

IMPACT SHEET: SET to SWITCH

Sustainable Energy for Tourism in Central Asia



Promoting Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy production in the Community-Based Tourism Sector in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan



PROJECT BACKGROUND

SET to SWITCH aimed to address both the challenges and opportunities of growing interest in tourism along the heart of the ancient Silk Road. Tourism is a key driver of entrepreneurship and job creation in Central Asia presenting urban and especially rural communities with an unprecedented opportunity to boost and diversify their income. However, the pristine landscapes of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are all acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and tourism is a notable contributor to both greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. Community-Based Tourism (CBT), characterized by local ownership and management, is one model to deliver a range of both economic and environmental benefits for communities and Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) therein, including women-led businesses, which play a crucial role in sustainable development.

CHALLENGE

As nature-based tourism is so pivotal in Central Asia, the project tried to address obstacles to the advancement of eco-friendly tourism in the region. The barriers are tied to broader issues affecting the establishment of a robust green economy in the region, including an unfavourable business environment for MSMEs, the absence of a supportive legal and regulatory framework, limited capacity of Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs) to provide green financing, insufficient awareness and commitment to Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) practices, and a shortage of incentives.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

SET to SWITCH aimed to promote sustainable tourism development and contribute to the reduction of the carbon footprint of the CBT sector in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. More specifically, the project planned to support MSMEs in the CBT, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RE/EE) sectors to adopt SCP practices and access green finance.

TARGET GROUPS

- Community Based Tourism MSMEs
- Manufacturers and suppliers in the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency sector
- Micro-Finance Institutions developing green finance products
- Policymakers, local authorities, and public institutions
- Rural communities in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Capacity Building and Market Linkages

- Market and value-chain analysis for RE/EE and CBT sectors
- Capacity-building on SCP for RE/EE MSMEs
- Business plan development and mentoring for RE/EE MSMEs
- Expansion of online matchmaking platform
- Zero Carbon Fairs to promote green technologies

Sustainable Tourism Practices

- Study tour to Germany for CBT MSMEs on green tourism and SCP
- Cascade training for CBT MSMEs on SCP
- Training on Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC)
- Developing eco-standards for CBTs
- Energy audits and joint investments with CBTs in green technologies

Access to Finance

- Green Finance Working Groups (GFWG) with MFIs in each country
- Gender sensitive green loan products for CBT and RE/EE MSMEs
- Capacity-building for MSMEs on responsible borrowing and green investment

Promotion of Green Tourism in Central Asia

- Green Tourism Working Group (GTWG) to develop marketing strategies
- Collaboration with European certification companies
- Engagement with local chambers of commerce for green tourism promotion
- National and regional events to promote sustainable, regional tourism
- International events to showcase Central Asia as one tourism destination

Policy Dialogue

- Business Environment Analysis for RE/EE
- Regulatory Impact Analysis
- Capacity-building for government officials
- Public-Private Dialogue Platforms
- Roadmap with policy recommendations published and advocacy campaigns

LESSONS LEARNED

SET to SWITCH began in January 2020 and was immediately disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a profound and prolonged effect on the global economy and tourism especially. This affected key stakeholders and the overall timeline and required adaptability to ensure that crucial activities continued despite travel restrictions and health concerns. In addition, technology was leveraged, and contingency plans developed to enable the maintenance of essential communication and engagement with partners and stakeholders.

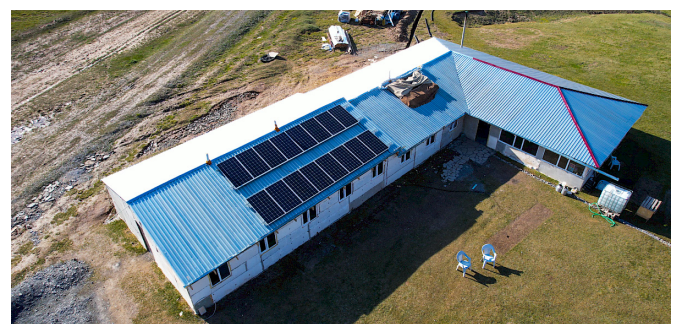
Another significant challenge was regional and global political developments. This included a revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2020, unrest in the Pamirs in Tajikistan throughout the project as well in Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan in 2022. Moreover, the dramatic escalation of the conflict on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, first in 2021 and again in 2022, led to long standing border closures, travel restrictions and logistical difficulties. To address this, strategic decisions were made to recruit local trainers, split training sessions between the countries and work in hybrid mode when needed. This approach allowed for the continuation of capacity-building efforts, despite tensions. Russia's War in Ukraine led to the unprecedented arrival of Russians in the region and dramatic inflationary pressures, which required careful and strategic navigation. These adaptations ensured the project could work towards its objectives and mitigate the effects of external shocks as far as was possible.

Throughout implementation, valuable lessons were learned, highlighting the significance of adaptive programming and effective coordination. Collaboration with a diverse array of stakeholders, including government agencies, implementing partners, local and international tourism stakeholders and communities, proved essential for success. Furthermore, delivering customized training and support to local MSMEs in the RE/EE and CBT sectors not only enhanced their skills but also promoted business development and resilience.



PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT

- Trained 123 RE/EE and 357 CBT MSMEs on SCP and business planning
- Expanded a matchmaking platform to enhance the regional RE/EE market
- Created a booklet on Sustainable Standards for CBT Providers
- Trained 90 CBT MSMEs on responsible borrowing and green investment
- Conducted energy audits and jointly invested in green tech with 18 CBT MSMEs
- Established national and regional Green Finance and Green Tourism working groups
- Piloted 11 gender-sensitive green loan products
- Created a Branding and Marketing strategy for CBT in Central Asia
- Held 7 Zero Carbon Fairs and participated in multiple international events, including [IFTM Top Resa](#), to showcase green tourism in Central Asia
- Published green tourism / decarbonisation roadmaps in all 3 countries
- Facilitated signature of long-term cooperation agreements between 3 national MFI associations; 3 national CBT associations; 3 national CBT associations and an eco-certification company ([Green Seal](#))





Greening Tourism at 3,000 Metres and Above

Jyrgal Omurakunova has been a pioneer in tourism in the Lake Kol-Suu area (altitude 3,514m) for nearly a decade, attracting a growing number of tourists to this captivating region, which has now surpassed other destinations in popularity. However, along with this opportunity come environmental challenges. Through collaboration with Acted and EU SWITCH-Asia, Jyrgal leveraged the benefits of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) practices and solar energy. This approach not only reduced her carbon footprint but also lowered costs, ultimately strengthening her brand. Today, she stands as an exemplar, reaping economic and environmental rewards through her dedication to sustainable green tourism.

Long-term project sustainability

SET to SWITCH ensured sustainability by working on both the supply and demand sides and strengthening key target stakeholders across the region. The project built the capacity of and catalyzed connectivity between RE/EE and CBT MSMEs, as well as MFIs. This involved supporting the development and technical production capabilities of 123 RE/EE MSMEs regionally. It led to the expansion of platforms for matchmaking, enhanced market linkages, and tailored finance products for RE/EE technologies. The project empowered 357 CBT MSMEs with activities such as SCP sensitization, eco-certification, and green investments, which raised awareness among CBT MSMEs on the cost-saving, environmental, and marketing advantages of SCP practices and RE/EE technologies. Modest shifts in behaviors have been initiated, showcasing solutions to reduce the collective carbon footprint of the CBT sector. The adoption of SCP practices, coupled with promotional initiatives, has enhanced the visibility and appeal of Central Asia as a sustainable and inclusive destination on the international tourist market.

SET to SWITCH's support for CBT created opportunities for rural populations in regions with high tourism potential. This approach prioritised environmental sensitivity, resulting in positive impacts on the use and preservation of natural and energy resources, as well as the cultural heritage and practices of the target countries. Tourism is a key vehicle to engage youth, women, and vulnerable groups and generate income-generating and employment opportunities. Indeed, the project embraced a gender-sensitive approach, promoting women-led businesses as a cross-cutting theme. Specifically, green loan products tailored to the needs of women customers were piloted. At the policy level, the project heightened the awareness of government institutions about the imperative to enhance the regulatory framework for both the RE/EE and tourism sectors. The project provided evidence-based recommendations for advocacy purposes and established public-private dialogue platforms across the region. These efforts contribute to long-term enhancements in governance and sustainable development.

Project contributions to Climate Change Mitigation and SDGs

SET to SWITCH made contributions to climate change mitigation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including **SDG 12**, by promoting SCP itself and the uptake of RE/EE technologies. The project developed **regional sustainability standards** and linked Central Asia to **international eco-certifications standards** while encouraging the adoption of **sustainable energy solutions** and **green business practices** among target enterprises. Additionally, the project sensitized 123 RE/EE and 357 CBT MSMEs, helping them integrate **SCP practices** into their operations. In so doing, the project showcased **economically viable pathways to reducing greenhouse gas emission** in the tourism sector.

SET to SWITCH also promoted the RE/EE sector, directly contributing to **SDG 7** and its goal of ensuring access to affordable, sustainable energy for all. The project supports the growth of MSMEs in the RE/EE, and CBT sectors, aligning with the aim of **SDG 8** to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, and decent work for all. Through its activities such as capacity building, market analysis, and fostering market linkages, the project contributed to enhancing **SDG 9** and sustainable industrialization in Central Asia and fostering innovation. The project's efforts to sensitize stakeholders on SCP practices and its emphasis on green technologies in community-based tourism contribute to climate resilience and align with the goal of **SDG 13** of taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.



Zarina Sagynbaeva

Acted, Regional Project Coordinator



SET to SWITCH supports the Central Asian CBT sector to anticipate and respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by emerging tourism trends, while helping to reduce the ecological footprint of tourism in Central Asia, a region that is highly vulnerable to climate change and other environmental challenges. The project made a huge contribution to CBT MSMEs going green while improving regional cooperation between the three Central Asian countries, which are now promoted as 'one tourism destination'.



Impacts at a Glance

Economic Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 117 USD saved on average per month per CBT MSME after integrating SCP and RE/EE investments 18 pilot CBT MSMEs benefit from energy audits and co-investment in green technologies Matchmaking platform for RE/EE consumers and suppliers in Kyrgyzstan expanded to include CBT MSMEs and MFIs, and replicated in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan to expand the regional energy market
Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 357 CBT MSMEs trained on SCP 32% of CBTs MSMEs now recycling versus just 4% before
Social Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 new jobs created on average per CBT MSME after integrating SCP and RE/EE investments Joint investments with 8 women-led CBT MSMEs in RE/EE technologies
Climate Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% and 30% reductions on diesel and petrol consumption by CBT MSMEs in Kyrgyzstan after integrating SCP and RE/EE investments 74% reduction in coal consumption by CBT MSMEs after integrating SCP and RE/EE investments 86% reduction in GHG emissions by CBT MSMEs after integrating SCP and RE/EE investments 44% of CBTs MSMEs now using renewable energy versus 24% before
Green Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90 CBT MSMEs trained on responsible borrowing & green investment 11 new gender sensitive, green loan products piloted
Target Group Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation agreements signed between 3 national MFI associations; 3 national CBT associations; and 3 national CBT associations and a European eco-certification body 484 SMEs involved in project activities
Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 advocacy roadmaps and white papers with key policy recommendations developed 2 public-private dialogue platforms established Capacity-building workshops and lobbying events with key policymakers
Europe-Asia Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 international events to promote green tourism in Central Asia organised with European and Asian partners 1 EU-Asia study tour on green tourism including a training of trainers on 'Sustainable Production and Consumption for CBT' organised in Germany





FUNDING

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DURATION

Jan. 2020 - Jul. 2023



PARTNERS



ACTED



Mascontour GmbH



Tajik Norwegian Centre on Sustainable
Development (TajNor)



BizExpert



The Association of Private
Tourism Agencies of
Uzbekistan (APTA)



Association of Microfinance
Institutions (AMFI) in
Kyrgyzstan



Uzbekistan National Association
of Microfinance Institutions
(NAMI)



Association of Microfinance
Organizations of Tajikistan
(AMFOT)



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