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## Office of Transition Initiatives

# KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

**PROGRAM UPDATE: June 24, 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.

### **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

To date, OTI has completed or initiated a total of **140 activities** for **\$9,428,726** including the following recent activities:

1. ***Engaging in the political process through Youth Parliament:***

On June 20, the US Ambassador along with Minister of Youth, Speaker of Parliament and the leadership of four of the five factions of the Kyrgyz Parliament helped to inaugurate a five-month Youth Parliament in the country. This activity will help national policymakers focusing on youth—including the Parliament's Committee on Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Youth Affairs—to formulate policy and legislation that responds to the recommendations and real priorities of their constituency. This activity will fund transportation and other costs for 58 young participants to travel to Bishkek to participate in five separate sessions of Youth Parliament. During each six-day session participants will learn about democratic processes, formulating policy and legislation, and constituency development. They will witness live Parliamentary debate, and generate mock legislation within a variety of committees. The Parliament will culminate with the representatives presenting a list of priorities and recommendations of the youth of Kyrgyzstan to members of Parliament and the Ministry of Youth Affairs.



2. ***Increasing democratic dialogue on "Radio Almaz":*** This recently initiated 12-episode series of current affairs radio programs is providing an opportunity for radio listeners in Bishkek city, Chuy Oblast, and Naryn city to engage directly with government leaders that appear on the program, helping the listeners develop more informed opinions and make better decisions about the selected public affairs issues. Radio "Almaz" is packaging the radio program as a mix of journalist reports, debates and viewer call-in. Producers are ensuring the participation of representatives of the different ethnic groups and political parties, official representatives from national and local governance, and local and international civil society.

3. ***Rebuilding trust and cohesion across the south: Youth Banks:*** Building on a pilot initiative conducted last year, USAID/OTI recently provided support to the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA), to build local conflict prevention capacity and address the grass-roots causes of local conflict through their "Youth Bank" project. Funds from this activity will allow 60 multi-ethnic youth implement six low-cost, high-priority community-driven projects in communities across the three southern oblasts. Each "Youth Bank" will empower its members to work with youth from different cultural backgrounds for constructive inter-ethnic cooperation and positive community change.

4. **Supporting local Public Advisory Boards across the South:** USAID/OTI has recently begun an initiative to improve awareness, effectiveness, and ethnic diversity of 80 local government public advisory boards in 14 multi-ethnic districts across the south. In response to a Presidential decree in March of this year, Public Advisory Boards are being created at the national and local level to facilitate interaction between government and civil society, encourage inclusivity and transparency in decision-making, and ensure the public's priorities and interests are best served. While implementation of this decree has commenced at the local level, some civil society organizations in the south have expressed concerns that local government will not establish these councils with sufficient efforts to ensure diversity. This activity will allow the southern-based organization ABAD to conduct an information campaign about the role of Public Advisory Boards, a series of 40 capacity building workshops for members of 80 local boards, and eight video-consultations with representatives of the National Agency for Self-Government and other experts.
  
5. **Empowering government to reduce conflict between investors and the public in Talas:** While the country is struggling to put its economy back on track following its turbulent recent history, there is concern that recent incidents of violence against mining companies in Talas in March 2011, could ward off the small amount of potential foreign investment available. In response, a recent USAID/OTI activity will fund the start-up think tank Foresight to conduct thorough research of the social and political situation in Talas province in an effort to identify sources of conflict between local citizens and investors working in that area. The grant will fund the honoraria and travel expenses of the research team, an expert roundtable, a series of public discussions, and media coverage. As part of the survey, Foresight will analyze relations between all stakeholders and key players in the mining sector, review current legislation and practices of attracting investments, and develop recommendations for both the local and national government and private sector investors.
  
6. **Expanding reliable information through KUSH KABAR telephone news platform:** Earlier this month, USAID/OTI added support to an ongoing media initiative supported by the Soros Foundation. Our support will help to continue and expand the availability of the innovative KUSH KABAR internet and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephone and web platform providing citizens access to reliable news about the political and economic situation in the country. Currently Kyrgyzstan has an over-saturation of biased and unreliable media. Many rural areas lack access to multiple news sources; ethnic minorities often lack access to news in their native language. In addition to providing honoraria for the journalists and staff involved in the project, OTI funding will support a media campaign that will involve more cell phone users into Door Media's network.
  
7. **Increasing information about reconstruction & services in the south:** Following a successful pilot project completed in February, USAID/OTI and the OSCE have decided to expand support for an activity to increase citizen access to multi-lingual information about reconstruction and recovery activities across the south. Rumors are rampant about inequitable access to services, there are few journalists remaining in the south to report fairly about ongoing reconstruction efforts, and no locally-produced content in the Uzbek language. In response, this activity will extend the project for 26 weeks and print approximately 14,000 copies of the weekly newsletter "Mir Vashemu Domu" (Peace to Your House) published by the Public Association of Journalists. By continuing to provide this information on current events and reconstruction in Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Russian, the weekly newsletter is helping to fill the void of credible news accessible by communities affected by last year's violence, particularly regarding reconstruction efforts.
  
8. **Drama troupe tours Jalalabad with message of tolerance:** On June 13, with support from USAID/OTI, the Barpy Drama Theater presented the first performances of the comedy-drama *Neighbors* in the Kok-Art and Kurmanbek districts in Suzak rayon. The play, which portrays events in three villages inhabited by residents of different nationalities, is being staged in forty *aiyl okmoty* through Jalalabad Province over the next two months. The traveling production was developed by the Barpy Drama Theater, a state-sponsored, community-based performing arts center that is uniquely positioned to engage communities in southern Kyrgyzstan on the importance of inter-ethnic relationships. This initiative also is assisting with the refurbishment of a 500-seat theater in Jalalabad city, where the final performance will be filmed for broadcast throughout Kyrgyzstan by the Jalalabad Tele-Radio Company.

#### FAST FACTS

Start Date: May 2010  
 Budget: \$21 million  
 Partner: International Resources Group (IRG)  
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