

UNESCO activity on establishment of Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) in Talas, Kyrgyzstan

Implementation Report

UNESCO launched the activity on establishment of Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) in Talas, Kyrgyzstan, in 2003 when main local partners were identified and basic conditions for the project feasibility were studied.

Brief information about the venue

Talas occupies the north-western part of the Kyrgyz Republic, one of the Central Asian states, on the border with Kazakhstan.



Map of Kyrgyzstan: administrative division.

In Talas region (oblast) there are 4 areas and 39 villages. Talas region occupies 6% of Kyrgyzstan territory and its population is nearly 200 thousand people. Not speaking about rural community, there is no electronic local mass media in Talas city, the administrative center of the region. That is why the region population, which is mostly disadvantaged, needs such community radio and multimedia center aimed at providing local community with information relevant for their lives and at ensuring the community's participation. The communication inside Talas oblast is good.



Talas region

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The leading industries are food-processing, light industry, manufacture of reinforced concrete products, and a brick-making plant. Industrial enterprises are concentrated in the town of Talas, which accounts for about 75 percent of the regional industrial output. Talas region is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture accounting for nearly 90 percent of the regional output. The region specializes in fine-fleece sheep-herding and cattle-herding for milk and meat. The region has a potential for developing food-processing, non-ferrous metallurgy, gold mining, machine building, and manufacture of construction materials.



*Talas residents is mainly based on **agriculture** and **cattle breeding***

The study of the conditions in the Talas region showed that for successful implementation of the project, the CMC should be placed in Talas city. A big interest and support of the republican and local administration was the main factor for the decision, which was made taking into account tied competition among mass media in getting frequencies and some political aspects related to the issue.

Being the administrative center of the region, the Talas city is rather a tiny town than a city, which is located very close to the region's villages, which are in turn located close to each other. There is no local radio or TV station in Talas, which is another positive factor helped gain support of local NGOs, local administration and other partners, who are aware of the importance of the CMC, combining community radio and community public access point, for the overall development of the region, which is geographically isolated from the other part of Kyrgyzstan by mountains.

Venue of the CMC

Talas State University, which is centrally placed and easily accessible to the community, contributed to the project by:

- providing premises for the CMC
- covering operational expenditures, such as electricity and heating



Talas State University: Administration



Talas State University: venue of the CMC

Main partners of the project

- National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO
- Talas State University
- Talas region local Administration

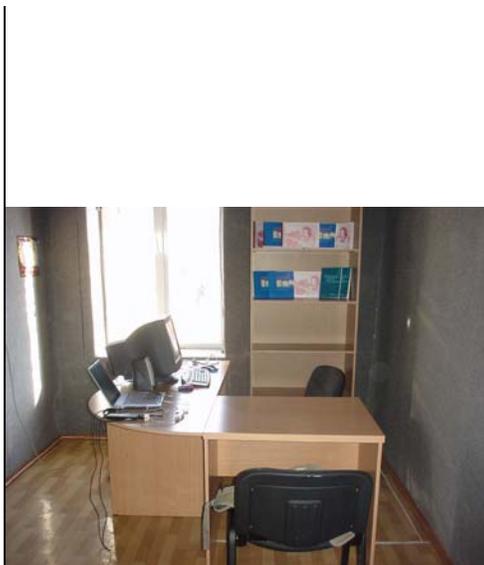
Note: it is expected that the list will be enlarged.

CMC facilities

The premises provided by the university were repaired and designed taking into account the objectives of the two main parts of CMC, i.e. radio station and Internet access point. The repairing work was financed under UNESCO regular budget.



CMC: Internet access point



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Community radio studio

The CMC is currently equipped with 12 PCs. Two of them were purchased under UNESCO regular funds and the remaining ones were donated by various local NGOs and international donors.

Collocation

The CMC shares one of the rooms with the International Center for Dialogue Cultures and Civilizations established within the UNESCO International Conference "Eurasia in the 21st Century: Dialogue of Cultures or Conflict of Civilizations?" held on 10-11 June 2004 in Kyrgyzstan.



CMC staff

Taking into account legal regulations of the country it was decided to establish an NGO 'Mediamost', which was contracted for the management of the CMC. The NGO headed by Mr. Sanjar Sultankulov provided volunteers for the CMC.



CMC staff together with representatives of local NGOs



'Zaman - Ordo' volunteers

The volunteers are mainly among those who previously worked for local administration or currently involved in various projects and initiatives being implemented in the region such as UNV, UNDP micro-crediting project for villagers. Besides, local residents, especially youth,

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expressed their desire to assist in organizing the work of the CMC. 'Zaman – Ordo' Youth Centre is one of such volunteers which agreed to assist in getting feedback from local rural communities on a regular basis.

CMC opening

The CMC and the International Center for Dialogue Cultures and Civilizations were solemnly opened in June 2004 during the visit of Mr. Koitiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General, to Talas within the UNESCO International Conference "Eurasia in the 21st Century. Ms. Mairam Akayeva, first lady of Kyrgyzstan, made welcome speech at the opening ceremony.



Mr. K. Matsuura: Opening ceremony



Ms. K. Matsuura: Opening ceremony

Feedback scheme

According to the preliminary plan rural residents will put their hand-written requests and proposals to mail boxes which will be deployed in each of the four regional centers of the Talas region. Local volunteers will take care of the boxes' delivery to the CMC and visa versa.

Sustainability

At the moment, 10 PCs are used for providing chargeable Internet access for residents of the Talas city and oblast (region). Currently, the cost of the Internet access is 30 Kyrgyz SOM (exchange rate: 1\$ = 42 SOM). Salaries of the CMC staff are covered from the earned funds. In the future, when the Community radio starts broadcasting and becomes sustainable with the help of various tools, a free-of-charge Internet access is planned to be provided on a regular basis. Some other sources for sustainability are currently being discussed and planned for the nearest future, namely:

1. photocopying services
2. faxing services
3. printout services
4. chargeable IT trainings
5. other types of trainings
6. other communication services, such as IP – telephony etc.

For the purposes 1, 2 and 3 a donation by an organization/donor of a second-hand equipment is expected.

Coverage of security services and other related issues are under negotiation with the local Administration and the Talas State University.

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Talas residents using Internet



CMC staff assisting local residents to obtain information in Internet

Further steps

Obtaining radio frequency and license

The CMC management, represented by the Mediamost Public Fund, applied to the State Agency of Telecommunication for the radio frequency. The frequency is expected to be obtained in the nearest future (one month or so) with support of the Governmental structures. Once the frequency is granted the license can be applied for. The procedure usually takes about a week.

Purchase of radio equipment

Once the frequency and license are available equipment for the community radio will be purchased. Taking into account the project peculiarities, especially in terms of the CMC's venue and the Talas region's geographical location, local experts advised to use a **250 Watt transmitter** to cover the rural community. Using transmitter of a less power in the mountainous Talas area will be enough for covering a few surrounding villages only, which will not be supported by local key actors and thus the project success will be gloomy. Local administration and community expect to have a radio which will be an information and knowledge source for both town and rural communities, living standards of which are almost of the same level. A technically powerful Community radio will be the solution for the Talas region, which is isolated from the other part of Kyrgyzstan for geographical and administrative reasons. Having a very dangerous road to Bishkek, the country's capital, with many 'surprises' such as landslips, snow-slips and the two very steep passes, local residents have to twice cross Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan borders, which is a very complicated way of communicating with the outer world. Though there is a visa-free regime between the two countries, the bureaucratic customs regulations much complicate the movement. The isolation hampers getting by the region's residents of a quality

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information and knowledge essential for their development. This is expected to be compensated by the Community radio, which will work for and ruled by the local community.

Available funds

The International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) allocated \$22 000 USD for the project. Decentralization of the funds to the UNESCO Almaty Cluster Office is expected.

Other organizations and donors operating in Kyrgyzstan are negotiated to contribute to the project. Among them area the UNDP Office in Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF Office in Kyrgyzstan, IREX/IATP etc.