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Office of Transition Initiatives

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

PROGRAM UPDATE: April 20, 2011

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The USAID/OTI program in the Kyrgyz Republic is supporting the country's efforts to establish a more stable and secure democracy. It provides small grants to civil society, government, and private sector partners to implement high-impact, short-term projects in volatile communities. The targeted assistance supports the ongoing democratic political transition in Kyrgyzstan, while addressing emerging sources of instability and drivers of conflict at the community level. The USAID/OTI model is designed to be fast, flexible and responsive to a dynamic environment. It allows partners to implement pilot initiatives and catalytic projects that build momentum for continued long-term development. As a whole the activities are working to encourage democratic processes and build trust both within communities and between citizens and government during the critical period of transition.

ENGAGING AT-RISK YOUTH IN PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES DURING SPRING

During the run-up to the anniversary of last year's violent protests that led to the ouster of the government, rumors circulated that dissatisfaction with progress on political reforms and economic stagnation could lead to violence on the streets of Bishkek during the spring time. Violence, allegedly perpetrated by disaffected youth from Bishkek's socio-economically marginalized periphery, rapidly eclipsed last year's political protests in Bishkek, and many believe these same youth were at-risk for similar mobilization and manipulation around the one-year anniversary. Most of these at-risk youth reside in the unincorporated settlements called *novostroiki*: quasi-legal settlements, many of which have sprung up in the last decade, that lack basic community infrastructure such as roads, schools, parks, playgrounds, libraries and sanitation. The youth who live in these peripheral communities lack access to jobs and education and are prime targets for those seeking to foment unrest during times of political turbulence. In response throughout the months of April and May, USAID/OTI is implementing a series of separate activities to engage a maximum number of these at-risk youth during the volatile spring-time season.



1. **Stimulating Youth Entrepreneurship through Business Leader Mentoring II:** Building upon an earlier OTI-funded activity, the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) are engaging 420 young people (ages 17-to-18 year-old) from 11 at-risk *novostroiki* and the town of Tokmok in a training course to develop their marketable commercial and leadership skills, provide mentorship to develop business plans and community development projects, and hold a contest to identify the best idea that should be supported with start-up assistance.
2. **Channeling youth energies through non-violent sport:** In partnership with the local NGO Erep, this activity will organize a football tournament, marathon and two weeks sports fair that includes teams from all 48 *novostroiki*. Two of the selected *novostroiki* have sporting facilities that OTI previously renovated under other grants. The semi-final and final matches were played at Dordoi field on April 15, with the winner being awarded the "Bishkek Cup". EREP co-hosted the tournament with the local authorities, or Municipal Territorial Committees (MTCs), thereby building early engagement between youth and their local governments.

3. **Mobilizing at-risk youth to clean up their communities:** Implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Employment, Labor and Migration's Mobile Employment Unit, this activity supported youth from ten *novostroiki* to rejuvenate large and vital community spaces. This activity provided lunch, refreshments and daily salaries for community clean-up to 1,000 youth not previously registered with the Ministry of Employment, Labor and Migration. By providing short-term income, the activities provided a disincentive to accepting money to join protests and riots. Over the medium-term, by engaging youth in a positive pursuit, the activity can demonstrate how working together can improve their communities.

4. **Supporting Partnership to Establish Ten Youth Initiative Groups:** Building on its earlier project that established five Youth Initiative Groups (YIGs) in the *novostroiki*, Erep in partnership with Youth Policy Fund and Youth Integration Alliance will organize 150 youth from ten volatile *novostroiki* into YIGs, train them in leadership, advocacy and community mobilization, and provide them with further support to carry out activities that will build trust within their communities and between their communities and local governments, or Municipal Territorial Committees (MTCs). Together, the youth groups and MTCs will identify and prioritize community projects designed to improve the standard of living in the *novostroiki*. By empowering the youth initiative groups to address community priorities in concert with local authorities, this activity will encourage citizen/government engagement and support youth as agents of peaceful change in their communities.



5. **Supporting Youth Media Initiatives: Competition of Political Video Anecdotes:** This activity, implemented by Sun People will provide opportunity for youth to voice their criticisms and reduce tension through satire. By reaching out to community youth who are active internet users, this activity will examine the social stereotypes and perceptions from a different angle. Through their existing partners - www.diesel.elcat.kg, www.torrent.kg, www.namba.kg, and Internet KG zone (whose monthly audience is almost 20,000 visitors) – Sun People will involve a wide group of young Internet users into the creation of nearly 200 videos that would reflect upon social stereotypes and perceptions of politics from a non-violent and constructive angle.

6. **Supporting the Development of Visual Artists:** Through the local NGO B'Art, this activity will provide art training for more than 65 at-risk youth from the *novostroiki*, followed by a full month of exhibition. By giving expression to *novostroiki* problems through art, the activity will engage young marginalized community members in constructive and expressive activities to both describe their lives and voice their concerns.

7. **Supporting a Festival of Revolutionary Humor (KVN)** During the third week in April, USAID/OTI will support the local company Sun People, to host a *Klub Veselyykh i Nakhodchivyykh* (KVN) or "Club of the Funny and Inventive", a competition where teams compete by improvising humorous answers to set questions and performing prepared comedy sketches. The competition will include 14 teams drawn from each of the oblasts in the country, and will be held at the Sports Palace –the largest venue in Bishkek, with a seating capacity of 2500. The performance will be recorded, edited to 30 minutes, and broadcast on national television. By engaging youth in a constructive form of expression and satirical protest they will have a critical, yet peaceful, way of affecting change in their society.

8. **Promoting constructive activities involving at-risk youth through media:** Cross-cutting seven activities implemented through the spring time in Bishkek and the city outskirts, the local company I-Media, will develop an advocacy campaign – implemented across print, broadcast media, and the internet – to promote the above activities and communicate a message highlighting constructive endeavors and community cohesion.

FAST FACTS

Start Date: May 2010

Budget: \$21 million

Partner: International Resources Group (IRG)

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