

In Kyrgyzstan, USAID's Jigerduu Jarandar Project is supporting civic engagement to improve the lives of communities and individuals, especially those most disadvantaged. The efforts of an Initiative Group that was established with support from the project in the town of Kok-Jangak from 2020 to date demonstrate how local leadership, strengthened knowledge and organizing skills, and close collaboration and learning with local government and the private sector can lead to positive results.

Promoting Civic Engagement to Address Unsanctioned Cattle Grazing in Public Spaces in Kyrgyzstan

Success Story | March 2022

Background

Kok-Jangak is a town of 11,500 inhabitants located in Jalal-Abad Oblast (a province or region) in southern Kyrgyzstan. It is a former coal mining town, with most of its residents currently engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. At the moment, almost all of the grazing lands around Kok-Jangak belong to the state or neighboring municipalities. Local farmers have limited access to needed pasture. Additionally, many households with small numbers of livestock oftentimes graze their cattle and sheep in public spaces of Kok-Jangak, because they are well aware of the fact that they are not going to face consequences for such behavior. It is not uncommon to see cows, horses, and sheep on the town's streets, in parks, and even on the premises of administrative buildings.



Cattle roaming freely and on the streets of Kok-Jangak

Photo Credit: Jigerduu Jarandar

Local citizens have long complained that the animals are destroying green spaces, disrupting traffic, and leaving behind droppings and offensive smells. This causes tension among the local residents. Sometimes arguments flare up with threats of violence. Over the past few years, the Mayor's Office has received a deluge of complaints from concerned residents. In one neighborhood, 60 citizens formally launched a complaint about cattle leaving trails of

excrement in their residential areas, causing a nuisance. Livestock also feed on trash from public bins installed in 2015.

Animals were found at times inside schools, including a kindergarten, or in the local library. Even the Mayor's Kok-Jangak Office was visited by goats. Local farmers have also complained about instances when their fields were trampled by other people's cattle and sheep. In addition, herds of stray cows and sheep roaming freely on the thoroughfares and interior roads in and around Kok-Jangak often cause hindrance to traffic, sometimes causing accidents.

These specific incidents raised the more general question of the public's sense of collective ownership of public space and the duty of care that this required by both government and citizens. It is at this level that the problem enters into the specific ambit of the Jigerduu Jarandar project. Despite these challenges, there were no regulations on livestock grazing in Kok-Jangak, which effectively prevented local authorities from taking any action against violators.

Establishment of an Initiative Group

As part of efforts to pilot support to civic engagement in target municipalities, Jigerduu Jarandar conducted a survey to identify issues of concern in Kok-Jangak. Unauthorized grazing in the town was identified as a matter of priority concern because it was a chronic problem that affected public order and health and seemed to have no solution. The Jigerduu Jarandar Project offered to support civic engagement on this issue. Citizens in turn formed an Initiative Group that brought together local activists, deputies of the local council, and representatives of the town government.



As a first step, the Initiative Group collected information about livestock ownership in Kok-Jangak and the total grazing land available. The

group determined that Kok-Jangak owns state pastures with a total area of 257 hectares. The group also met with relevant stakeholders, including the mayor, chairperson of the Town Council, and representatives of the local Pasture Committee. The group also organized an online meeting with representatives of the Bishkek Mayor's and City Council to learn about how grazing is managed in and around the capital. In particular, the group members learned about how the authorities in Bishkek deal with illegal grazing in the city. Additionally, in order to ensure citizen participation, the Initiative Group organized a series of public hearings where local residents voiced their ideas and recommendations. Afterwards, the Initiative Group established a Working Group to come up with a viable solution. The group brought together members of the Initiative Group as well as local activists and representatives of the Kok-Jangak Town Council and Mayor's Office.

Results to Date



Kok-Jangak residents hold a public hearing to discuss unsanctioned grazing in the town

Photo Credit: Jigerduu Jarandar

Following a series of discussions, the Working Group came to the conclusion that reforming the legal framework was a prerequisite for any sort of solution to the challenges posed by unauthorized grazing. Therefore, the Working Group developed a proposal based on citizen comments that focused on regulatory mechanisms within municipal jurisdiction. The Jigerduu Jarandar team ensured that the proposal received all of the technical legal support required, thereby empowering the citizen group to represent citizen views with confidence.

The proposed regulation was officially adopted by the Town Council on February 8, 2022. After being adopted, Regulation No 13/1 was posted on the official town website and added to the register of normative legal acts of the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic. In the view of the citizens' Initiative Group and local authorities, including the Mayor, Regulation No 13/1 provides the discretion needed for decision-making by the mayor in the name of public order, health and safety.

In the view of the Initiative Group and mayor, the regulation provides the needed discretion to fairly adjudicate public order issues involving livestock. In order to increase the awareness of the residents about the new regulation, print and video materials have been produced and widely disseminated. Additionally, to ensure that the law translates into action and the residents comply with the new regulation, a monitoring group has been established. Jigerduu Jarandar will continue to monitor the implementation of the law.

The fact that local residents as well as local authorities were actively involved in resolving the issue has ensured buy-in from all stakeholders. Not only were the residents able to share their views

during engagement sessions such as public hearings, but they also managed to connect with local authorities and learned more about taking part in decision making processes to address issues that they care about.

Kok-Jangak's authorities have also greatly benefited from this activity. Officials of both the Mayor's Office and the Town Council have expressed their gratitude and satisfaction with the work of the Initiative Group, pointing out the effectiveness, low cost, and sustainability of the solution. There has been a great deal of interest in Kok-Jangak's case, as livestock encroachments are a challenge in many populated places across the country. Jigerduu Jarandar will take action to share Kok-Jangak's experience in target municipalities and beyond.

Lessons Learned

The example of Kok-Jangak demonstrates the results that municipalities can achieve by adopting a broad-based approach to civic engagement. It clearly shows that civic engagement can allow citizens to have a say beyond the ballot box, leading to robust and resilient solutions. Studies show that civic engagement can lead to increased satisfaction with the performance of local governments.¹ Several residents of Kok-Jangak have in fact expressed their satisfaction with how the Initiative Group acted as an engagement conduit between them and the local authorities.

The experience of the Kok-Jangak Initiative Group has three strategic elements: 1) it began and ended with civic engagement; 2) it worked through civic leaders, associations, and organizations able to sustain efforts throughout and beyond the project period; and, finally, 3) it sought to engage constructively with public institutions to generate sustainable governance solutions. The Mayor's Office will ensure the regulation is enforced in the coming months, with the Initiative Group monitoring progress.

Next Steps

Almost 12,000 inhabitants now benefit from a regulation that did not exist before the collaboration between the Initiative Group and the local authorities, local elected officials, and other stakeholders. Moreover, there is a strong view among the participants in this process that it will inspire similar civic engagement in the future when public interest issues arise. The project will continue to build horizontal networks to ensure that the knowledge, experience, and innovative solution of the Kok-Jangak Initiative Group are widely shared, including through the Local Self-Government (LSG) Union, which has over 450 LSG members.

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¹ Kumagai, Saki, and Federica Iorio. *Building Trust in Government through Citizen Engagement*. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33346/Building-Trust-in-Government-through-Citizen-Engagement.pdf;sequence=1>