

# YOUTH THEATER FOR PEACE

## PROGRAM EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# YTP Program Evaluation – Executive Summary

## I Overview

The Youth Theater for Peace (YTP) programs in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan work to promote sustainable conflict prevention at the community level. IREX designed the YTP model in response to USAID’s request for people-to-people approaches that create opportunities for contact and exchange between adversarial groups and has implemented the programs since 2010. In 2011, independent evaluation consultant Vadim Nigmatov was hired to conduct a program results assessment using an experimental/comparison group evaluation approach to determine the effects of this initiative.

Through this evaluation methodology, the YTP programs both in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were found to achieve measurable outcomes in facilitating lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes regarding conflict issues among youth and adult program participants. Furthermore, the programs managed to engage wider community members in the target areas into Drama for Conflict Transformation (DCT) activities, having influenced somewhat their attitudes and behaviors toward conflict issues. Finally, the programs are in the process of promoting long-term sustainability of the DCT methods, with DCT activities having visible effects on new participants (secondary beneficiaries).

In general, the evaluation suggests that the YTP approach, including the DCT methodology employed by the program, is an effective tool in promoting lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes in youth and adults in relation to conflict issues at the community level, relations within the community, and particularly in relation to people of other ethnicities, religions and nationalities. The DCT methodology was also determined to be very effective in raising self-confidence and developing leadership skills, not only among youth, but also among adults.

### **A: History and Program Overview**

IREX designed the YTP model in response to USAID’s request for people-to-people approaches that create opportunities for contact and exchange between adversarial groups. The YTP programs aim to promote sustainable conflict prevention at the community level through a participatory theater methodology called Drama for Conflict Transformation (DCT).

### **YTP Results Highlights**

- 100% of program participants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan reported being confident in their ability to help to resolve interpersonal disagreements or conflicts in a peaceful way, compared to approximately 37% in Tajikistan and 55% in Kyrgyzstan of comparison group respondents.
- Nearly 98% of program participants in both countries reported confidence in their ability to positively affect conflict situations in their community, compared to about 15% in Tajikistan and 31% in Kyrgyzstan of comparison group respondents.
- Approximately, 90% of program participants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan reported having confidence in speaking in front of large audiences, compared to about 10% of comparison group respondents in Tajikistan and 17% in Kyrgyzstan.
- 100% of target community members (‘audience’) stated a belief that the DCT methodology can have a positive effect on community relations as they relate to conflict.

The YTP programs introduce DCT to teachers and other youth-serving professionals and teenagers (15-16) in rural, conflict-prone areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The programs aim to ultimately create a group of empowered youth and supportive adults who are equipped to lead community-based conflict resolution activities—sharing DCT techniques and a newfound understanding of those of other ethnicities, religions, and/or nationalities within their larger communities.

To achieve its stated objectives, the YTP model includes several key phases of activity. Adult participants were trained to facilitate the DCT methodology at Training of Trainers events and applied their learned skills with youth participants at Summer Camps, with the support and guidance of IREX's DCT experts. Following the Summer Camps, YTP participants created Theater Tour Troupes and implemented Theater Tour Grants to take their performances on the road, sparking dialogue about conflict issues and allowing audience members to suggest and test solutions to real problems. (In Kyrgyzstan, school-based Drama Clubs were also introduced and supported with micro-grants following the Summer Camps.) Finally, YTP participants implemented Sustainability Grant projects to institutionalize the DCT methodology in their communities and received ongoing capacity-building and mentoring from IREX and its local implementing partners. These activities were implemented in the Sughd and Khatlon regions of Tajikistan and the Batken and Chui regions of Kyrgyzstan, in conjunction with local partners EHIO and Fidokor in Tajikistan and the Foundation for Tolerance International in Kyrgyzstan.

Both adult and youth program participants were selected on a competitive basis. The pool of prospective adult participants consisted of those adults already working with youth in the target communities. These youth-serving professionals were invited to attend an initial DCT workshop held in their districts, complete a program application, and have an interview with IREX and/or partner staff. Selection criteria included demonstrated interest in and aptitude for the DCT methodology, communication skills, mature perspective on conflict issues, experience in theater, music or dance, good relationships with local NGO, education, civic and religious leaders in their community/region, and the support of their school or organization to participate in program activities.

Prospective youth participants were also required to attend a DCT workshop and complete a program application. Selection criteria included demonstrated interest in and aptitude for the DCT methodology, leadership skills, sensitivity to other identities, experience in theater, music or dance, awareness of and/or experience with conflict issues, and prior community engagement.

## **2. Results**

### **A. About the Program Evaluation**

In September 2011, IREX contracted an external evaluator to design and implement an end-line evaluation of YTP program results in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Since the programs in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are implemented under separate awards but share similar strategies, approaches and activities, it was decided to conduct the evaluation of the two programs sequentially using the same methods and tools, but warranting specific conclusions and recommendations for each program.

The evaluation methodology and tools were developed based on the research questions designed by the YTP program team and agreed with the consultant. The major research questions included:

- To what extent has YTP accomplished its stated goals and objectives? What factors have contributed to or prevented success?
- What effects has YTP had on target youth, institutions, and communities?
- What effects has the YTP program had on the capacity of IREX's partner organizations, FTI, Fidokor and EHIO, to conduct effective conflict prevention programs and engage youth in conflict transformation?

The evaluation utilized a variety of tools to assess, verify and triangulate information from the target group, local partners, project staff and other stakeholders. The principal tool was an orally-administered survey of program participants and a demographically similar group of non-participants (comparison group) disaggregated by age categories – adults and youth. This tool allowed for conducting quasi-experimental analysis by comparing program participants and non-participants.

The survey was designed to assess and compare attitudes and behaviors of program participants and the comparison group around conflict issues and towards those of other ethnicities, religions and nationalities, to assess abilities and confidence in having a positive impact on solving community and interpersonal conflicts in a peaceful manner (a sense of 'personal agency' in conflict situations), and to evaluate abilities and confidence in speaking in front of groups of people and community leaders. In addition, the survey intended to evaluate if the DCT methodology had any effects on program participants in regard to positive changes in their communications and interactions with those of other ethnicities, religions, and nationalities.

The questionnaires included a number of open- and closed-ended questions. For most of the questions, respondents were asked to rate the level to which they agreed with a number of statements. The questions were formulated in a way which best allowed data to feed into YTP program progress indicators.

The survey was administered to 59 program participants in Tajikistan and 60 program participants in Kyrgyzstan, as well as to the same amount of respondents who were not involved in YTP activities. In total, there were 238 respondents in the experimental and comparison groups. Since each group was similar in demographic composition, this methodology allowed the evaluator to determine the extent to which participation in YTP contributed to achieve the intended effects, and to what extent changes were attributable to participation in the program.

The evaluation tools also included focus group discussions with target community members. The focus groups were aimed to assess the program's effects on community members ('the audience' at DCT performances) who were not involved directly in the program training events (TOT and Summer Camps). The focus groups were conducted according to designed structured guidelines with key questions. The focus groups were conducted separately with youth community members and with adults. In total, there were 24 focus groups conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In addition, key informant interviews with community leaders (school principals in the target schools having Drama Clubs created through the Sustainability Grants and relevant representatives of the local authorities) were conducted in each target community visited to evaluate YTP program effects not only on direct

participants, but also on wider community members including schools where the Drama Clubs were established.

In order to evaluate YTP's effects on 'secondary beneficiaries' (i.e. new program participants trained by direct program participants, primarily through grant activities), semi-structured interviews with randomly selected leaders of sustainability projects were conducted.

Finally, a review of primary and secondary program documents (Project Proposals, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plans (PMEPs), Quarterly Program Reports, Media Mentions, etc.) and one-to-one interviews with the YTP Program Directors, semi-structured interviews and participatory evaluation exercises with project partners and IREX staff were conducted. The participatory evaluation exercises helped to provide insight into the YTP program's effects on the capacity of IREX's partner organizations. All quantitative and qualitative data was triangulated, coded, and analyzed by the evaluator following its collection.

The survey was conducted by an independent evaluator together with local partner organizations' responsible staff in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, who served as enumerators and focus group facilitators. Before data collection began, the evaluator trained partner staff on basic research principles and ethics. In the beginning stage of data collection, the partners had an opportunity to practice administering the oral survey under the supervision of the evaluator before conducting individual interviews.

The focus groups were implemented using the same approach. The partners were trained on planning and conducting focus groups. Then, the partners' were presented with the focus group guidelines including key questions. During the evaluation, the partners had an opportunity to participate in the focus groups as observers first, and then, as facilitators with the evaluator serving as an observer. This approach allowed the local partner organizations to increase their skills in conducting interviews and focus group discussions through direct participation in the evaluation.

It is important to note the limitations of the assessment. For instance, the quasi-experimental analysis of program participants and the comparison group has certain limitations. The program participants are comprised of those who had taken their own initiative to become involved into YTP; thus, it is likely that they would have started the program with 'better' or more favorable attitudes and behaviors towards conflict issues and those of other ethnicities, religions and nationalities. In order to address this limitation, the survey utilized additional questions for the program participants only in order to best determine if program participation was the cause for positive changes in attitudes and behaviors.

. Focus group and survey respondents may also have provided more favorable information about the program due to the participation of local partners in the data collection. However, the partners' involvement may also have contributed to a greater sense of openness in talking about the program and provided the evaluator with greater access to subjects for data collection.

## **B: Analysis of Results**

**To what extent YTP has facilitated lasting attitudinal and behavioral change among program participants (young people and adult mentors)?**

The survey findings suggest that program participants are much more confident in their abilities to positively affect conflict issues related to interpersonal disagreement as well as conflicts at community or even district level, compared to non-participants. 100% of program participants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan reported being confident in their ability to help to resolve interpersonal disagreements or conflicts in a peaceful way, compared to approximately 37% in Tajikistan and 55% in Kyrgyzstan of comparison group respondents. Regarding conflicts at the community level, nearly 98% of program participants in both countries reported being confident in their ability to positively affect any conflict situation in their community, compared to about 15% in Tajikistan and 31% in Kyrgyzstan of comparison group respondents.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that program participants have more positive interactions with people of other ethnic, religious, or national origin than their counterparts in the comparison group. 100% of participants in Tajikistan and about 98% in Kyrgyzstan reported being able to communicate well with people of other ethnicity, religious group or nationality, compared to 44% of comparison group respondents in Tajikistan and about 81% of comparison group respondents in Kyrgyzstan. The results are almost identical regarding the question if respondents are able to form friendships with those of other ethnicity, religious or national origin.

Also, the survey findings suggest that program participants are more self-confident, particularly in relation to speaking in front of a group, than those in the comparison group. For instance, approximately 90% of program participants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan reported having confidence in speaking in front of large audiences (25+ people), compared to about 10% of the comparison group in Tajikistan and 17% in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, about 83% of program participants in Kyrgyzstan and 81% in Tajikistan reported feeling confident while speaking in front of governmental officials or community leaders, compared to 15.5% of the comparison group in Kyrgyzstan and 8.5% in Tajikistan respectively.

Finally, program participants reported changes in their empathy toward and positive interactions with those of other ethnicities, religions and nationalities during the last two years. For instance, 100% of program participants in Tajikistan and 98% in Kyrgyzstan reported having better conversations and friendships and increased trust with people of other ethnicities, religions and nationalities. Almost all of the respondents reported that the changes in their empathy toward and interactions with those of other groups were caused by their participation in the YTP program.

### **To what extent YTP has engaged the wider community in Drama for Conflict Transformation activities?**

The analysis of findings from focus groups suggests that YTP had a certain effect not only on direct program participants, but also on wider community members, through events organized by program participants (i.e. Forum Theater plays). Thus, the generalized results of the focus groups conducted in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan show that 100% of community members believe that the DCT methodology has a positive effect on community relations regarding conflict issues and local problems. Moreover, the majority of focus group participants said that Forum Theater plays performed by the YTP participants influenced their attitudes toward conflict issues, and toward those of other ethnicities, religions, and nationalities.

The overall analysis of focus groups found that about 60% of adult community members and about 67% of youth audience members in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan who saw one or more YTP Forum Theaters plays are able to speak about conflict issues in their community in an open and balanced way. This analysis was based

on observation and scoring by trained facilitators, rather than on self-reporting. However, there is no similar baseline information to make a comparison in retrospective.

### **To what extent YTP has promoted long-term sustainability of conflict transformation models?**

The generalized findings from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews with leaders of sustainability projects suggest that YTP program's sustainability grant projects have positive effects on secondary beneficiaries and the target institutions (primarily schools), although the projects were ongoing at the time of the evaluation.

In addition, the self-evaluation exercise held with local partner organization staff showed that the YTP program and IREX as the lead program implementer have had a positive influence on increasing partners' capacity, including expected and unexpected positive effects.

### **F: Highlights, Recommendations, Closing**

The evaluation findings suggest that the YTP approach and the DCT methodology employed by the program are effective tools in promoting lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes in youth and adults in relation to conflict issues at the community level, relations within the community, and particularly in relation to people of other ethnicities, religions, and nationalities.

The DCT methodology is also likely to be effective in raising self-confidence and developing leadership skills not only among youth but also adults. For instance, the evaluation showed that DCT is a very effective tool in empowering youth and developing their potential. All youth who were direct program participants became leaders among their peers, leaders in their schools and even gained authority among adult community members.

The evaluation findings showed that the DCT methodology turned out to be a very strong motivational tool for program participants. As a number of program participants mentioned, the DCT methodology provided by the program gave them such inspiration that they "could not stop anymore" in using the DCT methodology in their work and further promoting it among their community members.

The lessons learned by local partners showed that the DCT tools and methods could be effectively used in other programs and projects promoting conflict prevention, as well as in other programs aimed at youth development and empowerment.

However, for future similar programs it is recommended to further promote and institutionalize the DCT methodology through the involvement of relevant local institutions and structures such as local non-governmental organizations, local self-governance structures (e.g. Mahallya Committees in Tajikistan), local Youth Committees, Palaces of Cultures, etc. By employing such an approach, the positive effects of the DCT methodology would cover larger segments of the population, including out-of-school youth. There were also a number of recommendations from the side of target community members and community leaders to attract more adult audience members to Forum Theater performances, in order for the DCT methodology to have a wider impact. The sustainability projects and new Drama Clubs created through the program should also be closely supervised and mentored by partner organization staff members in order to ensure the successful transfer of the DCT methodology to new beneficiaries and institutions.

**The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)**

began providing assistance to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in 1992. Since that time, the American people through USAID have provided nearly \$1.5 billion in programs that assist the development of the economic sector, education and healthcare systems, and democratic institutions in Central Asia.

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**EHIO** is a non-governmental organization working to improve the quality of life, develop communities, and make positive social changes in Tajikistan.

**Fidokor** is a non-governmental organization which strives to support at-risk groups and to prevent conflict in Tajikistan's civil society.

**The Foundation for Tolerance International** is a Kyrgyzstan-based nonprofit organization focused on conflict prevention, peace-building and justice in Central Asia.

*This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of IREX and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*