

English Transcript: Episode 5 with Fatima Yakupbaeva and Nurai Mamytova, cofounders of Mildet-bot

I'm Tiffany Sprague and welcome to UNDP's Chats with STEMinists podcast in which we engage in conversations with people working to advance girls and women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers sharing their ideas for transformative solutions within the STEM ecosystem for lasting change.

Tiffany Sprague: In today's episode UNDP Kyrgyzstan's Communication officer Ainagul Abdrakhmanova will speak with Fatima Yakupbaeva a lawyer and director of a firm in Kyrgyzstan and Nurai Mamytova, UNDP coordinator of the project Spotlight Initiative which is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Fatima is the creator of Mildet-bot a chat bot operated on the Telegram platform and provides advice on various legal issues such as "How can I collect alimony for my children" or you can also get written legal advice on divorce and how to divide jointly owned property." Take a listen as Ainagul shows how women use technology to advance gender equality. The interview is in Russian. There is an English transcript on the STEM4ALL website. Enjoy!

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Hello, dear listeners. Today, we have another episode of the Chats with STEMinists podcast. My name is Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, I am a Communications Officer at UNDP Kyrgyzstan. Currently, I am with two guests, Fatima Yakupbaeva, the director of a law firm, a lawyer and Nurai Mamytova, the coordinator of the UN project "Spotlight Initiative." Today, we would like to discuss Mildet-bot, a telegram bot which provides legal advice. A Mildet-bot will help collect alimony and get answers to many of our questions. So, Fatima initiated the creation of this bot and let's talk about it: "What was behind the creation of the bot? What difficulties did you face? What kind of results or changes are expected?"

Could you tell us, Fatima, what “Mildet” bot is and why you initiated such project? Is it because it is a part of your job or was it more personal to you? And why did you come up with a bot, and not something else?

Fatima Yakupbaeva: Okay, thanks for the questions. I am very pleased to talk with you on this topic and tell you about the bot. “Mildet” bot is a bot on the Telegram platform that advises on various legal issues. As you already said, it helps to answer the questions that people sometimes ask in chats, forums and sometimes to lawyers directly. But these questions are, in my opinion, quite basic. Getting quick feedback on them should not be a difficult procedure. “Mildet” bot can advise on various legal issues online, such as “What if you were fired? How do you fire a negligent employee?” That is, it considers both sides of perspectives: from the employer and the employee. “How does one collect alimony for minor children? How does one register the status of an individual entrepreneur and start running their own business?” The thread will be able to provide information about taxes and the peculiarities of each tax regime. “How do you protect your rights if you have been sold a substandard product?” And now, with the support of the Spotlight Initiative and the UNDP Kyrgyzstan, the functionality of this bot is expanding, and it will also provide written legal advice on divorce, on the division of jointly acquired property, establishment of paternity and appeal against the inaction of the bailiff. Why was the choice made for this functionality? When considering the issues of protecting the rights of women and children, there often arises a situation when women cannot prove that a particular person is the father of the child. Since, they cannot prove it legally, then, of course, it will not work to collect alimony. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to establish paternity, and then file an application for the recovery of alimony to bring the whole process to its logical end. I often come across women who do not know how to do this. If they know, they are either afraid or too shy to seek legal assistance. Some do not have the money or financial ability and it seems to me that such technology to help solve the problem will be a win-win situation. That is, in such a position, it turns out that they are two minutes away, documents are ready to print and go to court. Thus, they become more literate in the legal sense. They become more independent, they understand that the protection of human rights is needed, but not for donors and other organizations. That is, first of all, it is always

personal responsibility for your life and for the well-being of your children. Therefore, intentions to create this bot were that women and the vulnerable segment of the population in general had the opportunity to receive high-quality and affordable legal assistance. These are all the questions that I previously raised about labor rights, consumer protection and family law. I have received all these questions over the course of many years of my legal practice, and in December I will already have an anniversary - 10 years of work as a lawyer. These questions have always seemed so basic to me that it is not worth taking money for it, especially nowadays. I really wanted to automate this process so that lawyers can quickly provide advice. As a rule, these are the same type of situations. There are children - there is no alimony. There is proof of paternity or there is a birth certificate, that is, everything happens according to the same type of scenario. Therefore, it is not so difficult to automate and write algorithms for solving such a problem and this is the reason the bot exists. It is expanding and now it works in three languages. For example, I cannot advise in three languages, I cannot simultaneously make twenty applications for the recovery of alimony, and so on. So, this bot still helps not only women or other people who want to receive remote accessible legal assistance, it also helps me. I cannot do all this alone, with such a speed and with such a volume. So, I think that this bot should have a good future. We will develop and expand it further.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Thank you Fatima! I think that we will return to some questions, in any case there are questions. I want to ask Nurai, why did you decide to support the upgrade of this bot as the coordinator of “Spotlight Initiative”? Indeed, there are actually centers for free legal aid. Was it worth replacing them, or is it on the contrary, supplementing or increasing the capacity of legal centers? For what purpose did you support this project?

Nurai Mamytova: Yes, thanks to Ainagul for the question. In fact, we have been puzzled for a long time with this problem, that women, unfortunately, do not know about the procedure of collecting alimony very often. This question is often asked in the same free legal aid centers that were created in the Ministry of Justice. And in fact, a lot of requests are received by people, including women and girls, who come to live in these centers and

undergo this kind of consultation. In fact, as Fatima already noted, we were very interested in this idea, since the bot not only increases legal literacy among women and girls, but also allows women to start specific actions and collect alimony. When we found out about this bot, we tested it among our female acquaintances who had difficulties in collecting alimony. And this small test showed that women can absolutely independently generate a statement for themselves to go to court and quite successfully collect alimony from their former partners. When we were convinced that this bot works, we decided to contact Fatima to discuss the possibilities of our cooperation within the framework of the project in general. Since the program is under “Spotlight Initiative”, it is still aimed at eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls. We understand that 95% of those trying to collect alimony are women. This really is a gender issue. Since, this is a form of certain economic violence that women face, when fathers do not allocate money for caring of children, we have determined for ourselves that within the framework of the Spotlight Initiative, this problem should be dealt with one of the highest priorities. And as you know, last year we put forward a bill [in Kyrgyzstan] to amend the alimony legislation. The bill was signed by the president in August last year. And in fact, there were good changes which were made to the law. In particular, the size of the minimum alimony payments that the fathers had to pay increased. The concept of a hard-core non-payer was introduced, and certain restrictions were also imposed. The new changes in the law provide very good opportunities for women to collect alimony more effectively. But unfortunately, after we promoted this bill, we traveled to the regions, and it turned out that we were faced with a situation where women actually do not know about their rights and the changes that were introduced in August last year. Unfortunately, they said that they did not know about these changes in legislation. Secondly, women, like Fatima has already noted, have limited access to qualified legal assistance. Firstly, they do not have the financial resources to pay for the services of lawyers, and secondly, there is a very small number of lawyers who are ready to help women in the regions. And, during the conversation with women in the regions, it turned out that they have a lot of such stereotypical attitudes regarding the procedure for collecting alimony. They first believe that this is a very difficult process that requires the obligatory hiring of a qualified lawyer, and the second reason is that women do not believe in the justice system itself

and considered it a waste of time and money to collect alimony from former partners. And when we told them about the changes made, that there is an opportunity to contact the bot and get high-quality legal advice, especially since it can generate documents that they can take to the courts even without the help of lawyers, the reaction was very positive. It seems to me that even by informing many, we inspired women to start taking concrete actions. In fact, this experience was very inspiring for us, and right after our trips to the regions, we decided to meet with Fatima and expand the functionality of this bot. And answering your question, this measure does not duplicate the work of free legal aid centers, but in fact, this functionality will help to unload the work of these centers, since women can already solve a certain layer of issues already by contacting this bot. And accordingly, the lawyers and attorneys who work in the centers will be able to redirect their efforts to more complex cases that really require attention from lawyers.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Thanks Nurai. And Fatima, could you tell us how the bot works? Is it built on frequently asked questions? How often is this information updated? Is there is a person who processes it? If it requires human intervention and not a bot, to whom is it transferred? Who is on the other side of the bot?

Fatima Yakupbaeva: Thanks a lot. There is the developer and I on the other side of the bot. That is, some technical questions arise if the system is frozen or people do not advance further in the dialogue for some reason, the functionality does not work. Because there are often such cases, when, for example, a document is generated, you need to fill in all the fields correctly. And often there are difficulties with filling in the date of birth of the child and the date of birth of both the respondent and the plaintiff. It turns out that some of the users recently wrote about failures, saying, here we enter and for some reason the command does not go further, because they did not put spaces after the periods. That is, it is necessary to write, for example, March 19, 1991, it is necessary to write "19.03.1991" without spaces. Because this is how the bot advises and it needs to be given an exact answer like in his library, how correct the answers can be. Therefore, speaking about how a bot works, it works through dialogue. It asks questions and offers options for answers. That is, if we are talking about collecting alimony for children, then it

asks how many children you have, how many of your children are over or under 18 years old. Because you need to immediately understand that this bot and the legislation in general establishes the recovery of alimony for minor children. If we are talking about adult children, then alimony can be collected if they study in higher educational institutions and if there is a contract. In other cases, if they are 19 years old, do not work and stay at home, it will not be possible to collect alimony for them. The law establishes such a procedure, such norms. Therefore, the bot asks, because initially it has written in the program what options and how alimony for children under 18 is properly collected. Then it asks other questions, "Where do you live?" And in brackets indicates which answer may be. That is, for example, there is "Tynystanov street, house 16, apartment 18", that is, write like this, and not just one word. Because if there is only one word, then the bot will show "does not look like the real address." Because it understands that the address contains the name of the street, or the mention of some numbers along with words. That is, numbers and words are necessarily included in it as the correct answer. Therefore, the technical side of the bot is such that there are many "if " options, in the software function what options there may be. Also, since this is a computer and all the same, it cannot advise as a person, so it asks about each child separately. That is, they can collect documents for twins, twins who were born on the same day. And you need to correctly answer this question "how many children do you have?" "Two". The bot asks about each child separately as "write the last name, first name, patronymic of each child" and "date of birth of each child," so that then the bot will automatically issue a document for 33% of the alimony recovery. Because when there are two children, this is 33%, and if the bot does not ask about each child, it will return 25% by default. Since for one child, 25% of the income is collected from the father or mother, that is, with whom the child lives. Therefore, the bot itself works on the logic of dialogues and correct answer options.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Thank you very much. Here is another question, how do women find out about this bot? Do you somehow promote it, or do you have to travel? This is a very necessary mechanism, and it should be discussed. Is there anything planned to promote it, or has something already been done?

Fatima Yakupbaeva: Yes, before supporting the Spotlight Initiative, the promotion was only through social networks, that is, my pages on social networks, some of my opportunities, but they were limited. That is, pages have been created on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. I write information on these pages, on my Facebook page, and also on my channel in a Telegram. But I still understand that this is a very limited audience. I am not a member of any large groups in Whatsapp. I do not advertise in any social media groups, in any specific groups or channels where the target audience is located. And this is determined by the approach and limited resources. And so, I understand that in the next two months there will be an intensification of the information campaign. The bot will be promoted in public, and in social networks and on television, in chats, publications. This happened with the support of the Spotlight Initiative, and I think that we will be able to reach a larger audience. The number of times people have used the bot is 1710 so far. I understand that this is little in comparison with its future potential, and I hope that after some time we will be able to declare and assert an increase directly in the audience and recognition of the bot.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: If there is an increase in bot users, will the bot cope with the technical influx? How long do you need legal advice later if the bot does not cope or the bot is not efficient enough to handle all requests of the users?

Fatima Yakupbaeva: The bot is still doing it efficiently, that is, the technical side of it is provided with updated servers. I pay for the server every month for technical support, and I have no doubt that this may be a weak side. Of course, I have concerns about questions that may come to me in a personal message, because it is indicated in the bot that “the author Fatima Yakupbaeva, if you have questions, please contact her.” These cases have already happened when people wrote me, and I did not have time to answer them promptly. There were cases when I answered within a few days, I understand that some moments were missed where they did not receive a full answer. I understand that this is an area in which you need to further promote and improve because you need a person to be satisfied. That is, the user was satisfied, so he came with the intention to receive qualified legal assistance from start to and finish, and accordingly, this assistance should

be provided. But at the same time, I understand that my focus is not on selling my services as a lawyer and attorney at the expense of a bot, but my focus is that, on the contrary, so that lawyers have less work in this area. May my colleagues forgive me, in order for you to do other things, or already accompany the post in some process. And at the very beginning, the spark ignited, and she began to move and live precisely by the forces of the applicants themselves, the plaintiffs themselves. Therefore, I think that over time I will ask colleagues, novice lawyers, so that they are such a conditional call center, or conditionally the team will answer questions using these documents. Because the document itself is being prepared by a bot and it will be prepared only in this format. And already the application and if some questions remain, then it will be a person, not a robot, who will be engaged in this.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Thank you very much. I would also like to check with Nurai. What do you think, if the bot partially helps women to collect alimony, is this somehow connected with the issues of violence, including economic violence? In general, the bot helps to reduce the percentage of violence, so to speak, or is it still aimed at the legal side and does not have such a goal?

Nurai Mamytova: In fact, it has such a goal. We believe that it fully corresponds to the concept of empowerment. The fact that we speak English, in Russian, we now use translation, that we give strength and confidence to women so that they can make decisions on their own. This bot just encourages women to make decisions and act on their own. Independently and not hoping for someone's help. Because there is a very big problem in addressing gender-based violence. Very often, when people try, what is best for the victim. But in fact, what I like about this bot is precisely the fact that it corresponds to this concept that we all cultivate this subjectivity in women so that they can independently solve their problems. And I already noted at the beginning, that alimony, they are not directly but indirectly, they are all the same and an indicator that a woman is in a situation of economic violence. When she has no choice but to use the justice system to get paid to support the children her parents gave birth to together. And why this responsibility and financial burden on their maintenance falls disproportionately on the

women. It's not really the desire of your partners to pay for the maintenance of their children, it's essentially a form of economic violence. And when we decided to support this idea, we clearly understood that this would be the contribution of the Spotlight Initiative to eradicate such forms of economic violence. And here I would also like to note that we have been working for a very long time to integrate the upgrade of this bot, to expand the functionality with project goals and tasks, which we really succeeded in doing, because even every other day we had an event that we held before in the regions a "Solidarity Bus" together with the Ministry of Justice. The second most popular request among women who came to the bus was, again, the collection of alimony. And in fact, we saw through the project activities that the problem is really widespread. Indeed, women, since they do not have legal literacy, do not know how to exercise their legal rights, which are guaranteed to them by law. And accordingly, this bot, it turns out, performs two very important tasks: first, it increases legal literacy, and secondly, it encourages independent actions of women, to solve their own problems. And I think this is a great example when, through raising legal literacy and awareness, we can together solve the problem of gender-based violence.

Ainagul Abdrakhmanova: Thank you very much, Fatima and Nurai, for your words. I wish the bot every success and hope we will meet again and talk when there are more users on it. We will help many women in strengthening their legal literacy

Nurai Mamytova: Yes, thanks.

Fatima Yakupbaeva: Thank you very much. Thanks for your questions and interest. Goodbye.

Nurai Mamytova: Goodbye.