



The Chartered  
Institute of Logistics  
and Transport

## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OFFICIAL UPDATES



**STRONGER TOGETHER**

### **Responding Flexibly to the Covid-19 Crisis in Central Asia Through Capacity Building**

Working in a three-way partnership with CILT International, CILT Kazakhstan and USAID, our Central Asia case study shows how, through agile planning and thinking, CILT has been able to continue their development activities in the region whilst tackling head-on some of the business challenges presented through the Covid-19 outbreak.

Through transforming some of these challenges into opportunities, CILT and its partners have been able to tackle some of the urgent business needs and skills issues in the Central Asia Region.

#### **Building on previous success**

CILT has been operating in Kazakhstan since 2017, and has now expanded to cover the Central Asia Region due to support funding awarded by USAID in 2018-19 for training and capacity building. Now in the second phase of the project (2020-21), the original plan was to continue to develop the strength and presence of CILT, grow the number of training opportunities and also to develop a business consultancy/support model.

Through careful replanning, the project has been rescoped to address some of the key market needs arising from the Covid-19 crisis, and repurpose the programme to focus on supporting Small Medium Enterprises across 5 countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). CILT Kazakhstan was also able to move swiftly to set up a series of ongoing Russian-speaking webinars to support business as well as providing access to the CILT International webinar series.

This short article reflects on the lessons learnt so far and some of the exciting plans for the next 3 months. It also outlines the model we have developed for supporting the businesses coaches and mentors, as well as the SMEs themselves.

#### **What are CILT doing with USAID in Kazakhstan right now?**

As part of the USAID funded CTJ (Competitiveness Trade Jobs) transport and logistics training and development programme, the CILT proposals for SME support were brought forward to commence in May 2020. This rearrangement of programme priorities was designed deliberately to support practical business recovery and resilience/risk planning across the logistics, transport and supply chain sectors in the Central Asia Region.

The CILT/USAID relationship is now concentrating more on longer-term capacity building and being able to support the business sector through advice and problem-solving, alongside technical training and other development activities.

In early June 2020 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a key report looking at the impact on Covid-19 across Central Asia. This crisis response document forms part of the OECD's policy responses to Covid-19 and CILT were able to adapt their approach quickly to take account of the key findings in their project.

The comprehensive piece of research examines economic, fiscal, governmental, social and health aspects of the current crisis, and includes a country-by-country analysis of what has been achieved, along with some of the risks and weaknesses that still have to be tackled at a policy level. The full report is located at <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-response-in-central-asia-5305f172/>

## **A lean and agile response**

Within two months the programme had been recalibrated and the new operational model defined.

The current Central Asia programme now covers:

- A series of transport and logistics webinars tackling key transport and logistics themes – at international and local levels
- Setting up a panel of Business Support advisors – over 25 industry experts who are being trained to 'business coach' and support SMEs
- Delivering training and support to the advisor pool – developing their coaching, mentoring and technical skills
- Launching a Business Support programme targeted at the SME sector (25-150 employees) where clear, succinct guidance is needed to help problem-solve and tackle some of the critical issues facing SME performance during the Covid-19 crisis
- Providing online 'cluster' groups for businesses to come together as communities, share, learn and support each other, as well as receiving specific webinar advice
- Piloting the Covid-19 focused programme through to October 2020, when there will be a key review

## **How does the Central Asia model work?**

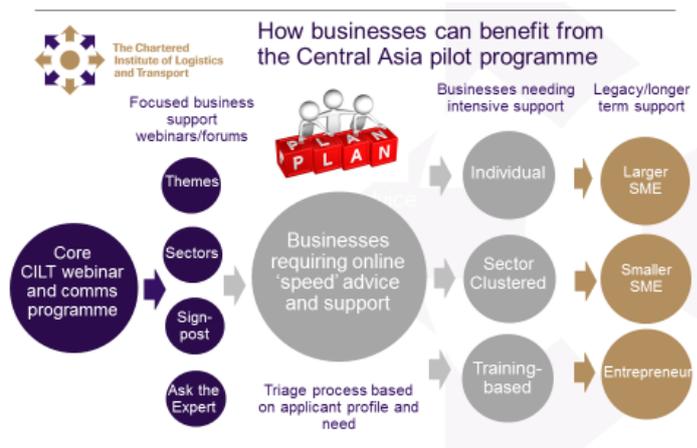
This newly defined programme puts learning and development skills at the heart of delivery, supporting both the business advisors and the 'end customers'. Getting knowledge 'out there' is critical so the CILT webinar series provides a backdrop for promotion of the scheme as well as direct and referral marketing.

CILT Kazakhstan are then reviewing applications for short or longer-term assignments and introducing the most appropriate advisor to work alongside the businesses.

Regular check-in and evaluation activities are vital, as we want to see if there is a role for this to be provided longer term to support business resilience and recovery

A critical part of the programme is to encourage businesses to take ownership of the development of solutions in-house, and to challenges, stretch and grow existing leaders, managers and technical leads – rather than provide all the answers. This will mean the advisors have to be agile and flexible in the way they support each business.

The advisors themselves are being mentored by lead experts from CILT International and locally, with regular development webinars planned for the business support team. This is so any improvements to the programme can be implemented quickly.



## Developing skills and capacity long term

As well as developing skills and competency within smaller businesses that may not have logistics or supply chain expertise, developing the skills of the business advisor team is a vital outcome.

The advisor is expected to focus on developing their own methods of coaching, mentoring and guiding other professionals, as well as being able to deliver consultancy advice and direction.

Longer-term CILT plans to keep the Business Support service open, hopefully transforming into a steady- state situation.



With CILT's help, each advisor will also develop comprehensive roadmap/action plan for their own continuing professional development and identify ways to achieve both 'breadth and depth' in their experience.

## Lessons learnt

Through USAID's willingness to be flexible, and a strong team approach between CILT International and CILT Kazakhstan, we have been able to adjust our approach to maintain a service during Covid-19, while still meeting the overall training and capacity building objectives of the project.

As a result of the acute changes in the region's economy, the adapted Central Asia project has been able to focus on:

- Business survival and resilience in the light of the economic impacts of Covid-19 on workforces, ways of working, product and service diversification and ongoing business efficiency.
- Accelerating impact during the July -October period (and potentially longer), and the 'reach' to businesses in an accelerated way.
- Boosting the target number of businesses to be supported in an 'in depth' manner to a minimum of 20+ overall to May 2021.
- Developing a series of focus support forums/webinars targeted at business support.

This gives just one example of how collaborative work across the CILT family has used skills development, learning, facilitation and technical capacity skills to support industry resilience and recovery in one region of the world.

To find about more about the Central Asia project please contact

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