

Central Asia

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Kazakhstan

AES Corporation Launches Environmental Education Initiative

AES Corporation launched a project to establish a graduate degree program in environmental management and engineering at the Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana. The two-year graduate program aims to reduce air and water borne industrial pollution and will require students to conduct applied field research. AES and the Eurasia Foundation, which is managing the project, selected the University of New Mexico (UNM) through open competition to partner with ENU. In addition to a five-year, \$550,000 funding commitment from AES, UNM, ENU and the Eurasia Foundation—with funding from USAID—all organizations expect to make extensive, ongoing contributions to the program. Following intensive planning and training at UNM this summer, ENU professors plan to start the first graduate-level courses this fall.

ExxonMobil Opens First Ecotourism Resource Center

In order to promote ecotourism sites across Kazakhstan, the Kazakhstan Tourism Association (KTA) officially opened the first Ecotourism Information Resource Center in Almaty on April 27. The Eurasia Foundation, with funding support from ExxonMobil and USAID, helped KTA set up the center, which will conduct marketing campaigns and public relations for a number of emerging ecotourism and community-based tourism sites in southern and eastern Kazakhstan. VSO, a UK-based overseas volunteer organization, is providing technical assistance to KTA and the ecotourism sites. All partners plan to expand the network of sites over the course of the year.

TengizChevroil Creates Microfinance Center in Kulsary

The Atyrau Micro Finance Center (AMC) extended its micro-finance support to the rural Zhylyoi district near Tengiz in a formal opening ceremony on May 3 in Kulsary. The project, supported by TengizChevroil, the Eurasia Foundation and USAID, will help entrepreneurs in Zhylyoi district start-up or grow micro businesses. AMC will also introduce specialized business training and consulting to entrepreneurs in the area. "[TengizChevroil] is committed to improving the standard of living in the community we live in," said Alexander Cornelius, General Director of TengizChevroil. He said that TengizChevroil is particularly focused on "increasing micro-lending services to rural and suburban regions."

Companies Hold Community Engagement Practitioner's Forum

In order to promote international best practices and help coordinate the growing number of community engagement programs, members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kazakhstan (AmCham) ran a Community Engagement Practitioners' Forum on April 28-29. The Eurasia Foundation and AmCham co-organized the event with sponsorship from ChevronTexaco, Philip Morris Kazakhstan, the Kus Zholy Foundation, Eurasia Foundation, Counterpart International and the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP). "This Forum includes very large and very small companies, domestic and international companies, those with long experience of community engagement and those who are new it," says Steve Colville, ChevronTexaco's General Manager for Government and Public Affairs. "But we all share a common desire and commitment to improve the lives and opportunities of the communities among whom we live and work."

The Kyrgyz Republic

Coalition of International Donors Supports Nationwide Exit Poll during Presidential Elections:

Three independent local research companies—SIAR-Bishkek, M-Vektor and Marketing Service Bureau—will conduct a nationwide exit poll during the upcoming presidential elections on July 10. The non-partisan exit-polling project is designed to promote transparent elections across the Kyrgyz Republic. The three research companies consulted with experts from the Levada Center in Russia and Interview–NSS in the Netherlands, two organizations specializing in exit polling, while developing a methodology and strategy for the poll. More information about the exit poll (and a poll conducted during the Kyrgyz Republic's parliamentary elections in February and March 2005) is available on the following web site: <http://www.kyrgyzpoll.org/>. The exit poll is supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Almaty, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Embassy in Tashkent, the US State Department Democracy Commission, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Eurasia Foundation (EF). *For more information, see www.efcentralasia.org.*

USDemocracy Commission Helps EF Support Internal Migrants in Bishkek:

EF and four local NGOs launched a project to improve the standard of living for internal migrants living in the area surrounding Bishkek. A network – made up of Eraim Social Fund for Women, Arysh, Ayaldar Kelechehi, and the Association of Women Builders –will establish self-help groups, which provide members with access to microcredit loans and other services such as legal consultations and information-sharing between the groups, local government, non-governmental organizations, and the local community. The project is made possible by a grant from EF with funding from USAID, the US State Department Democracy Commission, and the microcredit agency Arysh-Kench. *For more information, see www.efcentralasia.org.*

EF and DCCA Launch Legal Assistance Program on Refugee Issues Along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek

Border: In the rural border area of the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan, where a number of Uzbek citizens are seeking political asylum in the Kyrgyz Republic, EF and Development and Cooperation in Central Asia (DCCA) recently inaugurated a conflict mitigation and legal assistance project. DCCA will establish community councils in six villages, which will act as an informational resource for the local population. The project's legal assistance component will be implemented by Ferghana Valley Lawyers without Borders, who will monitor the implementation of Kyrgyz immigration law and international conventions at border checkpoints. *For more information, see www.efcentralasia.org.*

Uzbekistan

Uzbeks seek opportunities in Afghan market: A reconstruction boom has replaced fighting in Afghanistan. However, trade between the bordering regions of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan remains small. One reason is that producers in Uzbekistan's southern Surkhandarya region lack information about demand in Afghanistan and how to export goods there. The Surkhandarya branch of the Republican Universal Agriculture Commodity Exchange is actively working on filling that information vacuum under an EF grant. The exchange's experts are collecting information on demand in the Afghan market, consulting with Surkhandarya farmers on how to export, and sponsoring trade missions of Uzbek businesspeople to Afghanistan. The project is just starting, but EF specialists believe that the common language and geographic position of Uzbek farmers and producers give them a strong advantage in filling the needs of northern Afghanistan.

DDRP prepares drug-prevention trainers: EF grantees in early May sharpened their skills in working with communities to prevent drug use, under the USAID Drug Demand Reduction Program (DDRP). EF runs the DDRP country office in Uzbekistan. The training is a small but important part in a full program of activities that EF and the other DDRP partner organizations are conducting to improve the ability of NGOs, health care providers, police, teachers and others to combat the specter of drug use and HIV/AIDS.

Largest ever English-Russian-Uzbek dictionary completed: The Uzbegim Dasturlari publishing house has finished the largest ever English-Russian-Uzbek dictionary, under an EF grant. The software-based dictionary contains more than 50 thousand words and terms. "It is by far the best English-Russian-Uzbek

that has been created,” said Ergash Umarov, head of the Uzbek lexicology department of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences.

EF grantees raise labor migration issues: NGOs Jasmin in Namangan and Khayal ham Shanarak in Nukus recently received grants to prepare a series of broadcasts in cooperation with local television stations, to highlight issues surrounding labor migration. Hundreds of thousands of Uzbeks travel to Kazakhstan and Russia each year, for the most part illegally. The shows will attract attention to this important phenomenon as a first step toward promoting public policy reforms. Other EF grantees are providing consultations to labor migrants and working with government officials to draft new legislation that would normalize labor migration.

Schools to set up parents’ boards: Parents in recent years have been asked to cover more and more costs of their children’s schooling, yet have little understanding of how their money is spent. In order to provide greater transparency, and in turn encourage parents to contribute needed funds, the Fundraising Consulting Center is helping 14 pilot schools in and around Tashkent City set up public school boards, using an EF grant. The project is mid-way through completion, but so far has met with tremendous enthusiasm from parents and education officials.

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