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**KYRGYZSTAN**

# CASE STUDY

## Clean Water Eases Ethnic Tensions

**Hundreds of families share access to clean drinking water**



Photo: Mahabat Alymkulova

An Uzbek boy fills up on fresh water from the Kyrgyz well.

***“We are all parents,” said Nasiba Ganieva, a 57-year-old Jar-Kyshtak resident. “We all want our children to stay healthy. [Water] is our life.”***

### Challenge

Jar-Kyshtak is a village of 2,400 people bordering Uzbekistan in southern Kyrgyzstan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the village infrastructure rapidly deteriorated. The villagers had no drinking water, and residents were forced to drink irrigation water. Runoff from the cotton and rice fields, this water was contaminated with fertilizers and created a high rate of hepatitis A and typhoid among the villagers. Ethnic tensions also flared up when the Soviet Union dissolved. Once an integrated village, Jar-Kyshtak split into two communities, Jar-Kyshtak on the Kyrgyz side and Komurchi on the Uzbek side.

### Initiative

In 2001 USAID launched the \$3 million Peaceful Communities Initiative to open lines of communication between cross-border communities in the area. In an effort to address specific sources of conflict the initiative has rebuilt the water distribution system, as well as repairing the gas distribution system, improving schools and creating multi-ethnic sports teams and children’s festivals.

### Results

Over five months in Jar-Kyshtak, the community reconstructed the old drinking water system and dug 30 new wells. The whole community—more than 400 families—participated in the project. Although the local government of Komurchi was reluctant to become involved, the people of Jar-Kyshtak invited the 160 citizens of the Uzbek enclave to use the fresh water at the new wells.

“No one from the Kyrgyz village prevents them from drinking our water.... We are all brothers,” said Ganiev Alijan, manager of the water system.