



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**TAJIKISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

### Acting Together, Performing Peace

**Youth are raising awareness of community conflict issues through theater**



Photo Credit: IREX

*Youth camp participants in Sughd illustrate an image of alcohol abuse in their community. Their peers will then interpret the image and share their views on the problem in a facilitated discussion.*

***Firuz, a young woman from Khatlon, felt empowered by her experience. "When I came to the camp the first time, I saw that the other participants were pro-active," she said. "I decided to be like them – even better than them! I felt I could do it. A human being can have an impact through interaction."***

Many think of theater as a source of entertainment or a temporary escape from everyday life. But the arts can play an important role in community development. In July and August 2010, over 100 youth from Sughd and Khatlon regions learned an interactive technique called Forum Theater at summer camps held under USAID's Youth Theater for Peace Project. The project uses an arts-based approach to conflict resolution.

In Forum Theater, "the audience can get involved in the process by expressing their views and suggesting ways to resolve the issues presented on stage," says Ali, a high school student from Khatlon.

At the camps, Ali and his peers experienced a theater development process that builds trust between diverse groups and develops young people's confidence, self-esteem and critical thinking. The camps were facilitated by international theater experts and local teachers who had been trained in the methodology at an earlier training for trainers workshop. "At the camp we developed friendships between Uzbeks, Tajiks, Russians and Americans," reflected Firdavs, a youth participant from Sughd.

In the safe space of the camps, youth participants shared personal stories and dramatized them into powerful plays about issues such as land and water conflicts, ethnic discrimination, obstacles to obtaining an education, and domestic violence. Under this project, USAID will fund small grants for youth and their adult mentors to perform these plays in their own and neighboring communities, raising awareness of conflict issues and sparking dialogue about potential solutions.

Over 90% of youth camp participants agreed that participation in the program taught them what it means to be a leader and 95% now feel more confident that they can positively affect conflict situations in their everyday lives.