



GENERATION EQUALITY **IMPACT STORY**



## CHAMPIONING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN S.T.E.M. IN KYRGYZSTAN

Photo: Courtesy of Kyzhibek Batyrkanova

**TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY** is the focus of one of the six Generation Equality Action Coalitions, the innovative, multi-stakeholder initiative convened by UN Women that is mobilizing governments, civil society, international organizations and the private sector to deliver tangible impact on gender equality and women and girls' human rights by 2026. Ahead of the Generation Equality Forum in Paris (30 June - 2 July 2021), when the Action Coalitions' plans will be officially launched, this special edition of the [Impact Stories series](#) will include six briefs focused on each of the Action Coalitions' themes.

"Women face so many barriers, challenges and stereotypes at home, work and public life," explained Kyzhibek Batyrkanova, 26, director of the Kyrgyz Space Programme. "When you are a woman in science, the challenges are multiplied. Women and girls are expected to behave, look and express themselves in a certain way."

Founded in 2018, the Kyrgyz Space Programme is a scientific and socio-educational initiative that contributes to the development of science, education and gender equality in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region. Together with a team of girls, the programme is conducting courses on soldering, 3D-modeling, 3D-printing and programming

**Photo above:** Kyzhibek Batyrkanova, director of the Kyrgyz Space Programme, partnered with UN Women to engage Kyrgyz youth in STEM with a focus on rural disadvantaged girls.



The **Generation Equality Forum** is a milestone global event to advance action and investment for gender equality convened by UN Women and co-chaired by the governments of France and Mexico in partnership with civil society and youth.

The Forum kicked off in [Mexico City from 29 to 31 March 2021](#), and will culminate in [Paris from 30 June to 2 July 2021](#), when heads of State and Government, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and youth organizations will gather to launch the **Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality**. Structured around **six Action Coalitions**, the Plan will include concrete commitments and intergenerational, multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance gender equality over the next five years.



**Register** for the Paris Forum at: <https://forumgenerationequality.fr>

**Learn more** about the **Action Coalitions** and its leaders at: <https://forum.generationequality.org/>

**#ActForEqual!** for **#GenerationEquality**

to promote STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education among young women and girls. It is also working on assembling the country's first nanosatellite. "We want to show by our own example that girls are capable of anything, even reaching for the stars," said Batyrkanova.

In 2019, the Kyrgyz Space Programme, in partnership with the UN Women Kyrgyzstan Office, pitched the project "Promoting Positive Community Norms through Engaging Youth with STEM-Education" to the Ideas Campaign, an initiative led by UN Women in the region with the aim of helping UN Women offices and their partners tap into innovation and generate new levels of value across programmatic activities through high-impact and cost-effective solutions. The project proposal was selected as one of the three winners, which enabled it to receive specialized technical assistance, interactive training as well as remote mentorship through a four-month coaching with an innovation specialist and a four-day bootcamp in Istanbul. During this phase, the project ideas were refined through user research, systems thinking, behavioral insights and design thinking.

The "Promoting Positive Community Norms" project emerged from the coaching phase with a strengthened plan for training rural disadvantaged girls on information and communications technology by integrating the community-led methodology called Gender Action Learning System (GALS), which is aimed at behavioral change towards supporting girls in choosing STEM professions while promoting gender equality. "Girls are not encouraged to study biochemistry or bioengineering because these are not considered professions for women. Many families are reluctant to invest in girls' education as they believe they will not get a 'return on their investment,'" noted Batyrkanova.

With the additional support of the EU-funded UN Women project "Across Generations and Gender Borders – Communities Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Kyrgyzstan," the project was piloted in 2019 in Talas, a town in northwestern Kyrgyzstan, targeting senior grade students. It also engaged family members, community

## PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

The **UN Women** and **Kyrgyz Space Programme** project "Promoting Positive Community Norms through Engaging Youth with STEM-Education" was one of the three selected project proposals under the 2019 "Ideas Campaign," an initiative led by the UN Women Regional Office of Europe and Central Asia, made possible through core and seed funds.

The piloting of the project took place in 2019 with the support of the **EU-funded UN Women** project "Across Generations and Gender Borders – Communities Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Kyrgyzstan" in partnership with **HelpAge International and Agents of Change.**

members and schoolteachers of rural girls to support and encourage girls to pursue STEM.

"Through the Ideas Campaign, this project refined its approach regarding the use of co-learning processes that capacitate both girls and their guardians on the use of new technologies," said Ulziisuren Jamsran, UN Women Representative in Kyrgyzstan. "By engaging the participants' families through GALS, social norm changes were catalyzed in their communities, and concrete approaches for creating more favourable ecosystems for the realization of girls' rights were tested."

After a general GALS training, boys and girls attended a 6-day "Tech Camp" implemented by the Kyrgyz Space Programme. The curriculum included soldering, 3D-modeling, programming, as well as soft skills, teamwork a guidance on how to enter university.

Batyrkanova emphasized the need to expand access to educational programmes and job opportunities outside of big cities. "We need STEM education among marginalized groups of women and girls, men and boys. Girls can succeed in any profession."

As **Action Coalitions** leaders, **Armenia, Chile, Finland, Rwanda, Tunisia, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), The Rockefeller Foundation, A+ Alliance, the Global Fund for Women, Social Builder, Digital Grassroots, Koc and Microsoft** will commit to ensure that all women and girls have equal access to technology and innovation.