

# Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

## Ferghana Oblast NGO Network

February 2003

When the USAID-funded ZdravPlus NGO and Small Grants Program started four years ago in Uzbekistan, there were only two NGOs working in the health sector in Ferghana Oblast. That number has now risen to 40 NGOs who have recently come together to form an NGO Network, and are working together on oblast-wide health campaigns, such as AIDS Awareness. This network is a first for Ferghana Oblast, and is the first such national NGO association in Uzbekistan working on health issues.

ZdravPlus-Uzbekistan began its work with NGOs in 1998, with the initiation of a small grants program for NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) working on health projects in Ferghana Oblast. The grant program aims to build and strengthen civil society through supporting community-based health promotion projects throughout Ferghana Oblast. To date, five rounds of the grant program have taken place, with approximately ten health promotion projects funded per round. With each round of grants, the quality of applications has improved, and the number of applicants increased, resulting in a more competitive grant process.

Through USAID-funded ZdravPlus grants, the NGOs/CBOs have implemented a variety of innovative and informative projects such as puppet shows in schools to educate children on hygiene, diabetes and mothers' support groups, visiting nurse and midwife outreach for patient education, education and advocacy to prevent iodine deficiency through using iodized salt, family planning education, hepatitis prevention, promotion of dental hygiene, establishment of a health booth in a weekly bazaar, school health lessons, and many others. While many of the 40 NGOs working in the health sector initially began their work in response to the ZdravPlus grant program, they have continued their work independently and have gone on to receive funding from other sources.

In an effort to help the NGO sector to continue to develop its work on health issues, ZdravPlus met with NGOs involved in health programs in Ferghana Oblast in Fall 2002 to help them identify their vision for the future of the NGO sector and to discuss suggestions for the future development of ZdravPlus grant programs. At this meeting, the NGOs discussed the need for improved communication and collaboration between organizations, resulting in the initiative to create a Ferghana Oblast NGO Network.



*First Annual Ferghana Oblast NGO Fair*

Representatives from twenty-eight NGOs from Ferghana City and surrounding rayons participated in the first NGO Network meeting and became founding members. The Network's mission is "to promote the creation of an open forum for sharing information and exchanging the ideas and experiences of NGOs, and to develop both social partnerships and the Ferghana Oblast NGO sector." Membership of the Network has been expanded to include CBOs and initiative groups dedicated to addressing social issues in Ferghana Oblast and Uzbekistan as a whole. Rather than pay membership fees, NGOs and CBOs contribute their specific organizational assets (material and technical) to Network activities. The Network holds monthly meetings to ensure better communication and collaboration amongst NGOs and CBOs.



The USAID-funded ZdravPlus Program provides technical assistance and training to improve the health of Central Asian populations by improving health delivery systems

At the NGO Network meeting in November 2002, the NGO “Ishonch” suggested that the first Network project should address the issue of HIV/AIDS, and its impact in Uzbekistan, particularly in Ferghana Oblast, where AIDS is becoming an increasing problem. With this in mind, the Network decided to bring together NGOs, CBOs, government departments and other organizations to organize a public awareness campaign: “There is No Place for AIDS in Ferghana.” The campaign, which ran from November 14 to December 22, 2002, targeted youth, especially secondary school and university-age students. The campaign aimed to both raise awareness of the risk, existence, and effects of HIV/AIDS, and also addressed issues related to acceptance of persons with AIDS and reduction of the stigma attached to the illness.

The AIDS Awareness Campaign was organized by nine Ferghana Oblast NGOs working in cooperation with the government-run Ferghana Regional AIDS Center. During the five weeks of the campaign, more than 6,500 young people took part in the events, more than 50 people from 12 NGOs, and seven specialists from the Regional AIDS Center worked together in their organization.

Asadullo Mansurov, Executive Director of one of the Network NGOs, said afterwards: “This Public Awareness Campaign is the best example of the cooperation and unity of different organizations for the sake of one social objective. I think the results are great. I am proud that my organization was part of this union.”

A great success for the NGO Network was the support lent to the campaign by local government agencies, including the Hokhimats of various rayons, local businesses, individual donors, the local press, ZdravPlus and others. Local government health departments also supported the campaign, and the regional AIDS Center played a significant and active role in several of the events. The cooperative environment created was impressive, and the Oblast Hokhim personally wrote a letter to local government bodies, such as the police, local councils, and education departments requesting their support.

This campaign was important not only because it was the first collaborative effort of the NGO Network, but also because it introduced civil society to the public. The campaign also convinced NGOs that collectively they can make a real difference, and as a result the NGO Network plans to continue its work on HIV/AIDS over the next six months. Building on its experience with the AIDS awareness campaign, the Network is also planning to carry out a series of oblast-wide activities for the upcoming International Health Day on April 4, 2003.

The success of the health awareness campaign led the Network to establish an NGO Fair, which brought together all the NGOs of Ferghana Oblast to create an open forum for sharing experiences and to learn about each other’s work. The Network now intends to hold such a fair annually. On top of this, the NGO Network’s current plans involve working hard on further promotion of information sharing, NGO advocacy, and collaboration on future health promotion events.

Although the Ferghana NGO Network formed only recently, word of their activities has spread and NGOs in neighboring Namangan and Andijon Oblasts have decided to form their own Networks. Today the Ferghana Oblast NGO Network members recognize the importance of expanding their Network beyond their own oblast and hope to join forces with the NGO Networks in Namangan and Andijon Oblasts to establish The Ferghana Valley NGO Network.

ZdravPlus is delighted that through its small grants program and its NGO mentoring efforts, the NGOs in Ferghana have developed into a thriving and innovative sector, with the capacity to influence the health of their communities for the better. Based in part on ZdravPlus successes with NGOs in Ferghana, ZdravPlus, in cooperation with Counterpart Consortium, has recently launched a Central Asia-wide small grants program aimed at empowering local organizations throughout the region to make a real difference in the lives of their communities through health.

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