



AARHUS CENTRES OF KYRGYZSTAN
ОРХУССКИЕ ЦЕНТРЫ КЫРГЫЗСТАНА
КЫРГЫЗСТАНДЫН ОРХУС БОРБОРЛОРУ
2017-2018



Review and analysis of implementation of the Aarhus Centres Development Strategy for 2015-2018

The Strategy was developed to support the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (SAEPF) in effective short and medium term planning and implementation of activities to promote the basic principles of the Aarhus Convention in the Kyrgyz Republic (KR - further) for the period 2015 - 2018 years. The strategy includes a set of measures to implement the three fundamental principles of the Aarhus Convention, and to strengthen the capacity of the Aarhus Centres of the Kyrgyz Republic. The main executor of this document are the three Aarhus Centres of the KR, which carry out their activities in partnership with SAEPF.

Aarhus Centres together with partners carried out the main activities planned in the Strategy. The most important achievements include: involving the maximum number of stakeholders in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Strategy in the Kyrgyz Republic. This was made possible through the joint activities of the SAEPF (the responsible state body for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the KR) with the Aarhus Centres (a civil institution that was delegated a number of powers to implement the Aarhus Convention in the Kyrgyz Republic). Such a tandem made it possible to effectively involve key government bodies of executive, legislative and judicial authorities at all levels, civil society, Conventional government bodies, educational and academic institutions, the media, international partners, business and other organizations and structures affected by the Convention. In order to understand the area of responsibility with key partners, memorandums of cooperation were signed for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and regular meetings of the Aarhus Convention coordinating council were held, which allowed achieving a high-quality implementation of the Strategy.

Maximum informational effect. In all components of the strategy, various methods were provided for informing stakeholders about the principles of the Aarhus Convention. The Aarhus Centres use various methods of information dissemination available in the Kyrgyz Republic - web resources, media, information stands on the ground, distribution of leaflets, training, attraction of trainers, volunteers and active residents to disseminate information, exchange of information with state and public organizations.



Review and analysis of implementation of the Aarhus Centres Development Strategy for 2015-2018

The strategy is aimed at developing practical mechanisms for participation and protection of the rights to participate, which allowed working out and implementing a mechanism of public monitoring of local environmental problems, to implement a number of project activities. The organization of round tables and public information campaigns on the most significant issues of environmental protection ensured the participation of all stakeholders, which helped to resolve a number of local conflicts, as well as establish a dialogue at the transboundary level. The development and wide dissemination of the collection of normative legal acts in the field of environmental protection for 2009-2016 provided the necessary legal information for the participation and protection of rights.

The implementation of this Strategy also made it possible to identify weaknesses in the implementation of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention in the Kyrgyz Republic. The most significant of them are: low level of participation of interested public in the regions and remote areas. The main reason for this is the lack of necessary information and an active civil society. In this regard, it is necessary to support actions aimed at informing the public and developing additional tools to provide accessible and understandable information to residents of the regions.

Provision of resources for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. In this Strategy, sources of resources have been identified from the budgets of local governments, the National Fund for Nature Conservation and Forestry Development, and the implementation of projects. In the course of the analysis, it was revealed that the attracted resources from local and national budgets are not sufficient for the sustainable implementation of the Strategy and the follow-up activities. To change the situation, it is necessary to involve state economic and financial institutions, as well as deep integration with national programs on Sustainable Development and the Green Economy.

As a result, the development and implementation of the Aarhus Centres Development Strategy for 2015-2018 made it possible to significantly strengthen the fulfillment of obligations under the Aarhus Convention. The main result of the implementation of this Strategy is the preparatory work and the rationale for the need to develop a long-term comprehensive national program for the implementation of commitments to the Aarhus Convention, which will include the most effective mechanisms for ensuring access to information, public participation and access to justice. At the moment, the SAEPF, together with the Aarhus Centres and international partners, has started to develop a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2019-2023, which will be the further step for the Strategy.

The Aarhus Convention

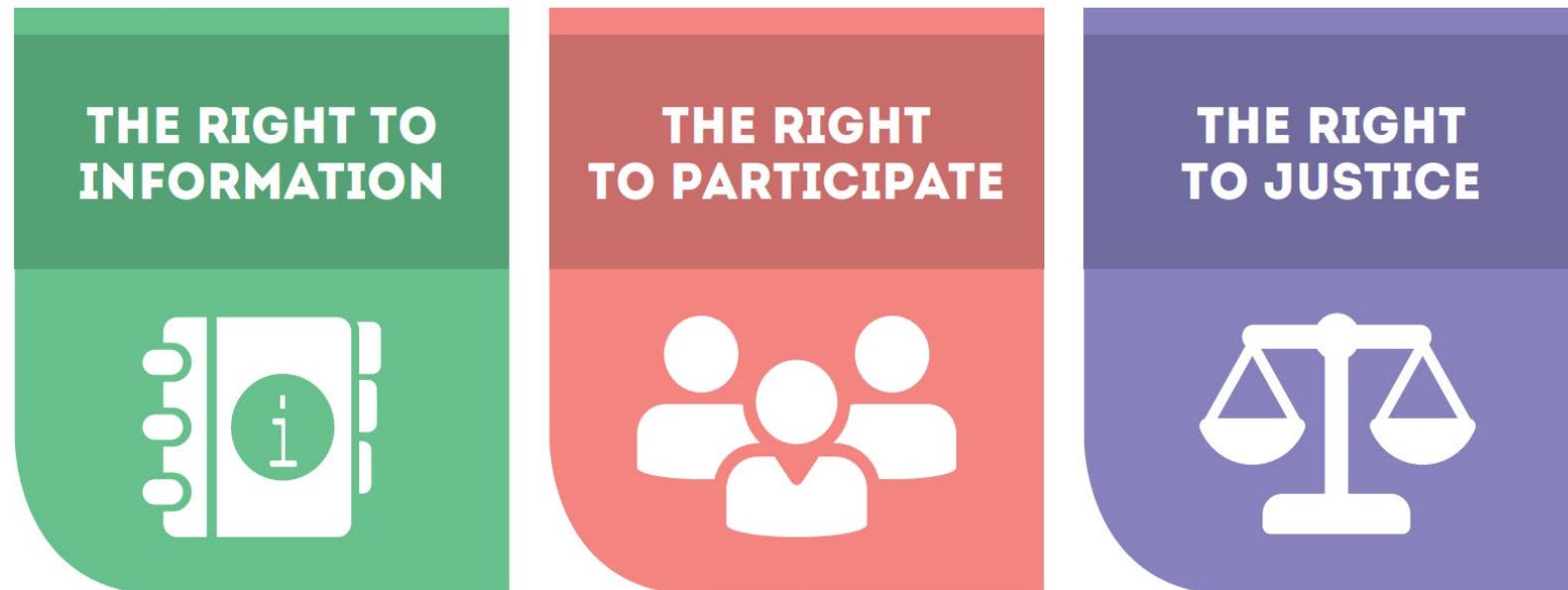
The purpose and main pillars of the Convention

The Aarhus Convention recognizes the right of each of us to a healthy environment, as well as determines our responsibilities for its protection. Its goal is to ensure that everyone lives in an environment that is conducive to his/her health and well-being. This applies not only to us but also to future generations.

The Convention was signed in Aarhus, Denmark on 25 June 1998 at the Conference of Environment Ministers of European countries under the “Environment for Europe” Press. It is based on earlier agreements, including the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and a number of resolutions of the UN General Assembly.

The Aarhus Convention officially entered into force in 2001 and by 2006 it had 39 participants. In 2003, the Parties adopted the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), which entered into force upon its ratification by sixteen countries.

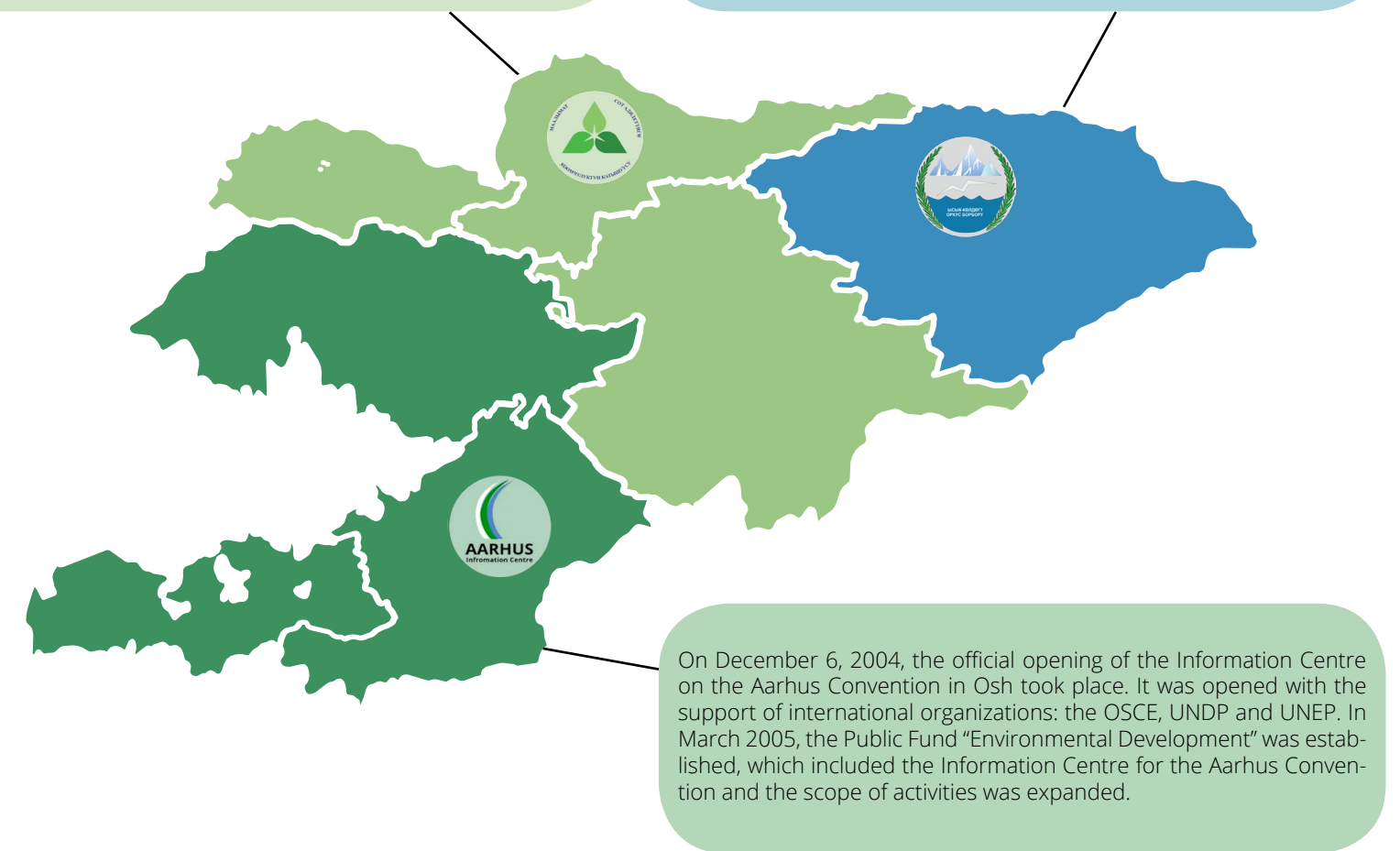
The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to the Aarhus Convention in 2001 and assumed obligations to the international community to guarantee the rights to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. These three rights are the three pillars of the Convention.



Aarhus Centres in Kyrgyzstan

On December 23, 2014 in Bishkek, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to establish the Aarhus Centre. The official registration of the centre in the justice bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic was held on January 23, 2015, and the presentation of the Aarhus Centre took place on May 7 of the same year.

On November 9, 2017, the Issyk-Kul Aarhus Centre was opened in Cholpon-Ata, Issyk-Kul District. Officially, it is considered a branch of the Aarhus Centre in Bishkek and carries out its activities with its support. The office is opened in the building of Issyk-Kul territorial department of environmental protection of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry and works in close contact with ecological organizations of Issyk-Kul province.



On December 6, 2004, the official opening of the Information Centre on the Aarhus Convention in Osh took place. It was opened with the support of international organizations: the OSCE, UNDP and UNEP. In March 2005, the Public Fund “Environmental Development” was established, which included the Information Centre for the Aarhus Convention and the scope of activities was expanded.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Promote the provision of open and timely access to environmental information for a wide range of public

The Aarhus Centres of Kyrgyzstan conduct information campaigns on acute issues in the field of environmental protection, covering the broad masses of the public in all regions of the country. Timely dissemination of environmental information provides an opportunity to gain open access to environmental knowledge and the use of environmental rights to comply with them. To this end, meetings, seminars and other various events are held in partnership with partners from various governmental and public organizations, during which environmental information is provided to all segments of the population.

a) Aarhus Centres held information meetings in 7 regions of Kyrgyzstan, during which up to 1000 representatives of the public, government employees and environmental services took part. It is especially necessary to emphasize the holding of such events in places where the information campaigns are rarely conducted due to remoteness and weak infrastructure. This allowed an opportunity to provide complete and timely necessary information first-hand, as well as to answer all the questions of interest in the field of environmental protection.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Promote the provision of open and timely access to environmental information for a wide range of public

b) To ensure awareness of the local population, the Aarhus Centres organized and installed information boards. In 2017, additional 7 information boards were installed in the cities of Bishkek and Osh, on top which were already installed in 2016 in Cholpon-Ata, Batken, Min-Kush (2 boards), Maily- Suu (2 boards) Shekaftar of Chatkal district of Jalal-Abad region.

Thanks to the additional information boards, the Aarhus Centres are able to provide information on various environmental topics to the local population, which makes it possible to reach an even larger audience. And the installation of boards in remote places - sometimes this is the only way to inform the public due to the lack of conditions for the transfer of information.

The installation of information boards will continue and soon they will be installed in all regions and, if possible, in places where communication infrastructure with the population is poorly developed.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Effective involvement of media representatives to highlight environmental topics and principles of the Aarhus Convention

The involvement of state, central and local media in the creation and broadcasting of environmental TV programs and radio programs is of particular importance for the delivery of information and advocacy for environmental issues for the future generation.

a) The Centres regularly organize various events for media representatives to cover and transmit information to the local population. In this regard, special assistance is provided by local partners and local self-government bodies that take part in Aarhus Centres events. With the help of Aarhus Centres, local TV companies of Talas, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, Osh and Batken provinces were able to attract coverage of Aarhus Centres events in newscasts, and printed publications about the activities of the Centres.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Effective involvement of media representatives to highlight environmental topics and principles of the Aarhus Convention

b) Also, one of the important areas for involving the media in the work of the Centres is the identification of spots that have an effect on environmental problems. In 2017, in cooperation with Internews and the OSCE Program Office in Bishkek, 3 videos on uranium tailings and 4 videos on various regional environmental issues were created, which were subsequently broadcast on state and public TV.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Effective involvement of media representatives to highlight environmental topics and principles of the Aarhus Convention

c) Public libraries operate in the Aarhus Centres, in which there are various thematic periodicals and information materials for studying environmental issues both in Kyrgyzstan and in the world. Anyone can visit the Aarhus Centres library during working hours, get acquainted with the available literature, and obtain the necessary information. For people studying in educational institutions, the Aarhus Centres suggest using material that is available for the preparation of diploma papers, abstracts, reports and other assignments received during classes. The library is constantly replenished with new literature and today it occupies the most part of the Aarhus Centres offices.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Public participation in decision-making on environmental issues

Strengthening the implementation of mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision-making

a) The cases of conflict situations related to the use of natural resources, have increased in the country. Investors, which obtained the opportunity to invest their financial resources, do not carry out explanatory work with the local population on their projects at the proper level. This in turn leads to a misunderstanding of the local population on the use of natural resources for commercial purposes and the future state of the environment in these places. In these conditions, the Aarhus Centres can organize the necessary venues for meetings and discussions on the future of these projects, during which all interested parties can find consensus and jointly solve the issues on the sustainable use of natural resources taking into account the opinions of the local population. Thus, the Aarhus Centres are the bodies that can protect the rights of the local population in matters of environmental protection and do not infringe the rights of investors. Examples of such Aarhus Centres work were public discussions in the district centres of Jalal-Abad, Naryn, Talas and Batken provinces.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Strengthening the implementation of mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision-making

b) Aarhus Centres regularly conduct regional roundtables in all regions of the country, during which representatives of state structures, local authorities, the public, civil society and the media take an active part. During the roundtables, the Aarhus Centres provide participants with information on their activities, the results achieved in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention principles in Kyrgyzstan, offer an opportunity to discuss problems in the environment, and plan the practical measures to preserve the environment with all stakeholders. Also, such meetings help to find associates and volunteers among the participants of the round table, who then take an active part in the Aarhus Centres various field events. Thus, the Aarhus Centres create a network of partner organizations and enthusiasts in the regions among the local population and the public to jointly address environmental issues.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Public participation in decision-making on environmental issues

Strengthening the implementation of mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision-making

c) Aarhus Centres together with environmental services investigated regulatory and legal acts in the field of environmental protection that was adopted in recent years. Experts analyzed all legislative acts in the field of environmental protection for compliance and the need for amendments and changes. In total, about 150 legislative acts are currently in the field of environmental protection, some of which have become obsolete and new amendments are needed.



Particularly in need of constant monitoring are such normative legal acts as the Forest Code, Laws "On Protected Areas", "On Protection and Use of Flora", "On Wildlife", "On the Ecological and Economic System of Issyk-Kul" and others. It is also necessary to constantly analyse and make corrections in order to exclude non-compliance and duplication of different items of certain legislative acts. A special role in improving the work of environmental services could be the early adoption of the Environmental Code, which is being developed by SAEPF.

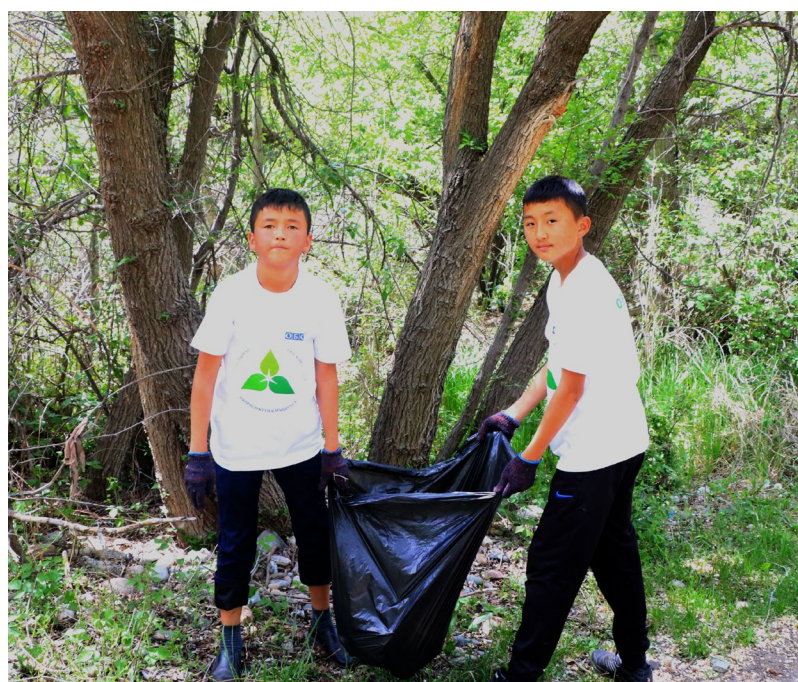


Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to environmental information

Strengthening the implementation of mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision-making

d) Aarhus Centres place a special role for the establishment of public relations. During the various events, the Centres provide information about their activities, raising the issue of the problematic situation in a specific area with public involvement, act as a mediator resolve the problem and suggest ways out, encouraging all stakeholders to take the necessary measures to prevent the emergence of such situations. Such examples include flash mobs, clean-up campaigns, press conferences and much more. During these events, the Centres try to draw attention of decision-makers on problematic issues, and to attract as many people as possible, including the local population and volunteers. Such activities were carried out by Aarhus Centres in 2018 on the Issyk-Kul Lake, in Bishkek, Naryn, Talas, Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken provinces.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Public participation in decision-making on environmental issues

Strengthening the implementation of mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision-making



e) One of the activities of the Aarhus Centers is the establishment of a dialogue on cross-border (regional) cooperation between the public and local authorities on environmental and security issues in the border areas through the network of Aarhus Centers in Central Asia. For several years, such cooperation has been developing between the Aarhus Center of Osh and Aarhus Center of Khujand (Tajikistan). This allowed the public of the border areas to jointly resolve environmental issues, including prevention of natural disasters in river floodplains on the borders of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They were able to mobilize their effort for joint actions and use the potential of the local population of border villages. With their assistance there were subbotniks for garbage collection, contacts were established for joint raids on environmental pollution control, joint awareness-raising work with the local population and business structures.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to justice in environmental matters

Raising awareness among the general public about environmental rights in order to participate effectively in addressing environmental issues and sustainable development.

a) The Aarhus Centres continue to conduct training courses for judges of local courts on the use of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention in court cases, as well as familiarize the judiciary with the innovations that have been adopted in recent years in normative legal acts and legislation in the field of environmental protection. In the course of 2017-2018, the trainings were conducted for the judges of Naryn, Talas, Issyk-Kul, Batken provinces. The trainings are conducted according to a modular program approved by the Council of Judges under the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, developed by experts from the Aarhus Centre in Bishkek with the participation of consultants from the Higher School of Justice under the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic. Upon completion of the training, each participant of the training is given a certificate that confirms the knowledge gained on environmental issues.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Access to justice in environmental matters

Raising awareness among the general public about environmental rights in order to participate effectively in addressing environmental issues and sustainable development.

b) The Aarhus Centre in Bishkek together with SAEPF and UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic, with the participation of the OSCE Program Office in Bishkek, developed and printed the 2nd edition of the collection of normative legal acts in the field of environmental protection. It includes all the Codes of the Kyrgyz Republic, the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic, the decrees of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the resolutions of the Government of the KR, instructions, regulations and other Normative Legal Acts that were developed and adopted from 2009 to 2016 in the field of environmental protection in the Kyrgyz Republic. This collection is prepared in the form of 2 volumes and consists of 3 books. It is intended for use by employees of state structures, departments and institutions. Also this collection is distributed among public organizations, foundations, international institutions and other organizations that have shown interest and can use in their work.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Component for capacity building of Aarhus Centres

Creation of conditions for more effective cooperation and coordination of the Aarhus Centres of the Kyrgyz Republic taking into account short-term and medium-term prospects and priorities both at the national and regional levels

a) In each Aarhus Centre the coordination groups are formed for more efficient and full-scale activities. These groups, using their resources and knowledge, provide practical assistance to the Aarhus Centres to implement its program tasks, as well as to suggest shortcomings in the implementation of the activities. For instance, Aarhus Centre in Osh created a coordination group, which included representatives of State Agency for Environmental and Technical Safety, mass media, and independent environmentalists. On a quarterly basis, they hold meetings and discuss the work plans of the Centre; the results of the activities carried out and specify what needs to be paid attention on in the future. The Aarhus Centre in Bishkek has a supervisory board, which includes the representatives of environmental services and international institutions. Their functions include monitoring the implementation of planned activities by the Centre, the effectiveness of decisions taken on various activities, discussion of future activities and plans for the future, approval of annual reports. These coordination groups are established for a certain period of time and operate within a strictly defined time frame.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Component for capacity building of Aarhus Centres

Creation of conditions for more effective cooperation and coordination of the Aarhus Centres of the Kyrgyz Republic taking into account short-term and medium-term prospects and priorities both at the national and regional levels

b) The effectiveness of the Aarhus Centres depends on the geographical location of the office. Sometimes due to the remoteness of the office some issues are resolved late and lose their relevance. In this regard, in 2017 it was decided to cover several offices in remote locations on both short-term and permanent basis, and on a permanent basis. So, in December 2017, a new Aarhus Centre was opened in Issyk-Kul province as the branch of the Aarhus Centre in Bishkek. It is located in the building of Issyk-Kul territorial department of environmental protection. For now, while it is fully coordinated and financed by the Aarhus Centre in Bishkek, but in the long term, at the end of 2018 - early 2019, it will become independent.

Also, thanks to the implementation of the project "Involvement of stakeholders in solving problems related to uranium waste in Central Asia", the public information centres were established in the city of Min-Kush (Naryn province), Maily-Suu and Shekaftar (Jalal-Abad province). Their activities to implement the project have already been completed, but the office itself acts independently and implements its plans taking into account the need on the ground.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Component for capacity building of Aarhus Centres

Increase the institutional and human capacity of the Aarhus Centres to improve the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Kyrgyz Republic

Public participation in the Aarhus Centres events is based on explanatory work among young people. Conducting training courses and lectures for students of universities and pupils of schools on environmental trends is the basis for the training of modern cadres who will devote themselves in the work of an ecologist in the future. Therefore, the Aarhus Centres conduct quarterly lectures on various environmental topics in many higher educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan and educational schools. In order to closely cooperate with educational institutions, the Centre has signed Memorandums of Cooperation with some educational organizations, such as the Kyrgyz National Agrarian University, Kyrgyz State National University, Naryn State University named after S. Namatov, Kyrgyz-Turkish University "Manas", and Osh State University. The experts and staff of the Centre provide information on the latest results of their activities, on new developments in the field of environmental protection, and on advanced methods of working in the field of ecology and other necessary information.



Main activities of Aarhus Centres

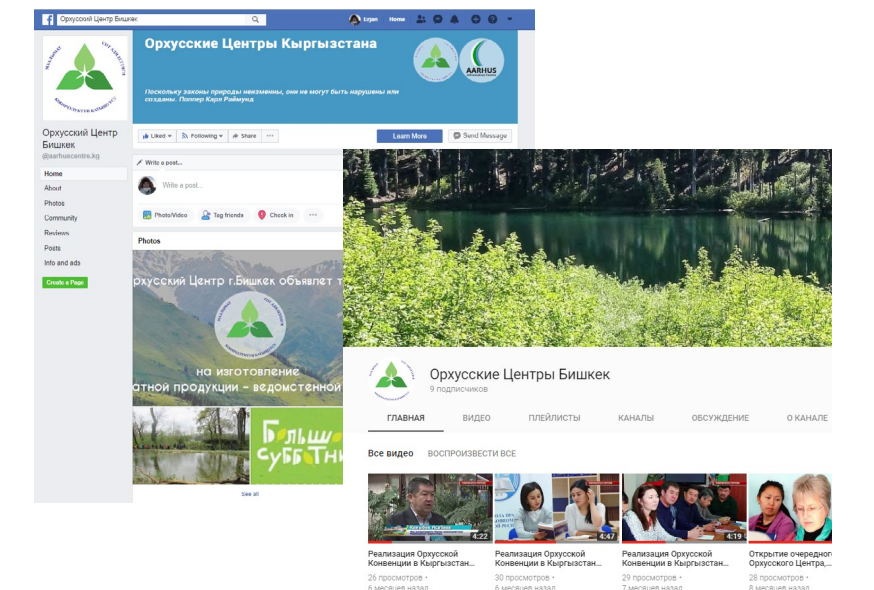
Component for capacity building of Aarhus Centres

Improvement of the work on stakeholder awareness of the activities of the Aarhus Centres in the Kyrgyz Republic

a) The Aarhus Centres continue to use their own electronic website to provide information on their activities, the latest news in the field of ecology and environmental protection, news of partners, videos and photos from events, as well as various issues discussed by the public on various environmental topics (www.aarhus.kg). Thus, the Aarhus Centres enables visitors of the site to obtain full information and evaluate the activities of the Aarhus Centres. Also, information from the Aarhus Centres site can be obtained promptly on mobile installations (tablets, mobile phones, laptops, etc.).



b) Also, the Aarhus Centres regularly disseminate information on their activities through the electronic mailing network to their local partners and foreign Aarhus Centres on a regular basis. For this, various electronic media are used - Facebook, YouTube, Google Plus and others.





Main activities of Aarhus Centres

Component for capacity building of Aarhus Centres

Attracting additional resources to support and develop the activities of the Aarhus Centres in the Kyrgyz Republic

The Aarhus Centres participate in various tenders for the implementation of project proposals, conducted by both donor organizations and local organizations. As a result, the Aarhus Centres became participants in the implementation of projects organized by such institutions as UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic, the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and Internews. In 2017, the Aarhus Centres won grants from Internews to create videos on environmental topics that were prepared and shown on TV. The Aarhus Centre in Bishkek together with experts assisted in the implementation of the project “Development of an analysis of monitoring indicators of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity”. Most recently the Aarhus Centre in Osh has implemented the project “Involvement of stakeholders in solving problems related to uranium waste in Central Asia” and is completing the project “Promotion of environmental safety and sustainable management of natural resources in Kyrgyzstan”, implemented with the support of the OSCE. Experts and consultants from the Aarhus Centre in Bishkek take part in the project “Development of an institutional framework for the monitoring and management of environmental information” which forms a national set of environmental indicators that help to assess the state of the environment, funded by UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic.

