



## **Final Report for Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia’s “Promoting Improved Relationships between Religious Institutions and Civil Society” Project**

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### **I. Executive Summary**

The Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA) was awarded a grant by USAID/Central Asian Republics to promote improved relationships between religious institutions and civil society in February 2008. This had three major objectives for religious education institutions: to link them with wider society, to include secular subjects into their curriculum and to improve the overall quality of education. In this way, graduates would be able to contribute positively to the social, economic, cultural and political lives of their communities.

The project contributed to the development of a coalition of actors including the Ministry of Education, President, State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), the muftiate and the religious education institutions (REI) who are determined to improve the quality of education in religious schools and introduce religious education in to secular schools. EFCA’s project manager, Nazgul Asangozhoeva was included in the working group to develop a religious education course in schools. The project brought secular and religious schools together to work together to improve the quality of education; provided a strategic plan and framework for the development of the Islamic Education system and for individual schools; gave seven religious schools the books and skills to introduce secular subjects and additional books to partner secular schools; enabled seven madrasah to introduce secular subjects and start on the process of getting a license from the government; developed a film to increase critical thinking and improve teacher methodology and a manual to improve school management and helped the Muftiate to identify a course for madrassah which includes secular subjects. Most importantly, the project provided a series of positive solutions at local and national level to address issues of religious education in Kyrgyzstan and has already provided the opportunity for more than 100 REI students to receive a state diploma, allowing them to enter university and improve their employment prospects.

More work will now be necessary to ensure that SCRA and parliament are fully aware of how the current draft law on religious education may impact on religious freedom and drive religious education underground; to work with participants to implement their plans to improve the quality of education; to extend the geographical scope of the project; to continue the dialogue with all parties to ensure that REI have the chance to award diplomas to their graduates and to develop a quality ‘History of Religion’ course so that students in secular schools have the knowledge they need on religious issues to reject extremist views.



## II. Outline of activities and results

### Overall:

The project built on the political will of the State Committee for Religious Affairs and the muftiate to transform attitudes among religious institutions themselves and improve their relationships with the secular world:

"... we, the leaders of religious educational institutions (REI) aren't just in favor of integration (*of standards in secular and religious schools*), we ourselves ask for this integration. This would provide our students with the Certificate of Secondary Education and, therefore, give them the opportunity to enter university and find employment. If integration occurs and our diplomas are legitimate, then the youth will receive religious education in our country, and not in homes, and will not be subjected to the influence of various faiths. This will allow the state to solve the problem of extremism. That is why we should rapidly address the development of religious education. I, on behalf of the leaders of REIs invite representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science to support us and help us. "

**Maksutova Zhanargul, director of the women's madrassah, "Saida Hadicha", in Osh, speaking at a project press conference in August 2009**

### **Each target religious school improved their links with wider civil society, most notable were:**

- **Ak Mechit Madrasah, Naryn oblast, Kochkor village** built links with: Kydyraliev school - their students study there part time and English and Russian language teachers from the school teach at Madrasah; the school' head helped the Madrasah to develop a strategic plan; the state administration on orphan issues; a local sewing workshop to provide skills for the girls
- **St. Luke Orthodox Church school, Issyk-Ata region, Novo-Pokrovka village** worked with three general education schools to organize integration activities;
- **Moldo Tabaldy Madrasah, Osh Oblast, Nookat regional, Karatash village** built links with Mamyrov school with their teachers teaching secular subjects in the madrasah. Madrasah students will be able to get certificates of general education;
- **Ala-Too Madrasah, Chui oblast, Ken-Bulun village** built links with: the local government to organize community work days; Lalieva school so that madrasah students could also study there
- **Abdulla bin Abbas Madrasah, Chui oblast, Alamedin region, Arashan village** agreed with Strelnikov school that madrasah students can study part-time there and receive government diplomas and with a business to open a bakery producing a nan-bread.
- **Abdraim Kary Madrasah, Osh oblast, Uzgen region, Myrza-Aki village** worked with local government to organize community work days and sport events and Nurbaev school to introduce secular subjects in September 2010;
- **Azreti Usman Madrasah, Kyzyl Kuya town** worked with vocational school # 70 to provide students with training as a bricklayer, carpenter and welder and Abrahmanov school to organize sports events.

The project achieved the following outputs:

Expected Output	Impact Indicator	Realized output
1. More religious institution links with government, business and civil society.	Number of partnerships created between religious institutions and government, business and civil society	10
2. More links between religious	Number of partnerships between religious and	15

and secular institutions	secular institutions	
3. An improved system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning.	Number of policies and procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning are developed and applied	7
4. Greater capacity of administrative bodies to manage education.	# of strategic plans developed and # implemented Number of administrators and officials trained [USG standard indicator]	2 50
5. Textbooks materials to support secular courses	Number of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials provided with USG assistance [USG standard indicator]	4480 books
6. Improved teaching quality	Number of teacher/educators trained with USG support [USG standard indicator] # of teachers trained that improve their post training test score from the pre-training test score	22 teachers Improved by 27%
7. Increased employment opportunities for institution graduates	Numbers of graduates employed	9 people

**Related to each objective**

**Objective 1: To build links between religious education institutions and secular schools, government, business and civil society**

**Facilitating discussion on religion and religious education institutions**

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, EFCA together with the State Committee for Religious Affairs and ACCELS ‘Community Connections’ Program, conducted a round table entitled “Religious education in Kyrgyzstan: problems and ways to improve it” to discuss a draft law “On Religion and religious education institutions” and identify problems and ways of solving them. Members of parliament, representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Agency for religious affairs, representatives of Higher Education institutions and Muslim clergy, Christian religious organizations, Jewish Community, NGOs and experts in religious issues, mass media took part at the round table. Nazgul Asangozhoeva, EFCA Senior Program Officer, was included into a working group under the Ministry of Education to develop a new course on religious education for secular schools.

This was the first time that the issue of religious education had been discussed since 2008. Many of the participants hadn’t seen the draft law and were unaware that, if adopted in its draft form, it could lead to all madrasahs being closed. The good attendance from key figures and the content of the speeches highlighted the importance with which this issue is held by government.

**“The Ministry of Education initiated an introduction of a course on religion. This requires not only development of curriculum, but development of good textbooks and preparing teachers”.**

Boris Kubaev, the Minister of Education and Science

**“Improving the quality of religious education is a key factor in preventing and counteracting religious extremism and fundamentalism”**

Kanybek Osmonaliev, director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs

As a result of the discussion of the draft law “On Religion and religious education institutions”, the following key recommendations were developed by the round table participants:

- The law should take into account all forms of the religious education in the draft law: from formal to informal, full-time to part-time and should clarify the licensing process for each institution and course
- The state should support the introduction of general education courses financially to the religious education institutions if they want to exercise control over the institutions;
- The law should clarify the process of licensing by the Ministry of Education and the steps taken to enable graduates to get diplomas recognized by the government;

Participants also emphasized the importance of religious education in secular institutions. Suggestions were made to include theology in universities and participants were supportive of the Ministry of Education’s work to develop a course on religion.

### **Documentary about religious education**

EFCA developed and broadcast a 20-minute documentary about religious education in Russian and Kyrgyz at the round table. The documentary discussed the problems of religious education and the ways of solving them. The documentary included interviews with the representatives of Security Council, SARA, the Ministry of Education, independent experts, spiritual leaders, the directors of religious education institutions, students and their parents. A disk with the documentary was distributed to the participants of the round table and was used to facilitate ongoing discussion on these important issues.

### **Integration between religious and general education institutions**

In January 2010, two Christian and eight Muslim schools conducted joint cultural, social and sporting activities with secular schools, these included:

- Ali ibn Ali Tolib Madrasah together with Nurbekov School conducted a “Club of the Merriest and Wittiest” (KVN). 40 Madrasah and 100 school students participated.
- Abdulla ibn Abbas Madrasah and Streknikov school organized football, volleyball and tennis competitions with a total of 40 participants. All Madrasah students study at Strelnikov school.
- Orthodox Church school “Svetoch”, “Gramotei School” and Lomonosov school conducted a New Year-related theatre-game. Teachers, parents and other children watched the game. Both Church school and “Gramotei” school students expressed their willingness to conduct more integration events in the future and are looking forward to upcoming football tournament between “Svetoch”, “Gramotei” and Lomonosov schools.

**“This integration event was very useful for both Madrasah and the school. Madrasah students prepared hard and read lots of books on culture, geography and history of Kyrgyzstan”.**

Mederbek Sagynbaev, director of Ali ibn Ali Tolib Madrasah

**“Sport is a language of youth. Sport competitions between Madrasah and the school students helped them to build really close and friendly bonds. Students quickly found common language and a barrier that existed before just disappeared”.**

Akim Ergeshov, director of Abdulla ibn Abbas Madrasah

In addition, the overall structure of the program activities facilitated integration activities. Training courses involved representatives from multiple Christian denominations and Islamic schools. Each

school was paired with a secular school from their community. During the course of the two major training courses, they built up bonds which continue to provide vital links between the secular and religious education sectors:

"Such (*training*) events are important because they help us to get closer to understand the concerns and aspirations of each other, because we live in a multicultural and multi-confessional state. So far we have managed to maintain peace and tranquility in our country, which has always been friendly and loving. I want it to continue. Our society will benefit from the fact that the cause of healing and improving the moral environment will unite representatives of all spiritual directions. Each spiritual direction will do it according to their conscience, but we have one goal - the moral upbringing of the younger generation. The truly religious people are always tolerant of each other and friendly."

**Svetlana Pimenova, Director for Academic Affairs of the Orthodox church school**

### **Challenging of views in the press about religious education institutions**

The project conducted a press conference after a training course in Koi Tash in August 2009. 14 media participated and representatives from USAID and SCRA spoke at the event. This was the first time that the media had been able to hear from teachers in religious schools about their challenges and from the State Committee on what they planned to do to address these challenges. The coverage of the event was high: 6 news releases on internet sources, 3 articles on newspaper, a series of news broadcasts on 2 national TV channels and news releases on national radio. Schools themselves managed to secure local media coverage of their work. The local newspaper *Nookat tany* covered a volleyball and football tournament between Moldo Tabaldy Madrasah and Mamyrov school held on January 22, 2010. Osh TV and Mezon TV covered a round table organized by Saida Khadicha Madrasah at Toktogul school #26 in Osh. The round table sought to train girls from secular school and Madrasah in leadership skills.

### **Objective 2: Improving the provision of secular courses in religious and secular education institutions**

Seven madrasah have started to introduce secular subjects. Four of the seven will now be able to provide graduates with a state diploma. Christian and secular schools were already teaching secular subjects but have improved their methodology. The Spiritual Management of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (Muftiate) has approved a four year program which includes the following secular subjects: Arabic, Kyrgyz and English languages, geography, accounting and sports.

**Saida Khadicha Madrasah, Osh** – have introduced the subjects approved by the muftiate and will add psychology, design, Russian language and cookery courses in September 2010. Students also study off-site at Toktogul school.

**Ak Mechit Madrasah, Naryn Oblast, Kochkor village** - is teaching English language, Turkish and Russian language, sewing and design.

**Abdram Kary Madrasah, Osh Oblast, Uzgen region, Myrza-Aki village** - is delivering the program approved by the Muftiate and will introduce all secular subjects in September 2010.

**Ala-Too Madrasah, Chui oblast, Ken-Bulun village** - is delivering the program approved by the Muftiate. Students are attending Lailiev school to receive additional secular subjects and to receive a state diploma.

**Moldo Tabaldy Madrasah, Osh oblast, Nookat region, Karatash village** – have introduced all secular subjects starting in 2010. Teachers come from Mamyrov school. Graduates will receive state diplomas. Male Madrasah students are also trained in hairdresser skills, while girls receive sewing skills.

**Ali ibn Ali Tolib Madrasah, Talas oblast, Kumaryk village** – will introduce seven general education subjects in September 2010 with assistance from the local school.

**Azreti Usman Madrasah, Kyzyl Kuma - students** study Turkish language and computer science. After integration events, physical education was introduced, and they now plan to introduce geography.

### **Identification of secular courses to be included by madrasah (Christian schools already included secular subjects)**

As a result of the strategic planning meeting (see objective 3), participants were able to agree that secular subjects should be included in the curricula of madrasah and the number of hours for each subject. They also agreed to develop a secular professional specialism called 'Islamic Theology' which would contain secular courses and could be licensed by the Ministry of Education. The project developed that course further, so that it will be ready for submission by the end of 2010. Another option is that they are licensed as 'Initial vocational education institutions', providing sewing, driving, language courses and computer skills. Most madrasah have some courses but these would need to be developed further.

### **Distribution of secular textbooks**

At the training for school administration staff from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, school directors produced a list of the textbooks they wanted so that they could introduce secular subjects. 4,480 books were distributed to 7 religious and 4 secular schools. EFCA had planned to buy books for all 15 subjects taught in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 16 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. This was not possible due to the high reprinting costs. Additional books will need to be purchased if all subjects are to be introduced. The use of these books will be helped by the support to teachers on using innovative methods (objective 3).

### **Identifying teachers who can teach secular subjects**

With finance one of the main constraints to delivering secular subjects, the project focused on building links with secular schools that can provide them with subject teachers. Another solution identified is for the madrasah students to also attend classes in a secular school. The project helped four madrasah to make this arrangement and two more are exploring possibilities further.

## **Objective 3: To improve the quality of teaching and learning (and thereby the quality of graduates) in secular and religious schools**

### **Improving the administration of education systems**

**“The system of reporting within Muftiat and Kazyyats has improved. Muftiat gets reports now from Kazyyats, and Kazyyats get financial and other reports from imam-hatibs. Moreover, Kazyyats started developing their own activity plans. Such a reporting system never existed before”.**

Loma Usur, Advisor to the Muftiat of Kyrgyzstan Muslims

A strategic plan for the development of the Islamic Education system was developed at the **strategic planning meetings** in February 17-19, 2009 and February 26-28, 2009. *(Note that only Islamic administrators were included at this stage – this was prior to the suspension and revision of the project)* This involved administrators and teachers from throughout the country. The plan identified key priorities. These included the development of standard syllabi and curricula for religious subjects, the introduction of secular subjects, receiving licensing from the Ministry of Education, develop quality standards and the establishment of an Islamic Education fund to support investment in education institutions. This formed the basis of all subsequent project activities related to Islamic Education Institutions. **Training** to improve the administrative capacity of Muftiyat and Kazyat representatives was held in January 2010 (Christian school administrators were invited but declined to attend). It took 9 Kazys, 4 representatives of Muftiyat, 3 representatives of Islamic University in Bishkek through the process of strategic planning and gave them the skills and information to implement their plans. The training was designed to help administrators to create the mechanisms to help school directors to improve the quality of education in schools.

### **Support to improve the capacity of school administrators**

A training workshop was held from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of November in the Dostuk hotel. It took directors and their deputies through the process of strategic planning for their schools and gave them the skills and information to implement their plans. The training was designed by a working group of local and international experts and was the first time that issues such as stress management and human resource management had been addressed. The topics covered were: strategic planning to improve education quality, fundraising, HR management and evaluation, budgeting, conflict management, time management, partnership with the community, stress management, individual planning and income generation.

A total of 27 people participated from 8 madrasahs, 1 Christian school and 8 government schools. To ensure that all topics were covered effectively, 10 different trainers were recruited who were specialists in their specific areas. A manual for school directors was developed and the final version, adapted according to the recommendations of the participants, was printed. Participants from secular and religious schools found the course invaluable as demonstrated below.

**“I got answers to many questions regarding the effective administration in school, found like-minded people and broadened my knowledge in strategic planning and assessing the students”.**

Gulzina Satarova, director of school, Kochkor village, Naryn oblast

**“The training was very useful. Madrasah staff realized that in order to achieve positive results, the religious schools should work according to their strategic plan”.**

Makhmud Adylzhanov, director of Ak-Mechit Madrasah, Kochkor village, Naryn oblast

Trainers and EFCA then provided follow up consultation and support to directors to finish their plans. Madrasah who wish to be licensed by the Ministry of Education received additional consultation from a Ministry expert and a report on the steps they need to take to receive a license.

This support is already achieving results. The director of woman`s madrassah “Saida Hadicha” in Osh, used her new skills and knowledge to fundraise for a new heating system and a computer class; identify parents who were prepared to volunteer to teach Russian language, psychology, cookery, design and other subjects without a salary; and they have reached an agreement to use a secular school’s sporting facilities.

On January 25, 2010 the director of Mamyrov school provided training for school and madrasah teachers on developing a plan for education improvement, fundraising and conflict management. 37 school teachers and 8 Madrasah teachers participated at the training.

“Monitoring of teaching based on a new system of quality assessment is conducted at school. The strategic plan was improved. Starting in January 2010, an extra-mural form of teaching was introduced for Madrasah students. Holding trainings with Madrasah teachers brought us together. Madrasah teachers lack a scientific and systematic approach. At the training, we had an opportunity to help them on these issues”. **Abdyzhapar Borubaev, director of a Mamyrov government school**

“After participating at administrator’s trainings, we started open classes, where parents can participate. The trainings provided lots of helpful information, though it was sometimes difficult to understand it all and develop a nice strategic plan. So far, our school developed its mission and discussed it with parents. Teachers tried to utilize a system of marks. A table of innovative methods of teaching was developed and these methods are being used by teachers.”

**Svetlana Pimenova, Director for Academic Affairs of the Orthodox Church school**

“After trainings, we developed an annual plan taking into account the trainers’ recommendations. We also helped one partner religious school to develop their strategic plan. To improve administration, we apply methods of teaching quality monitoring. I have not participated in such trainings since 1999 and it was very helpful for me and my colleagues”.

**Anarbek Toktosunov, former director of # 14 school**

### **Support to introduce innovative teaching methods**

EFCA held a five-day **training** courses (August 10-14) for pilot religious and general education schools on innovative methods of teaching in Koi Tash for 6 madrasah teachers and directors, 8 general education teachers and school directors, 4 religious education institutions’ teachers and directors. The post-training survey revealed that the participants found the training very helpful and each participant developed individual plans to utilize their new skills and knowledge on innovative methods of teaching. Participants then received further **consultation** and support to incorporate these methods into their work. Monitoring activities showed high levels of incorporation in secular schools and good levels in religious institutions.

The project has produced a **film**, which will be an invaluable training tool for staff in religious and secular institutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It demonstrates best practice in interactive teaching skills and the development of critical thinking among children. It will be accompanied by a learning guide to help teachers to translate lessons learned in the film into changes in the way that they teach.

### **III. Making a difference**



From the age of 14 Aiperi Abdylida has wanted to go to a Madrasah to study religion. At first her parents supported her, but then they began to doubt the decision once they found out that the Madrasah did not award a secondary education diploma. Without this diploma Aiperi could not go to university.

The problem was solved when in January 2010 an extra-mural class was opened in the Mamyrov secondary school. More than 35 students at the Madrasah now have the opportunity to continue their studies and receive an official diploma. Now 16, Aiperi is a student at the Moldo Tabaldy Azhi Madrasah and is studying in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade of the secondary school. For the full success story, please see the attached file:



Aiperi success story

### **IV. Conclusions and next steps**

The project managed to achieve its initial objectives in spite of the suspension of project activities and the initial hesitancy of REIs to work with EFCA. Nonetheless, there is still much that needs to be done to follow up on the project achievements and to address other underlying issues, specifically:

- Continue support to SCRA on the development of the law on religious education to ensure that SCRA and parliament are fully aware of how the current draft law on religious education may impact on religious freedom and drive religious education underground;
- Work with project participants to implement their plans to improve the quality of education;
- Continue dialogue with all parties to ensure that REI have the chance to award diplomas;
- Develop a quality 'History of Religion' course so that students in secular schools have the knowledge they need on religious issues to reject extremist views;
- Purchase additional books and equipment to help schools meet Ministry of Education licensing standards;
- Extend the geographical scope of the project and the number of REI covered;

EFCA will be seeking additional funding for this important work.