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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Media Strategy Moves the Reform Along

Study tour offers new model for business, government cooperation



The television coverage arranged for World Bank Vice President Simeon Djankov's (center) Doing Business presentation to the President's Investment Council in March 2008. Photo: Pragma

"I believe that the success of Kyrgyzstan's Doing Business reforms was achieved due to ... the harmonized teamwork of all parties holding a unified and constant dialogue with the media."

- Uluk Kydyrbaev, Executive Director of the Bishkek Business Club and Chamber of Tax Consultants.

In early 2008, the Kyrgyz Government decided to take aggressive steps to improve their business environment based on the World Bank's "Doing Business" methodology. The reforms were expected to be difficult due to the economic and political climate. To ensure the success of undertaken reforms, the government, with support from USAID's Business Environment Improvement Project, conducted a massive public relations campaign to generate momentum for change.

Experience showed that reforms that failed to galvanize public support risked failure during implementation, as the people lacked knowledge needed to hold public servant to account. The USAID project helped the government and business associations design a media campaign to promote reforms. The project was also asked to assist in the distribution of information.

Throughout the summer of 2008, as the government kept introducing the reforms, the USAID project worked with local business associations and the government officials to keep the public informed. The two-month campaign comprised press conferences, round-tables, TV programs, newspaper articles with analyses and forecasts, internet articles and news releases, and radio interviews on critical reform topics. With extensive support from the USAID project, business associations, the Bishkek Business Club, International Business Council, the Union of Entrepreneurs of Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Prime Minister's press service led dialogue with mass media and disseminated a unified message on the reforms process. Over 64 articles and news releases were produced by different media agencies, newspapers, and magazines, providing the public with knowledge of the process and changes underway to business legislation. Television programs and radio shows on the reform topics brought the information into the homes throughout the country.

The campaign enhanced the public knowledge of the changes to business regulations, thus ensuring that entrepreneurs are aware of the new requirements and processes, while government officials were held more accountable for the reform implementation. Due to the number of successfully implemented reforms in its business regulations, Kyrgyzstan was named among top three business reformers worldwide by the World Bank's Doing Business report in 2008. The long-term impact has been greater, as the campaign heightened public and media interest in economic reforms - a year later, in the month of June 2009 alone, business reforms topics generated over 140 media mentions.