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**WORLD LEARNING
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

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***BIANNUAL REPORT, YEAR 1
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I. WORLD LEARNING/DC ACTIVITY REPORT

Washington, DC



Deliverables

World Learning submitted the **Monthly Reports (also called "Check books")** for the months of January, February, and March, 2013. World Learning plans to continue to submit these monthly reports on the first day of each month, for each country (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

World Learning submitted the **Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMEP)** and the **Annual Work Plan (AWP)** on November 19, 2012 and worked with the Mission to edit and adjust these plans over the course of the next four weeks. Final versions of the PMP and AWP are attached separately for reference purposes.

At the end of February, 2013 USAID submitted the list of approved themes for all six programs in three countries for FY2013 which included the following:

Kazakhstan:

1. Persons Living with HIV: Organizational development to address stigma and discrimination
2. Advancing Accountable Governance

Uzbekistan:

1. Capacity Building of Uzbekistan's National Tuberculosis Program
2. Introduction to the Adversarial System of Justice and/or Practical Implementation of Habeas Corpus

Tajikistan:

1. Community-Led Agriculture Development
2. Family Medicine

Host Organization Pre-Qualification Procurement

World Learning released a nationally distributed Community Connections Host Organization RFP as Stage 1 of the prequalification process for future approved Host Organizations. All interested respondents were asked to provide a detailed proposal that demonstrated their technical and organizational capability to host Community Connections programs. The proposals were evaluated for content in the following areas:

Corporate Capabilities:

- Successful history of arranging professional training, seminars, and site visits
- Ranked list of organizational thematic capabilities
- Use of local resources, experts and facilitators in program implementation
- Effective action-planning systems and facilitators
- Examples of the use of program design tools such hands-on programming, use of case studies, and technical training methods
- Systems and processes used in program management, including preparing hosts and facilitators for program engagement

Host Families:

- Description of active home-stay network that would be utilized for CCP
- The systems in place for selecting and monitoring host families to ensure the involvement of qualified host families

Cultural, Community, and Volunteering Activities:

- Description and examples of community activities that involve visitors in community and American cultural activities, including examples of how activities were tailored to the participants and program themes
- Description and examples of incorporation of volunteer activities in programs. If this would be a new component for an offeror, the offeror was asked to provide a description of how the offeror would envision incorporating volunteer activities

Interpretation:

- Professional interpreters that offerors would seek to utilize in CCP
- The offeror's experience with and management of interpretation services

Monitoring:

- Program monitoring systems that the offeror has in place to ensure successful implementation, including the monitoring of home-stay placements

Program administration:

- Experience of offeror's staff and management that would contribute to them being a successful Host Organization
- Resumes of key program staff

- Board of Directors and/or volunteers who could contribute to the technical or organizational capabilities of the offeror

Regional Links:

- Relationships that the organization and/or community has to specified CCP countries

Logistics management:

- Experience in managing all the logistics of visitor exchange programs, including cultural activities, coordination of home-stays, arranging action planning sessions, airport meet and greet, local transportation, hotel arrangements, per diem disbursement, and medical emergencies

Lessons Learned:

- Lessons learned from hosting previous visitor exchange or other training programs

Twenty-nine offerors submitted their responses to the RFP, many of whom had been pre-qualified as Host Organizations and implemented CC programs under FORECAST I. Following a detailed review and ranking, 27 of the offerors were accepted as pre-qualified Host Organizations.

Host Organization Procurement

World Learning received VERFs for three programs from October through March: Tajikistan – Community Led Agriculture Development, Uzbekistan – Capacity Building for a National Tuberculosis Program, and Kazakhstan – Persons Living with HIV: Organizational Development to Address Stigma and Discrimination. The three programs were bid to Host Organizations through World Learning’s Capability Statement Request (CSR) process.

The Tajikistan program was bid out to World Affairs Council of Oregon (WAC) in Portland and a Recommendation Memorandum (Rec Memo) was sent to the COR, Rabiga Baytokova, and approved March 10, 2013. World Learning notified WAC Oregon and began program development in earnest.

The Uzbekistan program was bid out to the Georgia Council for International Visitors in Atlanta (GCIV). World Learning sent a Rec Memo on March 14, 2013; however, the COR notified World Learning that Community Connections Programs are on hold in Uzbekistan, pending approval of the Uzbek government, which is expected by April 30, 2013. GCIV was notified of this pending status and both GCIV and World Learning, as well as USAID Almaty, are awaiting final word.

The Kazakhstan program was bid out to the Cleveland Council on World Affairs; however, after consultation with the Mission, two more locations were offered to

accommodate the Mission's request for a large city. Worcester, Massachusetts (near Boston and New York City) and Chicago, Illinois were both proffered and the Mission selected Chicago as the preferred location. The Host Organization there, WorldChicago, requested a date change to accommodate the program and the dates of the Kazakhstan program were moved from an arrival date of July 12th to July 26th. A CSR notification was sent the end of March from World Learning to WorldChicago.

World Learning looks forward to the arrival of its first group from Tajikistan on May 23, 2013 and the Kazakhstan group on July 26, 2013.

Washington, D.C. Cost Savings Measures

World Learning requires a 20% cost share for each program from all Host Organizations. Many of them exceed this amount due to their excellent management of resources and strong partnerships in the communities.

Budget challenges are generally minimal. The only budget challenge faced are when infrequently used languages of interpretation are required, as with the Tajik program. Because there are few well qualified Tajik interpreters available the search for an interpreter was national and while there were additional costs for such expert interpreters World Learning and the Host Organization were able to negotiate lower daily rates and lower per diem rates. Such challenges are not a normal part of program implementation, but when such adjustments are needed the HOs and World Learning work to reduce the overall financial impact on the program, as in this instance. Additional measures were taken by the Host Organization to reduce other costs and reduce the impact on the overall budget.

The Mission notified World Learning that the next group from Tajikistan will likely not need Tajik interpreters; therefore, World Learning expects the high cost of the first program to be the exception.

II. AMERICAN COUNCILS/FIELD OFFICE ACTIVITY REPORT

In February 2013, American Councils Almaty Community Connections Program (CCP) staff under the guidance of USAID specialists developed the regional CCP brochure and banners for all three countries. These promotional materials are planned to be distributed at the recruitment stage of the programs.

In March, CC staff were involved in negotiations on the documents for exchange visitors. Templates from the 2006-2011 CCP were used as samples and, thereafter, revised and approved by USAID in strict compliance with the newest rules and guidelines (among others, updated Security Risk and Fraud Procedures, forms for J-1 visa, and tax forms).

Kazakhstan-Specific Activities

Program Highlights

In December 2012, Julia Beloslyudtseva, CCP Coordinator, and Ekaterina Berezovskaya, CCP Assistant, launched preparations for the first Kazakhstan program titled "Persons Living with HIV: Organizational development to address stigma and discrimination."

On December 20th, 21st, 24th and 25th meetings with target organizations in Almaty were held to collect necessary information for the first VEF design. Respondents included USAID implementing partners, such as teams of PSI and Quality Health Care projects, and Doverie Plus, an Almaty NGO working with PLHIV, the Republican AIDS Center, and several HIV/AIDS experts.

After this series of consultations with the above mentioned organizations and the USAID Health and Education Team, the VEF for the first Kazakhstan program was designed and submitted to USAID for approval at the end of December 2012. A number of revisions and amendments to the VEF were approved by the HEO team in March 2012. The main recommendation of the HEO team was to tailor the VEF more narrowly to specific objectives aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination against PLHIV. The final version of the document effectively incorporates recommendations of USAID experts with actual needs and demands of the target audience and potential program beneficiaries.

Informational meetings with USAID implementing partners engaged in HIV/AIDS and experts from the Quality Health Care Project (QHC) provided valuable assistance and reliable up-to-date information on the current situation with HIV/AIDS in Kazakhstan, and informed CCP staff on the efforts undertaken by the QHC Project to fight and prevent the disease. The background information provided was very helpful when the first KZ VEF was developed.

Challenges

No problems were encountered in coordination of program arrangements.

Administrative/Staffing Activities

Two staff persons were hired to assist the Regional Program Coordinator with the implementation of CCP. Program Coordinator Julia Beloslyudtseva began her work with CCP on October 22, 2012. Program Assistant Ekaterina Berezovskaya began her work on November 6, 2012.

Planned Activities for the Next Six Months

CCP staff are now planning the following:

- Development of the information letter and theme-oriented application form for the first KZ program
- Drafting a schedule for informational meetings with target organizations and individuals
- Selecting potential candidates to serve as the program expert and review panel members

The application deadline for the first program is May 6, 2013. The deadline for training the review panel expert and the program expert is also May 6th.

- Semi-finalist interviews are scheduled for May 28, 2013
- Pre-Departure Orientation 1 - June 18, 2013
- Pre-Departure Orientation 2 - July 25, 2013
- Departure for U.S. - July 26, 2013.

Staff will design the VEF for the second Kazakhstan theme "Advancing Accountable Governance" and submit it for USAID approval in May or June 2013.

Tajikistan-Specific Activities

Program Highlights

December 3-7, 2012 Regional Coordinator Jessica Leonard travelled with Rabiga Baytokova to Dushanbe to meet with the USAID Country Office, USAID implementing partners, and local partner, the Center for Municipal Development (CMD).

CMD's staff, Program Coordinator Gulru Azamova and Logistics Coordinator Aziza Ernazarova, both worked on the 2006-2012 Community Connections Programs.

On December 4, meetings with the "Feed the Future" team and implementers "Family Farming and Productive Agriculture" provided input for the Community-Led Agriculture VEF. They also recommended a possible expert for the group. Jessica Leonard was able to meet with consular staff to confirm that visa data entry could take place from Almaty.

On December 4, 2012 Gulru Azamova, representative of local partner CMD, Jessica Leonard, and Rabiga Baytokova met with staff of the USAID Productive Agriculture and Family Farming programs to gather input for the Community-Led Agriculture VEF.

The VEF for the Community Led Agriculture program was submitted on the December 15, 2012. USAID approved the VEF on January 24, 2013.

CMD made radio announcements about the program and application deadline of the March 4, 2013 in the Tajik language on stations covering the target districts. A presentation was made at the USAID Family Farming Project, where application forms and information letters were distributed among 30 extension field staff.

CMD also contacted and forwarded the application package along with an announcement to USAID Productive Agriculture and Farmer-to-Farmer Projects. An official letter about the program was forwarded to the Ministry of Agriculture, followed by a meeting with Samadova Jamila, Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Also, agricultural specialists affiliated with the Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services and Mercy Corps programs were contacted to disseminate the announcement among the potential candidates. On February 22, an information session was conducted for all interested stakeholders in Kurgantube, regional center for Khatlon oblast.

A reading committee, convened in Dushanbe by CMD, reviewed 40 applications submitted by the deadline and selected the top 20 applicants for interviews.

A selection committee, including expert Tanzila Ergasheva and observer Rabiga Baytokova, interviewed 20 semi-finalists on March 27th and 28th and proposed 10 finalists and 3 alternates to USAID for their approval. USAID approved the proposed list on April 1, 2013.

During the same trip to Dushanbe (March 26-29), RCCP staff and Rabiga Baytokova met with the country office health team staff members to discuss the next group for Tajikistan – “Family Medicine”. A second meeting with the USAID Quality Health program and counterparts (Tajikistan Association of Family Doctors, Medical University, and Post Graduate Institution) provided valuable input on the VEF.

The Community-Led Agriculture Development group will be the first Community Connections program group with limited Russian skills which means that translation in the U.S. will need to be Tajik-English. In addition, RCCP reviewed program documentation and decided that key documents such as the PDO manual, PDO1 handouts and worksheets will need to be translated into Tajik from Russian. These are unexpected expenses that will need to be paid using savings achieved in the first program budget.

Challenges

No problems were encountered in coordination of program arrangements.

Planned Activities for the Next Six Months

- Translation of key Pre-Departure documents into Tajik
- Complete all participant processing steps

- Pre-Departure Orientation 1 - on/about April 24, 2013
- Pre-Departure Orientation 2 - on/about May 22, 2013
- Departure for U.S. – May 23, 2013
- Re-entry seminar for the group - on/about July 24, 2013

VERF for the second Tajikistan program, "Family Medicine", will be submitted during the first half of April with the group expected to travel to the U.S. in September.

Turkmenistan-Specific Activities

Program Highlights

Jessica Leonard and Rabiga Baytokova cancelled a planned trip to Turkmenistan for November 5-9, 2012 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not approve Turkmenistan visas. USAID later approached the Government of Turkmenistan for approval to re-start the program; however, the Government did not approve the program.

RCCP informed local partner Hemayat that the program is on hold pending government approval.

Uzbekistan-Specific Activities

Program Highlights

Jessica Leonard travelled to Tashkent with Rabiga Baytokova, the USAID COR, November 12-16, 2012 for initial meetings with Tashkent-based USAID staff and local partner Neo-Consulting. As discussed during this visit, USAID later submitted a diplomatic note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informing them of the re-opening of the Community Connections Program.

January 14-17, 2013 Julia Beloslyudtseva, together with Rabiga Baytokova, travelled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan to conduct several meetings with key USAID/UZ offices engaged in implementation of the target program themes, such as the Health and Education Office (HEO) for the first UZ theme "Capacity Building of Uzbekistan's National Tuberculosis Program" and the Democracy and Governance Office (DG) for the second UZ theme "Introduction to the Adversarial System of Justice and/or Practical Implementation of Habeas Corpus."

On January 15, under the DG theme, CCP staff met with the Director of the Regional Dialogue Branch Office in Uzbekistan to discuss the current status of the adversarial system of justice in the country and obtain up-to-date information on challenges, systemic gaps and specific characteristics of judicial arena in Uzbekistan.

On January 16, within the framework of the VERF design of the first UZ program, CC staff met with the representatives of Project HOPE, WHO, the Republican DOTS Center, and other international organizations engaged in TB care and prevention in Uzbekistan. Experts from the state and international agencies shared their views on the present situation in this sphere, focusing on the critical challenges and gaps that could be addressed through the CC Program. In late January, the first UZ VERF was designed and submitted for USAID approval.

On February 19, the first UZ VERF on "Capacity Building of Uzbekistan's National Tuberculosis Program" was approved and the program launched. However, advertising and application distribution is on hold for this program pending approval of the overall Community Connections Program by the Government of Uzbekistan.

Challenges

Since there have recently been last minute cancellations by government officials selected for participation in Embassy exchange programs, Public Affairs staff recommended that USAID meet with the appropriate ministry early in the planning stages to inform them about the program, invite them to distribute applications among eligible participants, and encourage the granting of approval of government participants when it is sought. The potential candidates for the program are identified through limited competition. CC staff designed theme-specific information letters and application forms for the first UZ program, and USAID/UZ HEO staff have initiated distribution of the applications and recruitment of participants.

Neo-Consulting, local sub-contractor of American Councils in Uzbekistan, has been informed of all required procedures at the stage of program advertising and recruitment, and will be closely cooperating with USAID HEO in approaching potential participants and distributing applications.

Administrative/Staffing Activities

Neo-Consulting LLC was identified as a local sub-contractor for the CC Program in Uzbekistan. The sub-contract with Neo-Consulting has been finalized, but will be signed upon approval of the program by the Government of Uzbekistan. Rustam Sapaev and Ruslan Ramanov are responsible staff members for implementation of the assigned activities in the framework of the CCP in Uzbekistan.

Planned Activities for the Next Six Months

American Councils plans to work closely with USAID/UZ HEO and Neo-Consulting at all stages of the program. CCP staff are now planning the following:

- Collection and review of applications (approximately 20-25)
- Submission of the list of semi-finalists for USAID approval
- Interviews with semi-finalists
- Selection of finalists
- Implementation of further required procedures.

Program progress depends directly on the authorization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan. As of April 1, 2013, USAID is waiting for the authorization, and next steps will be taken immediately upon receipt of the MFA's notice. The Program Operational Plan will be revised in accordance with the updates from the USAID Mission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, World Learning, our partner American Councils in Kazakhstan, and the USAID Mission in Almaty are successfully collaborating to bring the Central Asian Republics Community Connections Programs to fruition.

World Learning appreciates the trust placed in us, and our partners, to fulfill the objectives and goals of USAID for Central Asia.