

Project Highlights



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION
CANADA

An Agency of the Aga Khan Development Network

This report summarizes the progress, findings and impact of a project supported by Aga Khan Foundation Canada.

Afghanistan and Central Asia: Mapping a New Road to Regional Cooperation



Sixty public servants from across Central Asia participated in the University of Central Asia's Trade and Regional Cooperation training program.

Afghanistan and its neighbours in Central Asia stand to prosper through regional trade and cooperation. But leaders lack the evidence and analysis they need to make well-informed decisions. Through the **Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building** project, supported by Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Aga Khan Foundation Canada, the University of Central Asia is helping to establish a knowledge base and equip a cadre of public servants to support regional economic cooperation. To the institutional landscape of Central Asia, the University has added a strong indigenous platform for regional dialogue and collaboration and a new foundation for evidence-based policy development.

Since 2001, Afghanistan has been the focal point of global interest in Central Asia, with Canada playing an important role in the region's stabilisation, reconstruction and development. Afghanistan's northern neighbours understand that its stability is essential for the region's development. At the same time, Afghan progress towards peace and prosperity is inextricably linked to cooperation with its neighbours.

"Discussing trade recommendations within the region allows us to develop a strategic plan to build capacity and increase revenue and trade as the country transitions."

Wahidullah Waissi, Director General for Economic Cooperation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Once the overland route of the historic "Silk Road" trade network, the countries of Central Asia are today at a crossroads of a different kind. Most emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union as fledgling democracies with weak economies, beset by ethnic and political conflict and, in some cases, civil war. Looking ahead, Central Asia is blessed with abundant natural and human resources and enjoys support from within and abroad for political and market reforms. Given that stability in the region will be influenced by the success or failure of these still fragile states, a number of current international processes focus on fostering trade and cooperation and on deepening relations with Afghanistan.

Since the 1990s, the Aga Khan Development Network has actively supported programs and institutions that aim to enhance political stability and strengthen economic, cultural and intellectual growth. A cornerstone of its commitment in the region is the University of Central Asia. In response to the region's great need for highly trained professionals, the University offers an internationally recognised standard of higher education and prepares graduates to lead the transformation that is underway.

As Afghanistan and its neighbours attempt to deepen relations, they are hampered by a lack of home-grown expertise and have therefore had to depend on outside advice. To realise their vision of stability and prosperity, local leaders need what decision makers in the developed world can take for granted – a core of competent and technically savvy public servants who can offer policy options based on evidence, build strong relationships with regional counterparts and engage in professional, knowledge-based negotiations over trade and other matters.

Tailoring Steps to Strengthen Negotiations

“We need to be proactive in initiating trade agreements and take steps to build sound economic relationships,” observed Saeed Parto, Head of the Afghan Public Policy Research Organization, addressing a [Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building symposium](#) in Kabul that garnered attention both in policy circles and in the media. Government officials, diplomats and business representatives from across the region had come together to discuss just how to build these relationships, one practical step at a time.

The event, co-hosted in November 2012 with the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was part of a remarkable 15-month effort by the University of Central Asia, under the [Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building](#) project, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. In partnership with the governments of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, and drawing on the best of regional and Canadian expertise in trade and public policy, the project tailored a series of research, training and dissemination activities to give professionals in the region the knowledge and skills they need to help their governments take the necessary steps towards solid economic relationships.

“It is remarkable that the University of Central Asia has managed to bring delegates from these four countries together. For the Carleton University and Norman Paterson Centre for Trade Policy and Law, this partnership with the University of Central Asia is valuable and is the beginning of a longer-term commitment.”

Margaret Skok, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
and former Canadian ambassador to Central Asia

The project supported the establishment and launch of the Institute of Public Policy and Administration as the first initiative of the University's Graduate School of Development. The Institute is now a permanent regional platform for policy-relevant research and professional development. To frame the region's most pressing trade and cooperation issues, the Institute produced a series of working papers analysing regional trade patterns,

SUCCESS IN NUMBERS:

In just 15 months, the Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building project:

- Established the Institute of Public Policy and Administration
- Trained 60 civil servants from four countries in trade policy and negotiations, 40% of them women
- Produced 23 research papers on regional trade and a 500-page English-Russian Glossary of Terms in Public Policy, Public Economics and Trade Policy
- Co-hosted, with governments, high-level events involving 120 participants from across the region
- Held 9 public lectures and dissemination events

transportation corridors, customs and border regimes, the role of Russia and China as trading partners as well as a number of country-specific topics.

Working closely with regional governments and some of Canada's top trade experts from the Centre for Trade Policy and Law at Carleton University, the Institute developed and delivered an intensive executive program on trade and regional cooperation. Training for some 60 people, drawn from ministries and academia in the four participating countries, took place in the Kyrgyz Republic in August 2012. The training also featured presentations from the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, USAID and the Institute of Public Policy and Administration. Topics ranged from trade economics and policy analysis to the technical details of tariff and trade barriers, international finance and negotiations, and the current state of trade and prospects for expansion in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In the seminar's final days, trainees were divided into teams and asked to negotiate a trade agreement between countries of the region and China.

Follow-up workshops in each country explored country-specific issues, such as local perspectives on the effectiveness of existing treaties, custom union accession, export development strategies and public-private partnerships. In addition to the high-level forum in Kabul, a regional forum was co-hosted in Astana in November 2012 with the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These events, along with a number of public lectures and significant media coverage, served to share project findings more widely and underlined the importance of increased regional trade.

New Skills and Insights for Regional Trade and Cooperation

Through this project, governments in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have been actively engaged. The project has increased demand for solid policy research that can better inform decisions and raise awareness of the benefits of regional cooperation and trade. To this end, analytical papers continue to be published, with public events organised to profile each one. Feedback showed high levels of satisfaction among trainees, more than one-third of whom were women: 95 percent of respondents felt they could apply their new knowledge and skills directly in their work.

The project has also produced a wealth of findings relevant to supporting stability and growth in the region. These findings, which are described more fully in the papers emerging from research, highlight the importance of:

- Developing infrastructure to link energy-rich countries in Central Asia with markets in Southeast Asia and Europe
- Strengthening regional markets to stimulate small and medium-sized enterprise as a source of jobs and income
- Making trade and customs services more efficient so the region can compete as a transit zone
- Viewing bilateral and multilateral agreements and accession to the World Trade Organization as a potential means to integrate Afghanistan into the world economy
- Developing a tariff regime that will enhance Afghanistan's economy through increased trade, and
- Liberalising visa regimes to facilitate the travel of entrepreneurs.



Hazrat Wahriz from the Institute of Diplomacy, Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs simulating a free trade agreement with fellow course participants.



Wahidullah Waissi addresses participants at a symposium on trade and cooperation in Central Asia, co-hosted in Kabul by UCA and the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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Extending the Network and Deepening Partnerships

Integration and cooperation promise significant benefits as the region tackles shared challenges such as poverty and instability. The Aga Khan Development Network takes a regional approach to tackling development in this part of the world; its specialized agencies are working on these issues in a variety of ways. In response, the University of Central Asia is planning longer-term professional development for current and future civil servants and will continue to refine a corresponding research agenda in consultation with the governments of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. By engaging the public, private and civil society sectors across the region, the University aims to create a regional network of communities of practice around issues relevant to regional cooperation. A special focus of future efforts is to work with small and medium-sized enterprises and business associations to help them assess regional market possibilities for various products.

Given their shared experience in Central Asia and Afghanistan to date, and their mutual interest in peace, prosperity and pluralism in that region, there is great potential for continued partnership between Canada and the Aga Khan Development Network.

The University of Central Asia

The University of Central Asia (UCA) was founded in 2000 by a treaty between the governments of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and His Highness the Aga Khan.

UCA brings with it the commitment and partnership of the broader Aga Khan Development Network, offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education in Central Asia, and will operate on three campuses, one in each country.



UNIVERSITY
OF CENTRAL ASIA

- ◆ UCA Campuses
- ◆ Central Administration Office
- ◆ UCA Learning Facilities

Aga Khan Foundation Canada

Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) is a non-profit international development agency, working in Asia and Africa to find sustainable solutions to the complex problems causing global poverty. Established in 1980, AKFC is a registered Canadian charity and an agency of the worldwide Aga Khan Development Network.