

Final Evaluation Report

#YoshStan: Raising Youth Voices in Local Decision-Making in Uzbekistan

June 2022
ERGO Analytics
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Project Introduction</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Methodology of the Evaluation</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Findings</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Relevance</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Sustainability</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Conclusions and Recommendations</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Annex 1. Project impact and outcome indicators</i>	<i>37</i>

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the final evaluation of Search for Common Ground's #YoshStan: Raising Youth Voices in Local Decision-Making activity in Uzbekistan. The goal of the project was to ensure a meaningful and structured collaboration between youth CSOs and governmental authorities at the local level in order to ensure more inclusive governance processes. The project was based on the intervention logic that if civil society and local governments collaborate to promote youth-inclusive decision making, and if a supportive social environment for youth participation is fostered at the community level, then more inclusive youth policies will lead to enhanced governance and development at the local level. The project somehow represented the transnational extension of “#Jashstan: Youth as Agents of Peace and Stability in Kyrgyzstan”, which was earlier implemented in Kyrgyz Republic, yet aimed at youth inclusion rather than preventing violent extremism. It adopted the best practices which were suitable for the context of Uzbekistan, Andijan region, and Asaka district in particular. The project's activities in the active phase included training and mini-grants for developing youth-initiated civil society organizations (CSOs). As a result, 12 mini-grant were attributed to youth from 8 selected communities.

The final evaluation was based on a comprehensive methodology that included qualitative and quantitative research tools aimed at assessing the project's relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability from the viewpoint of different key stakeholders. Applied methods included desk analysis of the project's documentation, qualitative and quantitative data collection by conducting surveys, online and offline interviews. The final evaluation covered 437 project participants including youth from 8 target communities, representatives of local authorities (LAs or local governments), non-government organizations (NGOs), and government-operated non-government organizations (GONGOs), project grantees, and project staff.

The project appeared to be relevant in terms of demography and socio-economic conditions and considered the needs and issues of youth. Project activities were well-tailored, adapted by learning to different cross-sections, and positively perceived by participants. Youth in Andijan region experienced common youth issues for Uzbekistan such as financial difficulties, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, training and education, yet exacerbated by high population density and distant location from the capital. Participants highlighted the relevance of project activities to the local context, especially the mini-grants. Grant-recipients explained that mini-grants allowed them to help their community to fill the gaps in existing services, which they were unable to do earlier due to lack of financial resources. All projects under the mini-grants helped enhance the welfare of the communities through organization of training courses, formation of clubs, workshops, and running kindergartens.. Grant recipients engaged vulnerable youth from their communities and opportunities to participate in training and learning courses free of charge.

At the same time, the project successfully facilitated the cooperation between youth and local authorities in target communities and provided a basis for youth involvement in decision-making processes. First, separate and joint trainings were conducted for youth and

local authorities to enhance their cooperation by increasing youth awareness about the roles of different local authorities and by improving the skills of local authorities when working with youth. Second, town-hall meetings served as a discussion platform between local authorities and youth, where youth had a chance to explain their needs and grievances. Such events increased the confidence of youth in communication with local authorities and non-governmental organizations and on the other hand, local authorities reported greater confidence in strengthening youth policies. Such activities enhanced cooperation between youth CSOs and local authorities during the activities of mini-grants where youth closely cooperated with local authorities in implementing their projects. Youth showed strong motivation and aspiration to contribute to community wellbeing which in turn improved the attitude of local governments to youths' initiatives. As it was noted by respondents, youth demonstrated their potential to participate in local decision-making processes which increased attention of local authorities towards their needs. Thus, trust between youth and local governments was improved.

There is an improved social environment in the communities for youth participation through establishing youth CSOs under the mini-grants. Participants explained that as a result of the project, their lives improved. Project grantees involved vulnerable youth into their initiatives, which improved the lives of youth in target communities by increasing their engagement in community issues and providing training and employment opportunities. As a result of their participation in mini-grants, youth gained skills for social project development, motivation and self-confidence. They also reported feeling more empowered to communicate and cooperate with local authorities and non-governmental organizations and demonstrate a positive attitude towards youth-oriented social services and addressing of their needs by local authorities.

The project is youth-driven and involves youth's motivation and actions. Project exit strategy is aimed to create a community of practice which would serve a basis for further cooperation and activity. Moreover, most of the initiatives under the mini-grant aimed at improving infrastructural issues and human development, creating a basis for further small and medium business development, employment, economic welfare and thereby building peace. Stronger sustainability potential possessed by the collective infrastructure-oriented initiatives with several actors involved (e.g., a kindergarten).

During the project implementation, project staff encountered the following barriers:

- Low activity of NGOs in target region and as result relative inexperience of the implementing partner;
- In Uzbekistan, large amount of time required to establish and systematize working processes;
- Relatively underdeveloped workflows of service sector in target region;
- Scrutiny of local authorities towards international organizations and as result excessive bureaucratic procedures;
- Cultural barriers and social stereotype during implementation of project activities;

- Cultural context interrupts project activities;
- Relatively low skills of target population.

Based on the findings, following recommendations are furnished.

- Apply mini-grants activity for active youth members when scaling the project or introduce other youth-oriented projects;
- Encourage collective, rather than individual action;
- Soft intervention tackling stereotypes welcomed;
- More collaborative trainings and joint activities between youth and LAs;
- Launch long-term projects in Uzbekistan;
- Project scaling;
- Regulate and document all workflows;
- Conduct preliminary research on population cohorts similar to target population.

Project Introduction

The “#YoshStan: Raising Youth Voices in Local Decision-Making” project is a 24-month program that aims to strengthen the collaboration between youth CSOs and local authorities to contribute to inclusive governance. The project took action in the Andijan region, where 9% of Uzbek youth live¹ in 2021, and targets mahallas in the Asaka district. The project aimed to strengthen the participation of youth civil society organizations (CSOs) in local decision-making through investing in confidence and trust-building with government stakeholders and providing access to capacity building, dialogue, and networking opportunities for CSO members and government stakeholders.

The goal of the project was to ensure a meaningful and structured collaboration between youth CSOs and governmental authorities at the local level in order to ensure more inclusive governance processes. This project was based on the intervention logic that IF civil society and local governments collaborate to promote youth-inclusive decision making, and IF a supportive social environment for youth participation is fostered at the community level, THEN more inclusive youth policies will lead to enhanced governance and development at the local level.

Overall project objective was to contribute to youth-oriented services in Asaka district, Andijan region through collaboration between youth CSOs and LAs. Specific objective was to enhance the capacity of Youth Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) to collaboratively promote the meaningful and structured participation of Youth CSOs on strengthening deliverability of youth services in Asaka district of Andijan region.

Activities were designed to address identified issues at the individual, community, and institutional level. Results under each output area include:

- Enhancing the capacities of Local Civil Society actors, especially youth CSOs and activists, and LAs from Andijan in collaborative leadership and non-adversarial advocacy to engage youth around their particular needs;
- Strengthening the collaboration between youth CSOs and LAs to engage youth in local decision-making.

Table 1. Project’s logical framework

	Results chain	Indicator
<i>Impact (Overall objective)</i>	To contribute to promoting youth-oriented services in Andijan oblast through collaboration between youth CSOs and LAs.	O1.1. % of vulnerable youth surveyed who are satisfied with the quality of youth-oriented social services in the targeted area O1.2. % of youth surveyed who say that they have been invited in local

¹ State statistics committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Demography: Population aged 20-29-Total
<https://stat.uz/ru/ofitsialnaya-statistika/demography>

		decision-making mechanisms at least once in the last one year.
<i>Outcome (s) (Specific objective(s))</i>	To enhance the capacity of Youth Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) to collaboratively promote the meaningful and structured participation of Youth CSOs on strengthening deliverability of youth services in (Andijan r/ raion/ AA).	SO2.1. # of LA and Youth CSOs representatives who self-evaluated themselves as more capacitated on strengthening of youth policies as a result of project intervention SO2.2. % of vulnerable youth reported that their needs are well addressed by LG and Youth CSO representatives in the targeted area. Disaggregated by age and gender
<i>Outputs</i>	<p>O1.1. Youth CSOs, and LAs from Andijan have enhanced capacities to engage to address youth's particular needs in a non-adversarial way.</p> <p>O1.2. Increased participation of Youth CSOs in strengthening quality of youth service delivery mechanism</p>	<p>O1.1.1 # of Youth CSOs which demonstrated enhanced capability in addressing youth driven grievances and initiatives</p> <p>O1.1.2 % trained Youth CSOs' members with increased knowledge and skills on i) constructive advocacy, and ii) economic inclusion opportunities for youth</p> <p>O1.2.1. # Youth services strengthening mechanisms initiated by youth CSOs and supported by LAs</p> <p>O1.2.2. % of surveyed youth who report that project mini-grants met their needs (disaggregated by gender and age)</p>

The projects' activities had a significant number of capacity building training for local CSOs to ensure empowerment, participation and non-discrimination in line with the overall objective of the CSO-LA programme. This included workshops for youth CSOs to enhance their financial, operational, and programmatic capacity, including raising their positive leadership and collaborative advocacy skills. To create the space for increased youth CSO participation, the Action included capacity building for local governments (LGs) on equitable, effective and inclusive governance.

In order to enhance capacities of youth CSOs and LAs to address youth's needs in a non-adversarial way (Output 1.1) three activities were designed. First activity (Activity 1.1.1) was needs assessment and stakeholder mapping which identified key project stakeholders – local authorities, non-governmental organizations providing youth-oriented services and youth in target communities (Table 2).

Table 2. Key project's stakeholders

<i>LAs</i>	Youth department in district Khokimiyat
	Regional department of NGOs Association
	Regional and district departments of ministry of mahalla and family
	Regional department of public education
	Regional and district departments of Youth Agency
<i>NGOs and GONGOs</i>	Mehrimiz sizga NGO
	Qizil yarim oy jamiyati NGO
	Istiqbolli Avlod NGO
	Center for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women GONGO
	Yuksalish GONGO
<i>Mahalla committees</i>	Mahalla committees in target mahallas
<i>Youth</i>	Young population in target mahallas

Baseline study also identified the specific needs of stakeholder groups which are:

- Improper functioning of the feedback system for monitoring and evaluating young people's satisfaction with the services received
- Insufficient number of staff for the implementation of activities and programs aimed at young people.
- There is no training for personnel in organizations to work with youth, as well as there is an insufficient number of personnel to work with youth at the level of mahalla committees.
- Communication barriers between state organizations, youth-oriented CSOs and youth.
- Lack of youth-oriented activities in rural areas.

Based on obtained knowledge from the needs assessment, the second and third activities (Activity 1.1.2; Activity 1.1.3) represented training for youth CSOs on Leadership and Collaborative Advocacy and for LAs on Effective, Equitable, Inclusive Local Governance Training. For each stakeholder group, the first training was conducted separately and the second one was a joint CSOs and LAs training.

To achieve increased participation of youth-oriented CSOs in strengthening the quality of youth service delivery mechanisms (Output 1.2), the project-initiated town-hall meetings

(Activity 1.2.1), action grants for youth-oriented CSOs (Activity 1.2.2), and learning conferences (Activity 1.2.3). Two series of town-hall meetings conducted in 8 target communities gathered all stakeholders to strengthen collaboration between youth CSOs and LAs, in addition to eliciting practical recommendations that could later inform the Action Grants for Youth CSOs. Between December 2020 and August 2021 20 town-hall meetings were conducted with 711 participants.

Further, two rounds of one-day training were organized for youth to equip youth with proper tools and resources to both design, and present quality initiatives. After such training participants had the opportunity to submit proposals for the mini-action grants. In total, Search and Hamroh awarded 12 mini grants of EUR 1,000 throughout the six (seven after Kujgan mahalla was divided into Kujgan and O'ndud) target communities. In results, 374 young people participated in mini-action grants.

Methodology of the Evaluation

Final evaluation methodology was described by the Evaluation team in the Inception Report and approved by Search's team in April 2022. Field works started on the 29th of April and continued until 5th of May. Evaluation team key members visited the Andijan Region and Asaka district on May 6. During the final evaluation, the evaluation team worked in close cooperation with implementing partners to choose the most active project participants, and establish connections as well as for other organizational matters.

The final evaluation methodology was based on a comprehensive approach including qualitative and quantitative research tools aimed at assessing project's relevance, effectiveness and sustainability from the viewpoint of different key stakeholders. Evaluating procedures included the collection of both primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data. Secondary data was mostly taken from project documents (project's proposal, logical frames, interim reports) while primary data was collected through interviews (both face-to-face and telephone or Zoom technology) in the Andijan region (Asaka district) and in Tashkent. 18 interviews were conducted face-to-face, 5 using telephone and 3 by Zoom technology.

Qualitative data collection tools included key informant interviews (KIIs), which were conducted among project stakeholders who were directly involved in the project. As for quantitative data, a youth survey was initiated. Questionnaires were designed to collect data on impact and outcome indicators along with the project Theory of Change and three Global Impact Framework Indicators (GIF) which were relevant to the project.

Key informant interviews (KIIs)

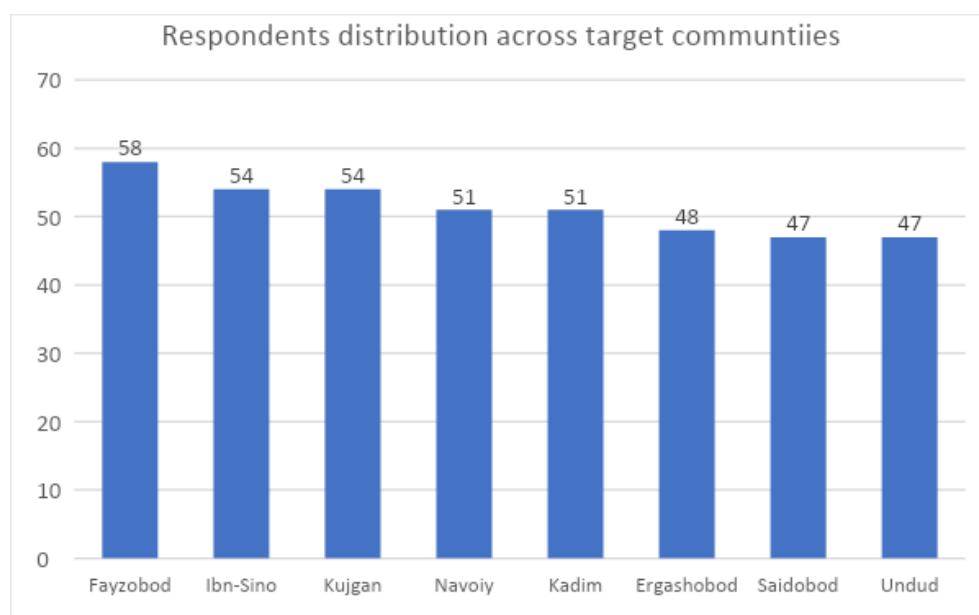
Key informant interviews were conducted with representatives of state bodies, local self-government bodies (mahalla committees), grantees and project staff (Search's team) including local implementation partner (Hamroh). These KIIs helped to address research questions around relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the project as well as lessons learned and issues encountered. The number of representatives from each stakeholder group and project staff was predetermined and the evaluation team was able to interview all reachable and relevant stakeholders. Evaluation team encountered barriers when attempting to cover all project participants. However, due to participants' personal life circumstances, actual coverage appeared lower than it was planned. Moreover, it was planned to conduct a FGD with representatives of NGOs and GONGOs but it appeared to be inconvenient for the participants. Therefore, instead of FGD, available participants were interviewed separately.

The evaluation team conducted a total of 26 KIIs (5 KIIs with local authorities, 3 KIIs with representatives of NGOs and GONGOs, 6 KIIs with representatives of mahalla committees and 8 KIIs with project participants who obtained mini-grants, 3 KIIs with project staff members and 1 interview with implementing partner). Out of 26 interviews, 8 was conducted in

Tashkent² and the rest were conducted either on-field in the Andijan region or online in Tashkent. The main reason for selecting KII as a research tool for above-mentioned stakeholders, especially concerning grantees and mahalla representatives, was that their involvement was on an individual basis. It allowed their honest and comprehensive responses. Each interview took on average 40 minutes and maximum duration yielded 1 hour.

Survey

The project involved 711 participants, including youth, representatives of mahalla committees and local authorities, and selected NGO representatives. The action grants involved 374 youth in 7 target mahallas. The evaluation survey was done among the direct participants from the town hall meetings, training and action grants and youth in target mahallas and aimed to cover 400 persons. Respondents were equally distributed among target communities. The graph below shows that a total of 410 respondents were surveyed.



Survey questionnaires consisted of two main sections. The first section derives demographic characteristics and the second assesses project intervention in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. Questionnaires were designed in a way to obtain respondent's assessment either on self or project activities in which he/she took part as well as to differentiate the effect between different project activities, involvement degrees, or to compare to those young residents, who did not participate in the project.

Table 3. Evaluation procedures by stakeholder group and research tools

Stakeholder Group	Actors	Research tool	Data collection site	#
-------------------	--------	---------------	----------------------	---

² During the first Volunteer Festival within the framework of the project "Yoshstan - increasing the role of youth in decision-making at the local level" between April 27-28.

LAs	Youth department in district Khokimiyat	Interview	Asaka city	1
	Regional department of NGOs Association	Interview	Tashkent city	1
	District department of ministry of mahalla and family	Interview	Asaka city	1
	Regional department of public education	Interview	Tashkent city	1
	Regional department of Youth Agency	Interview	Andijan city	1
	Sample size of stakeholder group			5
NGOs and GONGOs	Istiqbolli Avlod	Interview	Online	1
	Center for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women	Interview	Online	1
	Yuksalish	Interview	Tashkent city	1
	Sample size of stakeholder group			3
Mahalla committee	Mahalla chairmen	Interview	Faizobod community	1
		Interview	Kujgan community	1
		Interview	Navoiy community	1
		Interview	Qadim community	1
		Interview	Saidobod community	1
		Interview	Ungut community	1
	Sample size of stakeholder group			6
Grantees	Grant recipients	Interview	Ibn Sino	2
		Interview	Kujgan (Undun included)	2
		Interview	Navoiy	2
		Interview	Qadim	2
	Sample size of stakeholder group			8

Project staff	Cholpon Urmonbayeva, Technical manager	Interview	Online	1
	Aygerim Almazbekova	Interview	Online	1
	Keneshbek Saynazarov, Director	Interview	Online	1
	Implementing partner (Hamroh)	Interview	Asaka city	1
	Sample size of stakeholder group			4
	QUALITATIVE DATA SAMPLE			26
Youth	Vulnerable youth and project participants	Survey	Faizobod	58
			Ibn Sino	54
			Kujgan	54
			Navoiy	51
			Qadim	51
			Saidobod	47
			Ergashobod	48
			Undud	47
	Sample size of stakeholder group			410
	QUANTITATIVE DATA SAMPLE			410

Limitations of the study:

- **Coverage.** Evaluation team made an effort to cover all project's participants including project grantees and representatives of local authorities. However, due to personal life circumstances, not all project participants had the opportunity to participate in interviews as part of final evaluation.
- **Unavailability of pre-intervention indicators.** Provided project documentation did not cover data from pre- and post-intervention assessments, which did not allow to measure project's success in a more accurate way.

Findings

Relevance

The project's choice of the target region and district was relevant considering demographic characteristics and socio-economic state of youth. Andijan region mainly shares national issues of youth, yet they are exacerbated by high population density and distant region location. Andijan region is one of the most populous regions of Uzbekistan. In 2022, the population density of the region is 79 persons per sq kmsr³. Among 350,000 Asaka district residents, 185,000(or nearly 53%) are below the age of 30.⁴ Another reason is that Andijan is a bordering region, which means it shares common bordering areas issues – e.g., population vulnerability and risks of social exclusion. Asaka district, in particular, is exposed to high rates of youth, “not in employment, education, or training” (NEET) and gender stereotypes, which impedes female inclusion and participation in the society including their education and employment.

Project intervention was appropriate considering issues of youth in Asaka district. Youth in Asaka district encountered financial issues, unemployment, impeded access to education, and limited training (hobby clubs, courses for extra classes) opportunities. Because of low employment opportunities and lack of skills required by employers, many young people migrate to Russia. In Russia there is high demand for low-skilled workers, while in Uzbekistan there are high shares of low-skilled labor. For those who don't migrate abroad, access to education and skills training are restricted due to the fact that most training centers and education facilities are located in cities. Families do not possess enough income to afford private training and might consider traveling to the city unsafe for their children due to the need to get to the city on their own. In distant communities, low social inclusion of youth is an issue. Despite the aspiration of young people, lack of self-confidence and low awareness about existing services for youth or youth-oriented organizations impede their actions. The project activities provided youth in Asaka district with free of charge training opportunities in their mahallas. Under mini-grants, youth participated in language and IT courses, sewing and hairdresser training, sport and business clubs and other activities which they did not have in their mahallas before the project activities.

“Also, the head of the mahalla found out what problems exist, how we can help the youth and what kind of work can be provided for them, because in our mahalla there is not even a hairdressing where young people could learn how to cut their hair. I have to go to the city, this is an additional cost for travel and for the training itself, this was a problem. During the training, we learned about the details of the project, how to create and plan a project, what problems can be solved with the help of a project. In this regard, I put forward the idea of opening a barbershop, which was received very positively by the locals, because there is an acute shortage of male hairdressers in the mahalla.”

³ State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan

⁴ According to data provided by the district department of Agency for Youth Affairs during the interview with its representative.

"I would say that in our mahalla, there was no hairdressing salon or a sewing workshop, but even, without exaggeration, there was no ordinary grocery store, as well as other important objects of trade and services, such as a pharmacy. And in order to learn how to sew, the girls had to go to the city. Therefore, the project benefited our society."

– recipients of a mini-grant.

Project activities were well-tailored to target communities based on Kyrgyz Republic experience. #Yoshstan's design mostly mirrored the project earlier implemented in Kyrgyz Republic (#Jashstan) and adopted its already successful practices. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic share similar historical and cultural background and socio-economic and demographic traits as well. The main difference between the two projects was that Yoshstan had no aims to prevent violent extremism as its objectives were concentrated on enhancing youth activity in local decision-making processes through social partnerships between local governments and youth. Phase I of the Jashstan took place aimed to reduce community-based conflicts and radicalization by engaging young people from highly conflict-prone communities, putting them in leadership positions to become catalysts for peace in Kyrgyzstan. Second phase aimed to empower youth and involve them in decision-making processes, create an enabling environment for the at-risk youth, solve the issues and grievances youth experienced, and deter them from possible radicalization. Another difference is that, Jashstan was of larger scale in terms of both sampling and number of activities. Phase I engaged 120 at-risk youth participants in 27 locations across the country. Phase II involved 96 at-risk youth participants in 15 locations across the country. Jashstan mainly worked with at-risk youth, who had records in local police departments and provided them with mentorship programs. Yoshstan, instead, involved active youth and provided them with mini-grants for developing social projects.

Project activities-initiated cooperation between local authorities and youth. Before project intervention youth did not cooperate with the mahalla committee, NGOs or local authorities. They explain that they were inactive, mostly stayed at home, did not know the name of their mahalla committee and where it was located. Such project activities as town-hall meetings and training introduced local authorities and mahalla committees to the youth. Mini-grants facilitated their cooperation as local authorities were involved in their implementation together with youth.

"I believe that the project has radically changed my life. Previously, I was an ordinary girl who did not even know where the mahalla committee was, but now it has become my second and favorite home."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

Mini-grants are considered a good and effective practice in the context of target communities. Project participants repeatedly stressed out that mini-grants were of great relevance to their communities for several reasons. First, there were active young people who had their ideas but

lacked opportunities and capacities for their implementation. Second, such initiatives enabled high coverage due to its social-nature and free basis. Because most of the target population experience financial issues, free training and courses were received with enthusiasm, although with a little distrust at initial stages.

Considering low youth participation and community needs, the project activities provided youth with an opportunity to solve issues in their mahallas themselves. Mini-grants provided a strong stimulus for young people to realize their ideas aimed at solving issues in their communities by attracting vulnerable youth from their communities. As stated by most of the grantees, before Yoshstan was launched, they recognized the needs and problems of their communities. Despite their willingness to contribute to the development of their mahallas, they lacked financial resources, skills, and support from local authorities and community. All projects were aimed to solve specific community issues (e.g., absence of language courses, sport clubs, tailor's shop, hairdresser, kindergarten and etc.) and were based on skills and knowledge possessed by the project grantees. Project ideas were mostly infrastructural in nature and aimed at income generation. However, they were reoriented to social partnership by project staff. As a result, such infrastructural problems such as lack of kindergartens, training centers (language, IT, business, and entrepreneurship skills), sewing shops, and hairdressing services were transformed into corresponding training courses by means of which project grantees shared their skills and knowledge with vulnerable youth from their mahallas in close cooperation with local authorities.

"To be honest, before the project implementation, youth in our community did not have the opportunity to do something. All families lived in the same room; conditions were difficult. The project provided them with the opportunity to obtain the skill and to become a stylist. The guys had a desire to move in this direction, they also got the opportunity to see the world. Now these same guys have shown leadership qualities and want to become mentors in hairdressing themselves. They benefit our mahalla and are invited to various events."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

"In our mahalla, 3 mini-grants were won and all of them are aimed at solving the main problems of our community. One of the grants was directed to the opening of a private kindergarten, where children from low-income families stayed free of charge. We, the holders of two grants, interacted, since the children of my workers studied in this kindergarten. The third recipient of the grant taught the population of our village computer and IT technologies."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

Some activities were adapted considering participants' traits, which enhanced their relevance in local context. Project activities were adapted considering low writing and oral skills, lack of self-confidence and motivation, which enhanced their relevance to the local context. As the implementing partner noted, it was difficult to attract youth to some project activities. First, youth reluctantly joined town-hall meetings mainly due to their low participation in the life of

the community and low understanding of opportunities that such activities present to them. Significant effort was made by implementing partner, Andijan based NGO 'Hamroh', and with support from mahalla committees to bring the required number of youth participants. Second, two rounds of mini-grant proposal submission had not resulted in any proposals. Even though proposal submission forms were simplified, youth struggled to fill the forms as they experienced difficulties in presenting their ideas in written form. In that regard, a special training session (Makaton) was organized to equip youth with proper skills to both design, and present quality initiatives. During this session, youth were able to generate ideas for the development of youth-oriented services in their communities and were able to get financial and administrative support from the representatives of local government.

Gender based issues were tackled through soft intervention by introducing new role models.

Currently, there is significant gender bias in society. It is considered that young women's success is determined by marriage and family creation. The project attempted to introduce the idea that females may also succeed with their own initiatives. For this purpose, the project involved young and active women, which further formed new role models of educated, young females, who possess certain skills and knowledge and benefit their communities. Those young females were supposed to attract other girls from their communities. Moreover, significant efforts were made by the implementing partner, who conducted discussions with the girls' parents regarding their participation in the project's activities.

The project and its activities are perceived positively by youth and other project' actors.

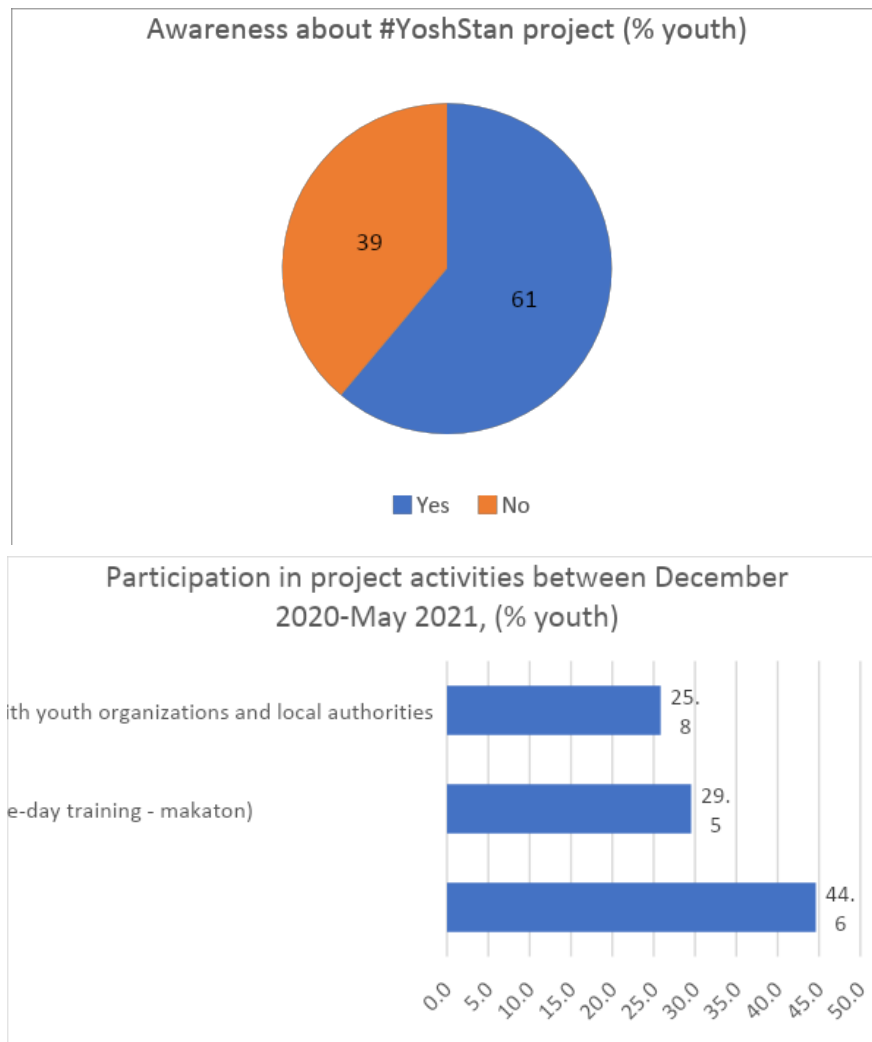
Interviews with project grantees demonstrated their positive attitude towards the project, and its activities. They are satisfied with their participation in the project and wish to continue their participation because the project provided them with opportunities to realize their ideas and potential and increased their social activity, which in turn improved skills and self-esteem. They also mentioned that more similar projects should be initiated in their communities to provide more youth with such opportunities. Similarly, other projects' actors (local authorities, representatives of NGOs, implementing partners, and project staff) expressed their favorable opinion about the project.

"The project certainly improved my life and the lives of youth in mahalla. Before the project, many problems were not given due attention. From the side of local governments, the state did not carry out any work to solve the problems of youth in our mahalla. As a result of motivational training, we have become more socially active, and this has benefited us. You can even say that many of my goals were achieved precisely within the framework of the Yoshstan project."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

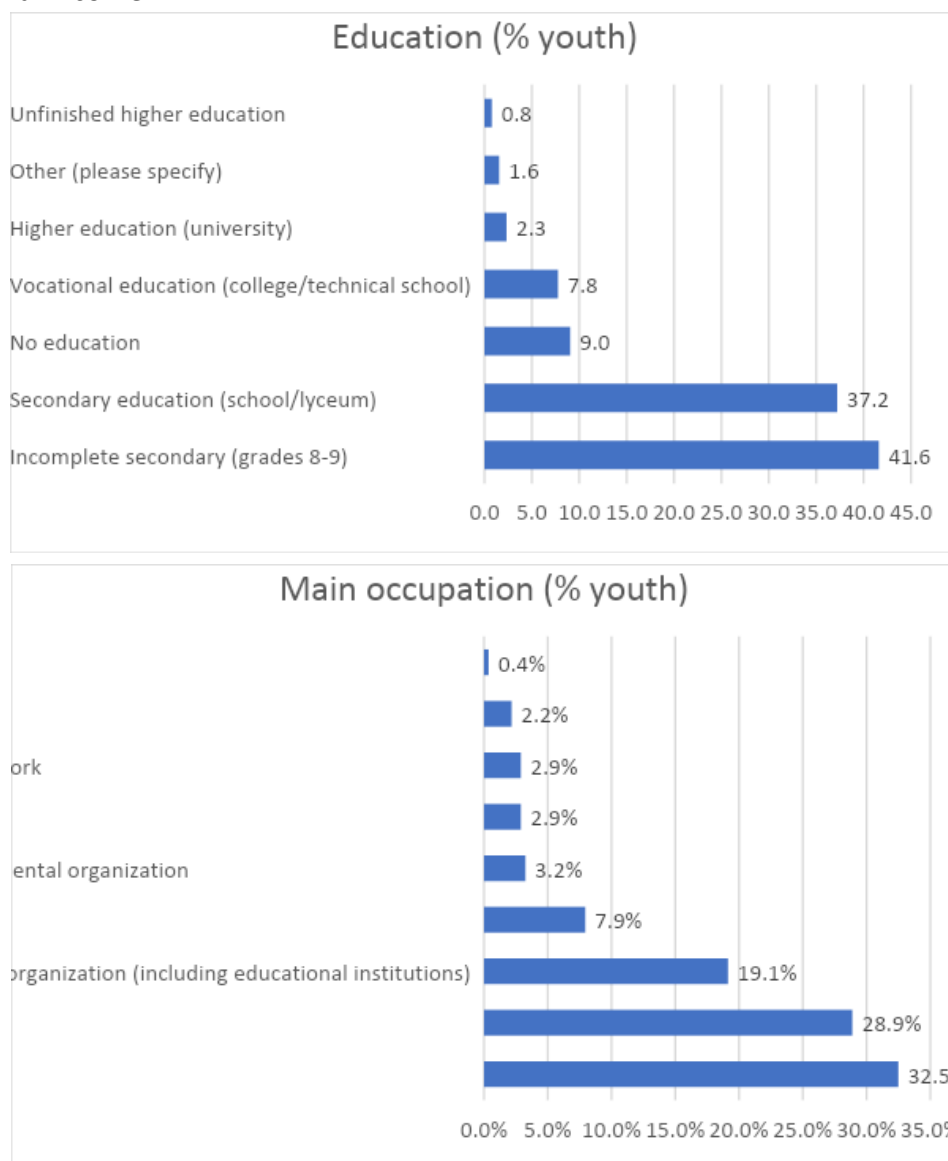
Effectiveness

Project involved a significant share of youth in target communities. As explained by the implementing partner, representatives of mahallas and implementing partners made significant efforts to gather many youths for town-hall meetings and training. Survey results demonstrated that 61 percent of youth in target communities have heard about the Yoshstan project of which 56 percent participated either in town-hall meetings or training. As reported by the project grantees, they attracted nearly 300 participants into their projects.



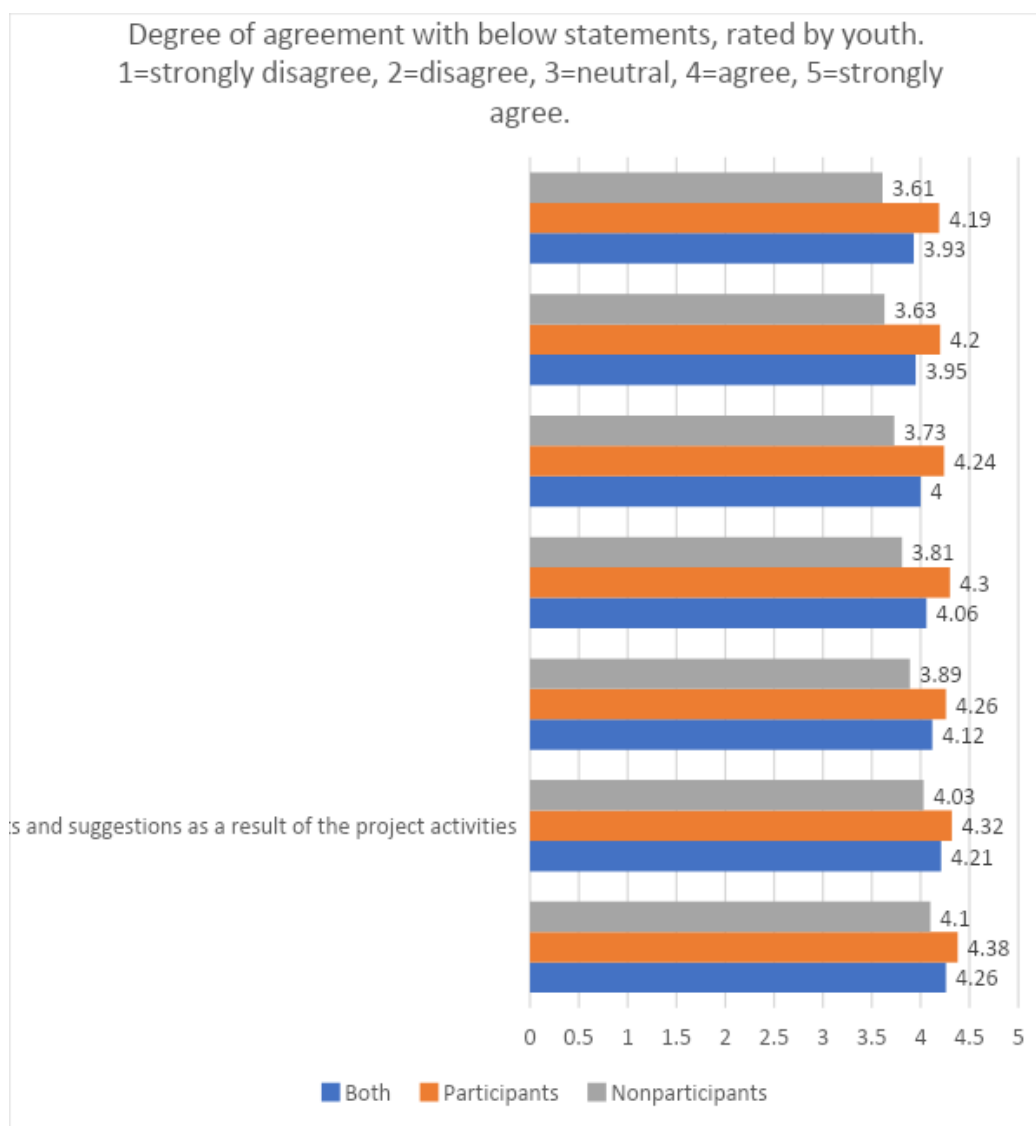
As part of final evaluation, 410 young people from target communities were surveyed. 58 percent of respondents were females and 42 percent were men. Most of the respondents (78%) were aged 15-19 years. On average respondents have either incomplete secondary (41%) or secondary education (37%). Only three percent of respondents indicated higher education. Educational attainment remains low among older respondents. occupation wise, 33 percent are

students and 29 percent are self-employed. Nineteen percent are employed in government agencies while eight percent are unemployed. Three fourths (76%) of the respondents do not have personal income.



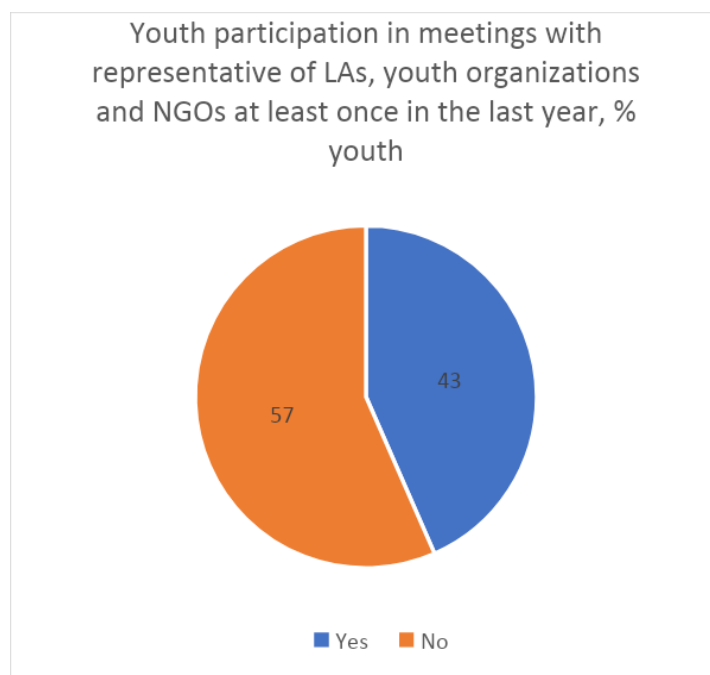
Local authorities and NGOs feel more capacitated to strengthen youth policies. The project is favorably perceived by LAs and NGOs. All respondents (14 persons) feel more confident about improving youth policies because of their participation in the project activities, in particular the training. Respondents particularly recognized the high expertise of the trainers and quality and relevance of training materials. Aspects of working with youth NEET were especially effective. An Interactive approach of the training was highlighted as a special advantage. Among other benefits, training facilitated new connections and closer cooperation between youth and local authorities.

The project grantees have increased confidence to communicate with local governments and other organizations. The diagram below demonstrates the rating of seven statements disaggregated by project participants (those who participated in town-hall meetings and training) and non-participants. Compared to non-participants, those who participated in project activity feel more confident to interact with local authorities (4.19) and civil society organizations (4.2). They rated their knowledge and skills to develop constructive project proposals higher than non-participants (0.5 points). Trust to local authorities and other organizations is greater among Yoshstan's participants. Moreover, they possess a stronger belief that they can significantly contribute to their communities. Finally, participants demonstrated stronger agreement with the idea that people should take action to contribute to their communities.



The project significantly contributed to establishing cooperation between key project actors.

Project activities were designed to establish cooperation between youth, NGOs and local authorities. During the project's lifespan, youth were actively involved in the improvement of their communities by filling the gaps in local markets of services (language courses, sport and business clubs, sewing and hairdressing workshops etc.) and cooperated with local authorities. As the implementing partner noted, before project intervention many young people were poorly informed about the role of the mahalla committee and other local governments. Similarly, 44 percent youth participated in the meetings with local authorities and/or other organizations. For example, mahalla committees and khokimiyats supported some grantees by providing financial and administrative means. For the sewing-shop project, a local school provided a premise and placed an order for a school uniform. For a kindergarten project, khokimiyat allocated a premise and facilitated obtaining of different permits. Second, project activities increased youth awareness. Moreover, better ties were established between local authorities and NGOs, as was mentioned by respondents. During their project young participants communicated with local authorities on different administrative issues. Before the project intervention, mahallas committees never worked with NGOs or international organizations.



“The school administration was involved in the joint work, as we needed computers and a place for conducting courses. The school administration provided a classroom equipped with computers. The computer science teacher showed interest in our courses and, on his own initiative, helped in conducting classes, provided free access to the classroom.”

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

“During the project, representatives of the education department helped us to purchase furniture. Khokim from the Andijan region talked to me and donated money (7 million UZS) on sewing machines.

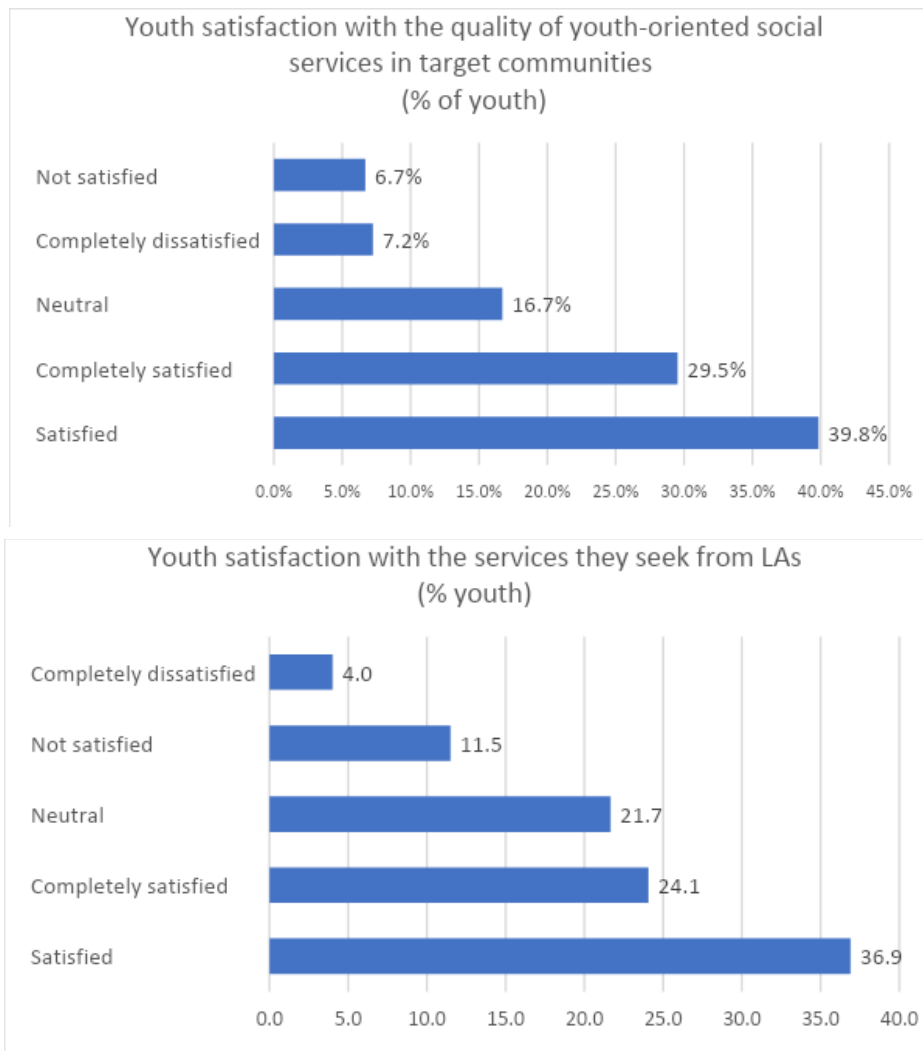
– a recipient of a mini-grant.

Attitude of local authorities towards youth issues and their problems has changed h. From the local authorities’ point of view, the project improved current practices of working with youth by providing an understanding of the importance of youth inclusion in decision-making processes. As it was noted by a representative of the Regional Department of Agency for Youth Affairs, the agency followed their own work plans and guidance from high-level authorities but the project made clear that youth grievances were addressed more effectively with youth involved in their solutions. It was also stated that the Agency should adopt the practice of conducting youth needs assessment before organizing any activities.

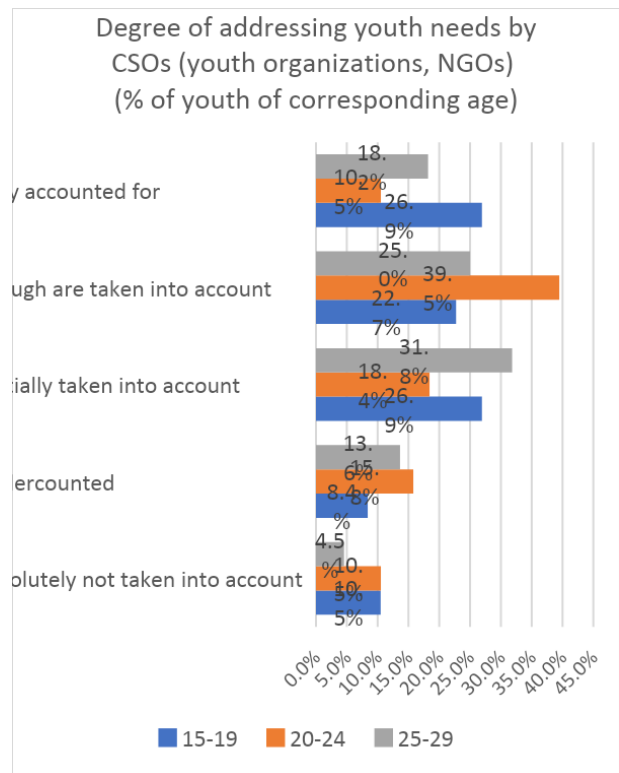
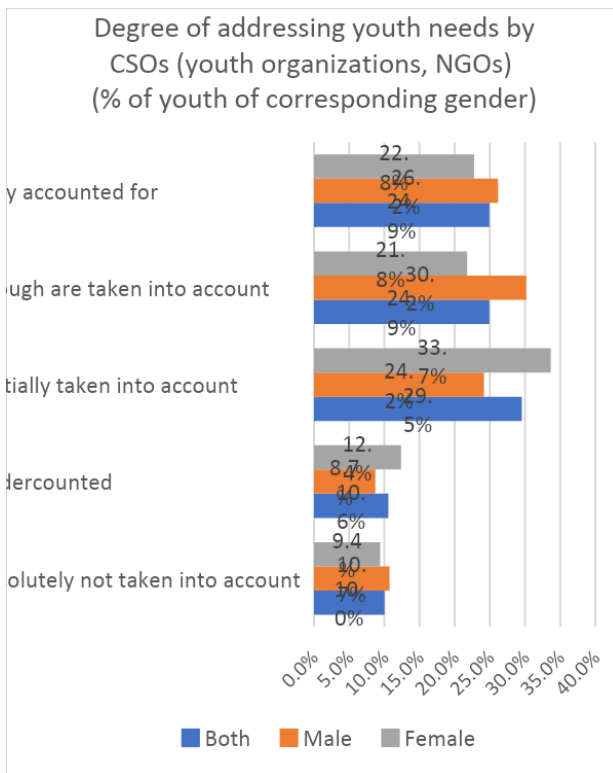
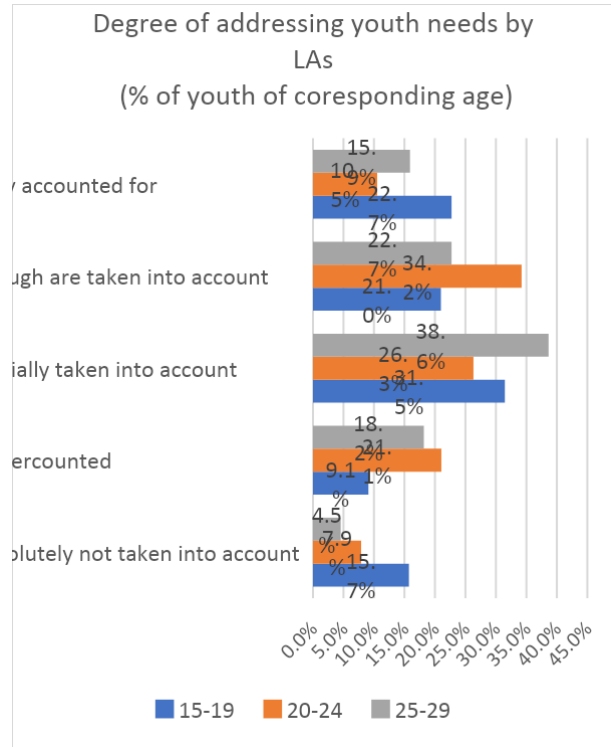
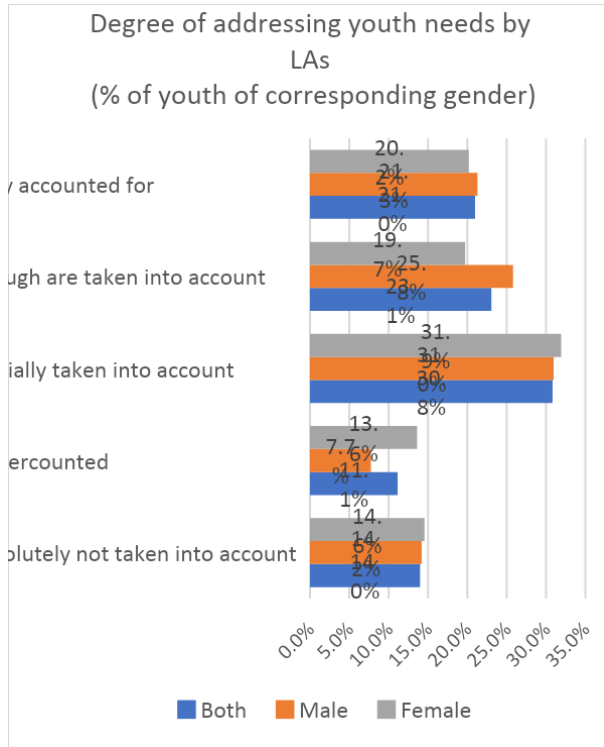
“We carry out our activities in accordance with certain government programs or our own work plan. But as a result of the project, it became clear to us that the activities of NGOs are much more effective if the problems of youth are studied and solved on their own initiative. In the further organization of projects, competitions or any programs it will be much more effective to receive information about the interests of young people from different regions through questionnaires.”

- a regional department of Agency for Youth Affairs

Youth demonstrate a positive attitude towards youth-oriented social services in target communities. Youth in target communities are generally satisfied about the services they seek and their quality. According to survey results, 69 percent of youth surveyed in target communities are satisfied with the quality of services provided, 17 percent are neutral and 14 percent are dissatisfied. Sixty one percent of the surveyed youth are satisfied with services they seek from local governments, 22 percent are neutral and 16 percent are not satisfied.



Youth needs are addressed enough by local authorities and civil society organizations, yet there are some differences between gender and age groups. Forty four percent of youth in target communities stated that their needs were either fully accounted for or accounted for by local authorities, yet 32 percent indicated that their needs were addressed partially. The satisfaction of males is on average 3.6 percentage points higher compared to females. Among age groups, the lowest satisfaction was observed among respondents aged 25-29 years. Regarding services provided by civil society organizations, these figures are slightly greater: 50 percent consider their needs enough or fully accounted for and satisfaction is on average 5.9 percentage points greater among males. Satisfaction with services provided by civil society organizations is highest for respondents of age 20-24.



“Local authorities changed their attitudes towards youth problems due to project activities”

- a recipient of a mini grant

“I myself was an ordinary worker at school. To be honest, after the launch of my project, my social activity increased. Both khokims and their deputies watched our project and drew conclusions. Because we cooperated closely, I was offered a leading position in the Youth Union. I work with young people and address their problems directly to the khokimiyat.

Mahalla Navoi is not particularly well known even in our region among the other 704 mahallas in the Asaka region, everyone is confused with the region and city of the same name. But with the launch of the project, many began to learn about our mahalla. And after our youth began to realize their talents, the khakim himself began to monitor the situation in our mahalla, began to communicate with the project participants, to find out their opinion.”

- a recipient of a mini grant

The project helped improve the trust and collaboration between local authorities and youth.

Before the project implementation, lack of trust was common between project actors due to low awareness and lack of cooperation. According to the implementing partner, local authorities were cautious at the very beginning of the project to work with NGOs that are collaborating with international organizations. Young people in target mahallas were not ready to apply to mahalla committees, Khokimiyat, or Agency on Youth Affairs to solve their issues mostly because they were not aware of their existence and/or their functions. Although youth issues have been put on the agenda by the central government, insufficient attention has been given at the local level. Implementing partners and NGOs noted that local authorities improved their attitudes towards youth-led initiatives for several reasons. First, the project demonstrated youth's strong potential to contribute to society. As project grantees worked closely with local authorities, their responsibility and commitment assured trust of mahalla committees, Khokimiyat, Agency for Youth Affairs and other related organizations. Second, as noted by implementation partners and project grantees, some mini-grants achieved attention from high-level authorities (Khokimiyat, Ministries) and even from the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This increased enthusiasm of local governments in social projects in general and in projects led by youth. Project grantees explained that local authorities are more willing to cooperate with them and more attentive to their grievances. One of them said that before the Yoshstan initiative, residents did not consider visits of Khokimiyat representatives as an opportunity to solve their issues which has changed due to improved relationship between residents and Khokimiyat.

"After the launch of the Yoshstan project, the khokimiyat authorities paid attention to us and provided us with comprehensive assistance - provided premises, financial and administrative support. But before that period, there was no help."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

"For so many years, I have never seen Khokim of Andijan region, but when the project implementation started, I met and talked with him many times."

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

"Local authorities have become more attentive to the problems of young people, especially the vulnerable ones. Although earlier attention was riveted to them, but not enough, and after the project implementation, they began to focus on youth."

- NGO representative.

The project improved the social environment in the communities for youth participation through establishing youth CSOs under the mini-grants. Project grantees consider that the lives of young people in their communities were improved due to Yoshstan's activities and mini-grants, in particular. Each of them stated that mini-grants supported their mahallas in many ways. Their projects contributed to overall community development by providing services and solving current issues. Most importantly, grantees made significant efforts to cover youth from low-income families, who could not afford paid courses. Various training were conducted for youth in the communities, including those from low-income families, which contributed to greater social cohesion and ensured inclusion of the vulnerable youth. Mini-grants provided the most vulnerable youth with the opportunity to obtain skills and knowledge for future professions and built their interests and ground for future plans. As one of them explained, those children were in difficult conditions which prevented their learning and future employment. Participation in mini-grants provided them with desire and motivation as well as leadership qualities to do something themselves. Another grantee stated that business courses initiated in his community gave a strong impetus for youth by providing them with basic skills for future education. As a result, some of them (12 out of 36) continue their education in various directions.

"...young people have the opportunity to make a decision and to get a job now."

"We have created equal conditions for all youth, both from low-income families and families living in abundance. By providing them with equal conditions, we believe that in the future, this will help them join society equally."

"The priority was youth, who were fond of languages, but their financial situation did not allow this. We put a lot of emphasis on family income to cover youth in need. 70 percent of our students are those from such families."

At the same time, youth get involved in decision-making processes as a result of project intervention. Closer cooperation with representatives of local governments and other organizations enabled networking, which improved lives of project-grantees in many ways. During developing their social projects, grantees were actively involved in contributing to their communities and established many new contacts. In result, some of them received job offers from local authorities. For example, one of them (a hairdressing project) was appointed as principal of a school in his mahalla. Another grantee stated that she was transferred to teach in school in her mahalla and she was invited to work in mahalla committee (a sewing-shop project). During the project lifespan, a Presidential decree was adopted on the creation of the position of "Youth Leader" at mahallas. In one of target communities, representatives of mahalla committee proposed the candidacy of the Yoshstan's project grantee for this post (business skills training project), where he still works.

"Now, in the position of Youth Leader, I have the opportunity to directly support our youth. My competence includes the provision of 13 types of support for young people, including the provision of social protection, assistance in purchasing housing, and so on. All this became possible thanks to the Yoshstan project."

- Mini-grant recipient

Project intervention addressed cultural stereotypes against youth, especially girls, engagement in sports and other extra curricular activities in a soft manner. Some youth-initiated CSO were directly targeted female employment and education while others addressed cultural issues which hindered their activities. One grant recipient explained that parents did not allow their children to come to football training after school because children usually helped their parents in fields or with other family income-related activities. He requested a psychologist to talk to his parents about the benefits of participating in sports for young males and attendance rates increased. The project raised gender issues by providing society with positive role models of educated girls contributing to their communities and helping other young girls. Due to long-established customs, young girls are not allowed to visit cities, other communities or districts alone, which means they could not study anywhere but schools in their mahallas. Project improved the lives of young females by providing them with opportunities for learning, employment and networking. After finishing school, girls stay at home, do not continue education or work. As the grant-recipient explains, before Yoshstan, she mostly stayed at home and felt isolated from society. The project significantly changed this aspect as she received a grant (sewing-shop project) and became more active in her community. This also changed the opinions of adults. As the implementing partner noted, one female project grantee was criticized by elder population for non-traditional behavior (being not married, wearing short hair and jeans). However, during project life-span she taught English to children in her mahalla, which changed the minds of people about her. Moreover, the President

of the Republic during his visit to Asaka district visited a youth CSO initiated by a project-grantee - a young female, which created a new role model of a young girl who was involved in community life besides her family duties.

“When you sit in one place, development is far behind those who spend their time with society. This part of my life upset me. But as the project entered my life, it was filled with colors and positive chores. Everyone began to take advice from me and looked with admiration.”

“Before, my girls thought that they would not achieve anything in life, but now each of them has their own set goals and at the moment they are firmly moving towards them.”

- females grant recipients

Youth improved skills and knowledge for further strengthening youth led services. As noted by respondents, project-grantees obtained skills required for continuation of their activities including soft and technical skills, motivation and self-confidence. Technical skills mentioned by respondents include record keeping, accounting and basic financial skills (opening a bank account, taking a loan). Project-grantees were taught to prepare project and financial proposals. Interpersonal and communication skills commonly mentioned. Grantees learned to communicate with children, their parents and authorities. Some of them emphasized leadership skills, which helped them to manage people. Finally, the implementing partner explained that most of her wards could not express their thoughts properly because of shyness and lack of self-confidence. Project-grantees also state that they gained motivation from their trainers and purposefulness (implementing partner representatives, local authorities and trainers). Joint training with Jashstan participants allowed experience exchange and networking among youth.

“During this project, I learned to evaluate my strength and believe in myself. I used to think that people with higher education are capable of doing such things and all doors are open to them. I realized that it was not about a diploma or education, but about believing in yourself and hard work. Each person can be independent, for this you need to work a little. Before, I didn’t even know how to interpret my opinions, but now I can express them out loud.”

– a recipient of a mini-grant.

At the same time, youth CSOs’ participants’ achievements are also impressive. Project grantees shared the success of their wards. They note that interest aroused among youth in their communities to start similar activities. They seek education and employment opportunities and wish to realize their own ideas in similar projects. School children were mostly involved in activities of youth-initiated CSOs. During mini-grants’ lifespan, some of them

succeed significantly. For instance, between spring-summer, some students improved their English and participated in school and district contests, while others even entered language universities. Another grantee (IT and programming skills training project) shared that his student started a business – called “Services Desk”, where people can apply for print and copy services as well as to order invitation cards for weddings and other events. 4-5 participants of the football-training mini-grant entered the Republican sport academy. Young females from sewing-shop projects purchased their own sewing machines and started to take orders from their friends and neighbors. A leader of another mini-grant, aimed at developing business skills, explained that participation in the project activities motivated them to obtain higher education. Three students entered universities in Fergana, one – in Poland and another girl entered a local college.

“At the beginning of the project they had no plans to study at the university, but they appeared after the end of the project in the fall. We noticed a strong increase in the social activity of all participants, they are looking for their calling and purpose in life, which was greatly facilitated by the project”. The #Yoshtan project has had a huge impact on young people. Our success has become a motivation for my friends of the same age.”

-mini-grant recipient, currently a Youth Leader

Active youth seek opportunities to continue their projects. Some projects were transferred to businesses. Project grantees shared their plans regarding their projects. For example, sewing training was transferred to a sewing-shop with six young females involved (including the grantee) in production of children's clothes for the local market. Another grantee explained that she plans to open language training centers (English, Korean and Arabic) in her mahalla and she seeks sponsorship to pay for the rent. A hairdressing and sewing courses mini-grant’s leaders seek for preferential loans or subsidies to continue their projects. Another grantee plans to establish his own business school. Income-bearing features are preferential, yet respondents express their interests towards social projects and wish to restart their training courses.

Sustainability

Project exit strategy was based on the idea of creation of the #Yoshstan community. Based on the experience of the Jashstan project in Kyrgyzstan, project staff aimed to create a project community followed by participants' self-identification of being a part of #Yoshstan. Identification strategy was the same as in Jashstan, generally suggesting that being a part of Yoshstan community means that oneself is able to take action and contribute to the community. For this purpose, two large-scale events were organized during the project lifespan. One of them was conducted in Osh region together with #Jashstan participants aimed to establish connections between youth of two republics for their further cooperation and experience-exchange. Such cooperation should be based on a sense of commitment to common ideas. The very last project activity was the first Volunteer Festival within the framework of the project "Yoshstan - increasing the role of youth in decision-making at the local level". The event took place in Tashkent and included educational conferences, video contests, fairs, and meetings with influencers. Besides large-scale events, some elements of branding and promotion were applied (e.g., sweatshirts, notepads and pens with Yoshstan logo, Facebook account). Such measures lived up to their expectations as project-grantees demonstrated their pride in participating in the project and being a part of Yoshstan initiative.

Project's long-term positive effects include infrastructural development, human development, employment rate increase and peacebuilding. Project grantees initially proposed infrastructural, rather than social projects that were aimed to improve urgent issues of their communities. After the project's active phase was finished, several projects were transformed to businesses. As youth actively aim to improve their financial condition, project participants may use their skills and knowledge to continue their activity, but initiate income-oriented infrastructure projects (e.g., paid training courses, private kindergartens, sewing-shops, hairdressing salons and etc.). Project participants share their experience, knowledge and skills with their fellows. As a result, youth will have more employment opportunities, which ensure tranquility and peace.

Project's sustainability potential is mainly formed by motivated youth and their actions. Currently, youth is the main driving force of project sustainability. The project provided strong motivation for youth and increased their activity. Grant recipients propose to conduct training with guest specialists from other regions, Tashkent and Kyrgyz Republic. As noted by project staff members, grant recipients possess strong capacity to sustain their own results and successes. Project grantees shared their plans to assure sustainability of the projects that they initiated under the aegis of Yoshstan. They employ obtained knowledge and tools to apply for other projects or transform their project into business initiatives.

Collective initiatives possess stronger potential of sustainability. Infrastructure-oriented mini-projects possess stronger potential for sustainability mostly because collective effort was made for their establishments. For example, a kindergarten was initiated by grantees and largely supported by local governments, who facilitated obtaining permits and provided facilities, as well as by the community, which helped to conduct construction works and

renovate the premises. Moreover, mini-projects with several active participants, who “actively replicate their ideas” are the most sustainable, compared to persona-centered initiatives. For instance, some project-grantees highlighted by higher-level authorities do not continue their initiatives and their activity decreases rapidly due to life circumstances (marriage, moving).

Other key actors, except youth, do not take responsibility for sustaining project results, yet they favor project extension. Up to date, local authorities neither do not take action for supporting project’s results nor adopt any of project activities as their practice on a regular basis. At the same time, local authorities are enthusiastic about a similar project or Yoshtan extension. There are no specific initiatives from youth-oriented organizations and NGOs, yet they advocate for project continuation. As noted by respondents, Search and NGO Association concluded a memorandum of cooperation and if the project continues, the organization will become the main implementing partner, responsible for coordination of NGOs across all regions to support project initiatives.

Although improved, the relationship between youth and local authorities still remains ceremonial. The project made a significant contribution into establishing relationships between youth and local authorities. At the same time, it also improved youth self-confidence and capacities to communicate with local governments, which is a vital barrier for their cooperation. However, as noted by project staff members, emergence of these relations is still ceremonial, which impeded their further interaction and raising youth voices. Moreover, there is a lack of cooperation mechanisms between youth and government agencies. Youth in target communities require guidance and mentorship and local authorities do not possess enough resources for this. In this sense, a new-created position of Youth Leaders in each community is a rather relevant measure, yet its effectiveness should be examined further. Up to date, one of the Yoshtan’s project-grantees work as Youth Leader in his mahalla and engaged in agitation of youth on volunteering, social activity.

Lessons learned and good practices

This section discusses the challenges during project implementation, based on which lessons were derived. Lessons learned provided a ground for improvements and proposing good practices. Because it was the first Uzbekistan-based project for Search's team and also because Search was not officially registered in Uzbekistan, the team faced many administrative challenges and barriers on early stages as well as during the project lifespan implementation issues arised and required significant attention of the project staff. Besides administrative and organizational issues, a few issues arise during implementation of some activities.

Activity: Initial stages of project implementation.

Challenge: Low activity of NGOs in the country and Andijan region in particular impeded the choice of experienced and reputable implementing partners. Only four NGOs registered in the region. Despite being inactive for several years, the most credible was Hamroh, who was selected by Search's team.

Lesson learned: When implementing a project without an official donor's registration in the country, the choice of implementing partner is crucial.

Plan improvement: To conduct a market assessment to identify the potential implementing partners.

Good practice: Search's team aimed to sustain their position in the country by establishing long-term partnership with the National Association of Non-Governmental Non-Commercial Organizations of Uzbekistan for further project's scaling.

Activity: Overall project implementation.

Challenge: First two years of project implementation dedicated to systematize working processes and establish a partnership base with local authorities and to understand the procedure of cooperation between international organizations and government.

Lesson learned: For an Uzbekistan-based project, 2 years duration was not enough.

Plan improvement: Increase duration of Uzbekistan-based projects.

Good practice: Search's aimed to obtain official certification in the country for future longer-term projects.

Activity: Overall project implementation.

Challenge: In Andijan region and Asaka district in particular, the working processes of different suppliers is underdeveloped compared to the capital which impedes overall project implementation.

Lesson learned: Document and regulate the working processes.

Plan improvement: Develop various templates with strict guidelines and explanations to facilitate all workflows.

Good practice: While working with youth participants, Search organized additional training and employed various templates. Such an approach is applicable when working with suppliers.

Activity: Dealing with local authorities during project implementation.

Challenge: In Andijan region and Asaka region in particular international initiatives are not common and local authorities possess little experience on working with donors and NGOs. This exacerbated their already existing excessive attentiveness to bureaucratic procedures. As a result, project activities required many permits which became an impeding factor for the launch of project activities.

Lesson learned: It is important to understand the level of attention of local authorities to the activities of international organizations.

Plan improvement: To consult with other donors, who implement similar projects in the target area about the approximate duration of bureaucratic procedures.

Good practice: Search's team aimed to sustain their position in the country by obtaining official certification and establishing long-term partnerships with reliable national partners.

Activity: Under the mini-grants, youth participants organized different trainings and clubs to involve vulnerable youth from their communities.

Challenge: Project-grantees faced low attendance rates because of social foundations that require children to help their parents in family businesses after school. Gender stereotypes required attention as well.

Lesson learned: Cultural barriers and social stereotypes may become significant barriers to the involvement of target population groups and achievement of project goals and objectives.

Plan improvement: Conduct preliminary research on existing social and cultural attitudes which may be applicable to the target population during the project implementation.

Good practice: Project grantees conducted introductory sessions on benefits of participation in project activities led by local mentors (e.g., psychologists, businessmen, religious leaders etc.) with community participants (youth, their families, active community leaders).

Activity: Various events with members of international organizations involved.

Challenge: Cultural context interrupts project activities. Locals organize a meeting of guests according to their customs which takes time for the project staff and distracts the working atmosphere.

Lesson learned: It is important to understand the local context regarding perception of international organizations before organizing any activities.

Plan improvement: Inform implementing partners about strict timeframes allocated for project activities and representatives of local authorities.

Good practice: Search's team had overwhelming experience in working with rural communities of Kyrgyz Republic which have similar cultural background compared to Uzbekistan.

Activity: Completion of written forms for mini-grants proposals submission by project participants.

Challenge: Participants could not fill the forms because of low writing skills and lack of understanding of social projects.

Lesson learned: It is important to understand the skills of participants when requiring any submission forms.

Plan improvement: Conduct a small focus group discussion with active community members of the same cohort to understand their skills' level.

Good practice: Search's team conducted additional training sessions (one-day makeathon) to assure participants' understanding of the idea of social-oriented projects, help to formulate their ideas and submit their proposal forms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The project represented the transnational extension of “#Jashstan: Youth as Agents of Peace and Stability in Kyrgyzstan” project, which was successfully implemented by the Search in Kyrgyz Republic. The main difference between the two projects was that the peacebuilding component of Yoshstan was based on ensuring youth inclusion in the decision-making process, rather than reducing community-based conflict and radicalization of youth.

Successful implementation of Jashstan project in Kyrgyz Republic provided the Search's team with strong ground to implement the project in Uzbekistan. The project staff adapted successful practices of the Jashstan project to Yoshstan's theory of change and thereby developed a suitable Uzbekistan approach.

#Yoshstan in Uzbekistan involved youth in two town-hall meetings with representatives of local authorities and youth-oriented NGOs to increase their awareness about existing services and policies for youth. Two rounds of town-hall meetings involved 711 participants including youth from target communities, representatives of mahalla and local authorities, and selected NGO representatives. A kick-off event and two rounds of one-day training were organized to equip youth representatives with the basic skills in project design, and budgeting so that they could draft proposals for mini-action grants. 12 action grants were provided to young people to enhance their civic engagement in community development and socially-oriented entrepreneurship. Similarly, action grants covered 374 young people in 7 target mahallas.

The evaluation results suggest general success of the Yoshstan initiative in Uzbekistan in terms of the project's theory of change and objectives. The project implementation was relevant considering youth vulnerability and grievances. Youth in Andijan region and Asaka district encountered financial issues, unemployment, impeded access to education, and limited training (hobby clubs, courses for extra classes) opportunities. In this sense, mini-grants initiative was both relevant and effective for participants and grant-recipients. Under the project's mini-grants, youth from target communities were provided with opportunities to participate in various training courses and clubs and active youth had the chance to realize their ideas and to contribute to their communities. Project activities successfully initiated cooperation between local authorities and youth CSOs by facilitating their relationship through town-hall meetings and mini-grants. Youth participants highlighted the improved attitudes of local authorities towards their needs and their support during the project lifespan and as result enhanced trust towards local authorities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations may be applicable:

1. **Apply mini-grants activity for active youth members when scaling the project or introduce other youth-oriented projects.** Under the Yoshstan activity framework, mini-grants initiatives were effective in stimulating youth engagement as it provided active youth with opportunity and financial means to realize their ideas and to solve community's issues. As final evaluation findings demonstrated, youth initiated CSOs were aimed at common community issues such as absence of kindergartens, training and education centers and lack of services for community population. Youth intentions and motivations, followed by aspirations to improve their lives, were supported by community members, who actually shared similar needs and lack of financial resources, which made mini-grants even more relevant. At the same time, the effectiveness of the activity is mostly explained by the activeness of youth participants. Thus, further projects highly recommended to apply a similar approach when working with youth in Uzbekistan.
2. **Encourage collective, rather than individual action.** Final evaluation revealed that sustainability of the project mostly depends on the collective youth actions and established partnership with local authorities. Higher sustainability potential possessed by collective projects with several active youth participants and in close collaboration with local governments, rather than individual projects, the future of which largely depends on the life circumstances of the project-grantee. Projects with greater community involvement also encourage sustainability. Based on this finding, it is recommended to allocate mini-grants among several recipients engaged in one project and to stimulate their collaboration with local authorities.
3. **Soft intervention tackling stereotypes welcomed.** Yoshstan's approach softly touched existing gender stereotypes by providing the community with new role models of educated young females contributing to her community versus young females concentrated on creating and supporting a family only. This was done by engaging capable and active young females into the projects. Moreover, the project addressed established stereotypes regarding after-school activities for youth by conducting sessions with community members (youth and their family) and reputable community members (activists, leaders, psychologists). Such an approach is recommended for future youth-oriented projects.
4. **More collaborative trainings and joint activities between youth and LAs.** Final evaluation findings demonstrated that the project successfully initiated collaboration between youth and LAs by organizing joint-training, town-hall meetings and close cooperation in mini-grants activity. The used approach introduced representatives of local authorities to youth and allowed youth to speak about their issues and suggestions. However, their relationship remained rather ceremonial. Future initiatives recommended to design more activities aimed at direct collaboration between youth

and representatives of local authorities. This could include training, workshops, joint-projects, internships, etc.

5. **Launch long-term projects in Uzbekistan.** Attention of donor organizations is new to Uzbekistan and the Andijan region in particular. That is why project implementation there is impeded by the scrutiny of government bodies, various regulations, permits and bureaucratic procedures. Because of existing challenges in working in Uzbekistan, it is recommended to launch projects of longer-term. In particular, 5-years projects are suggested. This duration is considered enough to get through required bureaucratic procedures, establish partnerships with local authorities, launch and implement the project.
6. **Project scaling.** Respondents favored project scaling mainly in two ways: geographic and contextual. The former implies project implementation in other communities, districts and regions, while the latter is about expanding the areas of mini-grants by including other in-demand knowledge-intensive spheres such as finance, social management economics and law.
7. **Regulate and document all workflows.** Because of lack of experience in cooperating with international donor organizations, local partners including project's participants are not aware about the standards of paperwork. It is recommended by the project staff to develop various templates with strict guidelines and explanations to facilitate all workflows.
8. **Conduct preliminary research on population cohorts similar to target population.** Although the project's team was experienced in working in Central Asia as well as possessed experience in working in Kyrgyz Republic Osh region, which shares similar cultural and social background with Andijan region, some peculiarities arised and challenged project implementation on different stages. First, it appears that the Russian language is not that widely used in the Andijan region compared to Tashkent and Kyrgyz Republic. This created difficulties for the project's team when visiting target communities and as well as when hiring staff. Second, it appeared that the target youth population did not possess enough skills to submit project proposals which delayed this activity due to the need for additional training. Moreover, the target youth population was subject to gender and age stereotypes: young females supposed to care about their families and young people should help their parents in family business. Thus, it is recommended to conduct preliminary research on the target population cohort to understand their skills' level and existing social and cultural attitudes which may be applicable to them during the project implementation.

Annex 1. Project impact and outcome indicators

Indicators	Question	Value	
Indicator O1.1. % of youth surveyed who are satisfied with the quality of youth-oriented social services in the targeted area	How satisfied are you with the quality of youth services in your mahalla?	Satisfied Completely satisfied	39.8% 29.5%
Indicator O1.2. % of youth surveyed who say that they have been invited to local decision-making mechanisms at least once in the last one year.	Have you been invited to or participated in general meetings with representatives of local authorities, youth organizations and NGOs at least once in the last year?	Yes	43%
Indicator O2.1. # of LA and Youth CSOs representatives who self-evaluated themselves as more capacitated on strengthening of youth policies as a result of project intervention	Do you feel more empowered to strengthen youth policies because of project intervention? Why?	-	14 persons
Indicator O2.2. % of youth reported that their needs are well addressed by LG in the targeted area (Disaggregated by age and gender)	In your opinion, how are your needs addressed by local authorities (khokimiyat, ministries or public state institutions) in your mahalla?	Addressed enough (overall) - Males 25.8% - Females 19.7% - 15-19 years 21.0% - 20-24 years 34.2% - 25-29 years 22.7% Fully addressed (overall) - Males 21.3% - Females 20.2% - 15-19 years 22.7% - 20-24 years 10.5%	23.1% 25.8% 19.7% 21.0% 34.2% 22.7% 21% 21.3% 20.2% 22.7% 10.5%

