

UCA, Swiss research program hold 'Open Day'

BISHKEK (TCA) — The Central Asian Regional Coordination Office (RCO) of the NCCR North-South and the University of Central Asia (UCA) are organizing a first joint 'Open Day' devoted to 'Research and Development - Pasture Management in Central Asia'.

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The event is taking place in Bishkek today, February 19.

The event is expected to attract fifty participants representing policy and decision makers, donors and partner organizations active in the field of pasture and livestock rearing in Central Asia. Presentations will be made by local and international researchers on results and experiences gained over the last couple of years by NCCR North-South mainly in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. There will also be an opportunity to explore research needs and areas for future regional collaboration.

The joint collaboration between NCCR North-South and UCA in Central Asia is a consequence of a natural partnership built on similar goals for building knowledge and capacity of Central Asian scientists and researchers in the areas of development of mountain societies and preservation of their cultures and traditions.

The partnership is under the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding between UCA and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Bern to foster academic exchanges, contribute to the development of UCA's academic curriculum and train Central Asians scholars.

According to Daniel Maselli, a Senior Researcher at CDE and UCA, Central Asia provides scientists with uncharted territory and a vast opportunity to make unique contributions of high relevance for society at large due to the rapidly transforming socio-economic, cultural and political conditions. UCA's hosting of NCCR North-South in Central Asia ensures the continuity of NCCR's research on sustainable development and the environment in the region.

Both institutions share commitment to building capacity in research and teaching. NCCR North-South has been active in the training of PhDs through partnerships between Swiss Institutions and regional universities over the past eight years. UCA recently launched the Central Asian Faculty Development Program (CAFDP) which provides young Central Asians to pursue graduate education at leading international universities so that they can return to

the region to take up faculty and research positions. In 2008, the Program sponsored five Central Asians, three from Kyrgyzstan and two from Tajikistan, to pursue their studies in Singapore and Germany.

The collaboration will be extended actively in the areas of joint research activities. "UCA's programs will focus on the practical application of academic knowledge and its utilization for the good of the region," states Bogdan Krawchenko, Director of UCA. "We aim to develop a new generation that can think creatively and apply knowledge to address issues facing transitional economies." This process has already begun with the recruitment of Central Asian researchers under the Research Fellowship Program at UCA which provides opportunities for young Central Asian scholars with PhDs to engage in research at UCA. Regional and international scholars such as Daniel Maselli are also affiliated as Senior Fellows with UCA.

Among the young Fellows, Duishon Shamatov received his PhD at the University of Toronto. He is currently engaged in research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the quality and outcomes of education offered at secondary schools in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The research project will offer policy and practice recommendations to improve quality education at secondary schools in the region.

Elmira Kuchumkulova returned to Kyrgyzstan after completing a PhD from University of Washington in cultural anthropology. She is leading a number of research projects in the areas of Islam, nomadic heritage and Kyrgyz identity, Kyrgyz Islamic cemeteries and traditional Central Asian music. Uzbek musicologist Alexander Dzhumayev, an established expert and scholar on Central Asian music, is compiling a Central Asian musical bibliography and working with regional scholars to publish original texts on music.

Maselli is positive about this innovative cooperation which is meant to produce relevant research results and help identify ways to bring investment for the economic development of the mountainous regions in Central Asia. Ultimately such efforts could help opening new avenues for overcoming the gaps in the higher educational system.