



“LOCAL INITIATIVE” FORUM: FOR COURAGE, WELFARE AND PROSPERITY

The goals of the Forum, which was held for the fourth time with the support of the Government of Switzerland within “Voice of Citizens and Accountability of Local Self-Government: Budget Process” project (hereinafter - the Project) were the discussion of current issues on how local communities together with local self-governments (LSGs) in Issyk-Kul, Chui and Jalal-Abad oblasts of Kyrgyzstan address issues of local importance through cooperation, achievements and perspectives, as well as experience and information sharing. Every year, Forum hosts different participants, however, all of them are people who try their best to improve own lives, take care of future generations, capable of making action, who have chosen a path of action. This path requires conscious efforts, knowledge, planning, and a fervent desire to witness the changes. It's harder, but it leads to tomorrow.

In the autumn of 2016, the fourth Regional Forum dedicated to the “Local Initiative 2016” was held in the village of Bulan-Sogotu, Issyk-Kul oblast.

During Forum, the results of three following competitions were announced: “Local Initiative 2016”, “Real Citizen Participation in Budget Process in 2017” and

“Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Engaging Citizens in Budget Process 2016” held among the municipalities of Issyk-Kul, Chui and Jalal-Abad oblasts. In order to have effective discussions and select best practices for replication in the municipalities, and achieve the Forum's goal, the winning municipalities of all three competitions presented their projects. In turn, the Forum participants had an opportunity to work in groups, which helped them to better learn examples of best practices of 9 different municipalities, volunteers and non-governmental organizations on addressing priority issues of communities, examples of the first prize winners of all three competitions. After considering each initiative, the participants selected the most liked topics, which they plan to practice at home.

The Forum participants were equally interested in the experience of international volunteerism, working with local leaders, preparation of projects with the US volunteers who spoke on behalf of the Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan. In the opinion of the majority of the Forum participants, many residents of municipalities, especially rural ones, have been actively involved in volunteer work since early childhood, such as helping the poor, the elderly,

community services, participating in “ashar” repair work, etc. Although such works were not named as “volunteering”, the very idea of a gratuitous assistance to those in need is the volunteering.

A separate exhibition was organized for initiatives that were not presented; 18 initiatives of Chui oblast were posted on banners in the hall with presentations, where the participants were able to familiarize themselves with each story separately. After analyzing and discussing of all 18 initiatives in the groups, each participant of the Forum filled out a scorecard, where he/she noted what experi-

“I realized that together we can solve every task. Everyone gained a great moral satisfaction from the realization that we can do something useful for our countrymen, for our native village. I dream that the trees will take roots, grow, and the park will expand further and become that trace in the life that each of us wants to leave on earth.”

Rakhat Sheraliev,
Representative of Ak-Bashat
aimak of Zhayil rayon, Chui.

ence they liked most, and which of them will be used at home. The next morning, the scorecards results were presented and most of all the participants liked the experience of two municipalities, which can be used further: **the youth initiative of Grozd AA on sport promotion in the village; and the initiative of Novopokrovka AA in joint work between population and LSG, expressing patience and perseverance in addressing the problem of roads.**

Hence by using the interactive method the Forum participants learned in details various experiences of addressing local issues initiated by the local communities through joint activities with LSGs, it also helped to identify the best experience for each participant, assess own capabilities and determine the experience to apply to their municipalities.

Furthermore, during the Forum a practical experience sharing on using innovative modern technologies in the drinking water service provision to the population was organized for the LSG heads. Representatives of LSGs from 11 rural municipalities and Kemin city took part in the exchange tour, 11 of them from target municipalities in Chui oblast – VAP Phase I and 2 AAs (Issyk-Kul and Jalal-Abad oblasts). The event of a national level was held on the basis of the project “Improving services at the local level” led by the target municipality, Kumbel AA (Issyk-Kul rayon, Issyk-Kul oblast) in the village of Korumdu, at the “Kumbel Bulagy” Rural Public Association of drinking water consumers (RPADWC). The main goal of the event was to demonstrate successful experience of cooperation between VAP and Public Service Improvement Project (PSI) on providing the population with clean drinking water through utilization of innovative water-saving management technologies. The participants of the tour in practice learned from the experience of the Kumbel Bulagy RPADWC and successful operation of the clean

drinking water supply to the population, and the use of innovative water-saving management technologies. According to the majority of participants, the experience gained was very useful and necessary, because problem of the drinking water supply in aiyl aimaks has reached a critical point today that needs help from the best practitioners and professionals from the Kumbel Bulagy RPADWC. Also, the participants admitted that they would do their best to use the gained experience and knowledge in practice in their municipalities.

The Forum was organized by the Voice and Accountability Project funded by the Government of Switzerland and implemented by the Development Policy Institute. Forum hosted 70 people (35 women) including heads and specialists of AOs, deputies of local councils, NGO representatives, local communities and media, Peace Corps Volunteers and Project staff. In addition to the Project's target municipalities (TM), representatives of LSGs and civil society from 13 non-target municipalities of Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul and Chui oblasts participated in Forum.

Based on the Forum results, the local communities' positive experience demonstrating local initiatives and achieving results through collaboration with LSGs through utilization of new technologies and a large-scale observance of the Constitutional principle on the citizen participation in the budget process were disseminated; the experiences of civil society organizations in promoting execution of citizen rights

to participate in the budget process was explored; the idea of “volunteering” was promoted, and the role of the local initiative in legal acts was determined.

At the end of the event, the solemn ceremony of awarding the competition winners with prizes, diplomas and certificates took place.

“Rural communities of Kyrgyzstan have enough strength and skills to make the first steps to a new quality of their own lives. Today it is possible, while preserving cultural and historical identity, to turn the villages into comfortable, well-developed, and civilized settlements. At the same time the key role is played by citizens who are able to find a common language with local self-government bodies, to support each other's positive initiatives. But the initiative development is impossible without efforts of LSGs. And these efforts should be of a twofold nature: on the one hand, local self-government bodies are able to stimulate the community's activity through promotion of own initiatives that engage citizens in their management; on the other - they are able to support and nurture nascent initiatives coming from the people.

All the stories presented today are stories about how communities solved the problems of drinking and irrigation water; sought and figured out ways to inform the public about the local budget in order to ensure transparency and engage them in the budget process; built and repaired bridges, roads and other infrastructure; restored street lighting, solved issues of culture, preschool education and care for the elderly; created conditions for sports and cultural development of young people, often with the help of youth in turn. Another undoubted value of our competitions is that communities have an opportunity to learn successful experiences of other communities and local self-government bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic, and not only to learn, but also to apply this practice in their own municipality.”

Bekbolot BEKIEV, Project Manager.