

## Helvetas – A Swiss Association for International Cooperation in Kyrgyzstan

Helvetas was founded in 1955 as the first private development organization in Switzerland. Helvetas is today an independent and non – profit organization with more than 100,000 members and contributors, and 15 program offices abroad. It actively works to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people in 22 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America such as Bhutan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Lesotho, Guatemala, Haiti, Columbia, and the Dominican Republic.

In Kyrgyzstan, Helvetas started its activities in November 1994 with Agroproject – restructured as the Kyrgyz – Swiss Agricultural Programme (KSAP), operating in close co – operation with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources – in the remote rayons of Kochkor and Jungal, Naryn oblast. Today, Helvetas runs 6 projects:

- *KSAP, the Kyrgyz Swiss Agricultural Programme*, which supports the nationwide Rural Advisory Service (RAS) and the Policy Support Project;
- *AVEP, the Agricultural Vocational Education Project* in Naryn oblast which is developing new curricula and teaching materials for agricultural training;
- *CBTSP, the Community Based Tourism Support Project*, which helps local communities market culture and adventure tourism;
- *SPIP, the Support to Private Initiatives Project*, which supports the development of small & medium sized businesses involved in food and forestry product processing;
- *LARC, the Legal Assistance to Rural Citizens Project*, which assists the rural population realize their rights and decision makers apply the law accurately, consistently and impartially; and
- *BioCotton Project: Organic Cotton Production and Trade Promotion*, which aims at developing and supporting production and export of organic cotton.

All of these projects aim to support rural people through the transition period from a socialist system to a market economy.

## AVEP in brief

Project duration	
Pilot phase:	• 2001-2002
I phase:	• 2003-2005
II phase:	• 2006-2008
Financial commitment:	USD 430'000
Donor:	Helvetas Switzerland
Implementing Agency:	Helvetas Switzerland
Counterpart:	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
Partner schools:	7 schools in Naryn Oblast, Central Kyrgyzstan
Beneficiaries:	Vocational students in agriculture School teachers and management

## How to reach us:

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# Agricultural and Rural Vocational Education Project



Ministry of Labour and  
Social Protection

◀ **helvetas** Kyrgyzstan ▶

**The Agricultural and Rural Vocational Education Project** started in January 2001 as the Agricultural Vocational Education Project in Naryn oblast, to support Kyrgyz partners in adapting the agricultural vocational education system to the new situation of the private market economy. Today, the project is helping rural development in general, by contributing to an effective and sustainable vocational education system that will provide graduates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to manage private farms, as well as other businesses, helping to raise the incomes in rural areas.

## Background

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, specialist farmers suddenly became private entrepreneurs, and narrow specialists suddenly became generalists, charged with the unexpected obligation of winning their sustenance from plots of land and success in the private market. That is especially critical in regions where a large part of the population depends, in some areas, even exclusively, on their natural resources. In those areas, extreme poverty is widespread, even though the natural resources are not scarce. This has created an urgent demand for agricultural advisory services, a need filled by the Rural Advisory Services, supported by the Helvetas-sponsored Kyrgyz Swiss Agricultural Project. While the advisory service has been active and successful in re-training the farmers, very little could be done for the younger generation in basic subject-oriented training, to help them succeed as farmer-entrepreneurs. Hence, in 2001, Helvetas began the pilot phase of the AVEP with a completely new education system: - in terms of content, teaching and learning approach.



## Approach and Implementation

The project creates and implements a new form of education enabling farmers to gain relevant and applicable experience from teaching, which is adapted to local conditions, in experimental classes in 7 pilot partner schools. The curriculum, teaching and learning approach are based on the reality of Kyrgyz farming life. This participatory innovation starts from the vocational schools and involves farmers, students, parents, teachers and school administrators, as well as, local and national authorities.

Since it started in January 2001, with 100 students in two schools, in Kochkor and Ottuk, Naryn oblast. As from 2003, the project covers the whole of Naryn Oblast - all seven vocational schools with rural vocational education programmes with 650 students - with an outreach to the national methodological center, in order to achieve standardization of the innovative vocational education system and to prepare for an eventual geographical and/ or professional expansion.



## Vision: the three-level educational system

The project concentrates on the profession of “farmer” and “woman farmer”, offering three education levels:

- *Farm laborer* (1½ years education) - is able to fulfil practical farm tasks.
- *Farmer/woman farmer* (total 3 years) - can run a farm on his/her own.
- *Master farmer* (over a further period of 6-12 months) - acts as a market-oriented entrepreneur and as a trainer for practical field training.

The new form of training involves both theory and practical, provided at the vocational schools, using their own facilities and natural resources, and also practical experience gained on productive farms. The students individually spend almost one third of their education time attached to host farms, where they are involved in the daily routine (apprenticeship system).

## Activities:

- Management support to schools
- Participatory development of new ideas (vocational education system, apprenticeships, curricula)
- Counselling, training, and information provision
- Didactical and methodological materials development

The project creates challenges for the parties, making students learn how to acquire a business-oriented and problem-solving approach, which is also new for many teachers; teachers to adapt to new roles – as fellow learners, as coaches, and as facilitators of the learning processes; and school managers to administer new systems and seek ways of improving existing systems and structures within their institutions.

## Project structure

AVEP is a joint project by <h> and the MoLSP. It has a small implementation and co-ordination unit in the premises of the Oblast Methodological Centre, which in cooperation with the National Methodological Centre and other partners, are mandated to promote AVEP activities and the new Vocational Education System. The project operates through working groups and advisory boards in the partner schools and involves authors to develop training materials, as well as local and international consultants to support it.

## Partners

### In Kyrgyzstan:

- All seven agricultural vocational schools in Naryn Oblast
- Methodical centers of the MoLSP in Naryn and Bishkek
- Rural Advisory Service (RAS), Naryn and nation-wide
- Agriculture and Trade Cooperatives Project, GTZ
- Poverty Alleviation Project, UNDP
- Assistance to Vocational Education, GTZ (Agricultural Technicum in Tokmok)
- Agricultural Area Development Project, ADB
- LESIC project (Vocational Education component for carpenters)
- Agriculture Universities of Naryn and Bishkek

### Abroad:

- The Swiss College of Agriculture in Zollikofen, Switzerland
- CIEA seminar: a worldwide seminar and knowledge network for agricultural vocational and university education
- The Social Forestry Support Programme, Vietnam,
- Natural Resources Training Institute (NRTI), Bhutan.