



Final Program Report

Working to Heighten Awareness in the Media (WHAM)/Media Advancement Project for
Azerbaijan (MAP)
(Cooperative Agreement No. 112-A-00-04-00017)

July 16, 2004 – October 31, 2010

Submitted: January 30, 2010

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the IREX program launched in 2004, the operating environment for the country's media sector was in decline; this deterioration continued throughout the duration of the program. 2006 saw further crackdowns on Azerbaijani media, as journalists were imprisoned and media outlets harassed and closed. ANS-TV was fined nearly US\$2 million for alleged tax manipulation and the station's broadcast license was not renewed; the station was ordered to close in late 2006. The closure was rescinded in early 2007 and the government granted ANS-TV's ownership the right to continue broadcasting until final disposition of their licensing situation was settled. Additionally, the government moved to evict *Azadlig* newspaper from its premises, which had been given to the paper in 1992 when then-President Abulfaz Elchibey ceded the building to them in perpetuity. However, the government claimed that the publication owed more than US\$30,000 in rent; the paper offered to pay but asked for a lease which the government was not inclined to provide. Additionally, the chairman of the National Television and Radio Council issued an edict that local stations could no longer broadcast international programming, including VOA, RFE/RL, and the BBC. In 2007, the number of journalists jailed grew.

In May 2008, the Government of Azerbaijan revised the Law on Mass Media, reviving a clause that had been abolished in 2001 and giving the government means to close any media outlet that has three "decisions" against it. However, this reversal did not mention how serious the violations must be in order to force closure and left the decision up to Azerbaijan's courts to decide.

At the beginning of 2009, foreign broadcasters—including RFE/RL, the BBC, and Deutsche Welle—were banned from Azerbaijan's FM waves. Foreign broadcasters retained access to shortwave radio, satellite, and cable broadcasts. However, most Azerbaijanis listen to FM frequencies. In March, voters cleared the way for President Aliyev to serve in office indefinitely by approving a referendum removing presidential term limits. That ballot also included two amendments to the constitution: one forbidding anyone to follow, videotape, photograph, or tape record anyone without the subject's consent¹ and the second allowing prosecutors to withhold evidence against a defendant prior to court proceedings.

In 2010, as the program shifted focus from work with Azerbaijan's traditional (print and broadcast) media to "new" media, arrests of the editor in chief of the Russian language *Realniy Azerbaijan* and the Azerbaijani language *Gundelik Azerbaijan* was declared by the European Court for Human Rights a violation to Fatullayev's rights to freedom of expression and ruled that Azerbaijan should immediately release Fatullayev and receive EUR 25,000 in compensation. Other cases of apparent harassment of media figures were experienced in the same period. Nevertheless, the IREX program saw a number of successes, including:

- **Establishing a regional "network" of television stations (ART Sh).** Prior to the IREX program, regional television in Azerbaijan had made little professional progress, commercially or journalistically, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In response, IREX designed a program that undertook several linked activities with the goal of improving the ability of regional stations to network with each other for program exchange, quality entertainment, public affairs programming, and a common entertainment program. While the Government of Azerbaijan ultimately halted the formal registration of this network, IREX

~~Subsequently adopted by Azerbaijan's parliament in February 2010.~~

organized them into a loose confederation of stations, completed a large scale frequency mapping project (the first ever in Azerbaijan), distributed transmitters to the participating stations, provided programming to them, and organized an advertising revenue plan.

- **Launching a broadcast ratings system which led to increased sustainability for regional television stations.** IREX partnered with AGB/Nielsen to institute a ratings system focused on the program-supported ART Sh network to help increase advertising revenue. This cooperation provided an avenue for local regional stations to overcome one of the basic impediments to their survival: proving their value to the advertising community via ratings. Prior to this arrangement, local regional stations in Sumgayit, Guba, Ganja, Mingechevir, Zagatala, and Lenkeran had no means to monitor their viewership and thus were ignored by national advertisers as well as advertising agencies, which will only purchase advertising on broadcast facilities that can be monitored. Because obtaining ratings services is cost prohibitive for many regional stations, IREX/Azerbaijan negotiated with AGB/Nielsen to determine a suitable price for AGB, IREX, and the associated stations. The ratings data supplied by AGB/Nielsen did, in fact, indicate that local television plays an extremely important role in the lives of regional citizens. It was consistently noted that local news aired on the affiliates rated as highly as that of national news. Consequently, these stations were able to develop an audience following that remained consistent throughout their prime time telecast.
- **Expanding an independent distribution system for print publications.** Through technical and financial assistance, IREX helped Gaya Distribution expand its services in Baku and throughout Azerbaijan. IREX's first grant with Gaya concentrated on Gaya initiating a new newspaper distribution system in Baku. The system increased sales by providing racks holding newspapers and placed them in high traffic shops near the cash registers where they actually became "point of sale" impulse items. Gaya also increased its home delivery system by hiring solicitors to seek new clients. As a result, Gaya's revenue increased nearly 62%. The publishers were also given an increase in net revenue when Gaya reduced its rate of commission to them and lowered the time span between the sale and the remittance to them. Under a second subgrant, Gaya expanded its distribution system to seven cities in the provinces. Gaya's owner invested his own capital along with the IREX grant and established a distribution system in the regions, thus challenging Azermetbuatyayimi, a government controlled distribution agency.
- **Adopting a Freedom of Information Law.** In September 2005, IREX's staff attorney, Alesgar Mammadli, was selected by the Government of Azerbaijan to work with the Parliamentary Commission established to develop a Freedom of Information law. According to Mammadli, 90% of what he had envisioned was passed by the Parliament; as a result IREX focused future efforts on implementation and enforcement. Among the additions that Mammadli proposed was the establishment of a public relations office for each of the ministries, a decrease in the waiting period for information to be received from the government facilities, and a right of redress if that information is not forthcoming.
- **Providing legal defense of journalists.** IREX provided a grant to the Media Rights Institute (MRI) in June 2008, allowing the Institute to hire additional staff and purchase basic office equipment to better position it to accept cases on behalf of journalists and media outlets targeted by the government. MRI began the process of opening litigation against the

government for the benefit of Agil Khalil, a journalist of the *Azadliq* newspaper beaten and stabbed by members of the Baku police force, and Emin Huseynov, the director of the Institute for Reporter's Freedom and Safety who was beaten by members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This program initiative was eventually transferred from USAID funding to a grant to IREX from the Department of State's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The two-year program provided legal defense resources and training to Azerbaijan's non-state media sector.

- **Airing of US presidential and vice presidential debates.** In an effort to demonstrate to the Azerbaijani public the importance of debate in a democracy, IREX worked with Ictimaj, Azerbaijan's public television broadcaster, to air the three US presidential debates and the vice presidential debate in September and October 2008. IREX worked in cooperation with the US Embassy in Baku, which ensured the delivery of the transcript of the debates. IREX and the Embassy then worked together to arrange for translations and voiceovers of the debates, and IREX supervised taping the live feeds in the Ictimaj control room at 6am each morning of the debates. Ictimaj subsequently aired the debates each Monday evening at 8:30 pm and at 10:00 am on Tuesdays. AGB/Nielsen reported major audience surges for the initial airings. The usual rating for that time period on Ictimaj was a 4.3 share of the audience. The first Monday broadcast garnered an 11.7 share, nearly triple the normal audience. As a result, Ictimaj began promoting the subsequent debates for the second week and the results showed that the program won the time period with a 22.2 rating, beating out the Azerbaijani version of "American Idol," which typically wins the biggest audience share for that time period. Aside from the ratings success, Ictimaj's general director decided that the format of future political debates in Azerbaijan should be revamped to follow the American example.
- **Producing and broadcasting of programs concentrating on issues of social importance to Azerbaijani citizens.** Over the course of the project, IREX worked with Azerbaijani journalists, media outlets, and broadcast professionals to compile, produce, and air several programs that highlighted issues of social importance to Azerbaijanis. These programs—"Problems/Solutions" and "Heroes"—covered topics such as: why local authorities were rebuilding a road that had last been repaired recently; the shortage of insulin in a local clinic and the abundance of it in the local *aptekas* where it was quite expensive; a retired school teacher who works with students falling behind on their reading skills; and a mother frustrated with Azerbaijan's Ministry of Education and its lack of understanding or support for parents with special-needs children like her own autistic son.
- **Establishing a series of FYI Community Information Centers (CIC).** In Phase II of the program, IREX identified, established, and opened 12 Internet access and media centers in the country's regions. The F.Y.I. Community Centers, as they became known, allowed regional journalists to work and post stories to the project-supported "*Hayatimiz*" site (see IR 1.3 below). Each of the centers was furnished with the equipment – video and photo cameras, voice recorders, and editing equipment – necessary for regional journalists to record and broadcast their own videos online. Each center housed computers, and IREX hired local coordinators to manage them. Centers were established in: Shirvan, Imishli,

Sumgayit², Guba, Gazakh, Sheki, Ganja³, Zagatala, Ismaili, Mingachevir, Lankaran and Gedabey. The Gedabey center opened in June 2010 with financial support from the Anglo-Azerbaijani Mining Company. The company offered to support the center as part of its corporate social responsibility goals.

- **Building and maintaining a web site featuring citizen journalist reports.** In mid- to late 2009, IREX launched its online citizen journalism Web site, “*Hayatimiz*,” which means “Our life,” at www.hayatimiz.org. The site provided an outlet for professional and citizen journalists to publish their reports about life in Azerbaijan’s regions. IREX contracted a local NGO, Multimedia Center, to design the site and provide training for staff who will be working on it. In early 2010, IREX began to spread news and feature stories written by local professional and citizen journalists on hayatimiz.org. The CICs promoted the site as an important vehicle for publishing citizen journalism and invited local journalists and citizens to submit pieces for publication.

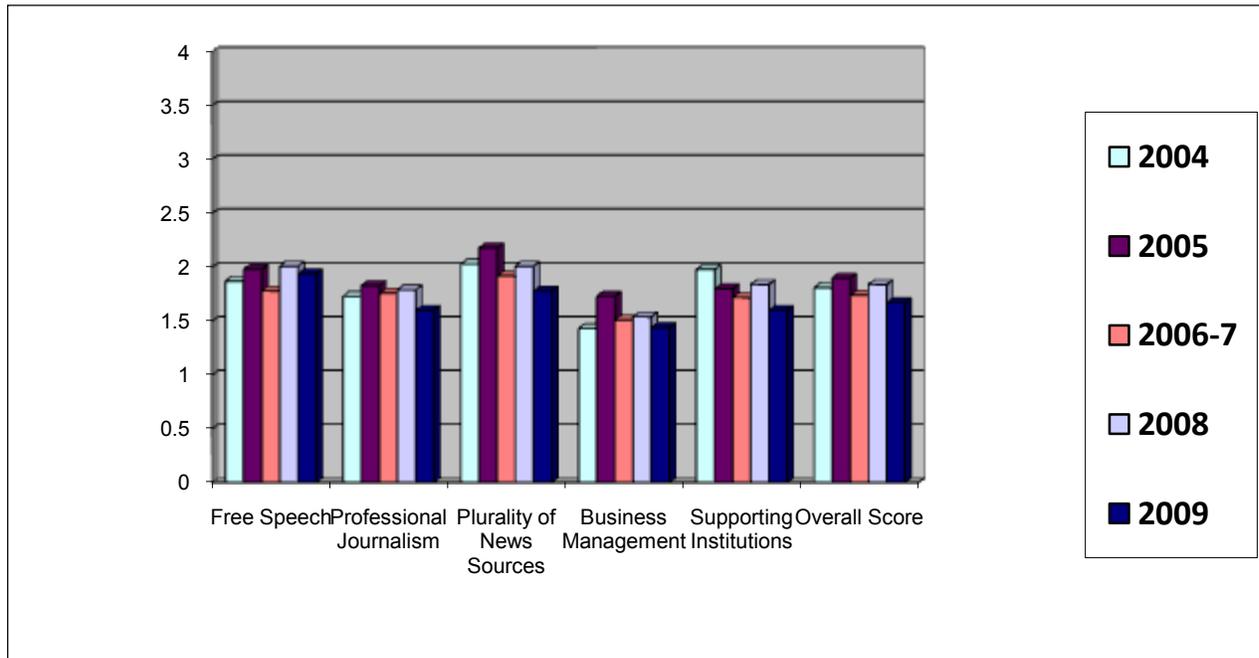
II. INTRODUCTION

Media Sustainability Index analysis. IREX’s Media Sustainability Index (MSI) provides in-depth analyses of the conditions for independent media in 38 countries across Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Since the Eurasian MSI was first launched in 2000, in cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it has evolved into an important benchmark study to assess how media systems change over time and across borders. Policymakers, development specialists, and civil society leaders and professionals in transitioning countries increasingly recognize the state of media as a key element of the development agenda, not only in the democracy and governance sectors but also in such fields as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, youth, and gender. The MSI is designed to assist in advancing development in all these areas by analyzing the elements of each country’s media system and highlighting where intervention can be most effective in promoting a sustainable and professional media system.

Azerbaijan’s Progress in the Media Sector 2004-2010 Measured through the Media Sustainability Index

² In April 2010, In April, IREX moved the Sumgayit center from a library to a bigger facility in the center of town that is shared with the Sumgayit branch of an NGO, the Baku Education and Information Center.

³ In Ganja, IREX worked with Internews Azerbaijan to reopen Internews’ previous center there. IREX provided Internews with a \$26,000 grant to reopen the center and IREX shared the space with Internews.



Overall 2010 MSI Score: 1.71

2010 MSI Score for Free Speech: 1.74

2010 MSI Score for Professional Journalism: 1.68

2010 MSI Score for Plurality of News Sources: 1.72

2010 MSI Score for Business Management: 1.62

2010 MSI Score for Supporting Institutions: 1.79

III. PROGRAM RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The WHAM/Media Advancement Project for Azerbaijan supported activities to strengthen independent media to help USAID/Azerbaijan achieve the following strategic objective:

Strategic Objective 2.1: Civil Society Better Organized and Represented

IR 2.1.1: Issue-based formal and informal associations/advocacy groups organized and active.

IR 2.1.2: Legal and policy advocacy environment supports civil society and media development.

IR 2.1.3: increased access to objective/varied information

In the first phase of the program, it focused on achieving four main intermediate results (IRs) in independent print and broadcast media:

IR1: Improved journalistic professionalism

- IR 2: Enhanced financial viability of media outlets
- IR 3: Improved media advocacy
- IR4: Improved civic journalism and citizen participation

Subsequent to work done in the earlier phase of the program, in the program's extension year (Phase II) it focused on achieving three main intermediate results (IRs):

- IR 1: Regional multi-media centers, equipped with broadband Internet access, are established and produce community-based content in piloted communities.
- IR 2: Media legal and advocacy organizations are strengthened.
- IR 3: High quality and innovative content is produced and disseminated.

IV. WHAM/MAP PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

As noted above, there were essentially two phases to the IREX program: Phase I (program inception – October 31, 2009) which centered on work with “traditional” print and broadcast media and Phase II (November 1, 2009 – October 31, 2010) which shifted focus to “new” (Internet-based, social media, etc) media. This shift was reflective of the increasingly deteriorating and limited operating space for traditional media, and the goal was to provide both new avenues for information flow for traditional media and professional journalists and to develop a cadre of citizen journalists.

In Phase I, the IREX-implemented media assistance program approached media development in Azerbaijan differently than had been done in the past by focusing on developing media outlets as businesses. However, IREX did not ignore the areas of journalism training and media law in Azerbaijan; rather the focus was to encourage editorial independence by strengthening financial independence. This tenet was a significant underpinning to IREX's programming initiatives in Azerbaijan.

In October 2006, USAID directed IREX to change the name of the IREX-implemented media assistance program in Azerbaijan from “Working to Heighten Awareness through the Media (WHAM)” to “Media Advancement Project.” While this name change was not included in IREX's any cooperative agreement modification paperwork from USAID, IREX complied with USAID's request.

In early program months, the IREX program improved the situation of regional television broadcasters by distributing and installing transmitters at various TV stations in cities throughout Azerbaijan. The transmitters enhanced local broadcasting signals, providing the station owners with a larger audience and the potential to garner more advertising revenue. Increases in revenue brought broadcasters closer to financial independence and the improved editorial content that comes along with it.

This initiative had a knock-on effect because it precipitated the need to develop a frequency map for the country and the Azerbaijani authorities. IREX worked with Azerbaijan's Frequency Commission, providing them with the necessary software and hardware to map the frequency spectra for the entire country. IREX employed mapping experts from Kosovo and Albania to train the Azerbaijani technicians and brought in technical equipment from Albania to complete the project. This initiative ultimately served two purposes. Primarily, it gave the National

Television and Radio Council (NTRC) an opportunity to visualize where opportunities lay for expansion of broadcast media. Vast pockets of the population were underserved in the allocation of licenses. The NTRC had been reluctant to issue new licenses for fear of interfering with existing broadcast signals. The map enabled them to plan for future expansion. With the information provided, NTRC has issued tenders for three additional signals in the regions.

With newer, more powerful transmitters installed, IREX turned attention to ensuring that the participating regional stations had access to programming which would build their audience bases and increase advertising revenue. With approval from USAID, IREX negotiated and procured programming from Warner Bros., which IREX translated into Azerbaijani and distributed to participating regional television stations. IREX also designed a management system for the participating stations that maximized the opportunity for each station to receive advertising revenue.

As the operating environment for media in Azerbaijan deteriorated, IREX tailored its approach to media assistance in Azerbaijan. The project devoted significant assets and energies to working with several local partners to develop a defense mechanism for those in the media who were being besieged by the authorities. IREX notes that in September 2008, IREX was informed that it was successful in its bid with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) at the State Department for additional funding to complement and expand the Media Defense Fund; the bulk of IREX's media defense activities were transferred to this program. Under this program, a coalition of three other organizations--the Institute for Reporter's Freedom and Safety, Internews/Azerbaijan and Radio Liberty--formed to enhance IREX's existing partner, the Media Rights Institute (MRI). MRI maintained its position of primary defender/litigator while the IRFS provided investigatory expertise in the provision of evidence. Internews/Azerbaijan and Radio Liberty worked hand-in-hand to keep the public informed of the progress being made on behalf of the press.

As the Internet expanded in Azerbaijan, more widespread on-line access and the availability of digital cameras, both video and still, made the possibility of "citizen journalism" more possible.

In Phase I of the program, IREX undertook support of several broadcast programming initiatives that focused on co-productions and increase of news and information to Azerbaijan's citizens. Azerbaijan's public broadcaster, Ictimaj, began broadcasting the Parliamentary program "Crosspoint." Along the way, the telecasts went from airing only the views of the establishment to include those of the opposition. "Heroes" was a television program that IREX developed several years ago in Albania which was replicated in Azerbaijan. It began with the intent of enlightening the public on the functions of various USAID partners but then expanded into highlighting civic participation. The program was designed to accomplish several things simultaneously:

- Highlighting the work being done by average citizens of the country that benefit either their community, their city or their fellow man.
- Training staff at participating television stations in sophisticated television production techniques.
- Providing regional television stations with indigenous programming that become a requirement by the National Television and Radio Council.
- Increasing civic involvement.

At the beginning of the program, the regional television stations were at a distinct disadvantage compared to their competitors in Baku. The capital city was the repository of most of the wealth in the country and very little if any ever got beyond its borders; this applied to advertising revenue as well. The regional stations could not compete because they could not afford to purchase the programming needed to draw an audience that would, in turn, bring in advertising. In light of this, IREX developed a project that endeavored to increase the ratio of advertising on regional stations.

With the Presidential elections looming in October 2008, IREX worked with ICFJ and Radio Liberty to produce a series of four debates among representatives of the competing parties to explain their platforms and reply to questions from the civil society. However, after the debates were taped, IREX was informed by the NTRC that it would be illegal for any station to air them. IREX then made arrangements to broadcast them on the Internet utilizing the MediaForum website.

Prior to the launch of Phase II of the program, in August 2009, USAID released a three year follow-on media program for Azerbaijan which was to focus on alternative media development and was originally envisioned to utilize the Counterpart-led GCSS (Global Civil Society Strengthening) leader with associate (LWA) award, through which IREX is the consortium's media implementing organization. IREX and Counterpart submitted an application for this program. However, after review, USAID decided to extend IREX's current cooperative agreement with USAID for media development rather than utilize the GCSS contracting mechanism. Maintaining a focus on developing alternative media in Azerbaijan, IREX prepared a one-year cost extension proposal and submitted this to USAID for consideration. The cost extension was processed by USAID in late September and added \$1.3 million to the IREX cooperative agreement's funding ceiling. Following discussions with USAID in September, the Media Advancement Project was given a one-year cost extension. Extension year activities were launched in November 2010.

The ultimate program goal during its twelve month extension was: News and information is available to Azerbaijan's citizens through traditional and emerging media technologies.

During the extension period IREX focused on:

- **Spearheading the development of regional community Internet access, content creation and dissemination.** Internet access in Azerbaijan continued to grow, with a doubling of Internet users from 2007 to 2008. However, Internet services, particularly in the regions, remained expensive and much of the country's Internet usage happened in Internet clubs or at the workplace. IREX developed a network of regional Internet facilities under the trade name "f.y.i. Community Information Center." Building upon the base previously established by IREX's USAID-funded Internet Access and Training Project (IATP) and the earlier phase of the Media Advancement Project, IREX increased the number of regional sites and the services that had been offered. In addition to providing training in the functions of the Internet, IREX provided widespread Internet access through these Centers for Azerbaijani citizens and journalists. The Centers became virtual libraries, citizen and professional journalist centers, training sites in new media, and networking hubs.

- **Promoting usage of new media tools to empower more content producers and information consumers.** In addition to training working journalists on new media presentation of news and information, IREX's created a core of citizen journalists (which included NGO/CSO activists) who utilized a variety of new media techniques for reaching audiences—online news sites, social networking, mobile phones and blogging, among others—to strengthen coverage of local and regional issues often ignored by the main Baku-based and national media.

Phase I

IR 1: Improved journalistic professionalism

IR 1.1: Journalists follow accepted and recognized professional standards

Center for Independent Journalists (Ganja). In November 2004, IREX launched its assistance partnership with the Center for Independent Journalists, based in Ganja. As a result of this year-long grant, which ended in December 2005, the Center aided in the development of TV journalists that continued to produce the “Haber” news program for Alternative TV in Ganja and, during the course of the grant period, initiated a weekly program that provided a forum for the problems facing youth in the regions. The trainees were also instrumental in the production of the televised 2005 Parliamentary debates in Ganja, acting as technicians, directors and producers. In all, there were 47 trainees, 19 female and 28 male. The manager of the Center performed well, as was evident by the number of future journalists trained and the programs they produced. A Peace Corps volunteer, Larry Badger, took a great interest in the Center and managed to provide quite a bit of support to the staff there. Mr. Badger, prior to joining the Peace Corps, was a cameraman/editor at the ABC affiliate in Portland, Oregon and brought vast experience with him.

In April 2007, the Center sponsored a workshop teaching the rudiments of investigative reporting. The young participants put together four packages that shed light on some of the basic problems the people of the region endure on a daily basis, including the inability to find adequate transportation between Ganja and Baku. Among the problems explored was the fact that drivers, even after being presented with a ticket purchased through the ticket sellers, still demanded an additional fee before allowing passengers on the bus. The program also addressed the problem of the new power plant constructed in the region. Even at immense expense, it had proven inadequate in providing enough electricity to keep the city lit at night. The program in its entirety was dubbed by IREX and distributed to each of the seven regional television stations (see IR 1.3, RTEAM, below) which agreed to air it.

Distance learning. In August 2007, distance-learning trainer Yevgenia Munro held a training session in Baku for the staff of the Trend News Agency. Munro had been mentoring those journalists through distance-training and article review and analysis for several months. During her on-site training, Munro first met with the Trend general director, Ilgar Guseynov, to discuss the targets of training, including the long-term goal of reducing the ratio of event-based stories and stories generated by officials from nearly 100% to at least 50%, with more articles generated directly by Trend journalists. In order to reach this target, Munro worked with the reporters to develop their abilities to find interesting and important news and write professionally about that news.

Munro's analysis of Trend's organizational structure led to several other suggestions for improvement. These included shifting the role of meeting moderator from the general director to the editor-in-chief. There was a general distrust by senior staff of junior staff, and this idea was resisted. Munro also noted that editors spent significant time rewriting the journalists' stories, while the journalists were not actively pursue story ideas, preferring instead to depend on press releases, press conferences and editors' suggestions. Munro also emphasized maintaining a local angle on all stories to ensure audience retention.

Several improvements at Trend occurred as a result of Munro's trainings. Trend expanded its site to include:

- Trend Life: a daily look at the social life in Azerbaijan and the culture of the country.
- Trend Capital: specializing in the economic activities of the country with an emphasis on oil.
- Trend Video/Photo: a for-profit archive of news videos and photos of Azerbaijan

Internet reporting training. In early 2009, IREX worked with the Multimedia Information Systems and Technology Center to hold a training even on Internet reporting. Of the 60 participants who began the Internet course – which covered the basics of information gathering, formatting and succinct use of language -- 52 graduated. Osman Gunduz, a professor of information technology at Baku State University and the center's director, led several of the courses, which taught the participants how to best use the Internet to deliver information. All the participants were working journalists and were also trained by experts in the information technology sector. All became adept at creating and maintaining blogs, fact-checking using online resources, and smartly using other online tools to utilize the Internet as a reporting and information broadcasting medium.

IR 1.2: Independent media provide in-depth and comprehensive news and community affairs coverage

Subgrants. Over the course of the program, IREX provided crucial support to various media organizations in Azerbaijan, including:

- **GUN (newspaper).** In April 2005, IREX joined forces with the Open Society Institute (OSI) in Budapest to support the Baku-based newspaper *GUN*, which first hit newsstands in February 2005. *GUN* was one of the two Azerbaijani language non-political newspapers and was under the leadership of Arif Aliyev, one of the most respected of journalists in the country and the head of Yeni Nesil, the young journalist's association. Aliyev had brought together a diverse group of journalists and management to provide a general purpose newspaper. IREX's support of *GUN* covered the running costs of the newspaper for three months in addition to supplying some vital equipment, while OSI's support provided the funding for promoting the newspaper via television ads and posters in addition to offsetting the cost of newsprint and printing. OSI also took responsibility for the internal communications system including installation.

Gun ceased publication in May 2008 after nearly three years of operation. IREX, along with Soros, had hoped that a truly independent newspaper could gain traction and be successful. For a time it was, but that was short-lived. A subsequent request for additional funding by

the publisher precipitated a need to investigate the probability of the paper surviving. IREX invited a consultant (Sylvija Mack) to spend several weeks with the organization to make that determination. Mack's observations indicated that, unless the paper's management style were to be modified and more attention be paid to the business side of the publication, the eventual demise of *GUN* was inevitable. IREX attempted to work with the paper to implement Mack's recommendations and was met with resistance from the newspaper's management.

- **Ayna.** In March 2005, *Ayna* received funding under a grant from IREX and launched a new format on March 28, expanding from four pages to eight.
- **Antenn 101.** In October 2005, Antenn 101 received a grant from IREX to expand its signal. The Baku radio station was regarded as one of the few independent broadcasters in the country and had long been the outlet for VOA. The grant provided equipment that helped expand the station's potential audience to include a reported 70% of the country. In its grant proposal, Antenn 101 agreed to work with other IREX media program initiatives providing airtime to the Internews Youth Radio project and also providing promotional spots to IREX-supported regional television network once it began broadcasting.
- **Turan News Agency.** In summer 2008, IREX signed a subgrant with Turan News Agency for them to retrofit their Internet news site (www.contact.az) to enable it to host video clips. The basic equipment was purchased, and the agency began gearing up for the inauguration of the enhanced news gathering web portal. Turan had completed modifications to its server in October 2008 so that its new Web site would support video archives. Turan's staff began uploading their own videos and launched a campaign encouraging citizen journalists to add their own videos recorded from either cameras or mobile phones. Turan solicited citizen journalists through advertisements in local newspapers.

In late 2009, IREX continued work with Turan News Agency to improve the independent news outlet's Web presence. An IREX grant was used to improve the site's technical capacity.

IR 1.3: RTEAM (Regional Television Enhancement Activity)

At the start of the IREX program, regional television in Azerbaijan had made little professional progress, commercially or journalistically, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Most still relied on grants from the foreign community in order to survive. Professional standards remained low. In addition, the regional television stations appeared to have a distinct disadvantage when compared to the national stations located within Baku. The regional stations, for the most part, broadcast via low-powered transmitters and had limited audiences. In light of this, IREX designed a program that undertook several linked activities with the goal of improving the ability of regional stations to network with each other for program exchange, transmitting quality entertainment and news and public affairs programming to a wide audience, and moving towards a more classic network formation with national news and a common entertainment program. The IREX strategy to develop regional television in Azerbaijan included the following elements:

1. Frequency mapping

2. Frequency planning
3. Licensing by federal authorities
4. Distribution of more powerful reliable transmitters
5. Establishing a network
 - a. Centralized purchasing of legal programming and a common program schedule
 - b. Combined sales effort
 - c. Ultimately establishing a national news program to be aired simultaneously by all affiliates

While visiting regional TV stations early in the program, IREX spoke with station managers about the possibility of replacing transmitters; however, new transmitters would have to be planned and agreed upon with the government of Azerbaijan. With that in mind, IREX initiated a series of meetings within Azerbaijan's government (Minister of Communications, Head of the National Broadcast Council) to seek the necessary approvals.

In October 2004, IREX solicited and received three bids from three different transmitter suppliers in Russia (St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Chelyabinsk). The specifications for each of the models were basically the same. In December that year, IREX completed the procurement of seven transmitters for regional television stations in Azerbaijan. The Russia-based supplier, Mart JSC, offered a package that included on-site repair, peripheral equipment, and a substantial discount in the purchase price. In early 2005, IREX had taken delivery of the transmitters and began to plan the installation of the first one (in Sumqayit) in April and an official ceremony to commemorate the event.

In December 2004, the Ministry of Telecommunications finally gave approval for the frequency mapping project, an integral component of the RTEAM initiative. IREX was given the name of a contact in the State Commission on Radio Frequencies and immediately made contact with him. Mr. Adil Masimov immediately recognized the fact that IREX had capabilities and experience that he had as yet to acquire in addition to access to equipment and technicians. Masimov assigned a team of engineers and provided IREX with passes to his restricted building. The date for the actual start of the mapping was the first week of April 2005. At this same meeting, IREX approached Masimov about the new transmitters that were to be provided under the auspices of the program. He immediately offered his support and made all of the arrangements with the customs authority and initiated the paperwork for the power increases for selected stations.

In February 2005, IREX began preparing a contract for the new network, which went by the acronym ART Sh. The network was to be formed as an LLC, with station owners as shareholders but they would cede control of the network to IREX management, with IREX responsible for programming prime time and selling advertising.

IREX held a meeting in March 2005 with all of the station owners participating in the network to outline the distribution of the transmitters. During the course of the meeting IREX learned that the new transmitters would not be compatible with their present antennas; after some discussion the owners agreed to install new antennas, which cost about \$1500 each. Each of them seemed eager to participate but some of them brought up problems that had to be overcome.

In April 2005, the first of the new transmitters was installed at Dunya TV in Sumgayit. The engineers of the State Frequency Commission were responsible for the installation. While there were some minor technical glitches, they were eventually overcome and the ribbon cutting ceremony went off on schedule with then-U.S. Ambassador Harnish presiding. Other speakers included Ali Hasanov, the Head of the Presidential Executive Board, the ExCom of Sumgayit, and various other notables including members of the diplomatic corps. The Ambassador's remarks were focused on this being the start of a network that would provide information to the local people. Mr. Hasanov, in turn, lauded the project and mentioned that this was the first step in accomplishing President Aliyev's goal of strengthening the economy of the regions. Two more transmitter installations were completed during April (in Ganja and Mingchevir).

By the end of May, five of the seven transmitters had been installed and were working. The two remaining transmitter installations, Tovuz and Zagatala, experienced slight problems. The owner of the station in Tovuz had changed his frequency and neglected to inform anyone, either on his staff or IREX, so the incorrect equipment was ordered. IREX rectified the problem and the replacement equipment arrived in Azerbaijan in the latter part of June. Zagatala, on the other hand, provided a bit more of an issue. The station owner told IREX that he was arranging for a UHF changeover from his current VHF assignment and that everything had been approved by the Broadcast Council. As a result, IREX had to intercede with the Chairman of the Broadcast Council and persuade him that it would in no way harm the future of broadcasting in Azerbaijan if Aygun TV were to broadcast on the UHF frequency.

In June, IREX found that the network affiliate in Guba (Xhayall TV) had already violated its agreement with IREX on the use of its transmitter. IREX had specifically stated that the station could not be sold without first informing us of the transfer. However, Xhayall was sold to a millionaire from the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan and IREX was not told. In response, IREX informed the owner that either a new contract would be signed or IREX would pull the transmitter and install it at the other station there in Guba. IREX learned in late July that it was not a voluntary transaction. It appeared that the owner was informed by the ExCom of Guba that he would be selling the station to the millionaire from Nakhchivan and that he would accept whatever was offered. The owner received \$21,000 for his investment, a price that fell far short of what he had put into it. IREX informed the U.S. Embassy of the situation.

In addition to the transmitter installation and a key component of the RTEAM initiative, IREX launched a major frequency mapping project in 2005. As part of this effort and with relevant approvals from USAID, IREX rented frequency mapping equipment from the Government of Albania and hired Albanian and Kosovar experts to complete the frequency mapping. The IREX consultants traveled around Azerbaijan with two of the Frequency Commission's engineers, gathering the data and inputting it into the mapping software program, with a detailed map of all broadcast transmissions available by mid-July. From there, the technical expert from Kosovo worked with the Azerbaijani Frequency Commission and a member of the National Broadcast Council to develop a plan for expansion of the spectrum.

Throughout this process, there was strong cooperation between the Azerbaijani Ministry of Communications, the Frequency Commission, and the IREX experts. IREX's consultants trained two Azerbaijani engineers as they gathered the data. Adil Masimov, the IREX contact at the Frequency Commission, commented that he was pleased with the response from his staff as they were eagerly working seven day weeks in an effort to complete the project. Emil Balkaj, the

Kosovar in charge of the project, was pleased with the level of expertise of the people with whom he was working. The Minister of Communications was given a demonstration of the software by IREX's consultants, where they showed him how the program would provide vital information as to spectrum usage and development.

In July, however, IREX's frequency mapping initiative was stopped dead in its tracks when Nakhchivan refused to allow the Frequency Commission access to the region. The Presidential Apparatus began trying to get them to reconsider but little luck was forthcoming. IREX's frequency mapping consultant, Toni Poga, returned to Albania with the equipment loaned from the Albanian government rather than wait for the region to rescind its decision. In August, however, the frequency mapping project was completed but neither the software nor the computer were presented to the Ministry of Telecommunications. Emil Blakaj, IREX's engineering consultant for the initiative, trained personnel from both the Frequency Commission and the NTRC in the complexities of the software and felt assured that they could utilize it. While in Azerbaijan, Blakaj found there were problems with quite a few stations when it came to the placement of their antennae and provided advice for quite a few, including the Public TV station.

The completed frequency map gave a true pictorial representation of the broadcast signals in Azerbaijan, including signals from the adjacent countries of Iran and Russia. Georgia was not represented because the country had no frequency plan and many of the broadcasters had no licenses to operate, especially those close to Azerbaijan. Iran had erected nearly 200 transmitters and towers along the Azerbaijani border and they put enough power to blanket Baku and interfere with local signals.

The final basic component of the RTEAM initiative involved procuring programming to be aired throughout the network. In order to address this need, IREX went to Budapest in June 2005 to attend Discop '05, a programming market to purchase programs. IREX made contact with various distributors--including Warner Bros., Sesame Street, Venevision, and Classic Media, all US-based vendors. IREX selected Warner Bros., and thanks to the intervention of a business contact at Warner Bros., IREX was not charged for the masters of any programs purchased for the network, a savings of \$200 per program.

In July 2005, the IREX-supported network, ART Sh, tried to register as a commercial entity with the Ministry of Justice. IREX's staff attorney made sure that all forms were filled out correctly and that all the required documents with all needed signatures were submitted. Normally, the registration process took 30 working days (six weeks) and was automatic. However, when the administrative period ran out, IREX received a letter from the ministry saying they were invoking another 30 day investigatory period to ensure that everything followed their requirements. In September, the application for the network was rejected, citing spurious reasons: (1) there is no law on the books that pertains to a network (IREX's counterargument: Based upon Azerbaijani law, if it is not illegal, it is legal.) and (2) Foreigners cannot broadcast (IREX's counterargument: IREX was not broadcasting, the stations were. IREX was merely acting as their agents, but the government rejected that as well).

As a result, the network registration was in limbo, but the affiliates continued to be optimistic that they would get registered. IREX retooled its tactics for registering the network and planned to name its staff attorney as the chairman of the network and to submit new paperwork. Until the

registration situation was straightened out, all plans for both purchasing programming and exploring options for connectivity were put on hold.

Further complicating the network's status, in August the National Television and Radio Council (NTRC), in the person of Nushavaran Maharamov, decided that the contracts that the station owners signed for the transfer of the transmitters and the eventual transfer of control of prime time to the management of IREX was illegal. He assured IREX that this was his decision and did not come from above. During IREX's conversation with the NTRC, Maharamov dropped the hint that most of the regional stations were in jeopardy of not getting licenses scheduled to be delivered to them on October 28. IREX called a hasty meeting with the various station owners immediately and asked them bring all their paperwork required for registration with them. IREX's attorney worked with each of them individually to rectify the problems.

In October 2005, Ministry of Justice received the new application of the registration for the IREX-supported regional TV network (ART sh) which named IREX staff attorney Alesgar Mammadli as the chairman of the network, thus eliminating a foreigner as the controlling factor for the group⁴ but maintaining IREX influence in the network. As proscribed by law, the bureaucrats returned their verdict within five days and, once again, it was a negative result. However, in this round of registration procedures, they found five new reasons to deny the registration.

In November, IREX again submitted revised registration papers addressing the five issues cited in October to deny network registration. While the local Ministry of Justice (MoJ) did accept the new registration forms with the required additional information, the five days that the registration process takes, as required by law, came and went with no response from the MoJ. After this five day window of time had expired, the local MoJ called IREX's staff lawyer to beg his indulgence but they did not have the authority to either affirm or deny the registration and they were sending it back to the Central MoJ.

USAID, represented by Livia Mimica and Bob Wilson (Deputy USAID Mission Director out of Tbilisi), then visited Ali Hasanov, the head of the Presidential Apparatus in an attempt to gain Hasanov's support for the network, and thus that of the Office of the President, to allow the network to become a legal entity, reinforcing IREX's position that ART Sh was a commercial organization that will purchase programming, sell advertising, and train the regional personnel (owners and managers) on business functions such as advertising, thus reinforcing President Aliyev's decree that more resources will be diverted to enhancing the financial viability of regional Azerbaijan.

In the interim, in order to prepare for an eventual refusal of the registration process, IREX gathered the owners of the regional television stations and offered an alternative to the network format wherein, instead of providing prime-time programming for the stations on a loan basis, the stations would be required to give IREX their program schedules for the time period of 20:00 to 22:00 hours and IREX would then take that data, make up a rubric and use that as a selling mechanism to gain advertising agency support. The stations would be forced to plan out their

⁴ IREX's previous registration application listed IREX Chief of Party Shelly Markoff as chairman of the network. The Government of Azerbaijan rejected the application on the grounds that a foreigner could not be the head of a network.

programming schedules weeks in advance of broadcast, selecting movie titles, and developing informational programs--actually planning the futures of their stations in sort of a forced training process. Under this scenario, IREX made plans to hire a sales person who would be trained by IREX. This was a much more complicated system, but IREX cautioned the owners that they had just one shot with the advertisers and if only one of them failed to perform, the entire group would suffer.

There was an interesting development subsequent to the IREX-sponsored meeting: Two of the owners, from the stations in Zagatala and Sumgayit, were called to the main Ministry of Justice to be interviewed by Fazil Mammadov, the person who is responsible for registering organizations. The owners were both asked specifics about what IREX was planning. According to Nazirhan Guliyev, the owner of the Zagatala station, both of them said it was strictly a business entity that was going to buy programming and sell advertising so that a greater percentage of the advertising revenues could flow to the regions thus enabling the regional owners to improve their broadcasting with better skills, better equipment and better facilities.

The owner of Lenkeran TV (LTV), Baloglan Mirzoyev, was a candidate in the November 2005 parliamentary elections and as such resigned control of the station (temporarily) during the campaign, as required by law. During the course of the campaign period, Mirzoyev provided each and every candidate with the opportunity to present themselves to the viewing public and only took equal time for himself. His rates for the political advertising were reduced so that all of the candidates could be accommodated without financial burden (IREX verified all of the advertising transactions to ensure that no candidate could claim favoritism). However, Mirzoyev was cautioned by the ExCom, Zeynal Nagdaliyev, to withdraw from the race in favor of the incumbent, Hadi Rajabli. Mirzoyev refused on the basis that Rajabli had not been in Lenkeran in a decade, had done nothing for the region, and was not qualified to represent it. Immediately after the elections, Rajabli brought suit against Mirzoyev on the grounds that the station, under his direction, showed favoritism to Mirzoyev, and, in their newscasts, defamed Rajabli. The local MoJ reviewed all of the archival material pertaining to the election period and found no grounds for a criminal action and closed the case.

Despite this ruling, Rajabli, with the assistance of the ExCom, Nagdaliyev, declared that Mirzoyev gained control of Lenkeran TV under false pretenses by coercing Nagdaliyev to transfer the station to him. (Originally LTV was a satellite of State TV and under the control of the local authority; It was privatized in 2004). IREX reviewed all of the papers involved in the transfer and determined there were no irregularities in the procedure. The case was adjudicated in the latter part of December and the judge found that the station was obtained illegally.

In January 2006, concerns about Lenkeran TV continued to mount. IREX Azerbaijan contracted a local attorney to handle the appeal for the owner of the station, Baloglan Mirzoyev, but it became apparent that the final adjudication was preordained: the local authority of Lenkeran had already chartered the course for the station with a new captain at the helm. Several of the original members of the station's owning collective (they had a 60% share based upon the preliminary court rulings) ceded over their ownership to the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a charitable group headed by the daughter-in-law of the former President—and wife of the current president--that funds local charities. This was done at the behest of the newly appointed local ExCom, Mikhail Suleymanov. While questionable whether the foundation was aware of the bequest--or even if it has it within its charter to administer such properties--IREX's staff attorney

was of the opinion that amendments could be made to the foundation's charter that would allow the ownership of the station to be transferred to the foundation.

In February 2006, Azerbaijan's judiciary ordered that the original ownership of the station be reinstated, thus nullifying the station's partial ownership by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. It was a complicated organization, with the ExCom owning 40% of the station and the remaining 60% being shared equally among the ten employees who ran the station prior to its privatization in 1991. The owner, Baloglan Mirzoyev, became owner of a one-sixth share of the facility but had made investments over the five years since the transfer to his ownership; however, these investments could not be substantiated.

IREX's staff attorney reviewed the contract that was signed by the Lenkeran station owner and was confident that if the station were indeed to become the property of the local authorities, that the repossession of the transmitter would not be a problem.

In March, two of the network affiliate station owners (from Sumgayit and Zagatala) were called to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and were coerced into writing letters disassociating themselves from ART Sh but were told not to inform IREX. In the interim, the MoJ went through the motions of the registration process, keeping IREX informed of the progress while all the time having those letters in their possession. It was not until IREX confronted one of the owners and asked if the rumor we had heard of the existence of such a letter was true. He then gave us the entire story of how he was told it was a matter of national security that such an enterprise be kept out of Azerbaijan. The Sumgayit owner then informed IREX that the Zagatala station owner had been with him and also filed a rescission. Upon asking that owner if he had written such a letter he denied the fact for fear IREX would remove his transmitter.

In spite of all of these obstacles, IREX continued to explore programming possibilities for the remainder of the network. It worked with Warner Bros. Distribution to develop a programming schedule for prime time and the Frequency Commission of Azerbaijan to provide a means of "real time" transmission for the delivery of the programming.

IREX learned from sources at the Frequency Commission that it would provide a list of open frequencies to the National Television and Radio Council (NTRC) in January and February; from the NTRC, IREX learned that those frequencies would be tendered for new stations. Among the opportunities was to be the city of Lenkeran. So, in an effort to ameliorate the situation there, IREX spoke to Iglab Ahmadov, a former resident of the city and head of the Public Finance oversight group, the organization that monitors the Oil Fund, to see if he would consider applying for the new license available for Lenkeran. In February, Ahmadov agreed to vie for a new broadcast license in Lenkeran and met with the head of the NTRC.

In April 2006, IREX launched negotiations with US-based program distributors for the delivery of product to the slightly diminished network stations. Warner Bros. Distribution agreed to waive the cost of "masters" (usually \$150-\$200 per episode). This arrangement significantly reduced the costs of procuring the programming.

Given the lack of registration of the network, IREX met with all network station owners in June 2006, laid out a contingency plan for program distribution, and asked which stations would be willing to participate in an ad hoc configuration, even though there might be repercussions from

the government. All remaining stations committed to the concept of cooperating as a network in the absence of a legally-registered network entity. IREX explained the program schedule, and all agreed it would be competitive with the national stations and would give them an opportunity to bring ad revenue to the regions. Prior to this meeting, the station owners from Sumgayit and Zagatala had seemingly defected from ARTSh, and IREX was in discussions with USAID and the US Embassy about the possibility of pulling the IREX-owned transmitters from those stations. During the June meeting, Ramiz Huysenov, the owner of Dunya TV (Sumgayit), raised the question of when IREX was going to start a network news program. IREX responded that as soon as the network proves viable IREX will invest in developing a news program where all stations will participate. With the Sumgayit station back in the fold and Zagatala following suit, IREX interpreted Huysenov's interest in a nationwide news program as hopeful, reinforcing the station's participation in the network.

In July, IREX prepared all the documentation for the launch of the network. After discussions with the AID office in Baku, USAID appeared to be satisfied with the plans to go forward—with or without GoAz consent. In August, the waivers for the necessary equipment procurement were approved by USAID in Tbilisi, so all that remained was to firm up the purchase of the programming and solidify the means of delivery to the participating stations. Due to costs, it was decided that IREX would install a satellite delivery system to each of the participants that would transmit the programming in “nearly” real time. Unfortunately, there was an ongoing financial obligation to the network for satellite rental but, this again was part of the ongoing process of teaching the stations how to run their businesses.

Also in July, IREX believed it was time to sever ties with Xhayall, the ARTSh affiliate in Guba. During a discussion with the then manager, Adelet Aliyev, the commentary on the future of the station, its programming tactics, and the excuses for not fulfilling the requirements of IREX's contract with the station, led the IREX to feel quite apprehensive about continued partnership with the station and believed it prudent to move the transmitter to Gubt-TV, the other outlet in Guba. IREX's staff attorney sent a thirty-day letter to the management of the station. In September, three IREX staff members—including the staff lawyer, DCoP, and CoP—along with an engineer from the Frequency Commission, paid a visit to Xhayall to make arrangements to confiscate the IREX transmitter as the thirty-day notification period had expired. However, the trip was in vain when the manager of the station refused IREX access to the transmitter site. He then became very abusive to IREX's staff lawyer when he reiterated IREX's legal rights. The Frequency Commission engineer was privy to all of the conversations.

A meeting with the Xhayall TV ownership's representative regarding the transmitter took place the end of October 2006. The owner's deputy, Mubariz Taghiyev, Alasgar Mammadli (IREX's staff attorney), Ulvi Ismayil (USAID/Baku's AOTR for the IREX project), and Livia Mimica were in attendance. Taghiyev professed ignorance of the situation saying he had only been on the job three months or so but that he did want to get it settled as quickly as possible. However, he felt that the situation could be ameliorated to all parties concerned if Xhayall were to retain the transmitter and fall into line with the other affiliates. Mammadli countered with the fact that the station had never complied with any of the IREX project's requirements dating back to the time that Josef Gedimbavli took control of the station seventeen months prior. Mammadli recited the list of the lack of cooperation including Xhayall's refusal to stage the 2005 Town Hall elections meetings, the political debates, and finally the fact they refused to participate in the training for

the “Problem and Solutions” program. At least the first two were orders from the owner himself, and when Mammadli asked Taghiyev why that would suddenly change there was no reply.

IREX’s request to meet with Minister Ali Abbasov regarding access to the fiber optic network was forwarded to the embassy in January 2007. The meeting was eventually scheduled for March 7; however, the meeting did not occur. Instead, a meeting with AzTeleCom was arranged in March by one of Minister Abbasov’s advisors. The negotiations went smoothly, and everyone agreed that the cost for transmission would be too expensive for the fledgling network once it was on its own. The alternate plan of distributing DVDs via a messenger delivery system was settled upon.

In March, IREX met with USAID and Ali Hasanov, the head of the Presidential Apparatus, to inform the government of the regional stations’ future plans. Hasanov expressed his belief that this was a worthwhile endeavor and looked forward to the stations moving towards professionalism. However the Chairman of the National Television and Radio Council, Nusharivan Naharramli, later called all of the regional station owners into his office. They were told they could act individually but not in concert in this program. Unfortunately, from a selling standpoint that will not be feasible for advertising. Individually the stations would get a low rating but, in aggregate, they would be competitive with the national stations. Other than that, as individuals, they were susceptible to intimidation by the authorities.

In April, IREX had a meeting with chairman of the Broadcast Council Nusharivan Maharramli regarding IREX’s arrangement with regional broadcasters for the regional network. Livia Mimica from USAID and Paul Narain, the political officer from the US Embassy, were also in attendance. Maharramli admitted there was a no legal basis for his interference and acknowledged that IREX’s plan was logical and would serve the regional stations well. The issue that needed to be resolved was that the regional broadcasters were acting in concert and thus, IREX, by “forcing” them to broadcast the programming at the same time, was inflicting its will on private businesspeople. IREX explained that under IREX’s obligation to Warner Bros., a force majeure to terminate the contract would document obstructions to the network by the government of Azerbaijan.

Throughout April and May IREX’s staff attorney, Alesger Mammadli, and Maharramli’s legal staff drafted various versions of the agreement to reach concurrence. In May, the language was agreed upon - IREX could not dictate the time periods for the broadcasting but, if only by coincidence, all of the stations decided upon the same time period that would satisfy the current regulations. In June, IREX staff journeyed throughout the regions of Azerbaijan, getting the required affirmation from each of the participating stations in the ad hoc network based upon the modified agreement. All agreements were signed and the project moved forward once the scripts and promotional materials arrive from Warner Bros (WB).

In August 2007, IREX began translating WB program scripts into Azerbaijani and preparation of voiceovers, as the scripts were delivered by WB. As the tapes themselves arrived, they were catalogued and acknowledgements were sent to WB to confirm their delivery. The tapes were then shelved according to program and episode number in the IREX studio. In October, IREX faced impediments to the WB tape deliveries. Azerbaijani customs officials decided that the tapes were subject to scrutiny and tariffs. IREX applied to the Cabinet of Ministers for a humanitarian intervention. In November, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the receipt of the

tapes and the IREX request that these shipments be considered humanitarian aid was signed in December by the Deputy Prime Minister, who has the responsibility of signing for the Cabinet of Ministers. WB had been informed to postpone delivery until the permission was received, and then faced computer problems that prevented them from resuming shipment. Apparently the Customs officials became weary of the bi-weekly shipments and demanded that IREX take the remainder of the tapes, about 400 or so, in no more than two shipments. IREX then contacted WB to apprise them of this change, sent them a list of all outstanding programs and awaited final shipment. In November, Internews set up a dubbing studio and began voicing over the programs.

In December, IREX management decided that the proposed Ganja affiliate, Alternative TV, had not fulfilled all of its obligations under its agreement. Consequently, IREX opted to provide the network programming to an alternative station, Kapaz TV. The ownership of Kapaz accepted the conditions for retransmission and joined the group without hesitation.

Distribution of the programs began in April, and the affiliate stations were adhering to the schedule and fulfilling their obligations to air the programming on time. IREX was able to monitor their performance via the Ariana program provided by AGB/Nielsen, and it was evident that this programming engaged a greater audience than the stations had prior to the initiation of the project. For example, upon review of the historical data in the Ariana database from the period prior to the inception of the programming and comparing it to the (then) current viewership numbers, the overall cumulative effect of the RTEAM initiative spurred an increase of nearly a 32% gain in viewers, more than enough to substantiate advertising interest.

The sales effort for advertising for the affiliated stations proved to be successful. In April, a marketing representative was put into place on IREX's staff in Baku; as advertising revenue for the ARTSh increased, he would become a full-time Globus (advertising agency) employee. The network's first sale was made to ATA Trading, which bought a month-long flite on the network. In June, McCann-Erickson, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, opted to use the network as a primary means to deliver advertising to the regions and contracted for AZN 80,000 for one month, using about 35% of the available inventory.

In July and August 2008, IREX revised its sales strategy for the fledgling network. It seemed that more potential clients were inclined to target their spots on individual stations rather than buying time on the group in its entirety. The Subaru distributor, for example, was focusing on the southern region of Lenkeran and only wanted to air spots on Cenub in Lenkeran. Even though the network offered an opportunity to expand the reach of the distributor, it decided to postpone any further purchases unless the option to target individual markets was given. After deliberate and controlled negotiations among the station owners, Globus management and the stations reached agreement that it would be wiser to offer targeted selling opportunities based upon potential sales. While the affiliates themselves may not benefit as a group, individual stations will, and their revenues will increase based upon their performance in ratings.

In September 2009, given the impending shift in USAID's support to media development in Azerbaijan and the strong focus on new (Internet-based) media platforms IREX ended the regional television project and returned to Warner Brothers the last of the regional stations' tapes of programming, which IREX dubbed for broadcast on seven regional television channels.

IR 1.4: Youth Broadcast Project

In July 2006, Internews/Azerbaijan began their broadcasting of the first three IREX-sponsored radio programs. The first two focused on the lack of recreational facilities for teens in the regions and the discussion was led by one of the most active of youth advocates from the central government. During the talk, Seva Aliyeva, the deputy minister for youth and culture, promised that the regions would soon get “some” benefit from the increased oil revenues and she would ensure that some of that extra revenue would be devoted to providing a better existence for the younger people. When asked to be more specific about what they could anticipate, Aliyeva declined to specify exactly what was planned but promised that the youth of the country would not be ignored.

In early 2007, the program “Tell Me” was additionally launched. Internews/Azerbaijan staff proposed the format, with the caveat that, if it did not work, subsequent episodes would be taped utilizing the IREX Chief of Party’s concept of the program. After the taping, the crew agreed that their ideas did not lend itself to a program worth watching. The new format went into effect on February 9. Two episodes of “Tell Me” were taped in February. The improvement with the change of venue and the limited number of participants was very evident. The second program involved an interview between fifteen students and the PAO of the embassy and Ulvi Ismayil (USAID/Baku’s AOTR for the IREX project).

In March, Fulbright Program Visiting Professor Steve Youngblood was brought in to help train the students in the basics of reporting and to try to reverse the decline in the program’s quality. Professor Youngblood had offered to work with the students in the off-week we were not shooting so the schedule could be maintained. Nasiman Yagublu, from Baku State, refused to cooperate saying this training was not part of the original proposal. Youngblood offered to accommodate the students’ schedules so his training would not interfere with their studies and then proposed it to the students themselves. Six of the 25 attended his first class and all agreed that was not enough participation.

In June 2007, production of “Tell Me” continued, but in a somewhat reduced form. Overall, the students produced three episodes interviewing local government and embassy officials and agreed that their chosen production format lacked professionalism. IREX suggested ways to make the program more watchable, including training. However, when Fulbright scholar Professor Steve Youngblood offered to provide training to the student participants in the basics of interviewing, Professor Yagublu provided a myriad of excuses why this could not happen. It was therefore decided to terminate the project in June, due to lackluster production quality and insufficient cooperation from Professor Yagublu.

IR 2: Enhanced financial viability of media outlets

IR 2.1: Independent media use market/audience research

Ratings. In October 2004, IREX met with SIAR, a polling firm based in Baku, and learned that they had been certified by ESMORA, the European statistical body that oversees such businesses. Their output was most impressive but IREX began investigating methodological and data collection processes to determine whether or not SIAR’s data provided a true picture

of viewing habits. In looking over some of their reports, IREX noticed several anomalies that raised both questions and concerns. Their primary focus was the ratings of the Baku-based stations and their operations in the regions were somewhat scant, centering on Ganja and Guba only. In order to prove the viability of the regional station network as a competitor for the national stations, SIAR would have to expand their operations to include each of our target provinces.

However, the Italian ratings organization, AGB/Nielsen, made plans to move its equipment from Kyiv to Baku during the first few months of 2005. It planned to install 120 PeopleMeters in the capital city and then eventually move into the major regional cities. This would provide some stiff competition to the already established SIAR which had come under some sharp criticism by the Baku-based broadcasters.

In May 2005, IREX meetings with AGB/Nielsen helped them formulate their plans on expansion of PeopleMeters into the regions of Azerbaijan. The data they provided, based upon Baku surveys only, had already altered the selling habits of the local TV stations. IREX worked with the Baku-based stations in helping them come to terms with the new method of selling that national advertisers were demanding. No longer would they be able to sell based upon volume of spots; instead they had to come to terms with GRPs (gross rating points) and cpms (cost per thousand).

In December 2005, AGB/Nielsen began preparing the necessary paperwork to bring the regional stations into their monitoring network. This process required establishing satellite offices of the company to process the validation of commercials aired by the regional stations. In speaking to members of the advertising community, they seemed eager to have an alternate to the stranglehold that the Baku-based stations had upon the industry. The advertisers appeared to welcome the pending competition. However, it was also reported that advertising revenues continued to spiral during 2005 and, after discounting the influx of political advertising, the net gain was nearly fifteen percent, or about US\$2.5 million.

In late 2006, SIAR, the original ratings group (prior to the arrival of Nielsen) introduced meters into its inventory of survey tools. In December, they were in Baku, Guba, Sumgayit and Ganja with a total of 400 families being surveyed. In talks with them, SIAR indicated that they would consider expanding into IREX's target cities, and they were developing a budget to accommodate project needs.

In January 2007, IREX asked MM&M, one of the primary advertising agencies in Azerbaijan, about utilizing the services of SIAR to provide ratings and validation. Shakhmed Mammedov, the owner of MM&M, insisted that AGB/Nielsen was more reliable, better respected by the advertising community, and least prone to manipulation. In February, IREX therefore carried on with plans to meet with AGB/Nielsen. At the meeting, IREX presented its needs and Nielsen presented its cost structure. The structure was rejected by IREX, and in March AGB/Nielsen recalculated and returned with a proposal costing 40% of the original.

In September, IREX met with AGB/Nielsen, with the focus of discussion the program's "network" (ART Sh) launch. The company was prepared to offer both monitoring and rating services to provide a basis for transferring a portion of the advertising revenues to the regional stations. AGB/Nielsen, and IREX signed a service contract in February 2008. The agreement included

both monitoring and ratings, with the IREX office in Baku receiving daily ratings data. In March, IREX sent two of its staff to AGB/Nielsen for a week to undergo training in the usage of the proprietary software, Ariana. Subsequent to the training, the software was installed on two desktops in the IREX office. IREX staff began receiving “overnights” and gauging the performance of the affiliate stations and competition.

With the distribution of the WB programs underway in April 2008, IREX began monitoring the airing of the network programming via AGB/Nielsen. IREX’s contract with AGB/Nielsen included not only ratings but the ability to monitor the stations’ performance for an entire day. By May, with the exception of the Zagatala station, all of the AGB/Nielsen equipment had been installed⁵. Zagatala was saved for last as it is the least important of all the cities in the system, and the station itself was the weakest link in the chain. The Zagatala station’s ownership had been problematic in its development. The owner proved reluctant to invest his own money in the station; IREX began working on strategies to encourage him to start investing a portion of his own resources into the station rather than relying on outside funding for station improvements.

Affiliate stations were required to remit daily to AGB discs of their broadcasting. IREX thus had visual proof that the individual stations were complying with their agreements and could verify the airing of both the network programming and their other programming. It was clear that the ratings for the IREX-provided programming showed a marked improvement over the affiliate stations’ ratings prior to the distribution.

In September, AGB/Neilsen modified its reporting procedures by requiring its subscribers to submit daily accounts of their programming schedules so they could match the programs being aired against the audience. Each of the affiliates was cautioned to prepare a weekly program schedule at least two weeks in advance and then, once that was finished, they were expected to adhere to it, save for emergencies such as catastrophe.

The partnership between AGB/Nielsen and IREX ended in March 2009. This cooperation provided an avenue for local regional stations to overcome one of the basic impediments to their survival: proving their value to the advertising community via ratings.

Prior to this arrangement, local regional stations in Sumgayit, Guba, Ganja, Mingechevir, Zagatala, and Lenkeran had no means to monitor their viewership and thus were ignored by national advertisers as well as advertising agencies which would only purchase advertising on broadcast facilities that can be monitored. Because obtaining ratings services is cost prohibitive for many regional stations, IREX/Azerbaijan negotiated with AGB/Nielsen to determine a suitable price for AGB, IREX, and the associated stations. Once the initial contract with IREX expired, it was anticipated that the network of regional stations would assume the cost of the service. Dunya TV in Sumgayit, Kapaz TV in Ganja, and Cenub TV in Lenkeran engaged in negotiations with AGB. The weaker stations in Mingechevir, Guba, and Zagatala were not able to afford the service.

Over the contract period, the data supplied by AGB/Nielsen did, in fact, indicate that local television plays an extremely important role in the lives of regional citizens. It was consistently

⁵ Zagatala’s transmitter went down and was not repaired until July 2008, thus contributing to the delay in installing the AGB/.Nielsen equipment in the station.

noted that local news aired on the affiliates rated as highly as that of national news. It should be noted that prior to the development of the network, the local stations aired their news broadcasts simultaneously with those of the Baku-based stations, but IREX managed to persuade the local station managers that it would be more appropriate to broadcast their news a half-hour before the Baku stations did. Consequently, these stations were able to develop an audience following that remained consistent throughout their prime time telecast.

The IREX-supplied programming from Warner Bros. (see IR 1.3, above)--which included a first hour of children's shows, a second hour geared for family viewing, and a third meant to serve adults--proved successful at competing against the Baku-based stations and helped establish the local stations as a viable alternative to the entrenched national stations. The sudden influx of revenue from national advertisers to the local stations was attributed to two facts: the affiliates were monitored by an unbiased ratings service and the IREX-supplied programming was a more palatable alternative to what the Baku stations aired.

It became incumbent upon the affiliates to maintain their agreements with AGB/Nielsen. The programming supplied by IREX remained in place until September 2009.

Though the partnership between AGB/Nielsen and IREX ended in March, IREX continued to maintain distribution of daily prime time programming to the stations in the regional television network. Additionally, IREX provided site management training to the six stations' staff and managers.

The affiliate stations developed their own advertising sales system. IREX staff worked with the network stations to enhance their sales efforts and ensured they remain financially sustainable. Since the inception of the network, average monthly revenues among the six stations increased from \$1,200 a month to \$8,700. The stations continued to use the revenue distribution system that IREX developed for them. As conceptualized, revenue was shared based upon performance as determined by the AGB/Nielsen ratings survey. The network members began sharing the expense of generating that survey.

IR 2.2: Independent media use increasingly sophisticated management techniques

Management training. Throughout the program, IREX consistently provided on-site technical assistance in management training, led by IREX/Azerbaijan staff as well as international consultants. Specific initiatives included:

- In early 2006, IREX provided follow-on training to **Trend News Agency**. The company had the opportunity to be with Myron Belkind, formerly a vice president of the Associated Press, who gave some insight into the workings of a news agency. IREX assisted in bringing the two together and augmented Prof. Belkind's suggestions with additional support on how to attract new clients, retain old ones and to seek alliances with other news organizations in other countries.
- In March 2006, USAID asked IREX to provide **Ictimaj TV** (the public broadcaster) with a traffic system to help them manage their operations. At the time, the station was funded by the Government of Azerbaijan at an annual budget of US\$16 million, but that funding was scheduled to end within two years, at which time the station would have to be self-sufficient.

IREX Azerbaijan began researching various vendors of accounting systems that would be applicable to the operation. It has sent the Chairman of the Steering Council to Amsterdam to observe the system used by the Dutch public broadcaster to seek recommendations.

- IREX began working with **Globus Company** in October 2006 in preparation for the launch of the ART Sh network. IREX helped Globus design a transparent accounting system, using Excel as a base. Several of the more involved owners provided input as to what they would like as information, and it was decided that they would all get monthly reporting as to the status of advertising revenues, collections and ratings. In June 2007, IREX continued work with the key personnel of Globus Management to set up a transparent accounting system. Each month, each of the station owners received a statement showing total revenue collected and expenses paid out, including Globus' minimal fee. The statement was accompanied with that month's ratings for the network of regional stations, and the rating that the station garnered during that period will determine its compensation (share of the revenue). Each of the participants agreed to this formulation.
- In October 2007, IREX met with the **RTEAM initiative's affiliated stations'** accountants to provide project sales and revenues formulation assistance. Shelly Markoff, IREX Chief of Party, developed an Excel-based system that enabled the stations to track both sales contracts and availability of time periods. It was translated in Azerbaijani so it could be used readily by the local stations.

IR 2.3: Independent newspapers have access to adequate printing facilities and distribution

Alternative distribution system. At the start of the IREX program, a major obstacle facing Azerbaijan's print sector was reliance on the state-owned distribution monopoly. In addition to making a newspaper dependent on the whims of government officials for its distribution, it was often difficult for newspapers to be reimbursed for copies sold and there was no reliable circulation data. In order to begin to address the need for an independent newspaper distribution system, IREX met with the owner of Gaya Distribution Agency in late summer 2004. Gaya came recommended by several of publishers, was held in high regard, and competed with the government-supported distributors who had established a stranglehold on the independent press. Gaya prepared a proposal for expansion that, if accepted by the publishers, would provide them with an alternative to the current system, improve their nonexistent cash flow from distribution, and allow the print media to increase circulation. IREX began working with Gaya to develop more fully its plan as well as speaking with independent newspaper publishers to encourage their support of an alternative distribution system.

In October 2004, IREX convened a group of five of the most responsible publishers to (1) get their reaction to a multiyear four-phase Gaya proposal to expand its distribution capabilities and (2) to test the integrity of the owner of Gaya. The owners verified each statement that Gaya's owner had made and added the fact that if he is called upon to advance a payment to them he always complies.

The Gaya plan called for the first two phases to be supported by grants from donors and the remaining phases to see a shift into income generation. With USAID approval, IREX worked with Gaya management and publishers to launch a series of Memoranda of Understanding

between IREX and the papers as well as a subgrant between IREX and Gaya. The MOUs specified that newspapers were expected to contribute to the second phase based upon the performance of Gaya. They would each be expected to contribute 10% of their revenue from the increased circulation (only) that resulted from Gaya's efforts. IREX tracked the performance on a monthly basis by masthead. The publishers made one demand: that Gaya reduce its commission (40%) by 25% for the first year. Gaya's management agreed after a bit of negotiation. In December, IREX finalized and issued a grant to Gaya.

In January and February 2005, Dmitry Tselok, a Belarusian management trainer, worked with the management of Gaya Distribution. While in Baku, Tselok:

- examined the Gaya's distribution and subscription internal systems and record keeping procedures;
- observed their methods of operation;
- made recommendations to improve their methods; and
- ensured that the recommendations for improvement will be put into place and that Gaya understood how to utilize them.

Tselok made the following recommendations to improve Gaya's operations:

1. The company has to design and to make own price-list on their services to subscribers in accordance with ads standards and rules.
2. The company has to start to design its own media kit which they can be use for promoting their services among potential clients and for holding relevant PR campaigns.
3. It will be much better if Gaya starts to work in accordance with their annual business-plan activities. At this time, they work mostly on an activity-based schedule, without a strict timeline and deadlines. It may prove difficult for Gaya to operate in such manner because of the Azerbaijani reality, but sooner or later they have to start to plan their activities for a year, at least, if they want to expand their services across a country.
4. Gaya should create a department which will be responsible for the promotion and advertising of their services, subscription benefits, possible PR campaigns, telemarketing for VIP-clients, etc., in order to attract new potential subscribers in future. Gaya has agreed that this is important and promised to create this in August-September 2005.
5. They have to revise their job descriptions for the staff and to write some additional parts on how to operate under force-majeure conditions, such as heavy rain, snow, and icy roads, etc. This will help the staff to operate quickly in such circumstances.
6. They have to design the attractive promotional lists which highlight their strongest and most beneficial services, and time from time to insert it in all newspapers and magazines that they sell via street vendors, kiosks, and deliver to subscribers.
7. Gaya should to design a few attractive and easy to read ad-modules for local newspapers. At present, Gaya advertises their services in local newspapers, but their ads are old and unattractive.
8. Gaya's director and top management should, from time to time, visit personally the all Gaya's kiosks, bulk centers and regional branches – it helps to receive feedback and to know better what changes have to be done for improvement of their activities.

Based upon the results of the distribution sales, matching 2004 records to the 2005 ones, in April Gaya had succeeded in doubling its distribution, at least for the first two months of 2005.

By May, based upon analysis that Gaya supplied to IREX, the sales of newspapers--especially those that support the opposition--doubled over that month. By June, Gaya's sales increased by nearly 40% over the month, following a gain of 100% in May. Gaya's expansion plans were right on track and, in speaking to the publishers that IREX monitored on a monthly basis as far as sales, they were enjoying banner months for distribution. The government controlled Qasid Distribution had problems paying the publishers--not because of the lack of sales--but because of mismanagement and they had the tendency to ignore the pleas of the opposition print media. In contrast, Gaya is maintained its payout schedule of 42 days.

In 2005, the ExCom of Baku, Hajibala Abutalov, lifted the two-and-a-half year ban on displaying and selling the opposition newspapers in the Metro controlled kiosks throughout the city. Miklos Harazti, the Representative on Freedom of the Media from OSCE, played a key role in this reversal by speaking President Aliyev about the situation. In addition, IREX began working with the US Embassy in Azerbaijan in getting the Azerbaijani government to allow Gaya to reopen its thirteen closed kiosks in Baku. They were shut down several years prior when Gaya had a dispute with the Baku mayor, whose nephew runs Qasid and was trying to force Gaya out of business.

However, this success was tempered by the advent of an artificial shortage of newsprint. In Azerbaijan, customs officials control the flow of newsprint and, as happened during previous election periods, the opposition newspapers began to find that their supply of newsprint was becoming more scarce and prices began to rise. Additionally, a strike by paper manufacturer's workers in Finland also had a direct influence on the cost of newsprint in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani publishers had been buying their newsprint from Russia and Russia imports most of the stock from Finland.

The owner of Gaya, Khanhuysen Aliyev, attended one of the celebrations for journalists on July 21, 2005. He entered into a conversation with President Aliyev and the ExCom of Baku, Hajibala Abutov. The owner of Gaya complained to President Aliyev about the action that Abutov had taken against him in 2003 when the mayor closed 13 Gaya kiosks for no reason. Abutov replied that they were substandard compared to Qasid's. Gaya's Aliyev called Abutov a liar and gave the president a photo of a typical Gaya kiosk. President Aliyev then took both men aside and directed Abutov to give those 13 kiosks prime space and that he, the President, would be awaiting confirmation from Khanhuysen Aliyev.

IREX's distribution consultant, Dmitry Tselok, visited Gaya again in July and reaffirmed that the distributor was moving forward according to plan. In August, Gaya began expanding its area of operations into the regions; sales continued to grow and revenue concentration was in subscriptions. Gaya's reports showed that *Yeni Musavat*, the voice of the main opposition, continued to be the most read newspaper even though their newsstand price was twice what the other papers were charging. In September, Gaya established distribution offices in Ganja and Mingechevir and began setting up a subscription service in those cities. Gaya also reopened the 13 kiosks in Baku that were closed down by the mayor of the city three years prior.

In July 2006, Gaya Distributing received its first tranche under a second subgrant from IREX and began construction of its new kiosks to be established in the regions. The targeted regional centers were Sumgayit, Ganja, Ali Bayramli, Yevlakh, Lenkeran and Zagatala. These additional

sites served to increase Gaya's opportunities for increased revenue as they provided a central distribution point in each of the areas for the development of the subscription services that would give the company a steady revenue stream. But, more importantly, this expansion would ensure that the newspapers will have timely distribution in these underserved cities. In June 2007, the second grant with Gaya Distributing Company expired.

IREX's first grant with Gaya concentrated on Gaya initiating a new newspaper distribution system in Baku. The system increased sales by providing racks holding newspapers and placed them in high traffic shops near the cash registers where they actually became "point of sale" impulse items. Gaya also increased its home delivery system by hiring solicitors to seek new clients. Over the course of the year, Gaya's revenue increased nearly 62%. The publishers were also given an increase in net revenue when Gaya reduced its rate of commission to them and lowered the time span between the sale and the remittance to them. The question arose as to how this increase in sales came from. For the most part, it was revenue diverted from the government system although there was a slight increase in circulation.

The success of the first grant was the impetus for the second grant, which branched out the distribution system to seven cities in the provinces. Gaya's owner invested his own capital along with the IREX grant and established a distribution system in the regions thus challenging Azermetbuatyayimi, a government controlled distribution agency. The results of that grant and the one preceding it proved several things: (1) when a grantee is a financial stakeholder in the project, he/she has a much stronger desire to succeed and (2) it is wise to fully assess all subgrantees.

Printing press. In June 2007, a working group--consisting of the OSCE, the U.S. embassy, the Norwegian embassy, the German embassy and the British embassy and IREX--was established to investigate the possibilities of installing a independent printing press in Azerbaijan. The group had already decided that, since the airwaves--radio and TV--were restricted and under the watchful eyes and ears of the ruling party, the only avenue for an alternate voice is print. The group met to determine the prospects for providing Chap Evi, the print house that catered primarily to the non-government sponsored press, with a newer and refurbished printing press. The one that Chap Evi had been using was very old, extremely inefficient, costly to maintain, and beyond repair. IREX performed a financial audit of the entity, with the full support of owner Shakhbaz Khuduoglu. IREX spent considerable time on the audit and felt that Chap Evi had the wherewithal to participate in whatever structure the group decided upon and suggest that the owner of Chap Evi become a stakeholder in whatever mechanism for buying the press evolves into.

In October 2007, another meeting of the interested parties took place to discuss the future of the printing press. It was decided to ask the Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF) to become involved in Azerbaijan. U.S. Ambassador Derse sent a letter of endorsement, countersigned by several other embassies, asking for support of the printing press project to the MDLF. In December, the MDLF asked for an updated application from Shakhbaz Thuduoglu, the owner of Chap Evi.

In early 2008, the Media Development Loan Fund expressed an initial interest in involvement in the securing of a more modern printing press for Chap Evi. They sent two representatives in April to explore the possibility, meeting with the interested parties and the principal of the print

house. However, in May 2008, the Media Development Loan Fund declined to participate in the funding of the printing press for Chap Evi.

US Study Tour on Network Operations. In May 2006, IREX, with funding provided by World Learning, sent a group of broadcasters to West Virginia to learn among other things how networks operate, their obligations to the organization, and what the organization provides for them. Part of the contingent included three people from Ictimaj (the public broadcaster) and these participants worked primarily with the public broadcast system in Charleston.

When the participants returned to Azerbaijan in June, IREX met with them to get their reactions. IREX brought in all of the station owners and queried them on what they had seen. The participants told IREX that the TV stations they had visited served to reinforce the groundwork IREX had laid before they traveled to West Virginia: as a network, participating stations gain better efficiency, get better ratings, and thus have greater opportunity for revenue.

West Virginia proved to be a good choice, as opposed to the other option of Washington, D.C., because the media there is more akin to what exists in Azerbaijan. Washington-based media has all of the latest equipment, all of the affiliated stations there are owned by the networks and thus have huge investments for infrastructure. West Virginia, on the other hand, lacks all of those advantages, and the broadcasters there have learned how to work smart, something they imparted to their guests.

IR 3: Improved media advocacy⁶

IR 3.1: The legal and regulatory framework supports the right to gather, produce, and disseminate news

Media law coordination efforts. In early 2005, IREX's on-staff lawyer was invited to participate in a round table in March for media legislation sponsored by the Council of Europe. IREX's lawyer was nominated to head a committee to work with the internationals to maintain a watch on all legislation that will affect the media.

Licensing legislation. In April 2005, IREX's staff attorney drafted legislation for the National Broadcast Council (NBC) to present to the Council of Ministers so that the NBC may issue licenses, set up a fee schedule, and actually begin to function. IREX also began work with Nushivaran Nahamarov, the chair of the NBC, to fill the vacant seats of the NBC. The board was down to four so that, in effect, since there was no majority, they had no Constitutional impact. In May, the President of Azerbaijan reinstated those whose terms had expired and the Council remained at the minimum necessary, six.

In May, the new legislation for licensing had gone through its second reading in the Parliament without comment, and the third reading was scheduled for mid-June. In June, the law on licenses for broadcasters was passed and, at first blush, it appeared to be realistic, but it could be better. For example, the fee schedule needed some adjustment. New TV licenses in Baku

⁶ IREX notes that the bulk of its efforts in this IR shifted to its DRL-funded Azerbaijan Media Defense and Public Information Program in late 2008.

(national licenses) would cost \$200,000, and the regional stations would have to pay between \$2,500 and \$7,000 depending upon their population. IREX suggested that the fee should be reduced significantly and modified to include a percentage of income. However, immediately after the new law was approved by the Parliament, the Frequency Commission sent notices out to the stations demanding that the broadcasters apply for licenses because they were in violation of the law as they were operating without being licensed. IREX began working with the stations to fill out the applications.

In September 2005, the National Television and Radio Council began issuing new six year licenses for broadcasters. The IREX staff worked with all of the regional TV stations, including the two which did not belong to the IREX-supported network, to bring their applications up to par. Nine licenses were approved while two stations in Baku, Space and ANS, were sent back to the drawing board.

In June 2006, IREX continued on-going conversations with Azerbaijan's National Television and Radio Council to offer the tenders for new licenses. Although the head of the council seemed to have de-prioritized publishing the available licenses, IREX reminded him that the law proscribed that he make the information available no less than one month after he receives the data from the Frequency Commission (which occurred in April). IREX also informed him that it was interested in developing a community radio system beginning in Guba and needed some guidance from him. The head of the council did support the notion that it was time for Azerbaijan to develop local radio in the regions since none existed at this time. He offered to "lend" IREX one of his engineers to see how both organizations could work together to develop a system.

In July, the National Council for Television and Radio succumbed to the demands of various media organizations to proceed with the issuance of new licenses. The former governmentally controlled station in Khachmaz had been licensed to a private individual. The National Council of Radio and Television (NTRC) chairman, Nusharivan Maharramli, held a press conference in October 2007 regarding the licensing of television broadcasts on the Internet, a move seen as further censorship of media. IREX Chief of Party Shelly Markoff provided the official definition of "television" as published by the European Broadcast Union (television is defined as that which is broadcast within certain frequencies assigned by regulatory bodies). The Chairman began to realize that the Internet was a domain unto itself and beyond his authority.

IR 3.2: Media legislation is fair and apolitical

Freedom of Information Law. In September 2005, IREX's staff attorney, Alesgar Mammadli, was selected by the Government of Azerbaijan, along with the Media Rights Institute, to work with the Parliamentary Commission established to develop a Freedom of Information law. According to Mammadli, 90% of what he had envisioned was passed by the Parliament; as a result IREX focused future efforts on implementation and enforcement. Among the additions that Mammadli proposed was the establishment of a public relations office for each of the ministries, a decrease in the waiting period for information to be received from the government facilities, and a right of redress if that information is not forthcoming.

In December 2005, Azerbaijan's parliament passed new legislation for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Law that was drafted by IREX and the Media Rights Institute. Contingent upon the President's signature on the law, the governmental authorities would be

required to deliver requested information within seven working days or will be subject to legal actions. The only restriction to the law was “state secrets,” “matters of security,” and information pertaining to the military.

Legal defense of journalists. IREX provided a grant to the Media Rights Institute (MRI) in June 2008. The grant allowed the Institute to hire additional staff and purchase basic office equipment to better position it to accept cases on behalf of journalists and media outlets targeted by the government. The MRI began the process of opening litigation against the government for the benefit of Agil Khalil, a journalist of the *Azadliq* newspaper beaten and stabbed allegedly by members of the Baku police force, and Emin Huseynov, the director of the Institute for Reporter’s Freedom and Safety who was also beaten, allegedly by members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In November 2008, MRI’s pending case regarding Ganimat Zahid was resolved. Zahid was imprisoned for hooliganism for allegedly beating up a policeman. During his imprisonment he wrote a political history of Azerbaijan under both the current and former presidents Aliyev. The prison’s warden confiscated the manuscript and burned it because they said it defamed the current government, and the warden was subsequently found guilty of misappropriating personal property. Zahid received no monetary compensation for the lost manuscript, because no value could be assessed.

In September 2008, IREX received a new grant from the Department of State’s Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The two-year program provided legal defense resources and training to Azerbaijan’s non-state media sector. MRI, which had a subgrant from IREX under the USAID-funded program, continued and expanded activities under the DRL-funded program in March 2009.

As MRI completed its subgrant agreement under the USAID-funded program, its staff was working on 22 cases. One of the more prominent cases, that of *Azadliq* newspaper reporter Agil Khalil, was filed in the European Court of Human Rights in March 2009.

Advertising regulation. IREX met with the National Television and Radio Council in June 2008 to persuade the chairman that public service announcements (PSAs) should not be included in advertising limits set in Azerbaijan’s law. At the time, the stations were prohibited from airing more than 15% of allocated time (nine minutes per hour) to advertising. IREX’s argued that since PSAs are not a source of revenue but serve to inform the public, their airing should not be included in the 15% allocation. The chairman agreed with the argument but said he would have to get concurrence from others.

Election code. In September 2008 and in advance of the October presidential elections in Azerbaijan, the Central Election Commission began revising the election code as it pertained to the media. The Commission immediately adopted a rule that the election advertising process would be limited to 28 days prior to the elections. IREX’s staff attorney, Alesger Mammadli was called in as an advisor to the Commission to assist them in their modifications strictly as a representative of the broadcast community. Mammadli is well regarded as an advocate of the free media, and his opinions on the viability of pending legislation was often sought. At that point, the only broadcast facility required to provide free equal access to the candidates or their parties was the public station, although Mammadli and IREX cautioned the Commission that this

would restrict access locally and place undue limitations on the opposition parties. Observers feared that all of these newly enforced revisions would remain in place for the Parliamentary elections of 2010 and would further restrict access for any potential threat to the ruling party.

IR 3.3: Journalists are organized nationally and regionally as a powerful voice for the rights and responsibilities of journalists and the media

Protest against actions of the NTRC. In October 2005, the National Radio and Television Council (NRTC) decided to go up against the most popular broadcast organization in Azerbaijan by closing down Azerbaijan News Service's (ANS) radio station in the regional city of Sheki. It seemed that although ANS had a national broadcast license, the NRTC viewed the fact that since the programming in Sheki was different from the other retransmission points a separate license was required for that station. The owners of ANS and the international community protested this action since the station was shut down in an election period. ANS was viewed as a semi-independent broadcaster and the way the law was written it was ambiguous enough to be open to interpretation. The Broadcast Council remained adamant in its decision and the radio station remained off the air.

In December, IREX, working with the NRTC, hosted a gathering of all broadcasters, representatives from the Ministry of Telecommunications, the Frequency Commission, and interested parties including the OSCE, Council of Europe, and embassies in an effort to bring the Azerbaijani legislative bodies and the broadcasters together and iron out differences, set up a body to provide a code of ethics for the broadcasters, and initiate a steering committee to determine the future of broadcasting in the country. The meeting was chaired by IREX staff attorney Alesgar Mammadli and Nusharivan Naharramov, the head of the NRTC. Representatives of all of the electronic media attended and participated in an open forum to discuss grievances towards the NRTC. The Chairman of the NRTC declared that he was open to suggestions after explaining that his organization was new and was still seeking assistance from anyone or anybody that could provide input as to how the group should function. At IREX's suggestion, a working group comprised of representatives of the electronic media was formed. The working group consisted of members from each of the Baku-based stations, including ITV (Public TV), and one member from the regional stations. Together they would work on drafting legislation, fee schedules, license requirements and a code of ethics for broadcasters. The drafts would then be presented to the NTRC and the parliament for enactment.

In January 2006, IREX hosted a working group to address the current media legislation in Azerbaijan. Representatives from all of the Baku-based stations, the NTRC and two from the regional stations met to discuss the initial phase of the project. They were tasked with developing a list of optimal legislative criteria, a basic code of ethics that would apply to all, and the preparation of a list of MPs that would provide support for their efforts. The first meeting lasted about three hours and it was evident that there were divisions among the group, mostly based upon their political affiliations. It was evident that SPACE, ATV and Lider all found the current situation amenable while the representatives from ANS and the regional stations had differences with the status quo. Even though there were reservations on both sides the realization that the need for improvement exists became evident.

In February, IREX's staff attorney, Alesger Mammadli, began working on a draft of the station managers' proposals. It was agreed that a modicum of modernization needed to be introduced into the current media legislation and that broadcasters need to have the ability to run their investments as businesses.

Press Council. It became even more evident in June 2007 that the Press Council, a group initiated by the Presidential Apparatus to ameliorate disputes that arose in the media, was merely a tool of the government. The Council was silent during the proceedings against journalists as they were being tried and the silence became even more evident when the verdict was passed. IREX had been asked in the past to provide support to the Press Council by the Presidential Apparatus and had deferred its decision until such time as its effectiveness could be determined. In the end, no program support was given to the Press Council.

Legal reporting training. On August 29, 2009, IREX worked with the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative to conduct a one-day training program, "Reporting on the legal process," at the Azerbaijan Media Center. Forty people – 27 journalists and 13 lawyers – received training from four experienced local trainers: journalism professor Zeynal Mammadli, RFE/RL Baku bureau chief Khadija Ismayilova, and attorneys Alasgar Mammadli (IREX's staff attorney) and Isakhan Ashurov. The trainers discussed how to report on court trials and other legal issues.

Legal handbook for journalists. In late 2009, IREX printed 80 copies of the book, "The journalist's legal advisor," which was written by Mammadli and Media Rights Institute director Rashid Hajily, and distributed it to the participants.

IR 4: Improved civic journalism and citizen participation

IR 4.1: Azerbaijani media provides full and accurate coverage of elections

2005 parliamentary election coverage and training. In May 2005, Azerbaijan's Presidential Apparatus asked the assistance of USAID to help them relay the contents of the new Presidential decree that detailed the rights of the voters and the responsibilities of those officials involved in the voting procedures and explain to the public how they are affected. At the behest of USAID, IREX designed an initiative to launch a series of televised town hall meetings in which seven members of the government would visit a possible nine venues to give the bureaucrats an opportunity to explain how the new system will work.

The town hall meetings began in Tovuz on June 9, traveling with six bureaucrats--Ministries of Justice, of the Interior, a member of the Supreme Court, a representative from the Central Election Committee and a representative from the Presidential Office (Ali Hasanov). On June 10, the team traveled to Mingachevir, on June 14 to Sumgayit, on June 17 in Guba, on June 21 in Ganja, on June 24 in Khachmaz, and on June 28 in Zagatala.

Each of the programs had live audiences numbering between 47 and 73 people. All had to register and provide their party affiliation so IREX could verify that the opposition was being represented. The programs began with each of the officials outlining how their particular part of the government was involved in the administration of the electoral process and then taking questions from the audience. The Tovuz town hall meeting was a bit contentious, as the

opposition there was a bit outspoken. However, the presenters handled it well and control was restored quickly. The subsequent gatherings were more representative of what a town hall meeting should be.

IREX used these opportunities to train the stations on production and to help them with the concept of camera directions, editing, and lighting. IREX also worked with the moderators on how to conduct such a program where they, in effect, are the controlling element without being the center of attention.

In July 2005, IREX's initial series of town hall meetings on elections ended in Nakhchivan. The state-controlled station even invited members of the opposition to participate. The only sticking point occurred when the banner for the town hall meetings covered the picture of former president, Heydar Aliyev, which was hanging on the wall. They demanded that the banner be removed. Somehow, the representative of the Central Election Committee managed to convince the manager of the station that the former president would not be offended if the banner remained and the program went off on schedule.

Meanwhile, IREX election consultant Steve Farnsworth worked in Baku with local journalists on election coverage. Over a two week period, Farnsworth's training sessions had 34 journalists in attendance, 11 of whom were women and 23 were men. Farnsworth also paid visits to *GUN*, Turan News Agency, and the Baku State University School of Journalism.

In August, one of the lawyers for the Central Election Committee (CEC), Elhan Ismayilov, asked IREX to develop a program for candidates on the do's and don'ts of campaigning using broadcast. IFES and IREX worked together to provide the training for the CEC and then let them bring it forward to the candidates.

In September 2005, IREX had planned to produce a number of campaign debates (45) in the regional stations. IREX had trained the twenty moderators in July in how to handle a debate. While ensuring all proper precepts were followed, IREX planned to anchor the first of each series and then turn over those duties to participating station on subsequent programs. However, the Presidential Apparatus stepped in and interpreted the law on foreign intervention in political campaigns differently than IREX did. According to the law, as written, foreign entities could not finance any candidate or party. IREX argued that it was providing support to the stations to fulfill President Aliyev's decree that all candidates would have equal access and that IREX funding would support the stations that would otherwise have financial constraints. However, the government rejected this argument, going so far as to insist that IREX could not even be in the same building where the debates were taking place.

As a result of this obstacle, IREX began monitoring the programs in each of the venues merely as an observer, which was legal and ensured that the regional stations provide the public with announcements to "get out the vote," "check the voter lists," etc.

In October 2005, IREX monitored 36 political debates in four regions (Guba, Ganja, Zagatala and Lenkeran) allowing 183 candidates for the Parliament to voice their opinions and answer questions.

In total, the following political parties were represented in the IREX-supported debates:

34 candidates from the YAP (ruling party)
17 candidates from Azadliq (the coalition formed by the key opposition parties)
14 candidates from the YES Alliance (opposition)
15 candidates from the Liberal Party
3 candidates from the Democratic Reform Party
3 candidates from the United Popular Front Party (pro-government)
3 candidates from the Democratic Azerbaijan election bloc
2 candidates from the Umid Party
1 candidate from the Communist Party
91 independent candidates

The independent candidates received the most benefit from these debates: If it had not been for these debates it is doubtful if any of the independents would have had “face time” on TV.

Qualitatively, if things had gone as planned, with IREX supervising the proceedings, the technical presentation would have been better. Some of the stations were ill-prepared (lack of facilities, lack of equipment, etc.), but the moderators did a good job as they had been prepared for this task in a special two-week training given by IREX prior to the election period.

The Central Election Commission threw out the results from November’s parliamentary election of ten districts and said that they would be re-contested in May 2006, with bi-elections scheduled for May 13. IREX began its pre-election coverage on April 24 by traveling to Tovuz and staging the first of the preliminary debates on SM TV and then going on later to Ganja, Sumgayit and Zagatala, all sites of the rerun elections. IREX provided the support for eleven debates which gave access to all the standing candidates should they so choose.

Over the course of this initiative, IREX supported ten debates and gave 42 candidates the opportunity to make their campaigns known to the voters.

Azerbaijani presidential election (2008) debates. IREX, in an effort to promote open dialogue, produced a series of four debates among the participating parties. Each of the debates had a separate theme:

1. foreign policy
2. social issues
3. defense/military
4. distribution of oil revenues

The talks were taped using the RIA Novosti facilities, and each debate lasted about 90 minutes. The parties were represented by either the candidate himself or a member of the party who had the ability to discuss his party’s views on the future of the country and the policies that his party would undertake in the event it was successful in gaining the Presidency. The forums were moderated by graduates of the ICFJ/U.S. Embassy-sponsored trainings that focused on Western style reporting. Unfortunately, due to last minute legislation by the Parliament restricting foreign participation in the country’s elections, distribution of these debates to the regional stations was cancelled. IREX subsequently worked to get the debates posted on-line.

Airing of US presidential and vice presidential debates. In an effort to demonstrate to the Azerbaijani public the importance of debate in a democracy, IREX worked with Ictimaj, Azerbaijan's public television broadcaster, to air the three US presidential debates and the vice presidential debate in September and October 2008.

IREX worked in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Baku, which ensured the delivery of the transcript of the debates. IREX and the Embassy then worked together to arrange for translations and voiceovers of the debates, and IREX supervised taping the live feeds in the Ictimaj control room at 6:00 each morning of the debates. Ictimaj subsequently aired the debates each Monday evening at 8:30 pm, and at 10 am on Tuesdays.

AGB/Nielsen reported major audience surges for the initial airings. The usual rating for that time period on Ictimaj was a 4.3 share of the audience. The first Monday broadcast garnered an 11.7 share, nearly triple the normal audience. As a result, Ictimaj began promoting the subsequent debates for the second week, and the results showed that the program won the time period with a 22.2 rating, beating out the Azerbaijani version of "American Idol," which typically won the biggest audience share for that time period. Aside from the ratings success, Ictimaj's general director decided that the format of future political debates in Azerbaijan should be revamped to follow the American example.

Additionally, two representatives from Ictimaj travelled to Washington, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, to observe the U.S. elections and produce a documentary for Ictimaj on the voting process in America.

IR 4.2: Public awareness and debate is raised by the publication and broadcast of articles and programs on specific issues of social importance

Parliamentary process programming. In January 2006, IREX was given a proposal by two former candidates for Parliament. Their proposed project called for open discussion through a TV program on legislation that has been approved by the Parliament, how it was drafted, the purpose the new law will serve, and how it will affect the citizens of Azerbaijan. After reviewing their proposal, IREX met with the General Director of Ictimaj to determine if there was interest in their participating in the program. Ictimaj's manager not only agreed to have the program aired on his station but, as a former MP, offered to involve the Speaker to gain his support.

In February, Ictimaj forwarded this project over to the director of information of the public broadcaster who then decided to impose his authority on the program. He denied using outside producers for the show, demanded editorial control and editing supervision. All of these demands were considered to be a diminution of the proposal and a stab at censorship.

In March, the producers of the proposed television program met with Ictimaj, and the parties agreed upon a format that would satisfy both the producers and not interfere with Ictimaj's patronage from the government of Azerbaijan. The producers also received a grant from NED for another project, and IREX ensured there was no duplication of costs.

The first taping of "Reading 2.5" took place on January 28, 2007. Two guests discussed the workings of the Parliament: the DCM, Jason Hyland, and Akram Abdullayev, of the YAP Party. Between the two of them, they explained the importance of this program and how it would help

enlighten the viewers on how the Parliament operates, drafting legislation, debating its merits and ultimately adding the new laws to the statutes.

Subsequent programs proved to be a bit problematic. The public broadcaster was not quite as public as one would hope and has, at times, worked magic in its editing bay making negatives about various subjects turn into positives. IREX had a meeting with the news management of Ictimaj in an effort to ameliorate the problem and bring ethical behavior to the public broadcaster. In the end, the program was suspended due to these unethical practices.

“Problems/Solutions” programming. In May 2006, USAID notified IREX that it was preparing a modification to IREX’s cooperative which will provide the project with additional funds for anti-corruption programming. This additional funding would allow IREX to continue development of an anti-corruption TV program to be entitled (in English) “Problems/Solutions.” The format was relatively simple—the regional stations participating in ART Sh would be tasked with finding everyday examples of situations which continued to make their lives untenable, develop a story line around the problem, shoot the story, and then submit it to IREX office for final production. IREX would then gather a panel of three experts to discuss the situation in focus and then render their opinions on how to solve the problem.

Each of the station owners agreed to participate in this program and, with the help of the Media Center in Ganja, a program grantee, IREX held a training in July for journalists from Tovuz, Mingechevir, Ganja and Guba. IREX’s consultant producer, Aysha Kerimova, and cameraperson/editor, Vugar Mammadov, led the training in preparation for this upcoming series. The stations in Tovuz, Ganja, Mingechevir, and Zagatala each sent three people (one cameraperson and two journalists) to take part. Each of them was led through the nuances of preparing their part of the program, with Kerimova paying special attention to the need for them to research their pieces in order to provide enough background so that the discussion of the experts would be able to focus on the basic problem.

Kerimova also emphasized how important it was for each of the group to work diligently and provide enough materials so the program would grow and gain audience approval. Kerimova worked in the field with the individual journalists over the course of several months to ensure that their journalistic efforts are fruitful.

Building on the training by the Center in Ganja, in July, IREX held a meeting with three additional stations (in Guba, Lenkaran and Sumgayiyt) at the IREX office in Baku where Kerimova and IREX’s staff lawyer Alesger Mammadli took the station representatives through different aspects of the “Problems and Solutions” program, explaining what was expected of the stations and how their participation would bring them both financial and professional satisfaction.

The station managers had been informed during the August monthly meeting, it still fell upon the journalists and the camerapeople in the regional stations to actually get the stories. Both Aysha Kerimova, the producer, and Vugar Mammadov, the cameraperson/editor, toured each of the participating stations to monitor the progress. While in the stations, the IREX consulting team critiqued what had already been shot, providing suggestions as to content and technique, and modifications were made while they were in the field. They returned with seven preliminary programs (the first half of each episode) and began taping the balance of each program when

the set was delivered in September. Internews/Azerbaijan agreed to lend IREX cameras and lights until the IREX equipment was delivered in order to keep this program production schedule on track.

In September, the first two episodes of “Problems/Solutions” were completed. Notably, IREX received at least one story from each of the regional stations except Xhayall. Each of the segments was approved by both the producer and the cameraperson as to their story value and technical requirements and they all passed the test.

By late 2006, “Problems/Solutions” had become the focal point of the IREX project. In October, the local staff prepared five additional programs and distributed them to the regional affiliates. The key topics covered in the program included the government’s ignoring the drug addiction problem in Lenkeran, the extremely high cost of ineffective road repair in Tovuz, and the lack of transportation facilities in Lerik.

November 2006’s “Problems/Solutions” devoted one of its programs to the current issues developing in the local media. The producer, Aysha Karimova, interviewed the attorney for *Azadliq* newspaper to get some background on the eviction notice that the paper received from the government. The other part of the program included two interviews about the refusal to renew ANS’s broadcast license: the first with Seyfulla Mustafayev, part owner and manager of ANS-TV and Radio, and the second with the Chairman of the NTRC to discover the reasons for the refusal to renew.

The quality of reportage improved with each submission, as did the quality of editing. The local affiliates were also heaping praise upon the program itself, telling IREX they were getting reaction from their viewers, most of it positive.

In early 2007, “Problems/Solutions” continued to progress with new vignettes being produced in the regions. The contributions from the stations all focused on the various problems the average citizen faces on an everyday basis, from the sharp increase in electricity and the cascading effect that has on the price of staples, to the lack of adequate medical care in the regions in a country as wealthy as Azerbaijan.

Other topics covered by “Problems/Solutions” throughout its run included:

- why local authorities were rebuilding a road that had last been repaired recently.
- the shortage of insulin in a local clinic and the abundance of it in the local Aptekas where it was so expensive.
- why transportation between the capital city and the second city of Azerbaijan was so sporadic and, worse, so costly.
- the diminishing supply of gas for heating in the regions and the fear of a total lack of fuel for the upcoming winter.

IREX did compensate the participants financially but only according to certain criteria. Their focus had to be relevant to the situation, the story line coherent, and the finished product they provided must incorporate acceptable production values. The onset of the project gave the stations quite a bit of latitude in all of these but, as the project has progressed, IREX became more stringent, forcing the producers to improve or be rejected and, if rejected, there was no

compensation. IREX worked with the participants by sending the program producer, Ilhamiya Rzayeva, and the editor, Vugar Mammadov, into each station to work with the local producers on a one-on-one basis, giving them examples (using their own tapes) as to what improvements could be made and, more importantly, how. Each of the contributors was given a checklist of what they had to do to ensure that their vignette would make it to broadcast.

“Heroes” programming. In August 2006, CHF International’s USAID-funded Community Development Program solicited IREX’s assistance in promoting their project, and IREX decided it would be a good vehicle to introduce the planned “Heroes” program to Azerbaijan. USAID, long an advocate of this particular production, agreed and in September IREX signed a contract with CHF International to produce four half-hour segments of “Heroes” to be distributed among the regional TV stations. CHF suggested this particular project as IREX would have the opportunity to develop the story as a work in progress and follow it from its inception to its completion. According to CHF’s program, their improvement projects must have local support, either financial or in-kind, with the local participants themselves deciding where the opportunities lay and how they fit into the success of the project.

IREX began taping the first two episodes of the Azerbaijani version of “Heroes” in October 2006. The first taping, according to CHF, had to be put on hold, as they had run into problems with their road construction project. The second had an anticipated completion sometime in February 2007.

After the end of the CHF funding, IREX continued producing “Heroes” until early 2010. People and topics covered by “Heroes” throughout its run included:

- a retired school teacher who works with students falling behind on their reading skills. The teacher spends two hours three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Thursday) with a group of six children using the very first primers written in the new Azerbaijani alphabet. He had been doing this for several years and his students have gone from being at the bottom of the class scholastically to an above average ranking.
- an elderly lady in the Lenkeran region who took it upon herself to care for horses and ponies that had pulled wagons for street vendors and had gotten too old to work or had been injured to the point where they can no longer function and were discarded by their owners. She tasked some of her family to build a small stable and corral to maintain the horses and enlisted the aid of a friend with experience in veterinary folk medicine. Village children played with, cared for the forgotten animals, and exercised them.
- a foster home association formed by a group of mothers whose children have already left home. Unwed mothers in Azerbaijan face a very negative stigma; consequently, many children born out of wedlock are placed in overcrowded orphanages or are otherwise abandoned. The mothers who are a part of this ad hoc association provide foster homes to abandoned children, including infants and street children. They ensure the children receive medical attention and attend school.
- a mother frustrated with Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Education and its lack of understanding or support for parents with special-needs children like her own autistic son. Valida Abbasova, the mother, enrolled in classes at Baku State University to become certified as a teacher

and form a support group for families in the Sahil district of Baku to provide her autistic son and others like him with a basic education.

- Ruhangiz Huseynova, the chairwoman of the non-governmental organization Among Women based in Ganja. She is a stalwart in gender issues in a society that looks upon most women – especially the poorer among them – as second-class citizens. Huseynova is a practicing psychologist who works with battered women. Her staff is also comprised of medical personnel who administer to the women, and the group provides shelter for them while they heal. The NGO has yet to receive any financial support from the government, but Huseynova has enlisted the aid of several prominent businesses in the area which have supported her efforts.
- “Aunt Anya,” a 70-year-old pensioner in Baku. Several years ago she was employed by an English couple to look after their children – a boy aged six and a girl aged three. The couple left on holiday to Europe nine years ago. Neither returned to Azerbaijan and effectively abandoned their children to Anya's care. She contacted the British embassy many times over the succeeding years but was never successful in her attempts to locate the parents. The children are now 15 and 12 and regard Anya as their mother. However, as Anya ages, her own situation in life became more dire. Her tiny pension was not sufficient to provide food for the children or an environment that is habitable. Consequently, she was forced to seek charity. She was terrified of surrendering the children to the state as she well remembered growing up in an orphanage herself.
- a blind, highly educated man who has experienced the travails of being handicapped, took it upon himself to teach other blind people the Braille alphabet in addition to providing counseling to those who have lost their sight.
- a refugee woman who established an NGO to help other refugees and internally displaced persons solve their problems.
- a lawyer from Mingachevir city who launched a free human rights training program for local residents. The program provides free legal assistance and representation at court trials for poor residents.

Phase II

IR 1: Regional multi-media centers, equipped with broadband Internet access, are established and produce community-based content in piloted communities.

IR 1.1: Establish and maintain Community Information Centers

FYI Community Information Centers (CIC). In Phase II of the program, IREX identified, established, and opened 12 Internet access and media centers in the country's regions. The F.Y.I. Community Centers, as they became known, allowed regional journalists to work and post stories to the project-supported “*Hayatimiz*” site (see IR 1.3 below). Each of the centers was furnished with the equipment – video and photo cameras, voice recorders, and editing equipment – necessary for regional journalists to record and broadcast their own videos online. Each center houses ten computers, and IREX hired local coordinators to manage them. Centers

were established in: Shirvan, Imishli, Sumgayit⁷, Guba, Gazakh, Sheki, Ganja⁸, Zagatala, Ismaili, Mingachevir, Lankaran and Gedabey. The Gedabey center opened in June 2010 with financial support from the Anglo-Azerbaijani Mining Company, which has an oil production agreement with the government of Azerbaijan. The company offered to support the center as part of its corporate social responsibility goals.

At the end of the program's extension year, IREX's records showed that approximately 4,200 unique patrons visited at the 12 Centers (60% male, 40% female).

In addition, IREX staff in Azerbaijan worked with USAID to launch a center in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in partnership with local partner Human Rights Resource Center, which is led by a journalist, Malahat Nasibova. It was determined that it was not feasible to establish a Center in Nakhchivan in the time span of the extension year of the program; thus, this initiative was slated for further investigation in the planned follow-on program.

All the centers regularly offered basic training courses on computer and Internet use, as well as instruction on how to use software like Microsoft Word, Excel and email. Each CIC hosted myriad events over the last year of the program, including: discussions on assisting victims of the earthquake in Haiti, round tables about women's role in society and other gender-related issues, training in citizen journalism, seminars on environmental issues, discussions on Novruz traditions, and training sessions for students, teachers, and unemployed youth. Center patrons regularly submitted civic journalist-generated stories to the hayatimiz.org website and numerous blogs were created. Several centers worked with local media organizations to provide research support in navigating the Internet. The new center in Ismaili hosted an innovative discussion forum via video conference for a secondary school in Ismaili and one in Chelyabinsk. The forum for students was organized by the CIC administrator and a teacher from the Ismaili school.

In mid- to late 2010, IREX faced some issues with local authorities regarding Center activities in Gazakh, Sumgayit, Imishli and Shirvan faced challenges from the local authorities. The Baku-based NGO Legal Education Society (LES,) with the financial support of the OSCE office in Baku, planned to conduct a series of town hall meetings in the regions on the issue of candidates and voters' rights during the parliamentary elections. In the abovementioned four cities, LES asked to conduct the meetings at the f.y.i. Community Information Centers. However, local police and executive authorities in Gazakh, Sumgayit, Imishli and Shirvan tried to prevent the events in advance. They called IREX CIC coordinators and told them that if the events were held, the centers would be shut down. However, IREX's staff lawyer, Alesger Mammadli, quickly intervened on behalf of the administrators. The issue was resolved and LES was able to hold meetings at all the centers.

⁷ In April 2010, In April, IREX moved the Sumgayit center from a library to a bigger facility in the center of town that is shared with the Sumgayit branch of an NGO, the Baku Education and Information Center.

⁸ In Ganja, IREX worked with Internews Azerbaijan to reopen Internews' previous center there. IREX provided Internews with a \$26,000 grant to reopen the center and IREX shared the space with Internews.

Chart 1: USAID-supported f.y.i. Community Information Center Usage

	Shirvan	Imishli	Sumgayit	Guba	Gazakh	Sheki	Ganja	Zagatala	Ismaili	Mingachevir	Lenkaran	Total
Number of visits per center	7786	10078	4456	6003	3883	4600	3705	5028	2946	715	134	49,334
Number of new visitors	896	473	445	542	606	432	430	1060	569	333	121	5907
Number of significant events at center	74	80	81	134	67	101	80	54	35	6	1	713
Number of informative presentations made about center activities	25	23	11	6	3	9	8	3	3	6	6	103
Events led by or including representatives from local or international NGOs	9	26	34	41	21	32	17	17	18	9	10	234
Peace Corps Volunteer-led events	24	17			9	7	2	17			3	79
Computer skills training participants	184	1707	679	732	610	549	909	195	97	40	50	5752
Blogs and Web sites created by center users	7	48		82	16	49	19			4	11	233
Number of f.y.i. Community Information Center user articles submitted to hayatimiz.org ⁹	16	10	25	145	15	23	84	33	10	7	56	424

IR 1.2: Citizens of all demographics (gender, age, and educational background) are trained in ICT skills

Internet usage in secondary schools. In Phase II of the program, IREX staff coordinated with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to implement a research competition for secondary school students. IREX staff worked with the heads of local education departments to gain their support and cooperation in the project.

In early 2010, IREX secured the support of Peace Corps volunteers to assist in this competition. IREX staff traveled to Sumgayit, Shirvan and Imishli to present the project to local principals. The project encouraged school children to conduct online research about Azerbaijan and present it as a school project. The best projects in each region were rewarded with netbooks for the student and his/her teacher.

In March 2010, IREX staff began to collect student research. IREX formed a jury of well-regarded teachers and academics who will judge the entries. In all, 73 secondary schools, more

than 100 teachers, and more than 400 students from eight regions of Azerbaijan participated in the project.

In spring 2010, the IREX-sponsored research competition for students ended with 99 entries from 22 secondary schools in eight regions around the country. Students had to use online resources to prepare research papers about Azerbaijan. Entries came from almost an equal number of boys and girls from major regional cities, as well as more remote villages.

A jury of teachers and professors reviewed the projects and selected eight first-place winners, who along with their teachers each received an Acer netbook. Nine second-place winners won digital cameras.¹⁰

In a nod to the success of this initiative, the Ministry of Education announced a similar competition and declared 2010 to be the Year of ICT in Education. The Ministry's contest was supported by a state program on greater technology use in education, which was launched in 2008 and is expected to continue through 2012. The organizations supporting this project include Microsoft Azerbaijan, Ultra, HP and Madad. The contest aims to encourage teachers to establish their own Web sites and blogs and bolster the use of electronic educational resources.

Internet open houses. Throughout the second phase of the program, the Community Information Center local administrators maintained an open door policy making the facilities available to any and all who wished to use them. Each of them provided access to local NGOs for their gatherings and encouraged local NGOs and CSOs to use the sites as places to hold open unrestricted conversation.

Several organizations took advantage of the centers to host discussion groups and informational sessions on, for example, women's role in strengthening society, health hazards related to smoking and leadership training sessions. i

A minimum of 20 visitors per Center were trained in ICT skills (40% male, 60% female. Ages averaged at 2 preteen, 10 teenaged, and 8 25 years and over).

Outreach between Baku-based and regional organizations. In the program's extension period, IREX worked with the Women's Bar Association, an adjunct of the ABA-ROLI project, in its quest to bring gender equality to the women of the regions of Azerbaijan, use the facilities of the Community Information Centers as sites for their training and, at the same time, enlist members who have then continued to meet within the Centers. In addition, several other Baku-based organizations traveled to the regions and used the CICs for presentations and meeting spaces. For example, the NGO Azerbaijan Gender Information Center and the AREAT Research Center organized a training session at the Guba center on women's role in strengthening society. As Azerbaijan's November 2010 parliamentary elections approached, several Baku-based and regional NGOs (like Legal Education Society, Sumgayit-based Legal Aid, Helsinki Citizen's Assembly) used the centers to teach the local electorate, candidates and their headquarters about their rights.

¹⁰ To read more about the competition (in Azerbaijani) go to:
<http://www.hayatimiz.org/news.php?id=24719>

IR 1.3: Local news and information is generated and posted to community-based websites and linked to other community centers, NGOs/CSOs, forums, and individual websites

Hayatimiz. In mid- to late 2009, IREX launched its online citizen journalism Web site, “Hayatimiz,” which means “Our life,” at www.hayatimiz.org. The site provided an outlet for professional and citizen journalists to publish their reports about life in Azerbaijan’s regions. IREX contracted local NGO, Multimedia Center, to design the site and provide training for staff who will be working on it.

In early 2010, IREX began to spread news and feature stories written by local professional and citizen journalists on its Web site, <http://www.hayatimiz.org>. The CICs promoted the site as an important vehicle for publishing citizen journalism and invited local journalists and citizens to submit pieces for publication.

Hundreds of unique visitors went to www.hayatimiz.org on a daily basis. Additionally, in May 2010, IREX grantee Turan News Agency and the news Web site www.mediaforum.az reprinted six articles from Hayatimiz. Each reprinted article mentioned the source as www.hayatimiz.org. In late 2010, about 15 stories from Lankaran, Ganja, Guba and Sumgayit were also republished by leading Baku-based newspapers and news agencies.

At the end of the extension year, more than 400 stories were written and posted by citizen journalists to hayatimiz.org and other news sites, exceeding the program target of a minimum of 75.

Citizen journalism training. In February 2010, IREX hosted two training sessions on journalism basics for citizen journalists at the Community Information Centers in Sumgayit and Guba. More than 50 participants – including journalism students, professional journalists and others interested in journalism – attended. A Radio Azadlig correspondent, Marif Akperli, taught the participants about journalism basics, as well as tips for using online media, such as how to create blogs. IREX staff member Vugar Mammadov taught the participants the basics of broadcast journalism

Later that spring, IREX completed a series of trainings on basic journalism skills for citizen journalists at the CICs. The last two trainings in Sheki and Zagatala drew more than 60 residents. A Radio Azadlig correspondent taught participants about basic journalism schools and how to apply them to new media. IREX staff member Vugar Mammadov taught the participants the basics of television journalism.

In May, the U.S. Embassy hosted a “Journalism 2.0” training seminar in Baku on using the Internet as an alternative media tool. The local coordinators from eight of the f.y.i. Community Information Centers attended the training session and also received their own special session to discuss working with journalists in the regions.

In summer 2010, IREX conducted a series of trainings on basic journalism skills for citizen journalists at its f.y.i. Community Information Centers (CICs). The trainings were conducted by experienced journalist and trainer Khadija Ismayilova and IREX staff member Vugar Mammadov in Sheki (July 19), Zagatala (July 20), Shirvan (August 17), Imishli (August 20), Ganja (August

30), Mingachevir (August 31), Sumgayit (September 13), and Guba (September 16). About 25 local residents took part in each training.

Also in August and September, trainer Vugar Safarov conducted a series of trainings at the centers for local NGO and civil society groups on “PR by means of new media and blogs.” The trainings were held in Guba, Sumgayit, Ismayilli, Gedabey, Gazakh, Shirvan, Imishli, Sheki and Zagatala.

IR 2: Media legal and advocacy organizations are strengthened.

IR 2.1: Legal advocacy organizations are proactive in prioritizing media legislative policy reforms¹¹

Advocacy training and subgrants. In spring 2010, IREX began providing financial support through a subgrant to attorney Isakhan Ashurov, the attorney for the so-called “Donkey bloggers,” Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. Milli and Hajizade were serving prison sentences for alleged hooliganism. It was widely believed they were targeted for a satirical video depicting the president of Azerbaijan as a donkey. Ashurov used the funds to cover his travel expenses while visiting the pair, who were imprisoned outside Baku.

IREX coordinated with ABA’s Rule of Law Initiative in Baku, along with several prominent local attorneys, to better protect journalists’ rights and provide legal defense as necessary. Using IREX’s media advocacy grants pool, the group decided funding for Ashurov’s expenses incurred while defending the young bloggers, who had become symbols of media persecution in Azerbaijan.

IREX worked extensively with three legal advocacy organizations which were active in media legislative reforms (Media Rights Institute, Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Safety, Legal Information Society).

IR 3: High quality and innovative content is produced and disseminated.

IR 3.1: Professional journalists capacity to produce multimedia, interactive content is improved

Journalist training. In early 2010, IREX signed a subgrant with Transitions On Line to provide various training. Their activities included:

- 12 new media workshops in Baku and the regions, in cooperation with the IREX program’s Community Information Centers;
- A combined Social Innovation Camp/Barcamp in Baku to promote the use of Internet technologies for social impact;
- Two round table meetings for journalists, media executives and journalism students;
- Azerbaijan’s first university-level new media course and the creation of an accompanying textbook;

¹¹ IREX notes that the bulk of its legal initiatives were covered by its DRL-funded Azerbaijan Legal Defense and Public Information program rather than the USAID-funded program.

- Small grants to the most promising projects that emerge from the SIC/Barcamp and for two other pilot projects – one in Baku and another in the regions;
- Localization of various online new media tools into Azerbaijani;
- An analysis of the new media situation in the country; and
- The production of a new multimedia CD magazine for youth and an accompanying Web site.

In spring 2010, Transitions Online trained nearly 200 participants in Azerbaijan's regions via eight CICs. The trainings focused on utilizing new media to publish news and information. A majority of the training participants were women. Participants included a mix of citizen journalists, NGO representatives and professional journalists from regional media, including Janub TV in Shirvan, Kapaz TV in Ganja, Aygun TV in Zagatala, Sheki TV in Sheki, Oguz TV in Gazakh, and Dunya TV in Sumgayit. Several librarians and Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) also participated in the trainings. Some Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) decided to pursue their own new media projects as a follow-on to TOL's work: for example, a PCV in Zagatala began a photography club for a group of young girls.

In summer 2010, Transitions Online hosted its planned Social Innovation Camp (SIC), as well as a number of related activities that led up to the camp itself in September. Preparation for the camp began in August with several events meant to promote the camp. Every Saturday in August, an open workshop on preparing ideas for the camp was held in the Ireli Youth Movement office. The first session included was focused for 25 youth movement members, the second was open to anyone, the third was for 31 representatives from the Azerbaijan Youth and Students NGO, and the fourth was also open to the public.

In addition, TOL promoted the event via its Azerbaijani site for SIC, www.syd-az.net, and actively used Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach a wider audience. Finally, the SIC organizers hosted two open consultation events for Barcamp Azerbaijan participants, called "minibars." The minibars allowed participants to get a better sense of how SICs have worked in other countries. In addition, they consulted with potential participants to help better formulate ideas to be presented at the Azerbaijan SIC.

The events garnered 80 ideas submitted via SIC's online registration form. The ideas covered a number of social problems and suggested their resolution or improvement with the use of online and mobile tools. A panel of four judges narrowed the ideas down to six finalists. The judges included Tony Bowden of the site, www.mysociety.org; Aleksey Levonchik, a TOL project manager from Belarus; David Birman, an Israeli marketing professional and co-founder of the Social Media Development Center in Georgia; and Vahid Gasimov, the head of Sahil IT Ltd. and owner of Katalog.net, the biggest catalog of Azerbaijani websites.

The six finalists included:

1. An online map project, similar to Google Maps, that allowed users to click on buildings and streets to gain more information about given neighborhoods in Baku and to provide accurate timetables for public transportation.
2. An online social network for students studying the same discipline to better share information about taking the right classes and finding jobs after graduation. Only

- master's and bachelor's degree candidates would be allowed to participate and universities would be responsible for activating and deactivating user accounts.
3. A site for people who suffer from the same diseases or ailments to share information about their treatments, in addition to suggesting folk medicines and cures.
 4. The "Let's Protect our Ecology" project would encourage citizens to work together to report environmentally unsafe or even just littered areas across Baku for potential clean-up. In addition, the site owners would work with municipal governments, residents and others to find solutions to the problems. The site's owners would also produce and distribute t-shirts that read, "Let's keep the purity of our capital," and which would include the site's address to raise awareness about the problem.
 5. One group aimed to further the impact of the Bologna Accords, which aimed to create standards for European higher education, by creating a website that would encourage students to review their teachers.
 6. The last group proposed building a website where citizens could report incidences of child trafficking, kidnapping and abuse. A forum on the site would allow people to discuss particular issues or cases and another section would encourage visits to and support for local orphanages.

The SIC was held September 18-19 in Novkhani, about 25 kilometers from Baku. On the first day the groups introduced their ideas, created websites, business plans and public relations plans. The judges came in throughout the day and provided feedback to each group. On the second day the groups continued to work on their ideas and presented them again to the participants, a group that concurrently attended a new media workshop also hosted by TOL, and three additional judges: Jana Terzimehic Petrlikova, a TOL manager from Prague, Beishen Daiirbekov, a new media expert from Kyrgyzstan, and Elza Ketsbaia, a journalist from Georgia. The judge chose the ultimate winner, while the audience held a popular vote to determine the second place winner. In first place was the map project, which will be hosted at www.yollar.info. That team received \$3,000 to bring their idea to fruition. The environmental project came in second. This team won \$1,000 to launch their idea.

On the sidelines of the SIC, TOL also hosted a new media training workshop. The SIC judges served as trainers for this activity. Sessions included, "Last challenges and examples of online tools," "The best examples from Azerbaijan: How to provide e-campaigns," "Online tools from Kyrgyzstan and their social impact," "Security, privacy tools and combating censorship," "New ideas for social influence," "E-marketing, PR, private and corporate promotion," "Georgian new media," and "Mysociety projects and possible use in Azerbaijan."

Dozens of online news outlets and other organizations covered the events, including: SICamp.org, TOL.org, SICampnigera.org, Wikipedia.org, Azadliq.org, Kavkaznews.info, Day.az, AzerPhoto.com, Barcamp.org, and numerous personal blogs. One of the online media outlets to cover the events, Kanal13TV, broadcast its evening news from the event's first night.¹² Furthermore, other users posted their own Facebook photos and updates from the event.

¹² You can view two Kanal13 videos at <http://www.youtube.com/user/tvkanal13#p/a/u/2/wuKNSE9PWjY> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/tvkanal13#p/a/u/1/0G6TTEUgUTg>.

The SIC also had support from outside organizations. Delta Telecom, Azerbaijan's largest telecommunications provider offered free access points and high-quality WIMAX modems for three days. SIC only paid for the traffic.

In a separate activity, TOL hosted a training on producing a CD magazine on August 23. Iryna Vidanova, a well-known Belarusian online activist and director of *34 Mag*, a CD magazine, led the training. The session served as a general introduction to producing a multimedia youth publication in CD format. The participants discussed the need for such a product, as well as the environment in which it would be produced and if Azerbaijan could benefit from such a publication.

The second part of the training focused on the example of *34 Mag*, before the group worked together to develop the concept of a similar project in Azerbaijan. The participants included online journalists, journalism professors, bloggers, and youth activists. Five students in their third year at Baku State University's journalism program expressed an interest in building such a publication.

Tools for Journalism 2.0 (3.0). In late May 2010, TOL began localizing the latest version of the IP Board forum tool into Azerbaijani. IP Board is an open-source software program popular in Azerbaijan that can build online community forums. A version available in the local language will boost the probability that Azerbaijani citizens will use the technology to create, organize and moderate online communities. The software allows users to create a single profile to use across applications on IP Board so that any content they create can easily be accessed by other users. Much like a social network, the IP Board also features profile comments and friend lists, as well as a user "reputation" feature to moderate comments and participation. In addition, it is closely integrated with other social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Users can log in using external (Facebook, Twitter) accounts and status updates are automatically synced. The tool also has strong search engine optimization features.

TOL also translated Imo.im for local use. Imo.im is a service that allows users to hold text, voice and video chats on multiple instant messaging services. It also allows users to communicate with different people through various applications. For example, a user could use the same window for both Facebook and Google's G-Chat service. The service is free and does not require user registration or sign-up, nor does it require downloading large files, an important point in Azerbaijan, where Internet connections can be slow.

Additionally, TOL assembled handbooks in Azerbaijani that instruct users on the best use of the tools Imo.im and Meebo, two online communication tools, among others. In September, TOL printed 750 copies of the handbook, which were distributed among the f.y.i. Community Information Centers, Ganja media organizations, Azerbaijan Free Thoughts University, SIC participants, and other journalism training participants.

Alternative content. In April 2010, IREX issued a subgrant to Turan News Agency to continue the development of its Contact and Top-7 Web site projects. The sites are among the few available sources of independent news and information in Azerbaijan.

As a result of these efforts, more than 60 news pieces produced by professional journalists incorporated innovative content. Twenty-six journalists were trained in Journalism 2.0 and incorporated those skills into their regular reporting.

IR 3.2: Journalists are linked to individuals and NGOs/CSOs as both implementers and contributors in the production of content

NGOs and civic journalism. In spring 2010, IREX engaged a leading producer from AN TV, a popular on-line youth television program, to train the NGO/CSO community on Internet television to help them both get their messages out and report on news and information relevant to them. IREX chose video editing software and ordered video cameras to support this activity. The activity is resulted with more contributions to *Hayatimiz*.

At the end of the program, more than 20 journalists were linked to individuals and NGOs/CSOs to produce content.

V. CONCLUSION

During the more than six year history of the IREX media development program in Azerbaijan, the country experienced events that had an impact on its overall development and its political and economic conditions. In particular, the increasingly detrimental moves against the country's non-state media and deterioration of its overall operating environment were evidenced in an overall shrinkage in the information space in Azerbaijan. It became increasingly more difficult for print and broadcast media to report fully on events in the country and numerous journalists and media outlets were targeted for reprisal and closure. The worldwide economic slowdown had a negative impact on the country's media as well and was particularly damaging to regional media: it was difficult for the regional television station to attract advertising revenue from the outset, as most advertising was concentrated in Baku, and this was exacerbated as available advertising revenue decreased.

Despite ongoing political and economic struggles, the IREX media development program had considerable impact on the independent media sector. One of the most visible impacts of Phase I of the WHAM/MAP program was the formation of a loose confederation of regional television stations acting as a network which was able to attract increased advertising from local and international companies. Prior to IREX's work, most regional stations were unable to attract advertising due to lack of audience and ratings data in addition to untrained advertising and business staff in the stations. On the print side, IREX launched a highly successful independent distribution system expansion that led to increased circulation opportunities in Baku and in the regions as well as increased revenue for publishers. IREX also began providing critically needed legislative reform efforts and legal defense resources for Azerbaijan's beleaguered journalists and media outlets. The IREX program also provided to Azerbaijan alternative, locally produced content which highlighted, among other things, work done by regular Azerbaijanis to improve their local communities. By airing on Azerbaijan's public broadcaster the 2008 US presidential and vice-presidential debates, the program brought to Azerbaijan for the first time ever an example of free and open discourse among political candidates on crucial issues.

Phase II of the program, which focused on providing on-line facilities at program-supported f.y.i. Community Information Centers throughout Azerbaijan, brought access to the Internet to

thousands of Azerbaijani citizens. Training initiatives developed a cadre of citizen journalists who wrote and posted hundreds of stories on the Internet.

As evidenced by IREX's Media Sustainability Index scores over the life of the IREX program, for the most part there was an overall decrease in Azerbaijan's media sector scores, although the business management component score saw some improvement. IREX believes this is reflective of the increasingly hostile operating environment against the media sector.

One of the biggest changes in Azerbaijan's media sector over the course of the program came in the new media world. Internet penetration in Azerbaijan had grown, and news, information, and ideas began to be exchanged and discussed. In addition to news Web sites and blogs, social networking provided a more interconnected way to share information. Even with these positive indicators, however, the full potential of digital media awaits the extension of Internet connectivity.

Given the continuing crackdown on Azerbaijan's independent media sector, IREX believes that future media development efforts in Azerbaijan should focus on exploiting the on-line world and technological advances. Recent technological advances in new and alternative media coupled with increased Internet access throughout Azerbaijan provide a unique window of opportunity to work with independent media to further develop their on-line capabilities. IREX launched several alternative media initiatives in the final phase of the WHAM/MAP program which should prove a solid foundation for future media development initiatives in Azerbaijan.