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Abstract

According to Agenda 2030, partnerships among sectoral stakeholders have an important and instrumental role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In fact, the lack of participation of actors is identified to be the biggest challenge in achieving the SDGs. Within educational policy, it is especially important for Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as it significantly depends on the success of multistakeholder cooperation, in which international development organisations (IOs) are increasingly attaining their own stake and importance.

This study explores how IO employees navigate their relationships with other TVET stakeholders in five Central Asian countries. John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model (1995) is employed to analyse in which cases TVET as an educational public policy receives attention and funding from stakeholders and how in other cases it is being neglected.

From semi-structured interviews with 17 IO employees, it has been revealed that the main stakeholders in all five countries are state ministries responsible for TVET, but not in all countries these ministries are the driving forces of TVET development. According to Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model (1995), the problem stream can be applied on Uzbekistan's high population growth and Kazakhstan's social discontent about unemployment. These problems are putting TVET in a priority position in the agenda-setting. Whereas Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's low economic capacities together with failed political bodies are not allowing them to prioritise and pay due attention to TVET development which, in turn, is bringing larger contributions from IOs. Turkmenistan was described by participants as a country with a neutral political stance and difficult cooperation both with public and private stakeholders. Finally, the research respondents believe that for successful stakeholder relationships in Central Asia it is necessary to understand social and cultural structures, specific to the region, such as old clan/tribal or regional divisions. Due to differences in economic structures and current levels of TVET development, the participants explained that the idea of one regional TVET system is not possible in the region. Instead, they stressed the necessity to strengthen learning from each other and exchanging best practices.

List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DVV International	Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (English: German Adult Education Association)
ETF	European Training Foundation
GIZ	The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GmbH or GIZ in short (English: German Corporation for International Cooperation)
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the Agenda 2030, partnerships among sectoral stakeholders have an important and instrumental role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United Nations, 2015); in fact, the lack of participation of stakeholders is identified to be the biggest challenge in achieving the SDGs (Horan, 2022). Especially during the last two decades the cooperation among public, private, civic and non-governmental organisations became vital for sustainable development, and yet, the studies have been consistently reporting a lack of stakeholder participation across varied sectors (Horan, 2022; Pattberg et al., 2012; Riddell & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016; Utting & Zammit, 2009). Moreover, there is one subsector of education that is most dependent on the success of the multistakeholder cooperation in every country, and that is the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

TVET is considered to be an extremely attractive segment of education for economic advancement in developing countries (Okolie et al., 2020; Pavlova, 2014; Winch, 2013). That being said, countries of the Central Asian region have not made much progress in developing their TVET systems. Those are Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. As all five countries of the region are facing economic, social, and political challenges, the governments disregard and are unable to give due attention to professional education. To demonstrate, according to UNESCO's TVET statistics the highest participation of youth in TVET in five countries is in Uzbekistan, with only 23.2% of youth participating in vocational learning, while the lowest is in Kyrgyzstan with 5.8% (UNESCO TVET Country Profiles, 2021). The figures can be worse as the information on Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are missing from the database. By understanding the importance of the sector and the multistakeholder cooperation within it, I aim to explore how the employees of international organisations navigate their relationships with other stakeholders in the five Central Asian countries in order to achieve their own organisational goals for the development of TVET.

International Organisations (IOs), as an actor, are increasingly attaining their own stake, autonomy, and power while working in host countries (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Pevehouse et al., 2004). To do this, IO employees must build relationships and cooperate with multiple interested parties of the respective fields (Suzuki, 1998). Looking at the IO employees' navigation of stakeholder relationships, I became interested in how they build

and maintain their relationships with TVET partners in Central Asia, what challenges they overcome in doing so, what best practices they have learnt, how they look for and find stakeholders, how and whether they cooperate on regional level, and who they consider to be the drivers of TVET development in the region.

In order to delve into all those questions, first in this introductory Chapter (I) I will give brief information about the importance of multistakeholder cooperation for the TVET sector, followed by contextual description of the region and IO role in it, and end with a brief explanation of the aims of this research. Chapter (II) will delve into existing literature on IO staff perspectives, and the formation and current systems of TVET in Central Asia. The literature review will also cover the theoretical background through which one can understand TVET as a public policy being prioritised in one country and neglected in another. The third Chapter (III) will go through all aspects connected to research process, including methodological questions on interviews with participants, that is the employees of IOs within the TVET sector in Central Asia. The main Chapter (IV) will present the findings divided by subtopics. And finally, Chapter (V) will contain both the discussion of the findings as well as the concluding notes. Additionally, each chapter has an introduction (not titled) and summary for convenience.

Multistakeholder partnership in TVET

UNESCO (2018) defines TVET as “education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods and which is fully part of the lifelong learning continuum” (p. 1). Because of this direct connection to professional fields, TVET is a very important sector for developing countries due to their weak economies and in most cases weak labour markets. But at the same time TVET is also vital for job-seekers themselves because “TVET is first of all for the employment of the population which needs certain skills and knowledge to enter the labour market” (Fluitman, 1999). The system and schools would not be effective and relevant if they do not directly benefit the working population itself. Another important aspect of TVET is its possible effect on reducing social inequality, and for this reason countries struggling with economic and social class inequalities are especially interested in vocational training (Fluitman, 1999). Furthermore, once considered one of the most alternative pathways for young people to quickly acquire the knowledge and skills to enter the labour market, TVET is now losing its popularity in many countries (Towey et al., 2019). This tendency, in turn, puts pressure on states to reform and

improve their TVET systems so that they do not lose the interest of students in training and, consequently, the flow of specialists to their industries (Ng et al., 2016; Towey et al., 2019). But despite the importance and pressure, most developing countries neglect this sector, prioritising other areas of development over TVET (Fluitman, 1999).

Across countries there are several basic components to the effectiveness of a TVET system: qualification framework, competency standards, assessment and certification, accreditation of institutions, research and monitoring and, finally, the involvement of TVET stakeholders (Baraki & Kemenade, 2013). Fluitman (1999) argues that within this list of TVET implementation factors, the involvement of stakeholders is the key most important aspect for the success of the system. Referring to partnerships, the author states that only those countries which are determined to actively involve all the stakeholders from the beginning of establishing TVET and further into the reform processes, can successfully implement TVET provision (Fluitman, 1999). Robert Oxtoby (1993) states that the challenge of successful system of TVET is “not simply in terms of formulating appropriate objectives, but also in terms of locating provision within appropriate structures” (p.196). In a similar manner, a number of scholars place great emphasis on the importance of stakeholder cooperation for TVET. Here, the challenge is in finding, involving and distributing responsibilities among stakeholders in an effective way (Horan, 2022). The effectiveness in these cooperations is crucial because “partnership building is complex and costly, and the inclusion of non-relevant actors can undermine the effective running of a partnership” (Horan, 2022, p. 2). This task can become very difficult if these stakeholders' cooperations are not regulated or at least not facilitated by one actor in the group. It has been argued by many scholars that the state itself should be the regulating actor. Among the arguments for state-ownership for TVET are: that the private sectors might not be ready or willing to take on this responsibility (Chankseliani & Relly, 2015); that individual TVET providers might not consider social equality when recruiting and placing students (Fluitman, 1999); that individual private companies might not be interested as much as the state in the long- term development of the TVET system (Chankseliani & Relly, 2015); that there might be a conflict of interests in transferring ownership from the state to other actors (Chankseliani & Relly, 2015; Riddell & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016; Towey et al., 2019). Irrespective of who the regulators are in these multistakeholder groups, the whole issue of stakeholder relationships in TVET is not much discussed and researched. “Less attention has been devoted to developing analytic

frameworks and evidence-based tools aimed at enhancing collaborative approaches to integrated implementation” (Horan, 2022, pp. 1–2).

Context: TVET in Central Asia

In the introduction part, it is necessary to clarify what it is that I mean by Central Asia. When the territories were divided and the nations were formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, under the leadership of Moscow, these countries had already strong ties due to shared borders, culture, and linguistic similarities. All five post-Soviet countries Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan were already referred to as one region with different names as Middle Asia, Turkestan, Central Asia, etc. (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013; Roy, 2000). Oliver Roy (2000) says that the major criteria for border demarcation was the language, determining if there is a separate language within a territory then there must be a separate nation-state. "Since the Soviet system had decided that a nation was defined by the existence of a language... a precise condition had to be fulfilled: it had to accentuate the dialect differences between the populations of a single linguistic area - the nation was constructed on the basis of difference" (Roy, 2000, p. 75). So, each country has their own language, different state systems, and there is no one body uniting them all. However, “despite the differences in the developments of the five countries since independence, and arguably even during the Soviet period, they all shared a common history for over 70 years, and this common history continues to shape their social and political life” (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013, p. 2). Based on this common past, I look at all five countries to compare their TVET provisions but also to see the possibilities of one united regional TVET system - regionalisation of TVET. In the current systems, scholars identify Central Asian professional education in three levels: (1) higher education; (2) primary and secondary technical vocational education and training; and (3) informal training, especially in small businesses (Drummer et al., 2018). The structure and design of TVET is slightly different in each country, depending on the needs, previous provisions, and also on the preferences of countries.

The second important clarification to be made is what I mean by International Organisation (IO). Pevehouse and colleagues (2004) define IGO (International Governmental Organisation) as a formal structure with nation-states as members, and an official head entity such as a secretariat or headquarter administration. “The existence of a secretariat or permanent bureaucracy helps distinguish IGOs from ad hoc conferences” (Pevehouse et al.,

2004, p. 103). In this paper I will refer to both multinational organisations (with multiple member states) and bilateral agencies (comprising two states: donor and host countries) as general IO.

Research aim

TVET itself as a topic is not very well studied in comparison to primary, secondary, and higher education. Quite a lot of work on TVET is generally descriptive, and there is very little practical research examining specific parts of TVET. For example, Fluitman argues that even those countries devoted to TVET, with effective systems in place, do not have visible financial sources and channels; he calls it an ‘unexplored territory’ (1999, p. 58). “What the papers do demonstrate, however, is the diversity and complexity of TVET systems, the difficulty of being able to compare one system with another, and a continuing need for individual countries to explore relationships between TVET policies and labour market practices, preferably with reference to specific sectors” (Oxtoby, 1993, p. 199). Hence, it is evident that TVET has a lot of challenges, starting with structural and ending with political constraints, multistakeholder cooperation is only one of the problems. This paper recognizes the complexity of the system and the connection between issues; however, I will look only at one aspect - multistakeholder cooperation.

As stated by Horan (2021), Agenda 2030 only leaves 8 years for countries to achieve each SDG. And for that, both scholars and the UN are calling for coalitions of actors to harness each problem collaboratively (Horan, 2022). TVET is a sector which particularly requires this collaboration of stakeholders and especially in the regions where its provision is weak, such as Central Asia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore on how multistakeholder relationships are built and maintained by the employees of international organisations working in the TVET sector in Central Asia. Which brings me to the main question of this research on **how do employees of international organisations navigate their relationships with TVET stakeholders in Central Asia?** As multistakeholder partnership is a key to the success of TVET, this qualitative research aims to contribute to exploring the challenges and drivers of these cooperations by analysing the participants’ narratives on the navigation of their stakeholder relationships.

Summary

This chapter presents TVET, the importance of multistakeholder partnerships for an effective TVET delivery, the role of IOs in building these relationships, as well as a brief explanation of the regional context of Central Asia. Although there are a number of problems and challenges in TVET, the main objective of the study is the multistakeholder partnership in the TVET sector through the accounts of employees of IOs.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II illustrates the existing literature on TVET in Central Asia. For the main research question, which is how the staff of IOs navigate their relationships with the TVET stakeholders in this region, I outline discussions about the perspectives of IO staff when working in host countries. In the second half of the chapter, I reflect on the formation and development of TVET in the region as it directly influences the stakeholder cooperations and decision-making today. It is important to note, however, that the literature on education in Central Asia, let alone on a particular sphere of education, which is TVET, is very much limited as the region itself is extremely underexplored in academia. The review of literature ends with the chosen theoretical background for the study - Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model (1995). This framework is applied in order to conceptualise the findings on stakeholder cooperations in TVET as a public policy. Hence, Kingdon's model is used to explain the importance of TVET in agenda-setting in these countries and the reasons behind the prioritisation or neglect of this sector by various stakeholders.

IO employee perspectives

The concern that multistakeholder partnerships are lacking is very timely now within international organisations. Referring to this problem, David Horan proposes an SDG interactions-based framework "to help identify relevant actors to engage that can be used to harness more collaborative approaches to integrated implementation" (Horan, 2022, pp. 1–2). According to the framework, IO employees should comprehensively assess the participation of a broad group of stakeholders and identify missing partners referring to the other SDG actors (Horan, 2022). Abby Riddell and Miguel Nino-Zarazua (2016) also argue that regardless of the effectiveness of individual development projects, "their success can never make more than a partial and limited contribution to sustainable educational progress, given the complexity of reforming education systems and the need for all the different and diverse stakeholders in education to work together to achieve lasting change" (p. 29).

More and more scholars are interested in how and by which mechanisms international organisations influence and assist educational systems in developing countries (Dale, 1999; Schafer, 2006). In the course of my research, I found quite a lot of work describing, analyzing or critiquing the work of IOs and, strangely, very little literature on the perspectives and

visions of individual staff members themselves within those structures. And yet, there are accounts by some authors that employees' visions and perspectives may differ from the organisation for which they work, for example the differences of opinion between field staff and those in headquarters (Eschenbacher, 2012; Suzuki, 1998). In addition, it is important to understand the difficulty of working in the education development sector, as “educationalists have continually pointed out that it is far easier to show the impact of aid-supported health interventions [for example] than education ones: improvements in mortality rates are more visible in the short term than increased learning” (Riddell & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016, p. 24). And on top of all these, as has been noted, the lack of data makes it even more difficult for field staff to work in the region, which from a head office perspective may not be as visible, distorted, or understood at first hand.

Working in the development sector for several IOs in Central Asia, I also have faced constraints in finding credible data when it comes to state education provision. In this regard, many IOs themselves conduct the necessary research, needs assessment, and monitoring for their implemented projects. And indeed, when searching for current research data on the TVET systems of these countries, I most often came across work reports or operational needs assessments of IOs. After the pre-project assessment and analysis, the employees, depending on which IO they work for, implement the models or mechanisms chosen by their organisation. For example, the publication *Vocational Teacher Education in Central Asia* describes the German development partners activities in improving the implementation of TVET (Drummer et al., 2018). According to the authors, Germany’s “dual model” for TVET has gained high popularity among the policy makers of other countries, especially in 2008-09 due to the financial crisis (Drummer et al., 2018). But unlike Germany, some of the CA countries which are trying to apply the model to their systems are mostly doing it with a “top-down” approach because of the lack of effective partnerships between the governments and other non-public or private organisations (Drummer et al., 2018). Other international organisations in the region operate with the same logic - almost all have their own programs, methods, or special TVET curriculums that they try to integrate into local systems.

Formation and development of TVET in Central Asia

In 1958, a group of 70 comparative education scholars from the United States wanted to explore the educational system of the Soviet Union and visited the country, including the territories of what is now Central Asia (Bereday et al., 1961). In their subsequent report as a

result of this trip, they wrote that by the late 1950s “from an ambitious design of a universal, academically oriented secondary education, the Soviet system seemed to swing toward a concept of an extended and practical primary school followed by various forms of vocational apprenticeships or professional training” (Bereday et al., 1961, p. 3). Apprenticeship in one form or another certainly existed in these territories, as it did in any other region. But it was during this period of Moscow's leadership that the five countries studied in this paper, started to build a systematic provision of TVET for the local population. Beginning from the 1980s, the Soviet Union for the first time started sending 20 to 24-year-old young people from Central Asia to the northern regions of the country to study in vocational schools (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013). The idea was that these young people, most of whom were from financially deprived and rural areas, would get the necessary knowledge and training for certain skills and, hopefully, stay there and serve their homeland through their newly gained technical qualifications. Unlike early started initiatives like ‘Red Corners’ for informal learning and adult education policies, the migration policy via TVET did not yield the expected results, because youth did not want to go far to study, or they chose higher education, or even went but then returned to their homelands (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013).

Sevket Akyildiz and Richard Carlson in their work “Soviet Legacy” (2013) explain the failure of the systems of apprenticeships in the Soviet Union by three factors: migrated youth not knowing Russian (well enough), by the centralised form of governing, and also by the perception of the population towards TVET which was less popular than higher education degrees. The authors also refer to certain beliefs that “in the Soviet territory of contemporary Uzbekistan, refusing to engage in technical-vocational training was a form of passive resistance of the population towards the strands of the regime fostering patriotic duties and ‘student inter-republic migration’” (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013, p. 23). Bereday and colleagues (1961) explain the Soviet education system by the main characteristics: 1) it was a planned system, and 2) it was a mass system. Referring to TVET provision, authors also saw ‘polytechnication’ as a mass-education phenomenon. According to the authors, for the Soviet policy makers one of the critical challenges of mass education was to bring the necessary amount of youth to immediate skills training whereas the youth wanted to go to university instead (Bereday et al., 1961). This was also exacerbated by the Bolsheviks’ initial aim to achieve equal socio-economic development throughout the country (Grogan, 2021). Scholars argue that although this goal of social mobility and positive discrimination policy has been partially achieved by the Soviet administration, there was a problematic aspect of

employment by ethnicity (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013). “Up to the 1980s, Central Asians preferred agriculture, the service sector and private trade, while the Russians monopolised technical, transport, academic and senior management jobs” (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013, p. 25). The problem was that those expert positions were vacated during the mass resettlement of Russians and other populations of Slavic origin from Central Asia (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013; Drummer et al., 2018; Grogan, 2021). “Until today, a great share of Central Asian VET teachers [for example] as well as university teaching staff had gained their professional and teaching skills during the Soviet era” (Drummer et al., 2018, p. 18). Another important problem which also remained as a legacy of the Soviet system was that in the centralised system the entire industry belonged to the state. In addition, “while, in the Soviet Union, internships and practical training in state-owned companies were a crucial aspect of every student and apprentice, however, private companies nowadays are not systematically and sufficiently involved in VET” (Drummer et al., 2018). By training young people in certain skills, it was easy for the administration to place people in certain jobs, whereas in today's Central Asian countries, not all states have this option.

Current TVET systems as part of Soviet legacy

“Even two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are still some distinctive features of its educational system in place, despite sometimes ambitious attempts for reforms in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan” (Drummer et al., 2018, p. 48). In *Insights from Ethiopia's Reform* Baraki and Kemenade (2013) argue that in most post-colonial countries more often than not TVET systems remain the same as they were built by their colonisers. These scholars drew the conclusion through the experience of African countries, where Ethiopia, not being a post-colonial country, has a very different TVET system from its neighbouring countries. Due to its history all the African countries up until today follow the TVET systems either structured by French or English colonisers, whereas Ethiopia, staying independent, managed to capture the best practices from all over the world and did not stick to one type of system (Baraki & Kemenade, 2013). Reflecting on the available literature on the overall education systems of Central Asian countries, I hypothesise that the legacy of the systems structured by Soviets is still present in today's independent states, including their TVET provision. Consequently, the challenges and problems left from the Soviet system such as seasonal work, migration, and lack of certain experts might potentially be the challenges in cooperation with stakeholders that the

participants of this research reveal. For instance, in Uzbekistan still one third of the population is calculated to be engaged in seasonal labour migration (Grogan, 2021).

In addition to all the problems left as a legacy of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries received with independence a host of other issues, such as civil wars, ethnic conflicts, economic hardship, to name a few. To demonstrate with a vivid example, Tajikistan's economic subsidies due to the civil war in 1992-96 were already half the country's GDP (Scarborough, 2013). While struggling with such difficulties, most Central Asian countries cannot devote enough time and budget to their educational systems. As a result, the quality of public education is quite poor. Again, one demonstration is Kyrgyzstan being ranked last in PISA worldwide, twice in a row. In most developing countries and countries in transition, because of the obvious reasons of other urgent needs of the population, TVET is especially known to be among the first to suffer (Fluitman, 1999). In this case, international donor agencies, either by borrowing or by generously contributing to global aid and development, provide these countries with finances and/or expertise for the development of this forgotten area of education (Fluitman, 1999).

Theoretical background: Kingdon's multiple streams approach

John Kingdon, in his book "Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies " (1984, 1995), provides the concept of agenda-setting, in which he tries to explain how some public policies gain attention and action from stakeholders while other public issues remain unresolved, so how public policy priorities are made. According to the author, the agenda and his perception of it "is the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time" (Kingdon, 1995, p. 3). In this study I analyse the findings from five countries using Kingdon's model in prioritising TVET policy. Through the stories of participants about how and with whom they cooperate to implement TVET goals, I look at the countries' TVET policies, implementation, reforms, and driving forces in order to analyse the reasons for stakeholder engagement in TVET sector.

Kingdon's model shows that the prioritisation of policies or certain public issues is the result of three factors: the problem stream, the policies stream, and the process stream. The problem stream can equally be one pressing problem or the number of problems pressuring the decision-makers in the country to act upon. The second factor, called policies stream, is

explained by the author as “a process of gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among the specialists in a given policy area, and the generation of policy proposals by such specialists” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 17). According to Kingdon, such accumulation can result in gaining the attention of decision-makers if the so-called policy community keeps talking, writing, billing, and lobbying about the issue. Finally, the third stream is purely the political events happening in the government itself, like a change of the leader, revolutions or other events connected to political coalitions, etc. There can be intersections between these streams, which would then be the most likely moments that a particular policy will get the attention of those who make the decisions, these intersections are called “windows of opportunity” (Kingdon, 1995).

Although Kingdon published his book analysing the public policy of the United States, this model has been used for many other countries and for various sectors of public policy, including education policy (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Cairney & Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; King, 1985; Young et al., 2010). I believe in its applicability to Central Asian governments as well because the model primarily tries to “understand public policy at the system level, modelling context to understand specific policy decisions” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 1). Through interviews and stories of participants my aim is to understand their interaction and their subjective stories about their stakeholder cooperations. And through the application of Kingdon's model on the streams, I want to comprehend the reasons behind the current situation in the development of TVET in each country, to understand where and why TVET as a sub-sector of education receives attention, money, and development, and from which stakeholders.

Summary

The review of available literature outlined the context of the region along with the TVET systems of Central Asian countries, their current problems related to the sector, and also the discussion on IO staff perspectives working in host countries. Overall, the current TVET systems of the Central Asian countries suffer from both the legacy of the previous Soviet system and the new problems that have arisen since independence. This chapter also described the chosen theoretical framework, Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model, in order to conceptualize the data obtained through interviews with research participants. This was done in the aim of identifying common patterns among all themes that exist in stakeholder cooperation and relationship building with partners

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the chosen methodology, the process of recruiting and selecting participants, the process of conducting interviews, the analysis of data. It also addresses the questions of rigour and ethics of the study.

Qualitative method

Any research, such as that presented here, should apply the methodology which best suits and satisfies the research question and research aims (Rickinson, 2005; White, 2013). And, since the main purpose of this work is to learn and understand the multistakeholder cooperation in Central Asian TVET systems from the perspectives of IO employees, it was decided to use the qualitative approach. I agree with the argument of Jody Miller and Barry Glassner (2021) that qualitative studies via interviews can help to discover social realities, where the gathered data is not only about 'what happens' but also about how these people give meaning and explanations to these events, define their roles in these processes, and evaluate their experiences. Data gathered via interviews, therefore, is knowledge “constructed in a social context and is then internalised and used by individuals subjectively” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 125)

A number of other qualitative studies have been conducted to investigate stakeholder relationships in education using interviews (Gali & Schechter, 2021; Kolleck, 2019; Tristão & Tristão, 2016). From that literature researching stakeholder relationships, mine was mostly inspired by the study of Yarden Gali and Chen Schechter (2021) on Israeli policymakers' perspectives towards NGOs in education. I was fascinated by how, through individuals' lenses, a researcher can demonstrate the complex human relationships which then determines the stakeholder cooperation and their actions. Applying that approach to my own area of interest which is TVET in Central Asia, I, based on my experience working in the region, decided to explore the IO employees' stakeholder relationships, as they have a comparatively large stake within TVET in all five countries.

Sampling criteria, participants, interviews

For the sake of representativeness, as well as for a more holistic understanding of stakeholder maps of this region, more than 10 international development organisations were contacted to

take part in the research. The initially prepared standard email invitation with the research information and description of the interview process was sent to either participants themselves or to the administration of the organisations. Along with that, because of my past experience in the region, I requested from my previous colleagues the contacts of potential participants who would satisfy the sampling criteria. However, most participants ended up being recruited through snowballing - the first interviewees were asked to give contacts of other potential participants they knew (after asking for their permission). As the number of organisations and especially within that the number of people in leading positions are limited in the region, it was effortless to get contacts and introductions to other people who matched the research participant's criteria. Due to the fact that the topic of the study is stakeholder relations and decision-making process, only employees who had such professional authority and therefore knowledge in this area, were invited to give an interview.

The detailed information on the organisations and their coverage of countries where the participants work is offered in Table 1. In terms of professional positions, 7 out of 17 participants managed projects in more than one Central Asian country: 1 in all 5 countries, 2 in 4 countries, 2 in 3 countries, and 2 in 2 countries.

Both international experts as well as local experts, who are direct employees of development organisations in Central Asia, participated. The average number of years working in TVET for the Central Asian region is 6,5 years among all the participants. Most of the interviewees worked for international projects within their organisation, which means they have limited timeframe to implement the designed activities and demonstrate the expected outcomes. There are participants also, who do not work for specific projects, instead they are involved in long-term ongoing activities for the development of TVET. Conveniently, most of these organisations perceive and work in the given five countries as in one region and appoint people accordingly. For this reason, the majority of participants work or have worked in more than one Central Asian country, giving more regional perspective rather than one country context, and proving their comparative experience in the region. Additionally, it shows a positive turnover of employees working for Central Asia who already have knowledge and experience in this region.

Table 1: List of participants, organisations, and covered countries

Participant #	Organisation	Countries covered
HELVETAS#1	Helvetas	Uzbekistan
ETF#2	ETF	Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan
GIZ#3	GIZ	Uzbekistan
GIZ#4	GIZ	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan
ETF#5	ETF	Kyrgyzstan
ETF#6	ETF	All 5 countries
DVV#7	DVV	Uzbekistan
DVV#8	DVV	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
DVV#9	DVV	Kyrgyzstan
DVV#10	DVV	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
ETF#11	ETF	Tajikistan
UNESCO#12	UNESCO	Kyrgyzstan
AGAKHAN#13	Aga-Khan	Kyrgyzstan
ADB#14	ADB	Kazakhstan
AGAKHAN#15	Aga-Khan	Kyrgyzstan
UNESCO#16	UNESCO	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan
UNESCO#17	UNESCO	Kyrgyzstan

Overall, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted in April-May 2022. All the participants were given options of interviews being conducted either in Russian or English languages. Due to my limited language capacities as well as the lack of funds for external translators, the local languages of Central Asia were not offered as an option for conducting the interviews. Fortunately, all the participants who were invited to an interview spoke either or both Russian and English languages. The interview questions were prepared before the actual data gathering. They all were about three aspects of the research topic: mapping the stakeholders in TVET in the respective countries, the dynamics of the relationships among them including leadership and decision-making process, and finally TVET's role in the regionalization process of Central Asia, and vice versa - the effects of regionalization process on TVET. The interview questions can be found in Appendix.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, meaning that during the interview I interrogated or asked back and forth to get more clarity or more elaboration on prepared questions, as recommended by Walford (2001); this, in turn, enabled me “to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and also enter into a dialogue with the interviewee”, to quote May (2011, p. 134). Due to the intersection between the prepared questions (for example the topics of leadership in the stakeholder group and decision-making process within that group) I skipped some questions depending on individual situations in order not to ask information that was already given by the participants. I asked clarifying questions, repeating, and paraphrasing at times, and even listing the work situations from which they might retrieve the specific examples from their experience. And finally, I was changing and improving my interviewing skills almost every time after each interview, taking into consideration details that I did not consider before (for example, keeping my translator open, as most of the participants were both Russian and English speakers, and sometimes could not continue their point of view because of not being able to translate a word into the primary language that they have chosen to give interview in). The duration of the interviews ranged between 40 minutes to 1,5 hours.

All the interviews were conducted online. I was aware of the possible disadvantages of online interviews such as the organizational inconveniences, lack of human interaction, impossibility to capture body languages, among others (James & Busher, 2009). However, the discussions and questions were structured in a way that the participants could tell their narratives and direct the conversation themselves along with the main question of the research, decide on how much they want to share, and elaborate on those topics which they were passionate about, this gave them the feeling of ownership in those conversations, as suggested by James and Busher (2009). In addition, because of the worldwide pandemic, all the participants at the time of data gathering were situated in different countries depending on their virtual or semi-virtual work style. That would not have let me conduct interviews in person as visiting each participant physically would require additional funds.

Data analysis

After conducting each interview, the recordings were transcribed in detail. I encouraged participants to get in touch with me via follow-up emails if they had any questions or additional information that they did not mention during the interview. I received several follow-up emails mainly with administrative questions but none regarding the content of

research. Therefore, no additional information was added from the follow-up emails. As some of the interviews were conducted in Russian, the transcribed Russian texts were then translated into English. For the analysis only the English versions were used in order to ease the harmonisation of topics.

Once all the data was collected and converted into text, I began the coding process. Coding is a process of “indexing or mapping data, to provide an overview of disparate data that allows the researcher to make sense of them in relation to their research questions” (Elliott, 2018). For that, the format of thematic/descriptive codes of Miles and Huberman (1994) approach was chosen. Which is also sometimes called analytic induction - “systematic examination of similarities between cases to develop concepts or ideas” (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Breaking down all the data by code, the two main themes and five sub themes for each were identified. The coding process included both the emergent and ‘a priori’ themes and subthemes, meaning there were prefigured themes according to which the questions were designed but during the process some emergent topics were voiced by the participants and added as separate themes depending on their regularity (Elliott, 2018).

Rigour and ethical considerations of the research

Under the terms of the university rules, the CUREC (Central University Research Ethics Committee) approval was obtained prior to the commencement of the study. According to that, all participants were anonymised. While the names of the organisations that they work for are used in the research, the names and positions of participants are not identifiable. The recordings of the interviews and any additional data given by the participants with their consent were recorded and stored in the university's Microsoft cloud. The Zoom or Microsoft Teams were offered as platforms for interview processes. Interestingly enough, almost all of the participants requested the online platforms in which they usually conduct their work meetings. They also had their organisations’ official logos on the background of their video, which might suggest that their answers were more reflective of the organisations’ they work for. For this reason, it was noted and reminded over and over again during the interviews to ensure that they are willing to share their own personal opinion based on their personal experiences.

It is stated that in qualitative research the shared information and worldviews of people are always biased, referring to the belief that there is no one objective quality of data (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2018). While the international organisations' headquarters with main decision-makers are usually not in the countries where these projects are implemented, I hypothesised that the managing staff working in the fields may have different individual views on the work they do. My aim is to understand the individual constructions that each of the participants in this study built for themselves while working with such a wide range of actors, and how they build and navigate their relationships with those actors in order to fulfil their organisations' goals. Therefore, the interest of this research is in their personal subjective experiences, their personal visions on the question, not the official positions of the organisations.

Within the process of qualitative research, I acknowledge my own probable influence on the data - by how I myself relate to the topic, how I collect, interpret, and then present the information. Therefore, it is important to note that previously I have also been an employee of one of the participant organisations and a few other development organisations in Central Asia which are not in the participants' list. My work experience and network helped me to recruit the interviewees, but I do not have personal contact or have known previously any of the participants of the research before. Moreover, as noted by Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (2005), I believe that my work experience was a good asset during the data collection in building trust with participants as well as in understanding and further mapping out the organisations/names/projects going on in Central Asia which the participants were mentioning.

Summary

In this section I have touched upon methodological questions of the study. First, I argued that qualitative approach via semi-structured interviews help to question and understand the participants' socially constructed views on their navigation of relationships with stakeholders. Second, the sampling criteria and the process of recruitment of participants were described. As for interviews, the semi-structured online formats were held. Third, the descriptive analysis by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used for coding and data analysis. And finally, it was argued that the qualitative researchers do not believe in one objective truth, instead the socially constructed individual viewpoints are analysed to understand the research question.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study is primarily interested in the IO employees' perspectives on navigating relationships with TVET sector stakeholders in one or more Central Asian countries. As a result of the data analysis, several major thematic findings were identified: the stakeholders map, leadership and decision-making, donor coordination, the interdependence of TVET and economic needs, political constraints, and finally the possibility of a regional TVET system.

The collected data mainly illustrates the navigation of relations at the national level in each of the Central Asian countries or at the regional level in several or all of the five countries. For this reason all the material was divided into two parts: the navigation of relationships at the national level (Part 1) and the navigation of relationships at the regional level (Part 2). This division of the findings into two levels was done in order to give readers a clearer understanding of countries separately with different economic and TVET systems, but also together as one region with one common history and challenges which directly influence today's TVET provision.

PART 1. NAVIGATION OF RELATIONSHIPS NATIONALLY

Participants were asked a series of questions to list the main stakeholders in each of the countries where they work, and to describe how they build these relationships and how decisions are made in these cooperative steering groups. Based on the analysis of the data collected, main partners with whom IO employees work are state ministries. The private sector was identified as important only in Kazakhstan. In Uzbekistan private companies were described as still governmental, and the government itself was identified as the main driver of TVET development there. The respondents reported Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's economic weakness as the main constraint to TVET development along with the lack of attention from the state administrations. And finally, Turkmenistan was described as a politically closed and difficult country to work in. Overall, in all five countries, except a few exceptions, no active chambers, labour unions, NGOs, or other actors were mentioned during the interviews.

1.1. Mapping the stakeholders

TVET, in its design, requires the cooperation and joint efforts of many actors, not only from education, but from other spheres as well. And because of this large number of actors,

interviewees mostly listed them based on the prioritisation of how they interacted with certain stakeholders for the TVET related issues. But in every case, absolutely all of the respondents answered that the main or at least the most mandatory partner for them is the state structure(s) responsible for TVET. Meaning, the main political partner is the governmental department responsible for education which also includes TVET. That body could be called differently in all countries but in principle it is the Ministry of Education.

Further governmental stakeholders are ministries either of labour or some specific economic sector, such as the Ministry of water resources or the Ministry of information and technology. Those ministries in itself would also have their own responsibilities in professional education of workers within their profile sector. Interestingly, the participants working in/also Tajikistan agreed that the Ministry of Labor and Employment is a more important and more primary partner for them within TVET while the Ministry of Education has a secondary role in the sector.

Some respondents noted that they are still in the process of identifying the specific economic sector which they would focus on as their second key partner within the project. Also, depending on the objectives of the project or organisation, some participants responsible for the same country marked different ministries as their key industry partners. For example, the participant from GIZ (GIZ#3), implementing project on the TVET reforms specifically in the sphere of textile industry, indicated the former Light Ministry (currently it is a privatised Association of Entrepreneurs UzTextileProm) as their second key partner, whereas another GIZ employee (GIZ#4) working for a regional project identified the Ministry of Labour as the second important partner in Uzbekistan. Another example is the cooperation of DVV respondents (DVV #7,8,9,10) with the respective Ministries of Justice. The reason behind that cooperation is their narrow-profiled project providing TVET to ex-prisoners that the participants work with.

DVV#10 states:

There is one actor whom we relate in all of the three countries [Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan] that is actually the Administration of Penitentiary System because we also have expressly and on a targeted manner been supporting access to education and most frequently the VET again for prisoners and ex-prisoners. So there, we do have to have working relationships. Even though we do not transfer funds to any of the government structures, they are still pretty direct partners.

The variety of these cooperations with governmental bodies is further exacerbated by the fact that within these ministries the staff of international organisations must find specific substructures responsible or willing to take responsibility for TVET and for cooperation with stakeholders in TVET. Participants responsible for (including for) Kyrgyzstan identified the Agency for Professional Education as the main structure within the Ministry with which they cooperate, while the participants mentioned that in Uzbekistan it is the Institute for Pedagogical Innovations and Enhancement of the Educational System. In Tajikistan, it was mentioned several times that, within the Ministry for Labour, the Adult Training Centre is the direct partner, while in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan no specific substructures within or outside the Ministries were identified.

Moving away from the state structures and looking to the private sectors, this is the most painful point for almost all five countries, except for Kazakhstan. Here, as the participants note, the main problem, of course, is that the private sector itself is not developed. There are very few large companies, but even the medium and small companies are not very sustainable.

GIZ#4:

We want to work with chambers, but we succeed only in Kazakhstan. Because in all other countries the chambers do not deal with formal professional education.

But at the same time there is another reason which is that there is no culture of cooperation on the part of private companies to work with TVET institutions or in any way interact with other stakeholders from TVET.

UNESCO#17 stated:

In general, working with the sector of employers and employment is very difficult in the regions of the country. It is very difficult to establish this connection, there is no dialogue between them. People on the ground have some kind of rejection from the employers, because the businesses are not sustainable in their activities. Sometimes it is possible only after repeated attempts, long explanations why they need it, what they will achieve exactly in the quality of personnel, supply of personnel, and that they now need to begin to accept internships with subsequent employment to their company - not all employers understand it.

In a similar manner, another respondent (ETF#11) briefly answered to the question of why they do not work with private companies:

We normally always invite and try to involve them in our activities, but maybe they are too busy, sometimes they join.

Additionally, another common theme when discussing private partners was the private TVET providing schools and centres. HELVETAS#1 pointed out there is also a “whole series of opportunities in informal professional TVET private providers”, they do not work with them now and even if they will not work with them in future, the participant thinks that at least they should not neglect learning from them, to be able to compare the quality of educations, teaching approaches, results, student satisfaction, etc.

There is another set of actors which are usually called labour unions or different associations on a national level in specific industrial or economic areas. There were only few notes on the existence or representative role of Labour Unions (Prof Soyuz), but other than that none of the respondents mentioned them, and even when deliberately asked, could not give examples of cooperation with them. There was an exception of the Association of Adult Education in Kyrgyzstan, which according to several participants is very active both politically and organizationally in the TVET as part of the adult education sector in the country.

UNESCO#17:

...the Association in Kyrgyzstan is a membership organisation. They all have members who are also actually registered as NGO. And mainly in Kyrgyzstan they really come pretty strictly in the form of adult education centres. They currently have 15, I think, members. And all of those also do a lot of professional skills related things. And all of them are in the position of providing state recognised certificates. So it is part of formal VET although of course it is not that kind of TVET that, you know, that people start after their secondary school and that they go to programmes lasting for 1 or 2 years. It is different, it is mostly short-term courses. Some of them do it on a commercial basis, some are free, some of them get their participants through the employment agency.

In terms of civil society actors, non-governmental organisations were reported as quite active in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. But it should be noted that active does not mean strong or influential, because the participants explain that both the general economies of these countries and the individual budgets of NGOs in these countries do not allow these stakeholders to somehow significantly invest in the development of TVET. Most of them act as implementers for international organisations and directly depend on their funding. In other 3 countries the NGOs were not really identified as their key stakeholder partners, in some

cases it was explained by the non-existence of active NGOs, in another by the political structures which constraint the civil societies' initiatives no matter in which sector they are.

One respondent (GIZ#4) jokingly noted that while we are talking about stakeholders in TVET "let's not forget another important actor, who are the students themselves, colleges and teachers." Indeed, most of the respondents had from little to no information on the students themselves and on the TVET providers - technicums, colleges, luecums, and other professional schools. Many projects do not work directly with students. When it comes to decision-making the respondents were referring most often to their so-called Steering Committees (specially created groups of stakeholders in order to discuss the decisions on their joint matter), where representatives of student groups or faculty groups are not included. Of course, there were a couple of projects mentioned that directly interact with students or teach TVET themselves, but they were in the minority.

The last group of stakeholders is the respondents themselves, that is, international organisations working in TVET. This group and their cooperation with each other will be elaborated later in Part 1.5.

1.2. Working with leaders

A logical theme which emerged from the interviews and analysis of the data is of course who is contributing the most to the development of TVET in each country, who are the driving forces. This is important not only as continuation of the previous section on stakeholder mapping, but even more on how and with whom the employees of international organisations work to advance the development of TVET through real decision-making. Despite the different opinions on the topic itself among the participants, the interview data still revealed trends answering this question.

The most interesting and most discussed country among the participants was Uzbekistan, where, according to the respondents, the most committed actor currently in TVET development is the state itself. The respondents noted very rapid changes and reforms which are now taking place in the country, starting with political reforms on TVET and ending with very close cooperation of state structures with all TVET stakeholders, including international organisations working in the sector.

One of the interviewees (DVV#7) explained the whole narrative behind these changes:

To answer this question, one must take into account how the situation in Uzbekistan developed before 2017 and after 2017. If we take the period 2003-2017, then this period, from my point of view, was very difficult. During that time, we, as a foreign organisation operating in Uzbekistan, experienced a very difficult period. At first, if cooperation and relations with state institutions were very good, then gradually they began to deteriorate. But this was not connected with our activities, but it related to political events related to democratisation, etc. At this time, the so-called colour revolutions began among the neighbours, in this our former government saw a risk and began to treat international organisations with great suspicion. Therefore, it became more difficult for us to organise cooperation, to initiate new projects in education, it was very difficult. Even if you have a good program, even if you have finances, nothing moved because we represented foreign organisations. But the situation changed with the advent of the new government. Our government has begun to open doors to new ideas, foreign experiences. Now it's very good. Naturally, there are more projects, more initiations.

Another participant (GIZ#3) sees the economic pressures as the main reason why the government is so awake in terms of the TVET improvement now:

Uzbekistan I think is very clear. Also, for so many reasons, like civil society is not really developed here. And, I think that the birth rate in Uzbekistan now is 650 000 babies per year. So, the pressure is very clear from the government – what to do, whom to employ, how to feed. You can imagine, they have 35 million people now, and in comparison to other countries it is a different story now. This is really important. Therefore the government there is very awake, they are very interested in TVET because they also understand they cannot bring more people to the universities and give them better jobs after. They need middle and lower classes to receive basic education and to work in the system. They need workers for everyday work like plumbers or whatever. If you talk about shorter learnings for TVET certifications it is, definitely, the government who is pushing the TVET development and taking leadership positions. And for sure, on the other hand, it's also the economy.

Another participant had similar opinion, giving examples of the local Uzbek companies in different economic sectors bringing technology from China, Germany, Russia, and so forth, but not being able to hire people who actually know how to run that machinery. As a result the government, as the participant says, invites experts from Pakistan or India or other countries, which again according to the participant, does not make sense in terms of development goals and is expensive for the government. Overall, the participants covering only/also Uzbekistan within their professional work in TVET have agreed with the Uzbek government to be the main TVET development driver at the moment. As ETF#6 noted “there is funding, there is a way of allocating it, there is actually a will of using it, and there is a government which is working”.

As noted earlier, the private sector and the interaction of actors from this sector with the TVET is a bottleneck for all countries except Kazakhstan, where, on the contrary, the private sector was noted by the participants as the main driver of the current development of the TVET in the country. Moreover, one main private actor was mentioned by all respondents working fully or partially in Kazakhstan - the Ata-Meken Association.

ADB#14, for example, described them as very functional and sophisticated body:

Ata Meken is the Chamber of Entrepreneurs (Commodities and Entrepreneurs). Ata Meken has a great database here, including on TVET schools. And they are very good, and when we worked on researching problems in TVET, we also were talking to them, their knowledge was quite substantial.

But at the same time, one of the regional directors argued that in terms of the private sector itself there is not the only one actor in Kazakhstan that is contributing to today's TVET there, stating that "not everything is through Ata-Meken, for example you have Kaz Logistics, another big actor" (ETF#10). The private sector, taking the role of a leader, poses the question of why the state does not support TVET as, in the opinion of participants, it could. Participants did not give one single opinion in response to this question, but all of them noted that government funding and attention to the TVET sector should increase, and if not, it could lead to unfortunate outcomes.

One respondent (ADB#14) working in Kazakhstan shared the opinion referring to recent January appraisals in Kazakhstan:

We hope that a gradual increase in funding for that segment [meaning TVET] will happen. Even if it doesn't happen, it will inevitably happen later, but then it may be too late, because it is fraught with certain social unrest and discontent. We believe that it would be right for all these stakeholders to not only ring the bell next to their responsibilities, but along with that to tell the government, not only to fixate on through budgetary sources of funding, but also philanthropy, the private sector is there, and also external sources of funding, such as funds from international financial institutions.

1.3. Taking the leadership

While in case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan the employees reported with whom and how they cooperate to promote their decisions and support them as leaders of the TVET sector; in less developed countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, very often these organisations themselves have to step into the leadership role in order to be able to implement their activities. It is important to note that in both countries civil society is relatively active, but

their activity is mostly funded by international donors. This is understandable, since local stakeholders in the country, including the states themselves, simply do not have enough resources to cover this sector. Therefore, the participants seem to all agree that the international organisations are contributing to TVET the most, especially when one looks at the financial side of the question.

One of the regional coordinators covering both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan answered to the question on who leads the TVET development with following:

I can say that this is most probably coming from our own side in the case of Central Asia. Maybe we, ourselves, are more focused on the non-governmental side of things. And I am a bit careful in saying in very general terms this but, in our own view, the civil society providers are the more active drivers, not the only, I wouldn't go that far. Not to say that the states as the providers of the framework or, let's say, as the shapers of the framework conditions, is less important. But we have more programs that run through NGOs... For Kyrgyzstan maybe, yes, I would also go as far as saying that through the Kyrgyz Adult Education Association only we achieve small successes and steps forward also on the political sphere, or let's say in terms of influencing the framework, conditions, shaping the regulations. For example, they made a very large input supported by us or in cooperation with us into the new Education Strategy for 2021-2024. Just so that the kinds of offers of education that we would like to see more of and they would like to see more of becomes more possible and more stable, or might receive some funding.

Another participant voiced a similar opinion to the question on who leads the TVET development. Moreover, this respondent (Aga-Khan#15) also stressed the importance of states taking leadership in connecting actors for TVET provision:

If we describe the real picture and speak honestly, I would say that these are donor organisations and NGOs. They invest more, they work more. But again, they do not work in synergy and in coordination with each other, but each works individually. But they are the only ones who make contributions and investments. And this is very obvious. If you ask any TVET provider, they will definitely tell you the name of at least one donor organisation that has helped them, either ADB, or EBRD, or GIZ, or the Aga Khan Foundation, etc. Or if you just go into these schools, you see the logos of different donors or NGOs inside their buildings. Here, I think there should be support from the state. And the state should at least do facilitative work, linking these TVET institutions, these stakeholders. Of course, the state should work on the educational base, but it should also serve as a bridging actor between the education and job industry. But the state structures are not actively working on this now. There is no connection with employers. Those who graduate from TVET are not ready for employment right away. They still have to go through some stages in order to effectively find a job.

This dependence on international money is more demonstrative through the example of Tajikistan where the donor's money had to be returned by the government because they could not deliver the promised activities and outcomes.

One of the respondents covering Tajikistan explained this by their organisation's so-called budget support concept:

So instead of actually doing the technical work on systems with experts, the money goes into the governments and comes again as if spent on the salaries of experts doing the things for the country. So there is an approach of adding the budget to the national budget to their own management, but to stop or freeze the budget if the outcomes are not delivered. That is what is going on in Tajikistan now.

This shift of leadership from the hands of governmental actors is, of course, mainly explained by the challenging economic situations in those two countries. However, one of the participants shared the opinion that the states not only do not prioritise TVET as an educational subsector, but they do also not have permanent responsible body and personnel for TVET, they even on a legislative level do not acknowledge the idea of adult education along with their own responsibility in providing adults with education.

DVV#8 on Kyrgyzstan states:

The fact that people [in the government] are constantly changing, and that the system is constantly changing, and that there are some shifts in the government itself, makes it very difficult to achieve any sustainable results. All the more so when it comes to their commitment. There are, of course, people in the government who are interested in development in general, who care about this, etc., but it often turns out that conversations are held, meetings are held, something is agreed upon, but nothing actually happens.

1.4. Dealing with 3 layers of decision-making

To understand the stakeholder cooperation among the participant organisations and the rest of stakeholders on TVET in Central Asia, I have prepared several questions tackling the decision-making process. I asked the participants how they build and maintain their cooperation with their partners in TVET, to which almost all of the respondents referred to the cultural aspects of decision-making in Central Asia. The employees felt it is not possible to succeed in this region in partnership and negotiation without knowing the history of the region and how that defines today's realities of the way decisions are made.

One of the participants (ETF#3) who is an international expert working in Central Asia described the stakeholder relationship building as a very diplomatic process:

It is important to understand multiple narratives going on in the countries, the historic one, the soviet one, the Islamic one. All of these identities are growing up into one country. And currently they are still in a nation building situation and there is a very strong top-down leadership in the countries. So in order to do a job well there you have to be very much a diplomat as well as an expert. As much of my time is spent designing the relationships and avoiding the risk of my behaviour being misunderstood and at the same time interpreting what is the language and also the nuances and meaning of culture through my relationships with local stakeholders. And that is also about coming back to their office and explaining for a long time and communicating again and again. So there is a lot of listening, so there is an ambassador role that is very important. And of course there are changes in the governments as well, revolutions, rotations. And there is this hyper role of being part diplomat and part TVET expert and sometimes that can be quite challenging because the two roles can be conflictual in a way.

Here, it is important to repeat the information on participants that there were both international as well as local employees working for international development organisations. And regardless of whether they are local experts or international, they all made very honest points on the question of decision-making, referring to the hidden or unspoken truths of social divisions in Central Asia. Numerous respondents felt a very similar way concerning this idea of “multiple narratives going on in the countries”. Many participants particularly named 3 historic developments which were expressed by one of the respondents as ‘3 layers of identity’.

GIZ#4:

So you have these old or ancient structures, which are still working and going on. That’s also why the decision-making, I would say is 3 layers, you have an official layer of bureaucracy, let’s say like in Germany or Great Britain, where you have institutions and law and you have to go through the procedures which sometimes work and sometimes not. Then there is a second layer which is the post-Soviet layer. This is also a lot about the shadow economy, there are things behind the curtains which everybody knows how to do but which are not officially on paper. And I would say that is true for all of these countries. And then the third layer, which sometimes the foreigners would say that they even don’t fully understand, it’s even more traditional and more ancient, more family-based, clans-based, whatever. So it’s all a bit diverse I would say. So all these countries are somehow based on certain kinds of clans, structure, tribal unions and casts. Just for example you have 3 shuz in Kazakhstan, you have different names of all the tribes in Kyrgyzstan, and there are different regional ones in Uzbekistan.

#GIZ3 described the stories of similar experiences in dealing with decision-making with partners:

You need to always ask yourself with whom I am talking now. Am I talking to, let's say with the Vice-Minister of this government, but also what else is this person, what kind of connections does he have, why is he sitting in this position, and how is the real structure behind him? Is he so powerful as his official position says so or is there an even more powerful person behind him whose business card might not be as glamorous? But for certain reasons that person would be even more important. So, you need to dive into it.

Participants kept stressing the importance of understanding the anthropological and ethnographic knowledge of places in order to collaborate with decision makers.

Another common theme shared by all the participants was the hardships of navigating relationships with multiple actors equally. They all shared their experiences of how they always have to consider and play multiple roles while staying in the centre. In order for one decision to move forward, they must consider the views of the donor itself, that is the organisations they work for, local partners whether they are private companies or NGOs, and of course the states and their priorities. It has been pointed out many times in this paper that the TVET field itself, being a very multistakeholder sector, makes it extremely difficult for development workers to navigate multiple cooperations effectively. These employees observe the political shifts, talk to different actors, make assumptions, and try to guess with whom to collaborate to implement TVET.

Similar to other participants, ETF#2 explained this aspect of their work as following:

These processes complicate TVET. Because TVET is a multistakeholder social policy area. And there you have public companies, you have private companies, you have schools, institutions. And our work is multistakeholder partnership participatory relationship management. And therefore, it's hard to write down all the people you want to meet as you may not know all of them yet. And sometimes with Ministries of Foreign Affairs in both countries, it's difficult to understand if they've equally understood you. You have to meet multiple times at multiple ministries. And still there is this tendency to believe that TVET just lies with the Ministry of Education'.

DVV#7 illustrated this point by the fact on how much they work on their stakeholder map:

We are constantly updating the stakeholder map. We are constantly updating and supplementing it. Of course, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Vocational Education, the Ministry of Employment and Labor are also directly involved in the education of socially vulnerable populations in our country. That is, they have a network of their own educational institutions. In addition, depending on the portfolio of our projects, there are other partners.

As the other DVV employees explained most of these development projects work in phases, and before the start of each of the phases they do the analysis of changes in the countries,

looking at the questions of which target groups need assistance the most, who are better suited for key partnerships, which regions have to be covered this phase, etc. That can result in totally different people to work with in the new phase.

#DVV10:

And when you are asking about the state of decision-making we really have rather participatory planning processes. So, there would be very regular ongoing consultations with partners. In terms of where they see the needs, where they see the best options for further development, they would be really consulted very much in an eye to eye level. This is very important even though it's never ideal, but I would really say that for DVV International it is not something that is just on paper but it's really being done in practice mainly by my local colleagues in the three offices. So they play a very big role in our own decision-making as well. We call it a partner-oriented approach, so they come in very actively.

In general, as participants shared their experiences and stories of building interactions with partners, one could hear and feel the fatigue and frustration of working with all these stakeholders, the unequal interest and input, and also the sceptical attitude of actors toward these employees of international organisations. One of the participants, having come to Central Asia 20 years ago, has learned to speak Russian, knows majority of local actors, and has good networking - a base for promoting certain professional aims. But even this employee, according to herself/himself, has to organise meetings, explain again and again why and to whom this work is necessary, show the details of the work so that all the partners understand what the organisation works for in this region and what it is trying to achieve. But at the same time it is the main and most important job of the participants. Since they have to complete their projects and pass on the work they have done to local actors at the end of their term, they simply have to actively involve them. Therefore, the majority of these organisations' staff spent a lot of effort on interactive partnership.

DVV#8:

Everywhere, in every country, of course, we look at the situation in that country, the changes in the states. Because we see our role in consulting. We pass on all our products, programs, and ideas. Therefore, it is very important for us to adapt our projects. So that the states feel responsibility.

1.5.Cooperating with other donors

An important and unexpected topic emerging from the data analysis was the issue of cooperation and non-cooperation between the respondent-actors themselves, that is, between

the staff of different international development organisations. Some participants noted that sometimes even instead of cooperation, they can feel competition between organisations.

GIZ#4:

For donors to work together in harmony - it is impossible, because everyone has their own indicators, their own goals, and they come with them. For this to happen, it is necessary that donors cooperate at the level of the headquarters and together develop a plan for implementation, and this is just a dream. That's just not possible. Here I had the experience with another donor organisation, and we had the same goals, but we could not cooperate, because as competitors we achieved our own indicators in front of our customers.

There are several barriers to close cooperation among a number of international organisations: different goals, different approaches/methods, different scales of coverage (both in terms of regions and moneywise). At the same time, however, it was expressed several times that in principle they were not averse to “following the German approach or the UNESCO approach, rather than being competitive projects”. The same respondents explained that a clear leadership is essential for that cooperation which should be coming from the side of the governments themselves as the main decision-makers.

Aga-Khan#13 explained the situation by the lack of initiative from the states themselves which is necessary for cooperation:

Here, too, the state does not take the flag in its hands and say, ‘You work here, and you work there, who and who has what needs’. No, here again the international organisations act themselves. Aga Khan or GIZ, for example, invite each other and share knowledge, create working meetings. There is no one coordinator among donors. Projects end, other managers come, and the new ones might not know that they had a partnership, that they had certain agreements. And then there is again a collapse of knowledge and cooperation.

A number of participants noted the importance of small (here mostly referring to programmes with smaller budgets) projects compared to large donor financing, which is most often directly handed over to the states. The respondents explained that depending on the project size and project budget it becomes harder to cooperate on the same level with other donors, the donor coordination groups was even called as “a club of bigger donor agencies” by one of the respondents.

Another project coordinator commented on the level of complexity of small projects’ work:

I would say it's much easier to bring 20 million USD, but it is much more difficult and totally different to implement smaller projects which intend to influence the management of education, and that is also the intention of the local governments. It is also much more sensitive, it brings changes in culture, in relationships, in communication and collaboration. And those are the skills and capacities that the Ministries don't have. This makes the partnership, the collaboration, and also the decision making much more complex.

But it should be pointed out that this opinion on the lack of cooperation was not shared equally among all the participants. Some participants (mostly working in Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan) noted the coordination between donors is functional and even effective in solving many issues. For example, there were given examples of how in Uzbekistan on an equal basis with all the reforms and changes in work, state staff closely interacts with the staff of international organisations, share information, ask for their comments and their recommendations on TVET issues not only in implementation and monetary contribution, but also in development of legislative and regulatory documents on TVET.

As stated by DVV#7:

For example, we have an informal Telegram platform in Uzbek called TVET Donor Organisation Group. Thanks to this platform we have our informal communication. The employees of both international and state structures are present there. There, for example, we can get drafts of laws or any regulatory acts from employees of the ministry, which can offer us an opportunity to look at and comment on them. They even offer to organise a conference if other parties have suggestions. Previously, if we sent them all the initiatives ourselves or ensured their participation, now it comes from the state.

In Kyrgyzstan, according to participants, this group has existed for a long time now and is coordinated by some of the donor organisations themselves. And while the opinions on its functionality were divergent, one of the respondents gave a good example of donor coordination being helpful in their cooperation with the local state structures.

DVV#8:

...in all three countries it [cooperation with other donors] leads to good results. This year Morocco is holding a conference for adult education. And this year, in cooperation with UNESCO, we were able to prepare brief country [Central Asian countries] reports with local stakeholders on the state of adult education for that conference. With the support of regional experts we were also able to prepare a set of recommendations for the states. The conference also helps to get commitments from participating countries, because ministries usually participate there. This is one of the tools, so to speak, for commitment insurance. Because they all sign this document there, and it is an opportunity for us to

show this document to the local authorities and ask them if they comply and ask them to work together.

PART 2. NAVIGATION OF RELATIONSHIPS REGIONALLY

The possibility of regionalization of the five Central Asian countries has been an ongoing topic for a long time now, not only within the TVET sector but also in other fields. This was discussed with the interview participants as part of this study because many development projects that they work for were designed as regional initiatives. According to findings, the approach to regional TVET unification is diverse among the international organisations. Some organisations had already tried regional initiatives and were convinced that it is not possible and now they are more concentrated on individual countries; some organisations worked in each country individually initially and do not have any future intentions for regional cooperation; others were working in individual countries before and now have more regional approaches. However, a common theme within all the respondents (except one organisation) on regional TVET was that these five countries are too different in their economies, needs, and ethnical populations, making the regionalization aspirations questionable.

In this part, through the narratives of the participants, I will reveal more about navigating the relationships of international organisations' staff with stakeholders at the regional level. The participants mainly highlighted the different economies and developmental needs in all these countries as the main constraints or challenges for regional cooperation. Additionally, some of the respondents also talked about political and ethnic differences which are causing some inter-ethnic conflicts and directly affecting their cooperation. After these topics I will finalise this section with the participants' recommendations and opinion on the importance for these countries to learn from each other. The conclusion was that peer-learning should be strongly enforced in the region instead of one united harmonisation of TVET development in all five countries.

2.1. Identifying needs

To understand the progression of the idea of a regional TVET, I asked participants if and how they cooperate with TVET actors (both state and non-state) at the regional level. From my experience working in one of the participating development organisations in Central Asia, I

knew that there was a discussion of a regional TVET system with one qualification framework for all five countries. Such a united system would make it easier for TVET graduates in Central Asia to get employed, if not in their own country, then in a neighbouring one. Because of the similarities of languages and culture, it would be easier for them to work in neighbouring countries rather than to migrate to Europe or the United States, for example.

Aga-Khan#15 referring to one unified TVET system in all five countries said:

Ideally, if that were to happen, that would be great. Because it would be an exchange of talents or exchange of skills. It would help as it would be beneficial to everyone, so it should be.

UNESCO#16:

In fact, it seems to me that this is such a pressing issue that we raised so much. We wanted to build such a platform. That's exactly the part we wanted to do. It would help to make exchange, to make recognition of certifications easier.

Aga-Khan#15 also gave examples of how in some cases the regional TVET is already being practised among some countries:

This goes on informally and sometimes even formally. For example, there are some TVET institutions in Bishkek whose graduates can obtain certificates there that are recognized in Russia. So, they can go to Russia and work in their profession. After all, even if they already have some skills, they still need a document showing this. There have also been attempts, particularly with Uzbekistan, to negotiate with employers in Uzbekistan who need mechanics, car mechanics, who can repair and work in auto factories, as they produce cars. There were requests from Uzbekistan, because we (meaning Kyrgyzstan) had a scientific base under the Soviet Union and used to send car specialists. So, there are such graduates of our TVET institutions. It's not everywhere, but in a couple of communities I came across this.

Despite all these aspirations of one system and regional ideas for the development of a common TVET, most of the participants did not believe in the possibility of that vision due to the differences and challenges of five countries. The main common theme in terms of difference were the economic systems. Almost all the respondents admitted that developing TVET at the regional level as a unified system would be beneficial, however it is not possible because the economic needs are different, the labour markets are different. As it was discussed in Part 1, Kazakhstan has more developed economy in comparison to other four countries; and Uzbekistan is actively reforming its TVET system now and, mainly in the textile industry; Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were described by participants as being comparatively inactive towards TVET reforms and improvements due to the lack of

sustainable private sector, whereas Turkmenistan was called “being difficult” in cooperation with closed political regime. Additionally, participants felt that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan still do not have real private sectors, which are in fact still fully or semi-governmental.

Therefore, based on all these challenges, each country has its own economic priorities and needs at the moment. One participant, for example, noted that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are not focusing on TVET development because they do not have the companies to hire all these people. At the same time, they need just few highly qualified specialists, and for that they send certain people abroad for training and employ these people afterwards for the necessary top positions. While with the scale of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (in terms of territory and population respectfully) this approach will not work. As for Turkmenistan, it was noted that until the country itself does not ask for assistance for development, international organisations cannot help much there.

There were still several good examples of TVET implementation at certain regions based on economic needs. For example, although economically underdeveloped, the Ferghana Valley (western Uzbekistan and southern Kyrgyzstan) has good touristic potential due to its history and rich culture. On this basis, in 2005-2008 a successful personnel training project was conducted in the field of tourism.

2.2.Managing different development levels

Furthermore, besides the economic structures, also the differences in overall development level between these countries, their ethnic characteristics, languages, and different political regimes were highlighted.

As Helvetas#1 noted:

Regionalization is very interesting on the one hand and has benefits, but on the other hand there are so many changes going on in terms of the development of each of these countries. So, each is operating in their own way, with their own peculiarities. Having worked before in Kyrgyzstan and now in Uzbekistan, I thought it would be much more similar, but in fact they are totally different. I am so much focused on Uzbekistan and its education now, there is already so much on the plate to deal with, the regionalization is just too far away to even think about.

Remarkably, the participants were aware of TVET situation not only in the country that they were working on, but also about the rest of neighbouring countries in Central Asia. And because of this, they understood very clearly the differences and gaps in the development of

each country. It was voiced out that Kazakhstan now sufficiently stands out from other four countries to be worked with separately. According to participants, this country has been implementing a model of partnership between the economy, ministries, and the private sector as one joint work since the 2010s. Therefore, the Kazakh policymakers already know their concrete problems, gaps and can accurately approach what should be solved.

One of the regional directors explained the differences in development describing their meetings with each country's officials:

You have to prepare for all these meetings (referring to meetings with Kazakh partners) with them very carefully and know exactly what to say and what to do. In principle this is always necessary, but there we always expect very specific and detailed questions from them that we have to answer. This is Kazakhstan. In Tajikistan they are at the very beginning. That is, when I talk to people there, I think about where to start. Because it's quite difficult to explain everything, so that they could also follow the topic. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is such that in principle in the ministry there are only 1-2 people who are responsible for TVET. And it is certainly impossible to work. Institutions in Kyrgyzstan, unfortunately, are also very weak. That is, you also need to have a lot of patience there, the level of frustration is high when working with them. Because I go there several times and no approvals, no decisions are made. So there are such differences. And of course, not only in terms of the development levels, but also in terms of economic directions all countries are different.

GIZ#3 for example noticed differences in the decision-making:

There are different decision-making processes and structures. I also worked for Astana for a while, and I know that their decision-making process does not look like in other countries. Differences because of the different historical developments and peculiarities, but also there are similarities mostly because of the common Soviet past during the Soviet time. So, what I want to say is that this is one region but the region we define here by the colonials' design - the Russians, the German's, whoever but who defined it as Central Asia. This is an artificially defined somehow region because of all the differences. Her, there are things that are comparable, and there are things that are not comparable.

2.3.Coping with inter-ethnic conflicts

In the development of a regional unified TVET system, all aspects of the relationships between these five countries must be taken into account. One of the critical points is inter-ethnic conflicts, which most often occur within countries. Several interviewees described how this affects their work in cooperation with stakeholders from these countries. For example, the DVV#8 referring to their regional activities stated that they “face problems of

regional meetings, especially, when there were events in Andijan, in Osh”, addressing the inter-ethnic conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens.

Except for few participants, who skipped the current on-going conflict between Tajik and Kyrgyz ethnic populations in the border territories, almost all the participants pointed this issue out while talking about the regional TVET development. One of the participants, working for the TVET project in Kyrgyzstan, said that she is closely monitoring the situation.

To the question whether it is possible to create one regional TVET system, one of the participants answered:

I do not think that the Central Asian countries can be made into a mini-EU, unfortunately. Especially lately, when we see these conflicts in the border areas, which are incited by whom nobody understands. I have more and more feeling that though we are neighbours and have much in common in terms of culture, heritage, we are all on the Silk Road, etc., still people cannot cooperate. And I'm very sad to see what's happening now on the Tajik border. There are some bad forecasts that are being voiced now. I very much hope that this is fake news and that nothing critical will happen in the region. It's frustrating also because there are still so many ties between these states. As an example, I am part Tajik part Kyrgyz.

As it was said almost all the participants mentioned the conflict, however none of them perceived this border issue as big of a barrier for the regionalization as the economic and development differences, suggesting that the inter-ethnic conflicts, though happening quite often, are not the biggest issue. As for my understanding from the words of participants, the current conflict is primarily affecting the negotiations, in this case on the topic of TVET implementation. GIZ#4 explained the impossibility of project negotiations now between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as “they are not ready to sit together at one table and carry out something at the level of implementation”.

2.4. Including Turkmenistan into regional initiatives

Another obstacle, or to put it differently, another reason, why many participants noted the impossibility of a regional TVET system in all five countries, is Turkmenistan. This is because Turkmenistan, after declaring perpetual political neutrality, is now a closed country and in many aspects is much more bureaucratic and restrictive towards the activities of international actors in the territory of the country.

One of the participants covering Turkmenistan explained:

Turkmenistan is difficult and it is becoming more difficult. Most of the time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' permission takes longer, so there is a time delay. Sometimes it takes several months to set up a meeting in the country, and they might fail in informing everyone. Or if they don't have permission they might not be allowed to come to the meeting. So, Turkmenistan is perhaps still the most formalised among the Central Asian countries. And for the international organisations, even at the top level, they still struggle a little bit to make progress in social policy areas which are sensitive for them.

It was also noted that in Turkmenistan the employees are more likely to gain access and permission for projects and initiatives if these organisations are large multinational actors compared to bilateral agencies. As an example, if the employees are from UN or World Bank structures where Turkmenistan is an official member, it is at least possible to get attention from the side of the government, whereas the development agencies from a single country coming to Turkmenistan are not very welcomed. One of the regional directors from a bilateral organisation explained that they have gone to Turkmenistan at the beginning of their regional project and that Turkmenistan said they don't need any help for TVET development. For the actors who are already working in Turkmenistan, as they have expressed, it is extremely hard to get data on the TVET related activities, students, schools. Due to the closed and bureaucratic structure of the government, the information and statistics are not usually shared, or might not even exist.

Another point made by the participants is the difficulties with languages in Turkmenistan. It was reported that in all four countries, except Turkmenistan, the employees work either in Russian or English as more and more young people are learning English. However, that is not the case in Turkmenistan where majority of the local population speaks primarily Turkmen language, this would complicate the so-planned one regional TVET system uniting all five countries. Therefore, although it too is a post-Soviet country, participants noted that it is very difficult to include Turkmenistan into the regional discussions on development. It was also interesting to learn that UNESCO for example supervises the whole region through the office in Almaty, but by region they mean four countries. Turkmenistan is supervised through another regional office.

2.5.Fostering peer-learning

Along with all the above-discussed challenges and barriers to establishing a regional TVET system among five countries, the importance of learning and sharing with each other the best practices and lessons learnt was highly recommended by the interview respondents. The

participant from GIZ made a good definition pointing out the difference in the concepts of regionalization and harmonisation of TVET systems.

GIZ#4:

There's a distinction to be made there. Regionalization is an exchange of experience and knowledge among these countries, and we want that. But harmonisation, we think, as if the region functions better together - this is no longer possible. By regionalization in TVET you probably mean harmonisation with the same standards and certifications in all these countries, so that people recognize each other's qualifications. Unfortunately, no. We had a history of this - we thought that this was possible, that we could help them with this, but we noticed that it's just not possible. They're just too different now, these systems. So harmonisation is no longer possible, that's our thesis - there will not be one TVET system here. So, we have also moved from the goal of harmonisation in the region to having them learn from each other - exchange. That's what's possible.

The participant from ADB#14 had similar points of view on the possibilities of one regional harmonised TVET system:

Yes, we agree that each country in the regions, in this case Central Asia, has its own characteristics and differences, and different levels of advancement of solutions to the problems I mentioned earlier. But it is not necessary to say here that we all must build our united development. Of course, everyone has their own needs. But there is a platform for exchange, not only for experience and knowledge, but also for exchange of information. When implementing TVET reforms, there are additional problems that have to be taken into account. That is, some countries very skilfully take into account potentially unforeseen hidden issues, and some do not take them into account at all, and some take them into account but only partially. There is such a palette here, which we think is extremely necessary. And the word regionalization does not mean the regionalization of everything, where everyone must develop at the same time and at the same level, no.

In a similar manner DVV#10 expressed the opinion on this issue:

There was this phase when I think there were general hopes connected to the regional development in Uzbekistan at the political level. They were also expressly making attempts or showing the motivation to work more towards regional integration in general after the new president came, which is already not so new now. I would say that when I started my work in this region there was this kind of hope that could now receive a certain push. And just in general within different sectors with regionalization more things could become possible, which is now I would say maybe rather taking trend on the opposite side. And, of course, the conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is not helping, just taking the mere problem of even bringing people physically together, which was already exacerbated for 2 years by the pandemic. That is an obstacle. It's not as we've all foreseen.

Participants were all unanimous in saying that TVET regionalization is becoming an outdated and changing idea, and that people are no longer believing in integrated development.

However, unexpectedly, several participants from one organisation noted that they will soon launch a unified project on development of TVET throughout the region, in all four countries. At the same time, it is important to note that these participants described their project as more focused on each country separately, rather than uniting all systems, although with a great emphasis on peer-to-peer learning.

The participant of this initiative explained the reason behind it as:

The objectives are regional as well as national ones. We respect the diversity of all countries, but our overarching strategy is to bring them in one structure. Perhaps doing different things on a national level at the same time and cooperating, not necessarily five countries all the time, maybe two countries having the same issues or tasks or common interests in commerce or education itself. It is beneficial in part with the progress made for example in Kazakhstan and with relatively rapid changes in Uzbekistan, so we believe that region is the future. We've been discussing with governments for the past year, there is a lot of interest. So, instead of five individual strategies for each Central Asian countries, we will now work on one program, which will also be working on perhaps a regional qualification system and exchange of knowledge of teachers where they have commonalities.

By the rest of participants, it was told that the countries themselves or local stakeholders are not yet acting for the development of regional TVET.

DVV#7:

So far, I have not seen a regional platform initiated by ministries or local institutions. So far, I have not even seen a conference or a call for meetings.

Although at times there are flashes of interest from the states of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to become a regional hub for TVET training. But the participants explained that even these interests are more gaining direction of peer learning than the consolidation of systems.

GIZ#3 expressed positive changes towards peer-learning in Uzbekistan:

Uzbekistan is not only developing themselves, but they are very interested and looking also for other countries' practices. They are going to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and other countries for best practices and lessons learnt. And this works better. You must take this into account that they have common ground for over 70 years they've been under and following all the rules coming from Moscow, which was a centre of everything. And even though this faded away, still the idea of let's look for somewhere else for the rules - is there, now it might be let's look at the American practice or western or Russia. They expect that the best practices should come from very far away, they must come from foreign experts in the briefcases – this

idea is still there. And this mindset was persistent and still persistent. However, for example, Uzbekistan is starting to understand that the lessons can be learnt from the neighbouring countries, and I feel that they have less scepticism towards the neighbours' lessons now.

Summary

Having divided the data into two levels, I have reported on the main topics that were discussed by the participants during the interviews on building and managing relationships with TVET stakeholders in five Central Asian countries.

Participants firstly explained that the main stakeholders in all countries are ministries responsible for TVET, but it was also noted that not in all countries these ministries are the main actors in the development of this sector. It was discussed that in Kazakhstan this driving force is the private sector, and in Uzbekistan the state itself, that in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan international donor organisations make the main contribution to TVET development. Further it was explained that when making decisions in these stakeholder relations it is necessary to understand social structures and cultural aspects of these countries. Participants highlighted three different factors influencing decision making - old clan or regional divisions, issues of Soviet legacy of informal cooperation, and current formal institutions. It was also said that cooperation between donors themselves does not happen in most cases, which makes it difficult to work there because of duplication of activities or competition between organisations.

The second part of the data analysis showed that all five countries have different economies and correspondingly different labour market needs. Moreover, the participants explained that the idea of one regional TVET system is vanishing because the levels of development between these countries are far different. On the same issue of regional TVET, participants noted the outbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts that occur from time to time and complicate negotiations and implementation of projects between these countries. Turkmenistan was described by participants as a country with a neutral political stance, which makes it difficult to cooperate with both public and private stakeholders there. Finally, participants noted the importance of learning from each other in building and reforming TVET systems. The general conclusion on regionalisation was that a united TVET system is not possible in Central Asia, but instead it is necessary to strengthen learning from each other and cooperation between these countries on TVET issues.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper started with addressing one of the current challenges in achieving SDGs which is lack of active stakeholder participation in different areas. Incorporating the findings of the study into the available literature on TVET stakeholder relationships in Central Asia, my aim in this section is to present final thoughts on: how do employees of international organisations navigate their relationships with TVET stakeholders in five Central Asian countries? I have asked the participants about who the TVET stakeholders are in each country, who are the driving forces in these multistakeholder cooperations, how the employees of IOs achieve the decisions, how and whether they interact with stakeholders at a regional level. The findings, above all, show the complexity of relationships that the employees of IOs build with TVET stakeholders in Central Asia, starting with numerous diverse actors to build relationships with and ending with cultural aspects of decision-making process specific to the region. Furthermore, applying Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model, the research analysed in which cases TVET as an educational public policy receives attention and funding from stakeholders for development. This framework was employed to illustrate TVET in agenda-setting within and across all five countries.

Navigating multistakeholder relationships 'from the middle'

In the literature review, it has been argued that TVET is a sector that requires the cooperation of many stakeholders from different fields (Baraki & Kemenade, 2013; Fluitman, 1999). This statement has been repeated since the beginning of this paper and in the same manner was voiced by all 17 research participants. One of the major difficulties reported is identifying the right actors in each country, both in terms of the state structures and non-governmental cooperations. As stated by Fluitman (1999) "governments may decide, to greater or lesser extent, to devolve responsibility for vocational training to bipartite, sectoral organisations of employers and workers...where governments are content to hand over certain tasks or responsibilities, there are likely to be new mechanisms in place to ensure the necessary coordination" (pp.61-62). However, using the words of one of the participants, "still there is this tendency to believe that TVET just lies with the Ministry of Education". It is therefore important to note that the success of TVET depends to a large extent on the success of such multistakeholder cooperation which is, at least in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, mainly handled by the employees of IOs. This can correlate with David Horan's statement on the

partnerships: “Large N studies of partnerships tend to report low participation by actors from local and national levels, particularly in transnational partnerships which are often led by public actors such as UN agencies, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), or national governments, either on their own or in some combination” (2022, pp. 1–2). Moreover, it was shared by research participants that even after identifying the right actors they always have to monitor the changes in the country and change their Steering Committee members depending on the TVET needs.

Going further, Suzuki (1998) describes that during the implementation of developmental projects, the employees of IOs always have to balance the interests of local actors (partners in the host country) along with the global ones (IOs or donors). They have to weigh the interests and benefits for the host government, but also the priorities of stakeholders at the regional and school level, and be sure to comply with the interests and organisational policies of their international stakeholders, such as contracting or direct donors (Suzuki, 1998). For the interviews, only the field staff (though in managing positions) of IOs were chosen because the perception of field workers and the perception of the heads of these organisations or headquarter administrations may have been different. Several scholars (Eschenbacher, 2012; Suzuki, 1998) through their work, have shown such differences of opinion among employees of international organisations, depending on whether they work in the field or manage projects from above. Plus, in working with other employees, donors, governments, and private stakeholders, here again, the participants of this study shared their hardships of navigating relationships as being ‘in the middle’.

In addition, employees explained that policies and decisions with stakeholders will be achieved only with understanding the power and social divisions that come not only from formal institutions and processes, but also from informal groups left from the Soviet Union structure as well as from ancient clan/tribe or region-based divisions within the local populations. These findings correlate with the literature written on power relations of Central Asian countries. Some scholars believe that having received independence now more than 30 years ago already, Central Asian countries still heavily depend on and follow the rules, decision-making processes, and power structures left from the Soviet systems (Drummer et al., 2018; Roy, 2000). Another author similarly states that “certainly, clanic, tribal and, in the case of Uzbekistan, regional identities and allegiances are very much apparent and still permeate the administration and political systems of these [meaning five Central Asian]

countries” (Glenn, 1999, p. 138). Here, the author explains this persisting social divisions by the fact that they were never actually erased, even during the period of Soviets’ rule. “The tribal structure became fused with the hierarchical structures of the Soviet system, thus vitrifying the pre-revolutionary social status of the tribal and clan groups to the extent that it is said to be ‘one of the best-kept secrets of Central Asia’ that the pre-revolutionary social position is still the most important determinant of social position today” (Glenn, 1999, p. 137). This after-independence development of Central Asian countries is accurately described in the book *Social and Cultural Change in Central Asia*, where Sevket Akyiliz and Richard Carlson (2013) recount the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the these countries as a long-awaited event, after which the world expected a dramatic transformation of both the economy and society of the region. But as the authors themselves put it, “70 years of Soviet rule does not and did not just disappear, just as traditional cultures and customs did not disappear under the Soviet rule” (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013, p. 3). As a result, the local population not only preserved and continued to practise their old traditional indigenous norms and beliefs, but also the newly acquired Soviet ideology and thinking. And although this region tried, especially the political figures, to integrate into the world community and economy, independence did not have much effect on state rule and the way people lived and worked in the Soviet Union, accordingly, people continued to do so (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013).

Another topic discussed with research participants, on navigating stakeholder relationships, is the impossibility of regionally harmonised development of TVET in all five countries. The highlighted reasons by the participants were the differences in the economies and in overall levels of development of TVET systems in each country. This finding matches with several other works illustrating the differences of the economies of these countries in terms of the sectors, structures, and current challenges. Tajikistan, for example, has a specific problem of the informal private sector which complicates the engagement of the employers into formal TVET (Ajwad et al., 2014; Drummer et al., 2018). “In comparison with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan is not ambitiously aiming at private sector involvement into its professional education system, as according to 2014 report of the World Bank, a percentage of 60% of Tajik employees are working in the informal economy” (Ajwad et al., 2014, p. 51). The secondary identified reasons for the impossibility of a regional TVET system are differences in development, political regimes, and inter-ethnic conflicts both within and between countries.

And finally, there was an unexpected finding revealed from data analysis which is a problem of non-cooperation between IOs themselves. Majority of respondents explained the lack of cooperation among IOs by the fact that each organisation employees try to achieve their own targets and sometimes even compete. This creates a lose-lose situation because, as explained by participants, close partnership and collaborative work of IOs would be more powerful in addressing the governments on TVET issues. Here again, the reflections of interviewees correlate with David Horan's idea that the "broad stakeholder participation is desirable because of its role in enhancing the legitimacy of partnerships as an alternative governance arrangement" (Horan, 2022, pp. 1–2).

Applying Kingdon's model to TVET policy in Central Asia

In their comprehensive analysis on the impact of Kingdon's Multiple Streams model, Paul Cairney and Michael Jones (2016) stated that the book has largely prompted future empirical research in the sphere of public policy. I was one of those inspired by Kingdon's work. I tried to look why within these five countries, in some TVET is being implemented, improved, funded by certain stakeholders, while in others this sector is left out from the agenda-setting. The results of the collected data can be synthesised into three main discussion topics according to Kingdon's model (1995): problem stream, policy stream, and politics stream.

According to the model (Kingdon, 1995), via problem stream some systematic indicators, negative feedback from the population, or dramatic unexpected occurrences can cause the attention of policymakers to a particular field. In the Findings the following cases were broadly discussed: Uzbekistan's high birth rate with unemployment, Kazakhstan's recent appraisal events, Kyrgyzstan's ongoing changes of state officials because of revolutions, and systematic lack of experts among all five countries. Regarding the latter, it was explained in the Literature Review, that the Soviet system filled the expert positions mainly with Russian or other Slavic people during its rule, after which those people leaving the Central Asian countries created gaps in their respective vacancies (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013), resulting now in lack of particular experts in the region. The research respondents also referred to this problem with examples of some Central Asian countries bringing machinery experts from other regions, or the examples of some countries sending their elite workers abroad to learn the necessary skills and return them back for the prepared jobs. Sevket Akyildiz and Richard Karlson (2013) also deliberately described in their work the situation of Uzbekistan's high population and low employment rates which was a problem already back in Soviet times. The

authors point out the urgency with which the Soviet administration had to train Central Asian population “due to the young demographic profile in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, [so] more vocational training schools were needed than in the rest of the USSR, as were rural job creation scheme: in 1988 approximately one quarter of human labour in Uzbekistan was not employed, which in 1989 totalled approximately 760,000 of working age in Uzbekistan not employed” (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2013, p. 24). Young and colleagues (2010), explaining the problem stream of Kingdon’s model, state that “when conditions are bad enough or circumstances have changed significantly, policy decision makers see the condition as a problem” (p. 4). This partially also explains the January appraisal events in Kazakhstan to which some research participants also referred, saying that the Kazakh government needs to begin addressing the issues of unemployment, before these conditions cause further negative feedback from the population. They believe that so far, only the Kazakh private sector is contributing to today’s TVET.

Politics stream is all about the events, shifts, or developments within the government body (Kingdon, 1995). Again, looking at Findings, one can correlate this stream with the narratives on Uzbekistan’s current focus on TVET due to the change of president, Kyrgyzstan’s neglect of policies due to unstable political body and, of course, Turkmenistan’s closed political regime which limits the international organisations’ assistance there. Another interesting development TVET-wise is the Tajik government’s political attitude towards TVET. As was noted by the participants the country, due to weak economic capacities, cannot invest in this policy, meaning it cannot prioritise TVET above other issues. Because of that it was revealed that the IOs play a more important role there with TVET development. However, Scarborough (2013) explains that not only in TVET but in broader aspects of support, IOs in Tajikistan are making considerable contributions where the state is failing, especially in rural regions. For example, the famine of 1992-1993 in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) due to a blockade of the Pamir Highway was regulated and solved by the Aga-Khan Foundation (Scarborough, 2013). “The combination of Soviet development policies with the pre-existing highland realities had resulted in cultural and economic differences between GBAO residents and other Tajik peoples by 1991 [where] a large part of economy is now facilitated by the Aga Khan, but neglected by central government in Dushanbe” (Scarborough, 2013, p. 579). Eschenbacher’s (2012) ideas demonstrate that it is not specific only to Central Asian region: “international organisations often serve as educational recovery

and reconstruction practitioners in post-conflict countries while the host government increases its capacity" (p. 179).

The last in Kingdon's model is the policy stream which is described by Cairney and Jones (2016) as "evolving as the [solutions] are proposed by one actor then reconsidered and modified by others, as some issues take time to become accepted within policy networks" (pp. 37-58). Interviewees all unanimously remarked that even though TVET is not a priority state policy in these countries, it is necessary to raise this issue again and again, raise the attention of all actors, speak to the states about the importance of adult education and the impact of TVET on the overall economy and development of the countries. Kingdon believes that "independent of science and knowledge, ideas may sweep policy communities like fads, or may be built gradually through a process of constant discussion, speeches, hearings, and bill introductions" (1995, p. 17). The collected data from research participants demonstrate the importance of peer-to-peer learning between these countries. It was warned by the respondents, that in terms of TVET policies, for Central Asian countries it is more relevant to look at the neighbour countries' success stories rather than copy the Western or other developed regions' experiences.

Research implications and limitations

Potentially, the research findings have implications to current and future IO employees as well as state policymakers of Central Asian countries. Within all three streams of applied model, there can be and sometimes occur the intersections, called "windows of opportunities" by Kingdon (1995). It is critical to be mindful of changes because such events, for example, as the election of new governors or appointees can be considered as an opportune time to push TVET issues. The paper also argues that the old tribal/regional/informal social divisions are still persistent in today's power and decision-making relations. And the participants' belief in the importance of understanding such 'hidden' structures of social divisions for the decision-making process aligns with Roy's argument that developmental shifts "from colonial administrative structures to modern nationalism supposes a process of re-appropriation of these structures by local elites and society... and not by using the abstract model of what is or should be a 'nation-state'" (Roy, 2000, p. xvi). In order to ensure the rational use of resources, there are different mechanisms used in IOs, such as tying grants. This is widely used by the World Bank, and sometimes by the European Commission. Basically, it is "a strategy of tying grants and loans to particular education policy

prescriptions within many developing countries, [or in other words] it is a capacity to use financial incentives as an instrument of policy influence” (Coleman & Jones, 2004). However, not only financially but also time and effort-wise, it is vital for international actors to understand the power and decision-making process.

In terms of research limitations, I recognize the breadth of the topic and the actors covered in this study, making it more descriptive and less specific about each country and each stakeholder. Along with that I demonstrated the complexity of stakeholder relationships as very diverse and, in most cases, not generalizable geographically. Robert Oxtoby also points out that TVET varies markedly across countries within which “national ideologies, historical antecedents, social, economic and cultural factors are all potentially powerful variables and, given the complexities, we should not be too surprised that so few comparisons of different approaches to TVET planning and provision exist in the literature” (Oxtoby, 1993, p. 197). And finally, the application of Kingdon’s streams model to Central Asian countries might be questionable. However, it is noted by scholars that the model, even if designed to the U.S. political realities, is relevant and applied across different other regions and policy fields (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Cairney & Jones, 2016).

“Pilgrims to Samarkand, it is said, chanted in unisons: We shall go” is quoted in Anthony King’s review (1985) of Kingdon’s book (1984), where he criticizes Kingdon for not giving an answer to his question on how the agenda-setting works. At the same time, he also reminds us of the importance of not only answering but also of raising those questions, metaphorically saying that Samarkand might be disappointing but the joy is in the journey itself (1985). I also cannot give an answer to my research question - how the employees of international organisations navigate their relationships with TVET stakeholders in Central Asia. But I enjoyed working on this research with the same logic of raising the questions. The aim was not to give one answer (and it is not possible to give one right policy approach to all five countries) but more to put an avenue for further discussion and future research on both TVET as an educational field with least-paid-attention to it and Central Asia with the same problem as a region.

Summary

In responding to the research question of this study on how IO staff build and navigate their relationships with TVET stakeholders in Central Asia, this paper had to grapple with many

issues and challenges related to both TVET structures, the power dynamics, and decision-making processes of the region. And yet, given that the success of TVET depends on the success of the multistakeholder cooperation, it was reported that the participants of the study spend most of their time working on that cooperation building. Applying Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model to the TVET policy prioritisation in these five countries, it was said that Uzbekistan's high population growth and Kazakhstan's social discontent together with the unemployment rates of these countries, are putting the TVET in a more priority position in the agenda-setting. Whereas Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's low economic capacities together with failed political bodies are not allowing them to prioritise and pay due attention to TVET development, which in turn, is bringing larger contributions from IOs. Turkmenistan was the least discussed country within this study due to lack of participants from it and the closed political regime of the government which gives only limited access to country data on TVET. The overall conclusion on the decision-making process, according to findings and literature, is that despite the long period since the independence of the Central Asian countries, there are still certain tribal or regional social divisions affecting power relations. Furthermore, it was indicated that many of the IO employees have no faith in a regional TVET system because of the between country differences in terms of economics, overall developmental levels, and interethnic issues.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A. CUREC Approval Letter

CUREC Ref: CIA-22-106

Friday, 25 February 2022 at 11:06:53 Greenwich Mean Time Hamish Chalmers

████████████████████
Student CUREC

Dear ██████████

Title: Exploring the landscape of international organisations in TVET in Central Asia

Ref: CIA-22-106

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

[hDp://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf)

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study. Best wishes

Hamish Chalmers

Member of the DREC

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Director: The International Database of Education Systematic Reviews [IDESR.org](https://www.idesr.org)

APPENDIX B. Participant Information Sheet (English)



Study Title: Exploring the landscape of international organisations in TVET in Central Asia.

Researcher details: [REDACTED]

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read this information. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please ask.

What is the purpose of this study? To understand how the employees of international organisations manage their relationships and decision making process in partnership with local stakeholders of five Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan.

Why have I been invited? For this study we were looking for the employees of international organizations working in the TVET sector of any of 5 Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan.

Do I have to take part? You are able to stop taking part in this study at any time if you decide so. You do not need to give a specific reason or explain your decision.

What should I consider? This study is an independent research project, under the supervision of research supervisor, of the student of MSc Comparative and International Education program in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. This work is part of master program of an individual student and you will not be compensated in any way for taking part in this research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? Because of the potential benefits of the results of this study the policy makers both of the state structures and international organisations may benefit from its findings for the professional work.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential? The research will fully anonymise the participants. While the names of the organisations that you work for will be used in the research, the names and positions of participants will not be identifiable. The audio/video recordings of the interview will be seen and heard only by the student researcher and her supervisor. All the recordings and any additional data given by the participant with her/his consent will be stored securely and destroyed 3 years after the research has been completed.

Further information and contact details:

Address: University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY
Phone +44 (0) 1865 274024
Fax +44 (0) 1865 274027

Email of the researcher: 

APPENDIX C. Participant Information Sheet (Russian)



Название исследования: Изучение деятельности международных организаций в области профессионально-технического образования в Центральной Азии.

Сведения об исследователях: [REDACTED]

ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЙ ЛИСТ ДЛЯ УЧАСТНИКОВ

Вам предлагается принять участие в этом исследовании. Прежде чем принять решение, важно, чтобы вы поняли, почему проводится исследование и что оно будет включать в себя. Пожалуйста, найдите время, чтобы прочитать эту информацию. Если что-то непонятно или если вы хотите получить дополнительную информацию, пожалуйста, проконсультируйтесь с исследовательской группой.

Какова цель данного исследования? Понять, как сотрудники международных организаций (работающих в секторе технического профессионального образования) выстраивают свои отношения и принимают решения в партнерстве с местными заинтересованными сторонами в пяти странах Центральной Азии: Узбекистана, Казахстана, Таджикистана, Кыргызстана, Туркменистана.

Почему меня пригласили в качестве участника? Для данного исследования мы искали сотрудников международных организаций, работающих в секторе профессионально-технического образования любой из 5 стран Центральной Азии: Узбекистан, Казахстан, Таджикистан, Кыргызстан, Туркменистан.

Надо ли мне принимать участие? Вы можете прекратить участие в этом исследовании в любое время, если вы так решите. Вам не нужно указывать конкретную причину или обосновывать свое решение.

Что мне следует учитывать? Данное исследование является самостоятельным исследовательским проектом, под руководством научного руководителя, студента программы MSc Comparative and International Education на факультете образования Оксфордского университета. Данная работа является частью магистерской программы отдельного студента, и вы не получите никакой компенсации за участие в данном исследовании.

Каковы возможные преимущества участия? В связи с потенциальной ценностью результатов данного исследования, его выводы могут быть полезны для профессиональной деятельности лиц, ответственных за разработку политики как в государственных структурах, так и в международных организациях.

Будет ли сохранена конфиденциальность моего участия в исследовании? В ходе исследования будет обеспечена полная анонимность участников. Хотя названия организаций, в которых вы работаете, будут использованы в исследовании, имена и должности участников не будут идентифицированы. Аудио- и видеозаписи интервью будут видеть и слышать только студентка-исследователь и ее научный руководитель. Все записи и любые дополнительные данные, предоставленные участниками с их согласия, будут надежно храниться и уничтожены через 3 года после завершения исследования.

Дополнительная информация и контактные данные:

Адрес: **Оксфордский университет**
15 Норхэм Гарденс
Оксфорд, Великобритания
OX2 6PY
Телефон +44 (0) 1865 274024
Факс +44 (0) 1865 274027

Электронная почта исследователя: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX D. Interview questions (English)

Warm up questions:

- What does your organisation do in TVET sector of this country?
- What is your role within that organisation/project?

Main questions:

Stakeholder map

- What are your key partners in your work on TVET?
(Follow up clarifications on each type of partner organisations: private, public, trade unions, other IGOs, HE institutions, etc.)
- Could you describe decision making process in your key stakeholder partnership?
- Why do you think the partnership of actors is important for TVET in CA?
- Based on your overall experience in TVET who do you think leads the development and provision of TVET in this country? Who is taking leadership responsibility in this partnership?
- In percentage (or in numbers?) how would you describe the contribution of partners to the overall budget of TVET provision in this country?

Navigation of relationships with state structures

- What state structures do you work with in partnership? Who do you work with within that structure? What activities do you implement together?
- How would you describe the partnership with these state structures?
- What are the obstacles/barriers to do this cooperation more effective?
- What are the lessons learnt from this partnership? What worked best within the joint work?

Regionalisation of CA within TVET

- Do you work with any TVET stakeholders from the other Central Asian countries? (If yes) How would you describe this collaboration? (Mainly symbolic/representative? Action driven?)
- Does your organisation (and/or) you look for regionalisation of Central Asian countries? Why?/Why not?
- How do you think TVET could contribute to the regionalisation of Central Asia?

Closing questions:

- How long have you been working in TVET / in this role?
- What are your future professional goals?
- Do you have anything to add?

APPENDIX E. Interview questions (Russian)

Вопросы на интервью

Вступительные вопросы:

- Чем занимается ваша организация в секторе ПТО в этой стране?
- Какова ваша роль в этой организации/проекте?

Основные вопросы:

Карта заинтересованных сторон

- Каковы ваши ключевые партнеры в вашей работе по ТПОП?
(Последующие уточнения по каждому типу партнерских организаций: частные, государственные, профсоюзы, другие МПО, вузы и т.д.)
- Не могли бы вы описать процесс принятия решений в вашем партнерстве ключевых заинтересованных сторон?
- Как вы думаете, почему партнерство заинтересованных сторон важно для ТПО в ЦА?
- Исходя из вашего общего опыта в сфере ТПО, кто, по вашему мнению, руководит развитием и продвижением ТПО в этой стране? Кто берет на себя ответственность за лидерство в этом партнерстве?
- В процентах (или в цифрах?) как бы вы описали вклад партнеров в общий бюджет ПТО в этой стране?

Навигация отношений с партнерами

- С какими государственными структурами вы работаете в партнерстве? С кем вы работаете в этих структурах? Какие мероприятия вы проводите вместе?
- Как бы вы описали партнерство с этими государственными структурами?
- Какие существуют препятствия/барьеры для того, чтобы сделать это сотрудничество более эффективным?
- Какие уроки извлечены из этого партнерства? Что лучше всего сработало в рамках совместной работы?

Регионализация Центральной Азии через ТВЕТ

- Работаете ли вы с какими-либо заинтересованными сторонами в сфере ТПО из других стран Центральной Азии? (Если да) Как бы вы описали это сотрудничество? (В основном символическое/представительское? Движимое действиями?)

- Стремится ли ваша организация (и/или вы) к регионализации стран Центральной Азии? Почему? Почему нет?
- Как, по вашему мнению, ТПОП может внести вклад в регионализацию Центральной Азии?

Закрывающие вопросы:

- Как долго вы работаете в ПТО / на этой должности?
- Каковы ваши будущие профессиональные цели?
- Есть ли у вас что добавить?

APPENDIX F. Recruitment letter / email (English)

Dear [REDACTED]

My name is [REDACTED], and I am writing to you with a request to participate in university research.

I am currently a master's student at the University of Oxford and I am doing research, under the supervision of Professor [REDACTED], on the implementation of TVET (technical and vocational training and education) in Central Asian countries.

As [REDACTED] is one of the stakeholders in this form of training in Central Asia, we hoped that you could participate in our research by giving us an interview. The study will be based entirely on interviews with participants who are employees of international organisations working in the field of TVET in Central Asia. As such, we are looking for people working specifically in vocational and technical education in any of the Central Asian countries.

For your reference, I have also attached a document describing the study itself and the role of the participants in more detail.

I would very much appreciate your support for this study and some of your time to participate in it. We will try to find the most convenient time for you to do the online interview. And we will guarantee (if the participant wishes) complete anonymity in the release of the full study.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
[REDACTED]

Ms. Aigerim Kadyrova

MSc Comparative and International Education
University of Oxford



APPENDIX G. Recruitment letter / email (Russian)

Subject: Запрос на участие в университетском исследовании по профессиональному обучению в Центральной Азии

Уважаемая/ый [REDACTED]

Меня зовут [REDACTED], и я Вам пишу с просьбой поучаствовать в научном исследовании.

На данный момент я магистрант в университете Оксфорда и делаю исследование, под руководством профессора [REDACTED], по реализации **TVET (техническое и профессиональное обучение и образование) в странах Центральной Азии.**

Поскольку [REDACTED] является одной из заинтересованных сторон в обучении взрослых и в профессиональном образовании в Центральной Азии, мы надеемся, что вы сможете принять участие в нашем исследовании, дав нам интервью.

Исследование полностью будет основываться на интервью участников - **сотрудников международных организаций, работающих в сфере TVET в ЦА.** В связи чем, мы ищем людей, работающих именно в сфере профессионального и технического образования в любой из стран Центральной Азии. Для Вашего ознакомления я еще приложила документ, более детально описывающий само исследование и роль участников.

Я буду очень признательна за Вашу поддержку этого исследования и немного Вашего 1 часа Вашего времени для интервью. Также мы гарантируем (по желанию участника) полную анонимность при выходе данного исследования.

Буду ждать от Вас ответа!

С уважением,
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
MSc Comparative and International Education
University of Oxford

