

# Sustainability Indicators of Foreign Assistance in the Field of Media and Information Literacy: A Case Study on Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

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**Abstract.** *Media and information literacy (MIL) projects are crucial for a country's development. They provide citizens with access to vital information and resources. This enables them to learn about their rights and responsibilities, as well as gain access to critical resources to improve their quality of life. For the last decade several international organizations such as UNESCO, Internews, DW-Akademie annually have been providing grants for the training courses, and projects at various levels to increase the MIL level of the population in the Central Asian context. The present study will discuss ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of projects in the field of MIL in this region. The paper investigates the sustainability indicators of foreign aid initiatives in the realm of MIL within Central Asia. It aims to assess the long-term viability of foreign aid programs in fostering MIL across Central Asian nations through a comprehensive analysis of historical trends, policy frameworks, and stakeholder perspectives. As part of the research, face-to-face interviews were conducted with prominent trainers and experts from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Emphasizing the role of public-private partnerships, technological integration, and cultural considerations, the paper explores avenues for promoting enduring change and enhancing the effectiveness of foreign assistance in this critical field. The findings contribute valuable insights to policymakers, practitioners, and scholars interested in optimizing foreign*

*aid strategies for sustainable development in the ever-evolving landscape of media and information literacy in Central Asia.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Aid (FA); Sustainability Indicators; Media and Information Literacy (MIL); Central Asia (CA); Sustainable Development.

## Introduction

Foreign aid is one of the most important policy tools that rich countries use to help poor or developing countries improve population well-being and facilitate economic and institutional development (Cherkaoui, 2022; Cichos, 2021; Karras, 2005; Qian, 2015). In the context of Central Asia (CA), where socio-economic and political challenges persist, sustaining foreign aid initiatives becomes pivotal to fostering sustainable growth (Insebayeva, 2021; Kilichova, 2023). Media and information literacy (MIL) emerge as key factors to ensure the effectiveness and long-term impact of such initiatives.

The theoretical framework of this research paper draws on the concepts of media literacy (ML) and information literacy (IL) as intertwined components of MIL. ML refers to the ability to critically analyze and evaluate media messages, while IL encompasses the skills required to access, evaluate, and use information effectively for problem-solving and decision-making (Lee & So, 2014; Ramaiah & Rao, 2021; UNESCO, 2013). By examining MIL in the context of CA, this research highlights its potential in enhancing the impact of foreign aid initiatives.

Across various disciplines, researchers have recognized the importance of MIL in fostering development. In the realm of sustainable development and foreign aid, MIL stands as a powerful tool for empowering individuals and communities by strengthening their capacities in accessing and utilizing information (Grizzle & Hamada, 2019; Khan, 2020; Wuyckens *et al.*, 2022). It promotes critical thinking, awareness of media biases, combating fake news, disinformation, and misinformation and the ability to navigate complex information landscapes (Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Cunliffe-Jones, 2023; Spinde *et al.*, 2022). Thus, MIL contributes to efficient decision-making, sustainable development, and democratic governance (Carlsson, 2019a).

MIL projects can play very important role in the development of a country by providing citizens with access to information and resources that can help them learn about their rights and responsibilities, and access to critical resources that can help them improve their quality of life (Lord & Vogt, 2021). By increasing access to information, MIL projects can help to empower citizens and promote positive change in their communities.

Today, as in the countries of the whole world, many projects in the field of MIL are being implemented in the countries of CA. Several international organizations such as UNESCO, Internews, DW-Akademie annually provide grants, training, and projects at various levels to increase the MIL level of the population in the region (Dadakhonov, 2024).