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KYRGYZSTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Fair Test Opens Doors to Education

National test brings more equality to higher education



Photo: Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods

The National Scholarship Test was administered at over 80 sites across Kyrgyzstan in 2005.

“You don’t need money to continue your education at the university as before. It depends on your knowledge and education,” said Jyldyz, one of the first students to take the National Scholarship Test, developed with help from USAID.

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Jyldyz was among the first students to take the National Scholarship Test in Kyrgyzstan. When she learned that she received one of the highest scores, Jyldyz’s first thought was of her best friend Aisuluu, who graduated from the same remote village school a year earlier. The best student at her school, Aisuluu had wanted to study at the medical institute to become a doctor. Her dreams were shattered when she learned that she had failed the scholarship exam. Whether she truly failed the exam remains uncertain; what is certain is that her family did not have the connections or money to bribe exam administrators. After the exam, Aisuluu was forced to marry against her will and forgo her dream of becoming a doctor.

By the time Jyldyz took the exam, things had changed. Since 2002, USAID has been working with Kyrgyzstan to create the National Scholarship Test, a transparent and fair way for high school graduates to compete for government-funded college scholarships. USAID helps administer tests at 40 to 90 sites for over 35,000 applicants each year, promoting transparency and fairness of the examination and enrollment processes. Unlike regular entrance exams, the test is designed to measure aptitude, or the ability to learn, thereby providing a more level playing field for applicants from schools in less advantaged and rural areas. University administrators note that students enrolled through National Scholarship Testing have been successful in their studies.

Jyldyz is hopeful that this new system, which makes university education accessible to bright students regardless of their family’s social status or wealth, will bring big changes. “Now that everything has changed, one does not need money to continue education at the university as before,” said Jyldyz. “I hope there will be some changes in the country, too, because these young people will be excellent specialists and will serve their country. I hope the younger generation will be the future of our country!”