who may also be teachers, were provided with copies of the resource book to encourage them to act as resource persons for the teachers and students. The book is illustrated by the most revered artist in Kyrgyzstan.

My Prosperous Farm supports the teaching of several aspects of the Kyrgyz state educational curriculum in economics, maths, geography, biology and handicrafts, for which few textbooks are available, especially in Kyrgyz language. Teachers of forty GTZ partner schools in Batken and Jalalabad oblasts and from another eighty schools throughout Kyrgyzstan, earlier associated with the now completed USAID financed PEAKS network in Osh, Jalalabad, Issykul and Naryn oblasts were trained by GTZ consultants and local partners in the use of *My Prosperous Farm*. It introduces interactive teaching methods to Kyrgyzstan. Copies of the book have been printed and presented to 9th graders in one hundred and twenty schools. Parents of future 9th grade students can finance reproduction of the book from the CD-ROM provided to each school. *My Prosperous Farm* is designed for teaching in one year, using three teaching hours per week. The book is in seven sections covering 21 modules.

During the GTZ programme, approximately 200 village co-operatives were established, micro-credit agencies developed and seed potato funds initiated. The book incorporated practical elements derived from this experience. *My Prosperous Farm* encourages students and teachers to interact with co-operatives, micro-credit agencies, village advisors and the broader community to understand local business systems and agricultural conditions. These people are termed living textbooks, as they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience from outside the school, which has few if any written textbooks.

The book challenges the widespread belief that Kyrgyzstan's rural areas must be inherently economically backward and concludes with a plan demonstrating how a student, starting in 9th grade, with a one sotyk plot (100m²) in the family kitchen garden and with an initial investment of approximately KGS 1000 (USD\$25) can, with reinvestment of each year's profits, expand the area farmed to develop a viable business. Anyone in Kyrgyzstan, who is willing to work diligently and is open to utilising new knowledge, can escape poverty. *My Prosperous Farm* encourages students to understand that payment of taxes on personal and business income is an obligation, because taxes are used to provide public services and infrastructure. It is emphasized that as a taxpayer the student will contribute to building a stronger Kyrgyzstan.



(Illustration commissioned by the authors)

Discussion

Transition from a command to a market economy has been a traumatic experience for citizens of many countries. They have often been left without employment and the physical, financial and knowledge tools to seek opportunities for entrepreneurship. Without these tools the people lack self confidence to explore the pathways to improving their situation. They need assurance that their cultural development and societal histories have created innovative systems and knowledge that will allow them to participate in the world economies. They need to have constructive assistance and advice from the developed world. Policy makers in Kyrgyzstan should consider transitional issues at a micro level and not only at the macro level of government policy and international business.

The GTZ Batken programme and *My Prosperous Farm* emphasise self help, development of knowledge, dedication to personal and community achievement and the use of micro-credit, not grants, to overcome poverty. Promoting knowledge of business principles, marketing and ethical values, as well as a sense of opportunity in students at senior school level is considered an essential measure, as these students are the adults of the immediate future. Teachers have to participate in the system and, to be successful, have to adopt interactive teaching methodologies, which extend to using local people as living textbooks for students. The GTZ Batken programme, through introducing knowledge of farming systems at the school and household level and using the depth of knowledge and experience in the local communities, has laid the basis for a successful partnership between formal education and rural industry in Kyrgyzstan.

References

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