

Facilitating Development in Rural Kyrgyzstan. The Example of the Arslanbob Local Authority

Introduction and rationale

During the Soviet era, most people in Kyrgyzstan had secured state paid employment and officially, there was no unemployment. A focus on education improved literacy rates, access to basic health services was guaranteed and a system of pension insurance was in place that sufficed for a reasonable subsistence (Schmidt 2006: 13). Inquiries show that most of the elderly population of the Arslanbob local authority, comprised of the head village Arslanbob and 4 other settlements, namely Gumkhana, Bel Terek, Jaiterek and Jaradar, associate Soviet times with very positively connoted memories of security and continuity (ibid: 36). With the end of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the socialist system, the development of Kyrgyzstan experienced a harsh set-back. Becoming an independent country in 1991, Kyrgyzstan underwent radical changes which revoked much of the progress made during the Soviet years. Poverty and unemployment escalated during the first decade of independence. Medical assistance had to be paid for and public welfare services such as social welfare and unemployment assistance were scaled down. The economic recession was the consequence of the disintegration of the system that for decades had set a very strict (but socially very safe) frame. The resulting disorder was increased by people's lack of experience, since for many decades they had been taught not to act on their own responsibility (ibid: 18, 37).

The research area also saw an economic recession in the early years of independence which seriously affected people's lives. Most wage labour jobs dropped away or the wages no longer sufficed for essential expenditures such as groceries (Schmidt 2013: 315). This tense economic situation of households in Arslanbob was, and continues to be, aggravated by a rising population since 1991. As a consequence, the exploitation of natural resources in the region intensified, as most people gain a large part of their livelihood from the utilization of the local natural resources, namely wood, fruits and nuts from the forests as well as agrarian land. Furthermore, unequal access regulations within unbalanced power structures can play a role in the context of rising pressure on natural resources.

In a publication about Kyrgyzstani development employees and volunteers, Féaux de la Croix (2013: 448-449) states that literature about development in Central Asia generally turns on questions of the impact of development programs on people's lives, about the relationship between civil society, the market and the state, etc. In the context of rural development, questions about sustainable development processes that encompass economic, social and environmental aspects are being discussed.

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion about facilitators of rural development using the example of the Arslanbob local authority. The main research objective was to create an overview of the different actors that have been contributing to the development process of the Arslanbob local authority since the independence of Kyrgyzstan until today. Furthermore, it was intended to outline the different spheres of activity of the

development actors. A classification of development spheres was created in order to analyse the perceived deficits which induced the actors to become engaged.

The qualitative data of the research was gained from 18 expert interviews conducted in Arslanbob, the administrative centre of the Arslanbob local authority, Gumkhana, one of the four other settlements of the local authority, Bazar Korgon, the capital of the same-named *rayon* (district) and Jalal-Abad, the capital of the Jalal-Abad Province. With the help of resource persons who maintain long lasting relations to our university, it was possible to arrange contacts to more interviewees. The expert interviews were conducted with representatives of all groups of stakeholders potentially contributing to the development process: governmental and non-governmental actors, international, national and local organizations, private businesses, private individuals and the local community. The interlocutors were from the service provider or donor as well as from the recipients' side. Conversations with the local population were also crucial to get a more general understanding of the development process, the perceived problems and the community's solution to them.

Discussing the term 'development'

Depending on the position and the point of view of the interlocutor, a very different understanding of the term and the concept of 'development' could be observed during the research. Not only do the perceptions of what kind of development process is desired or required vary, but also the ideas on how to put these aspirations into practice. One can discern three different notions of development: the use of the term in the political and public sphere, its appreciation in the academic world and its application by development organizations.

The term development is widely attributed to definitions that match Chambers' notion of 'good change' (Chambers 2004: iii). However, this definition requires the determination of what is good and what kind of change matters. The idea of development as a process, going from an inferior to a superior condition, as illustrated for example in Rostow's historical model of the stages of economic growth (1960), remains valid, despite severe criticism of this doctrine. Most people continue to use industrial production and economic growth as a benchmark for development and equate the level of civilization with the level of production. This idea has been marked by President Truman's inaugural speech in 1949 when he said:

"We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas"
(cited in Esteva 2010: 1).

Since then underdevelopment has been equated with economic backwardness, the lack of science and industry. The industrial mode of production became the definition of the terminal stage of a uni-linear way of socio-economic evolution (ibid.: 4).

There are several other approaches to development that resulted from the criticism of measurements that only use one criterion e.g. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator for development. The Human Development Index (HDI) developed by Mahbub ul

Haq and Amartya Sen in the 1990 is applied to measure development for the annual United Nations Human Development Report. The HDI acknowledges the importance of not merely assessing economic development but human development, by taking into account the three dimensions of education, a long and healthy life and a decent standard of living.¹

The sustainable development approach also considers the natural dimension. The term is famously defined by the Brundtland Report (1987: 54) as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. Even though the term sustainable development recognizes that the conservation and protection of nature is necessary, the ulterior motive is anthropogenic. It is doubtful, however, whether these concepts of development contribute more than a simplified instrument of measurement or a theoretical framework to understanding how sustainable development works in practice.

Practitioners of the development community like to work with instrumental approaches. They use clearly defined development indicators which can be matched with previously determined development outcomes e.g. the attainment of a 90 % literacy rate. Thus the achievement of development can be quantified. However, these bureaucratic objectives may not always correspond to the interests of the ‘development’ beneficiaries. It can therefore be argued that this is a rather paternalistic approach, which assumes to know what is good for people’s well-being based on a set of universal values and characteristics (Sumner & Tribe 2008: 13). Supporters of the critical development approach argue that the development discourse itself has been constructed in the global North (the idea that economic progress signifies development) and this value system has been imposed on the global South. Since those who construct the discourse are also in the position to define the notions of inferiority and superiority, the power structures are obvious. One of the leading post-development theorists, Arturo Escobar, even views development as a mechanism for the production and management of the Third World and believes that the discourse of development actually constitutes the problems that it purports to analyse and solve (1992: 157). In this context it is interesting to analyse the actors that are part of and contribute to the process called ‘development’.

Actors facilitating development in the Arslanbob local authority

The identified actors that have been contributing to the development process in the Arslanbob local authority since independence in 1991 until today can be classified according to two main criteria: whether they are governmental or non-governmental and whether they are national or international (Table 9.1).

¹ The HDI is calculated using the following indicators: Life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling and the GNI per capita (Purchase Power Parity US\$). However, according to the 2010 Human Development Report, the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) represents the actual human development more accurately (UNDP 2014).

Table 9.1: Actors facilitating development in the Arslanbob local authority

Actors	Governmental	Non-governmental
National	Government on different administrative levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National • Region (<i>oblast'</i>) • District (<i>rayon</i>) • Village (<i>aiyl</i>) 	NGOs, individuals, community, private enterprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Based Tourism Association (CBT) • Lesic Yuk (Forest sector) • Arskok (Agricultural cooperative) • Rural Advisory Service (RAS)
	International	Governments and embassies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA • Germany • Switzerland • Japan

The role of governmental actors in the development process

The state in Kyrgyzstan as a facilitator of development has a relatively weak position. After independence, Kyrgyzstan succumbed to the neo-liberal economic guidelines of international organizations in order to secure financial assistance of Western states. The ‘shock therapy’ meant that certain directives had to be put into practice, such as the retreat of the state from several sectors and a wave of privatization, for instance in the educational- and the health care sector. This roll back of the welfare state encouraged by international interference brought a loss of trust in the state. Pétric (2005) introduces the term of a “globalized protectorate” to speak about the particularity of Kyrgyzstan being an independent state in which many prerogatives of the state are ensured by foreign actors.² The subordination to Moscow in Soviet times was converted into dependence on the international community, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank having a huge influence on Kyrgyzstan’s economic policy (Pétric 2005: 322-323).

The development process of Arslanbob is shaped by the state at four different governmental levels: the national, the *oblast'* (region), the *rayon* (district) and the *aiyl* (village). Since the adoption of a new version of the law on local self government in 2008, more rights and duties were transferred to the local level. Since then, decisions on the local budget are made locally and public services are provided by the *aiyl okmotu* (municipal administration) and *aiyl kenesh* (municipal council). The local budget being extremely restricted due to low tax income, the Arslanbob local authority receives subsidies from the national central budget (Schmidt 2013: 278-279). However, corruption and misallocation of funds remain a big problem within the country. The low wages paid by governmental employers induce employees to misuse their power. State employees are

² The term “global protectorate” denominates a new form of political space that is not comparable to a post-colonial model of predominance of the colonial power but with multiple international actors (states, NGOs) assuming preponderant roles (Pétric 2005: 322).

often involved in informal processes of land allocation or firewood concessions. In addition, they grant themselves extra agricultural and forestry resources in order to diversify their own source of income.³

International governmental actors are mostly foreign governments represented by their embassies. Their contribution to the development process is mainly in form of financial assistance in smaller or larger infrastructural projects such as building new roads, electrification of a certain area or renovating public buildings (e.g. the roof of a school or a hospital). Governmental development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) or HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation are often partners for projects with national NGOs. The GIZ is the only of them running a project during the research period. In cooperation with Arskok, they are running a research project to determine the best suited potato varieties for the climate and soil composition of the area.⁴ Representatives of the GIZ are regularly on site for evaluation meetings and to supervise the project. The Textbox 9.1 presents ARIS, a national stakeholder involved in the state's efforts to facilitate development in rural Kyrgyzstan.

Box 9.1: Example of a national governmental development actor: ARIS - The Kyrgyz agency for rural development

ARIS was founded in 2003. It has its head office in Bishkek and an office in every *oblast'*. The overarching aim of ARIS is to contribute to the alleviation of rural poverty. This is done by facilitating income and improving the infrastructure. Projects in the following areas are funded: 1) Economy and infrastructure, 2) Ecology, 3) Social infrastructure (hospitals, schools), and 4) Micro projects (loans to shop owners). ARIS supported 50 projects in the Arslanbob local authority between 2006 and 2010, working together with local representatives, elected in every village. Groups of different stakeholder were formed (e.g. women, elders, youth) to identify the specific needs and the most urgent problems. ARIS provided 75 % of the costs of the projects conducted (coming from the World Bank Group, the KfW Entwicklungsbank or certain governments (USA, European countries, Japan)) while 25 % had to be contributed by the local population (often done in the form of manpower).

³ This phenomenon seems to confirm T. Rauch's assessment, that decentralisation is not a magic bullet for peace and democracy but instead needs to be closely related to the specific social and economic conditions of a country and a society. Kyrgyzstan is a relatively young nation state which has been encouraged to introduce the democratic political model by international donor organizations, namely the WB and the IMF, which have also prescribed the policy of decentralization of power. Regarding that previously the country was a communist state, with no independent decision making power, and the extreme decline of well-being in the ex-Soviet states in the years after independence, decentralization might have been an inadequate, expeditious policy (2001).

⁴ This project is part of the activities in the context of the GIZ Program "Promoting stability and conflict transformation in south Kyrgyzstan" (project phase 2011-2014) aiming to address the humanitarian crisis after violent clashes in 2010. This is done with a main focus on the promotion of agricultural production to stabilize the livelihood of the rural population (interview).

The role of civil society and NGOs in the development process

The discourse about civil society in Kyrgyzstan arose during the democratic transition period in post-Soviet times. The ‘shock therapy’ adopted by Kyrgyzstan after the break down of the Soviet Union aimed at transforming the country into a democracy and a free market economy in the sense of Western governments (Pétric 2005: 319). The major challenge and the biggest learning process for the Kyrgyz society were to create an awareness of autonomous and self-responsible decision making and acting (Schmidt 2006: 38). The strengthening of the civil society facilitated in order to restore its competence after decades of centralized state rule was a key interest of the multitude of international organizations that became active in Kyrgyzstan after independence. Similar phenomena have been observed in many parts of the world, where in specific moments of historical transition (e.g. after the end of a long lasting dictatorship) international organizations, foundations and NGOs suddenly mushroom, believing in their contribution to the process of democratization. The idea is questionable, however, that the number of NGOs is a direct evidence for the strength of civil society and that NGOs are automatically autonomous from the state and do not reproduce power structures (Pétric 2005: 319). There are several reasons not to see the ‘NGOisation’ in such a positive light. In the transition time after independence, the phenomenon of ‘internal brain-drain’ was observed. Due to higher wages, many of the educated elite working in state structures sought employment in the emerging field of international and national NGOs, thus leaving a gap of labour force and expertise in the public sector. The fact that most of the organizations were financed by international sources furthermore led to a dependency on foreign funds. As such, NGOs are not accountable to the Kyrgyz state or its citizens, but to their foreign donors (Pétric 2005: 326).

Everywhere in Arslanbob there are signboards installed by a multitude of development projects funded and organized by national and international NGOs. All over the country the effects of the ‘grant rain’ of numerous donors can be observed.⁵ Two national NGOs with a permanent office in Arslanbob could be identified: The local branch of the national Community Based Tourism Association (CBT) and the association of Arslanbob’s potato peasants (Arskok). Other national NGOs coordinate their work from their headquarters in different parts of the country - the environmental organization Lesic Yuk and the Rural Advisory Service (RAS) with seats in Jalal-Abad. The only international NGO that was visibly settled on site, with a small office and a common accommodation for their volunteers, is Cross Link Development International (CDI). All the other international organizations have only been coordinating their work in the region from either the national office in Bishkek or from the home country of the NGO. Since most of them only give financial or advisory support, they don’t need a permanent presence on site. Save the Children, Mercy Corps and the German Agro Action have been running projects in Arslanbob in the past, but are currently not active.

The direct influence of the community on the development process of the village can be seen through the contribution of communally organized work, called *hashar* (usb./krg.).

⁵ There are currently over 10,000 civil society organizations registered in Kyrgyzstan, and only around 3,500 of them are operational (ICNL 2014).

The tradition of community work comes from the Muslim custom of granting one day in the week to work for the community's wealth. The *aksakal* council consisting of the elders of every major street in Arslanbob agree on a working day and communicate it to the households living in their neighbourhood -the *mahallah* (usb.). Each household is expected to send one person. The common working force is mostly mobilized for short term interventions mainly in two instances: (1) In cases where the local government fails to provide basic public services such as for example repairing a broken bridge after a strong rainfall. The local government often lacks financial means to deal with such incidents and the bureaucratic mechanisms are relatively slow. (2) Furthermore, the community organizes its work force in cases where an international donor organization promises financial support to a project and expects a contribution of the population. Depending on the project proposal, this contribution is usually calculated in a certain percentage of the total project budget and is mostly conducted through manpower instead of monetary payment.

Box 9.2: Example of a national non-governmental development actor: The Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association

The Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association (CBT) 'Hospitality Kyrgyzstan' was created in 2001 with the endorsement of the Swiss development agency HELVETAS who primarily helped to establish CBT by providing marketing-, training- and organizational development support. The support included business trainings, calculating prices and advice on minimum standards to be met in order to host international tourists. There are 16 CBT offices all over Kyrgyzstan which are independent of each other but work closely together under the common principles: 1) CBT relies on participation of local stakeholders. 2) CBT has to contribute to the local economic development through increasing tourism revenues. 3) CBT has to develop socially and economically sustainable tourism.

CBT Arslanbob started in 2003 with five home-stays, one coordinator and one guide for mountain tours. Today it offers accommodation in 18 home-stays and employs 20 local guides for its hiking, biking, horseback and winter tours. The credo of CBT, according to their web page, is that it must support products, services, knowledge and practices found in local communities and offered by local stakeholders. CBT requires that the majority of revenues gained through accommodation (usually 80-90 %) can be retained by the families, while the remaining amount generally supports the shared community office and the national association.

The main development spheres: environment, income generation and basic public services

The previously mentioned actors contribute to different development spheres. Every institutionalized actor and every individual perceives the development situation differently depending on the actors' circumstances. Different factors such as the social, political and financial position of the actors as well as internal and external power structures influence

the possibilities of the actors to become active and the degree of impact on the development situation. These differing conceptions of existing deficits lead to diverging opinions on what should be done to improve a given situation and how it should be done.

A needs and resources assessment⁶ conducted by CDI in 2012 in Arslanbob surveyed the perception of the development situation amongst the local population. The greatest perceived development deficits mentioned were the lack of employment for both men and women, environmental degradation, insufficient infrastructure and a low primary health education (CDI Report 2012). These main perceived deficits correspond to the three discerned development spheres: environment, income generation and basic public services (infrastructure, health and education). The following parts will give an overview of the actors which facilitate development in Arslanbob, categorized by the development spheres in which they are active.

Improving environmental protection through sustainable management of natural resources

Since the population of Arslanbob has risen substantially in the last decade, from about 1,800 inhabitants in 1939 to 11,100 in 2008, natural resources are suffering from growing stress (Schmidt 2013: 287). Due to population growth, there is an increased need for firewood as well as arable and grazing land for the growing number of livestock.⁷ The unique fruit and walnut forests in Arslanbob are an important economic factor in the region. For almost every household of Arslanbob the forest utilization is of great importance to their livelihood: collecting and selling walnuts, extracting firewood and letting their animals graze in the forest. Due to the rise in unemployment after independence, natural resources in general have gained importance for households to generate income and for self-supply. The utilization of the forest is regulated by the state forest enterprise - the *leskhoz* - ever since the end of Soviet rule. However the regulation and protection measures are not being implemented appropriately, partly due to lack of personnel and to corruption. The forest is often treated like an 'open access' resource and therefore overexploited (Dörre & Schmidt 2008: 221). Since a major part of Arslanbob's population directly or indirectly relies on the natural resources as a major livelihood ingredient, most people are aware of the environmental degradation that threatens their living environment.

The activities of development actors in the environmental sphere can be divided into three types of activities: there are measures implementing pure adaptation and coping strategies such as fixing erosion-prone slopes or to free rivers from riverine sediment. The local population has to cope with the direct consequences of environmental degradation in their daily life and have few possibilities to implement strategic large scale projects. Therefore the community is often the main actor implementing adaptation strategies. Secondly,

⁶ Volunteers of the international NGO conducted this survey before starting their work in Arslanbob in order to get to know the perceived needs and the existing resources and potentials.

⁷ During Soviet times, the number of livestock in private property was strictly regulated but in the last decades the livestock has considerably risen as animals serve as important capital investment for households which can be sold in situations of need. Officially, the number of cows and sheep doubled between 1979 and 2003 but informal information quote that it has even increased fourfold. Moreover, there are held approximately 1,600 goats which were forbidden in Soviet times due to their aggressive eating behavior (Schmidt 2006: 23).

there are measures operating directly against environmental degradation, for example through the implementation of ecologically adapted methods in agricultural practices. Thirdly, there are measures trying to counteract environmental degradation indirectly and pre-emptively through awareness raising campaigns among the population. CBT is one of the driving forces in the educational projects. They conduct workshops with pupils and other target groups, e.g. at the mosque.

In Arslanbob most of the households are Uzbeks, and in their bread is the most important staple food. It is common for each family to bake their own bread. The bread baking oven, the *tandoor*, is not very energy efficient as it is usually situated outside of the house and not contributing to the heating of the living space. As the main part of domestic energy is coming from firewood, the consumption of firewood in Arslanbob is very high. CDI is conducting an energy efficiency project in order to reduce fuel consumption. Energy efficient ovens that combine the different customary usages were developed, taking into consideration that the households' habits vary strongly depending on the seasons. The developed ovens are used particularly in wintertime for baking bread several times a week, heating the house and providing the households constantly with hot water for *chai* (green and black tea that is consumed throughout the day). So far, two of these ovens have been built by an international CDI volunteer in Arslanbob. As capacity building is a main objective of CDI's development approach, two men from the local population are being taught how to build these specialized ovens. The aim is to diversify the income generation of households through the development of an independent business.⁸

A predominant issue is the management of natural resources in Arslanbob, most importantly forest and pasture management. There are several actors involved in the process of improving the management system in order to reduce the stress on natural resources. The Kyrgyz NGO Lesic Yuk⁹ with an office in Jalal-Abad was founded in 1996 with the financial assistance of the Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC) and is dealing with the implementation of a community based integrative forest management system (CFM). Between 2000 and 2012 they were very active on site. Several Swiss and one Kyrgyz employees organized open seminars to inform the local population about changes in mechanisms and allocation practices in forest management, thereby promoting transparency. Since 2012, the NGO continues to contribute to a more participative and democratic management system by organizing elections for the allocation of positions with a degree of responsibility, such as the director of the local forest enterprise. It also carries out educational work in Arslanbob's schools and mosques in order to raise ecological awareness in the villages of the Arslanbob local authority. Lesic Yuk educates people, for instance certain pupils and imams, to act as multipliers of

⁸ In the course of - unverified - rumours about proselytization efforts pursued by CDI representatives in the community of Arslanbob, the NGO felt to impelled to stop its activities and left the settlement in autumn 2013 (editor AD).

⁹ Lesic Yuk, initially called Lesic Intercooperation, was founded as a cooperation between Kyrgyz experts and the Swiss development organization Intercooperation (today HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation). In 2010 Intercooperation ended their project period and since then Lesic Yuk is financed by the non-profit American NGO Christensen Fund, which is focused on biological and cultural diversity. The project period of the Christensen Fund will end in 2015.

knowledge. The mosque is a convenient institution to raise ecological issues, since the Imams have a very high social position and have regular contact with the population.

Since its initiation, the organization supporting sustainable tourism in the area, CBT, has conducted small environmental projects such as organizing collective rubbish collection days or doing ecological tours for Arslanbob's pupils. CBT has also installed rubbish bins and put up signs to request their usage. The NGO aims at increasing peoples' consciousness for the beauty of nature and the need to preserve it.

Diversification of income sources and promotion of sustainable tourism

Unemployment was mentioned as the biggest perceived problem by 70 % of those surveyed by CDI in 2012. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, most people in Arslanbob formerly employed by the state lost their jobs. There are virtually no industries and apart from some agricultural products, and there is relatively little business activity. While employment opportunities have declined, the overall population has greatly increased. The basic livelihood for most households is a combination of agriculture, forestry and livestock¹⁰, but these sources of income are not sufficient to nourish the growing population. Due to its picturesque mountainous surrounding with two waterfalls close by and diverse outdoor opportunities, Arslanbob has great potential to benefit from tourism. Since the 1960s, Arslanbob has been a major touristic attraction for tourists from within the USSR. Several boarding houses - *pensionaty* (rus.) - and guesthouse style accommodations provided the opportunity for recreation. Since independence, most of the recreational centres for groups have been closed or privatized and the number of visitors in Arslanbob has declined (Schmidt 2006: 30; Schmidt 2013: 323). Although international tourism and the total number of tourists visiting Arslanbob has been increasing again in the last years, only seven percent of the people surveyed by CDI in 2012 mentioned tourism as representing a part of their income. After having conducted the survey in 2012, CDI started a number of activities to meet the biggest perceived deficit of the population in Arslanbob - unemployment. Besides the oven-building training that is already in progress, CDI is initiating wood carving and sewing projects to train young men and women in the production of high quality souvenirs for tourists. For this, assistance in the marketing of products is an issue to be addressed.

CBT is mainly engaged in the sector of sustainable tourism and an example of an NGO active in a range of activities. Its focus has been changing and broadened over time. CBT has been successful in diversifying the sources of income for a remarkable number of households and the amount of individuals profiting from an income generated by the touristic offer of the NGO is constantly growing. CBT home-stays primarily benefit from accommodating and serving meals for tourists from Europe, the USA and Japan, while tourists from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia (representing the majority of tourists) more commonly stay in private home-stays and provide themselves with own food supplies. Another range of people benefit from the work of CBT indirectly, such as market vendors

¹⁰ Over 40 % of the masculine population work in the forestry sector and another 30 % in the agricultural and livestock sector (Schmidt 2013: 316).

or taxi drivers, and directly, such as porters for mountain tours and horse owners, lending their horses for tours.

Since Arslanbob is a rather remote village with limited access to other markets, creating access to various markets as well as the branding of products is crucial to increase sales and thereby improve the economy of the village. Improved marketing is not only necessary for touristic commodities but also for agricultural products such as potatoes as the most important sales product in Arslanbob. Ever since the cessation of centralized storage and selling of agricultural products during Soviet times, the storage of potatoes has been a major concern to peasants in Arslanbob. After independence, peasants either stored privately or rented common storage rooms in loose and changing groups. This procedure was costly and inefficient. Another problem was that the farmers were inexperienced in marketing their products as during the Soviet era there was only one, guaranteed recipient of their products (the Soviet administration). Thus for the single farmer it was difficult to make a profit after the end of the Soviet Union. In 1996, the Arslanbob potato peasants founded *Arskok (Arslanbob Kartoschka Onduuruyu Kooperati)* to better organize and articulate common interests. The German Agro Action gave advisory and technical support in the organization's beginnings. There has also been advisory support by the Rural Advisory Service (RAS)¹¹ through an international expert sent by the German Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM). In 2007, a common potato storehouse was built with the financial support of the GTZ. Co-financed by the GIZ, the building was renovated in 2013. As it is often the case for donor funded projects the community had to contribute a certain percentage (in this case 60 %) to the construction costs. For this purpose the inhabitants organize themselves to fulfil the community duty, in the tradition of *hashar*.

Further actors worth mentioning in relation to income diversification are two microcredit institutions in Arslanbob: *Mol Bulak* and *Companion*. They promote the expansion of revenues by awarding individuals with microcredits to enable them to start small businesses.

Investments to improve the basic public services

The budget of the Arslanbob local government is relatively low because the most important sources of tax revenue - arable land and forest area - are under the control of the respective *leskhoz*. Tax revenues can only be derived from the real estate tax from private land and a business tax from businesses, touristic institutions and commercial deals. These revenues are however not sufficient to finance all expenditures to be covered by the local government (infrastructure, educational- and health institutes and wages of civil servants), and the municipality receives a subsidy from the national budget (Schmidt 2013: 278). As the local budget is hardly sufficient to pay for the running charges of basic public services or for unexpected bigger expenses, such as repairs of the infrastructure or public buildings, other actors step in to fill the financial gap. The main actor is the Kyrgyz development

¹¹ RAS is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SCD) implemented by HELVETAS through the Kyrgyz-Swiss Agricultural Program (KSAP) through credits by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). RAS has independent offices in each *oblast'* that apply for the funding of their projects to donors. There are twelve local employees in Jalal-Abad and one international advisor (own data).

organisation ARIS. Through international funds 41 social infrastructure projects have been accomplished in Arslanbob. Apart from the biggest project, the construction of the hospital in 2006, smaller projects such as building a kitchen and toilets for the kindergarten were implemented. Nine micro projects, supporting small private businesses were carried out (e.g. acquisition of a refrigerator for a shop or mountain equipment for the local CBT group). The second very important infrastructure project, the construction of the polyclinic, was realized with the support of USAID in 2005. Smaller one-time contributions, such as providing the nursery and two different schools with equipment and furniture, were performed by Mercy Corps between 2003 and 2006.

To promote health education, CDI is developing a pregnancy calendar. This appears to be particularly important considering the fact that the abortion rate amongst women in Kyrgyzstan is extremely high, which is connected to numerous health risks. Furthermore, Mercy Corps supports the local nursery by organizing seminars for nursery workers on hygiene issues and healthy nutrition since 2006. They also sponsor annual food consignments of vegetables and staple food.

After the violent clashes between Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic groups in 2010 in the cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh peace work to foster intercultural understanding between the ethnic groups has been important. Save the children carried out integration workshops for school children in 2010, also sending some traumatized children to Arslanbob for recovery.

As seen, in Arslanbob there are activities and projects running in all three different development spheres: environment, income generation and basic public services. They are all promoted by different actors.

Conclusion

The overview of the actors engaging in development in the Arslanbob local authority since 1991 reveals a broad landscape of different actors that can be distinguished according to their nature: from international governmental organizations to local non-governmental and private actors. The primary reason for the commitment of these development actors is to complement or substitute the state, where it is unable to perform its duties or cannot satisfy the needs of the local population. Therefore the different actors become active in an attempt to fill a capacity gap.

The spheres of activities in which the actors are engaged revolve around the three axes of environment, income generation and public services. These areas appear to be a direct response to the most urgent deficits perceived by the local population. Financial assistance by international actors plays an important part in the accomplishment of larger infrastructure projects, while the national actors are mostly engaged in direct project implementation (e.g. CBT, *Arskok* and *Lesik Yuk*). The international actors can be sub-classified into pure donors (e.g. World Bank) and those who implement projects but often also contribute with funding (e.g. Mercy Corps, GIZ, and USAID).

A key issue which emerged during the research relates to the factors that contribute to the failure or success of development activities. This question is difficult to analyse, since there is no common agreement on what the multitude of development activities are

expected to contribute to. As the research has shown, there are, however, in particular three factors which contribute to successful development activities:

1) It is important to carefully take the local resources as well as the populations' abilities into account before introducing a development initiative (e.g. the failed cheese making training).¹²

(2) Strong, imaginative personalities, who can maintain a conscious link between the donor and the community, above all in terms of objectives and communication, can greatly contribute to the success of development initiatives (e.g. the CBT Arslanbob).

(3) Conferring ownership¹³ on the local population enhances the efficiency and sustainability of development. People who are directly involved in the accomplishment of development initiatives are more likely to take charge of their own development process. This can be viewed as an ultimate aim of development - that it becomes independent from outside assistance and can be self-contained by the local actors.

As shown by the example of Arslanbob, development is a multifaceted process to which a wide range of actors contribute. Development can be understood in different ways, but in order to make it efficient and sustainable in the long-run, it is crucial to consider the needs of the local population. These shape their personal understanding of development and are crucial for their commitment. The population of Arslanbob appears to agree on the necessity to create job opportunities, to improve the regions' infrastructure and the need to preserve the natural resources. The development actors which have been and currently are active in Arslanbob seem to be responsive to these demands albeit with different degrees of success, depending on the factors set out above.

According to the Human Development Report 2013, with an HDI of 0,622 in 2012, Kyrgyzstan remains among the low human development country group (UNDP 2013). Objectively this classification would likely be approved of regarding the region of Arslanbob. However, we would like to acknowledge another aspect of human development, which is not recognised by the development indicators previously mentioned - namely the significance of the community. In our opinion this is a very valuable asset which Arslanbob features. Our experience confirms that Arslanbob is a place where social networks, such as kinship and community, are of great importance as safety nets and the preservation of the traditional community work *hashar* keeps a solidarity spirit alive. It is a factor which in our opinion greatly contributes, on the one hand, to the classical development of Arslanbob but also provides for a kind of social well-being and an unofficial insurance which should not be underestimated in the investigation of development processes. The degree of

¹² In an attempt to diversify income opportunities, a Swiss expert came to Arslanbob in 2012 in order to teach four women the making of goat and cow cheese. Since the livestock gave too little milk to produce extra cheese, the women did not continue the making of cheese after the expert left.

¹³ According to Cedric de Coning (2013), when people from within the international development sector use the term 'ownership', they actually mean that the representatives of a given society should be encouraged to voluntarily choose to adopt the neoliberal norms and institutions that the international community has designed for them. What we mean is that the local population should actively participate and contribute to the construction of development processes in order to develop a sense of 'ownership' for the project introduced. Ideally this would allow them to take over 'ownership' of the processes after the development partner has ceased to take part.

solidarity cannot be measured by any development indicator, nor can its importance be integrated in the traditional development model.

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