

CREATIVE TIMES

FALL 2009



SPOTLIGHT:

**WORKING IN
CONFLICTIVE
ENVIRONMENTS**

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FRONT COVER:

A young boy in Balkh Province, Afghanistan, where Creative's BESST Project is conducting teacher training to improve learning outcomes.



This marks a new direction for Creative Times as a trimestral news magazine. This edition focuses on conflictive, challenging environments. Long ago we realized that in order to help beneficiaries envision peace and seek normal lives we needed to understand conflict. This led Creative to go to difficult places, finding new ways to do our work as a technical partner to the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Defense.

The Spotlight section features stories and insights that speak to reaching people where conflict and its consequences are part of daily life. In Afghanistan, the American Federation of Teachers' Nick Norman speaks about the Afghan Ministry of Education's efforts to bring quality education to children across this rugged country. There is a story of Palestinian women in the West Bank stepping into their communities in new and meaningful ways. A hopeful note in Guatemala's struggle with gang violence is struck in a story that speaks to reconciliation and youth defining new paths to lives with dignity.

*Creative Times will be bringing you thoughts by experienced practitioners. D. Larry Sampler, who recently joined Creative after serving as the State Department's Deputy Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, answers questions on the challenges and realities of working in conflictive environments. Dick McCall and Spike Stephenson engage U.S. troops to support their understanding of these environments. Alexandra Pratt reviews Rory Stewart's *The Places In Between*.*

Creative Worldwide takes you to Nigeria with a striking revelation about girls in Qur'anic schools, to Albania and the continuing struggle to triumph over the tragedy of human trafficking, and to one teacher's signal achievement empowering young people with critical thinking skills in Kyrgyzstan.

This edition also marks the launch of Creative's new web domain, www.creativeworldwide.com. We look forward to accompanying you with features that inform and contribute to our shared mission through Creative Times.

Peace,

Chau. ts



D. LARRY SAMPLER

Working in Conflict Zones

Q & A

Q: What is the biggest surprise someone new to working in a conflict zone would find?

A: Public perceptions of “conflict zones” generate artificially high levels of angst and concern. Our culture concentrates on drama. A television show about police doesn’t convey how boring and routine most of their work days are. In Bosnia, I was responsible for briefing new OSCE staff on safety and security. I’d ask them what they thought the two most important things were that they should do to assure their continued health and safety. Their guesses ranged from “vary your timings and routes” to “never discuss politics with locals.” The correct answer was “Wash your hands and wear your seatbelt.” The greatest killer of relief workers in conflict zones is traffic accidents; the greatest cause of lost hours is due to illness (often intestinal).

Q: What particular skill or set of skills do you think would make someone particularly well-suited to working in a conflict zone?

A: Flexibility and “tolerance of ambiguity” are two things that are absolutely essential in a conflict zone. As the situation changes, so too must our plans. And the changes are often sudden and counterintuitive, not explained. Most guidance to the field will be what I call “constructively ambiguous.” Distilling opaque and less-than-precise guidance from political masters thousands of miles away into detailed operational instructions requires a high level of self-confidence, tempered with humility and an ability to negotiate in good faith with others who interpret the ambiguity differently. It’s important that these differences be resolved in the field. Referring disagreements back to “Headquarters” will weaken the faith of leadership in their field staff, and result in micromanagement from afar.

Q: What’s the single biggest intellectual or perceptual fallacy that you’d like to see addressed?

A: When we fail — as a country but also as the “international community” writ large — to manage expectations about what our assistance or intervention will produce. Projecting the perception of the capacity of a mature democracy and powerful, educated nation-state to make changes onto a fragile nation-state will lead to damaging cycles of disappointment produced by unrealistic expectations. Our responsibility as international observers and mentors is to help governments prevent a moment of crisis and, when it does occur, to cope with both unrealistic and unmet expectations, as well as any nascent insurgency that emerges.

Q: What’s the best thing about working in conflict or post-conflict settings?

A: The people. In my experience, the people who choose to work in the most hellish corners of the Earth form a simply stunning community of practitioners. The emotional intensity of working in these challenging conditions creates bonds that are everlasting, and a shared experience that is unknown to most professionals who’ve not experienced the crucible of a conflict setting.

D. Larry Sampler is Creative’s Vice President and Director of the Communities in Transition Division

AFGHANISTAN: South Bronx Teacher Tells Students Mission is Worthwhile



This summer, the American Federation of Teachers deployed veteran teacher Nick Norman to Afghanistan to support the Obama Administration's USAID-funded education reform initiatives. Norman, an Iowan with a steady warm voice, left his home state over a decade ago to teach high school in New York City's South Bronx.

Norman speaks with pride about empowering the Afghan government to educate children in the midst of conflict. "A lot of my kids have disproportionately gone into the military and are sent to Afghanistan and Iraq – and, after this summer, I can look at them and say your risk and sacrifice was not for naught," said Norman. "At least, I feel I can tell former students — you're creating a safe space while trying to do something we think worthwhile for the Afghan people."

USAID's Basic Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) project is implemented by Creative Associates. The Afghan Ministry of Education is using the project to develop improved teacher training curricula and training materials that will work in Afghanistan's circumstances. Creative joined forces with the American Federation of Teachers, bringing teachers with substantial experience to bear on the effort. Norman was one of three AFT teachers serving on the mission.

The BESST team has been working since 2006 to improve training and establish standard qualifications for teachers in 11 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. So far, the project has trained and developed curricula for more than 50,000 teachers in modern pedagogy, including several thousand principals and school administrators in teacher observation and management



“A lot of my kids [South Bronx students] have disproportionately gone into the military and are sent to Afghanistan and Iraq – and, after this summer, I can look at them and say your risk and sacrifice was not for naught...”

techniques. An estimated 2.5 million primary and secondary-level students are expected to benefit from these teachers' increased knowledge and teaching methodology.

Though Afghanistan is a long way from the South Bronx, certain life choices thrust upon Norman's students resonated for him there. Still, he says, “Afghanistan was quite a stretch culturally.” Ministry of Education staff, the American Federation of Teachers and the BESST team were keenly sensitive to cultural differences in tailoring academic subjects to the country's various regions. In an effort that calls for great diplomacy, Norman highlighted the project's Afghan staff as “pivotal, a crucial piece to our success.”

Working through Kabul's summer heat, Norman and the BESST team helped the Education Ministry's subject specialists produce the Rapid Production Model curricula for both Pashto and Dari-speaking communities. “We had to be especially aware of designing the modules so that the process could survive through the cascade process,” said Norman referring to the fact that ministry staff would undertake to

train the bulk of Afghan teachers under difficult local conditions.

Back in New York, on a blue-skied day in early September, Norman took a long walk in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. His thoughts naturally turned to Afghanistan. “It was surreal to wander among crowds of people unconcerned about being blown up, shot or kidnapped. And watching children fly their kites on green grass instead of rubble strewn grounds crisscrossed by open sewers.” Yet, despite these reflections, Norman says, “It was a privilege to go where one can be useful.”

GUATEMALA: Historic Soccer Match Between Former Gang Members and Government Officials



U.S. Ambassador Stephen McFarland exchanges shirts with Agustin Coroy, a former gang member who now conducts prevention activities in schools for vulnerable youth.

A crowd of 10,000 turned out to cheer as 15 former gang members spilled out onto Guatemala's Mateo Flores National Stadium to face a team of government officials including the Chief of Police, the Minister of Culture, the Presidential Sports Commissioner, police officers, firemen, and two Armed Forces Generals in an historic soccer match. The event kicked off a multi-faceted "90 Minutes Against Violence" campaign ultimately aimed at engaging Guatemalan youth in making specific recommendations for reducing violent crime.

"The former gang members beamed with pride as they came out of the locker room onto the field, while the Guatemalan anthem played," said Harold Sibaja, Director of the Youth Challenge Program. The Program has supported the creation of the Youth Movement Against Crime, which is responsible for the Campaign. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc., the Youth Challenge Program has been designing unique interventions for youth-at-risk since 2003.

The "90 Minutes Against Violence" match included three games of 20 minutes each (Former Gang Members vs.

Government Officials, Private Sector vs. Politicians and Diplomats, and Artists and Faith Based Organizations vs. Professional Soccer Players). The match's last 30 minutes was played among the best players of the three first games. Although the first game's ending score was 0-0, the crowd was equally delighted with the three subsequent matches. Theatrics helped to drive home the Campaign's message. In the last match, players purposely broke game rules sending the ball to the wrong goal post and other antics, causing an outcry from fans. The interlude reinforced that without concern for rules, chaos reigns making all equally losers.

The games drew national coverage, focusing attention on the sobering fact that there is a murder every 90 minutes in Guatemala. The country's homicide rate has soared from 26 per 100,000 inhabitants at the end of the country's protracted conflict in 1996 to 46 per 100,000 today. The U.S. national murder rate, by comparison, stands at 5.6 per 100,000.

The Youth Movement's "90 Minutes Against Violence" is reaching beyond traditional media outlets to speak directly to Guatemalan youth who are disproportionately both the victims and perpetrators of violent crime. "Every goal scored

“90 Minutes Against Violence” Campaign

highlights

September 16, 2009
“90 Minutes Against Violence” Historic Soccer Game Draws 10,000

October 9, 2009
90 Dialogues against Crime

October 14, 2009
Youth Movement Submits 900 Proposals to the Coalition for the Development of Public Policy

October 17-November 14, 2009
Bus Against Crime, 9 Tours for a Dignified Life for Youth

November 13-21, 2009
90 Activities against Crime/9 Days Against Crime

December 9, 2009
Presentation of Recommendations for a Crime Prevention Policy (Youth Movement and Coalition)

December 13, 2009
“Concert Against Violence”



in this game symbolized a collective point scored for Guatemala against violence,” said Sibaja who leads Creative Associates’ Youth-at-Risk initiatives in Guatemala and the Latin American region. “With examples such as former gang members and police officers playing side by side, the message of the game was clear — Guatemalans united from every walk of life can combat violence and do not have to accept living with insecurity as the norm.”

With government, private sector leaders and ordinary Guatemalans now speaking up and reinvesting in their communities, “90 Minutes” is not limiting itself to a soccer stadium. The Youth Movement Against Violence organized by USAID’s Youth Challenge Program has literally taken the campaign on the road. Starting October 17th, every weekend for four weeks a bus has traveled through Guatemala City’s most dangerous neighborhoods, including “El Mezquital” where several police officers were recently killed by gang members. Members of the Congress of the Republic, celebrity professional athletes and business leaders aboard the bus are carrying out a “Dignified Life for Youth” campaign to reinforce the anti-violence message.

“Another activity planned countrywide for this campaign is ‘90 Dialogues Against Violence’ to get Guatemalan youth to reflect on violence and to propose solutions to decrease criminal activity,” Sibaja added. “Through these dialogues, we hope to study the cause of juvenile violence using principles — diversity, creativity, compromise, tolerance, unity, active listening — to initiate discussions and impart knowledge. Ultimately, the dialogues will achieve a multiplier effect by having participants impart lessons learned to their peers.”

The Youth Movement’s campaign is also planning a major concert to bring young Guatemalans together with the unifying appeal of popular music. The campaign’s goal is to support the draft of a policy paper that incorporates feedback from youth and all sectors of society. The Coalition for a Dignified Youth created under the Youth Challenge Program is using the proposals generated by youth to develop recommendations for a crime prevention public policy paper. The Campaign is a tangible way for young people to make their voices heard on the problems faced by disenfranchised youth in the hope of bringing them into the mainstream to end the cycle of violence in Guatemala.

WEST BANK: Middle East Partnership Initiative Empowers Palestinian Women



Efforts by the U.S. State Department's Community Leadership Empowerment Program are enabling women in the West Bank farming village of Biddu to leave their homes and become citizen activists.

In 2006, Mofida Hmidan, a joyful mother of four, won a seat on the local council in the West Bank village of Biddu. When she arrived in office, she was amazed to learn how much the local council does. Like most people in Biddu, she had never made the connection between the changes in the village's infrastructure and the work of the local council. Mrs. Hmidan was eager to use her new position to improve the quality of life for the women, children and men of Biddu.

Biddu is a village of 8,500 just north of Jerusalem. When the barrier separating the West Bank from Israel cut off local farmlands, unemployment soared, poverty spread and domestic violence became rampant. According to Mayor Ismail Qadan, most women in Biddu never used to leave their homes.

This is changing. In December 2008, seeking to empower leaders, the Biddu Center for Women and Childhood was selected by the U.S. State Department's implementing partner, Creative Associates, for an award through the a Middle East Partnership Initiative's Community Leadership Empowerment Program (CLEP).

"Women need knowledge," says Mrs. Hmidan, explaining why she established the center in the local council building shortly after she took office. "No one takes care of disenfranchised women. They are a financial burden." Some thought the men on the council approved her plan because they didn't think women would actually use the center.

Yet the women of Biddu and surrounding villages came in droves, finding the newly established center a haven from the struggles of everyday life. Without furniture, the women came together at the center and sat on the floor.

In 2008, Mrs. Hmidan secured a grant from USAID to add a third floor onto the local council building and worked with Creative Associates to tailor a \$14,000 CLEP award to furnish it to house the center. The CLEP award included office furniture, meeting tables, computer and audiovisual equipment, an oven, 40 chairs for

large training sessions, and electric fans and an air conditioner for sweltering hot days.

In addition to arranging meetings and training on issues ranging from the purpose of political parties to inheritance rights, Mrs. Hmidan organizes classes that address pressing needs, economic and otherwise. Course offerings include needlework, sewing, cooking, hairstyling, an oversubscribed adult literacy course, math, conversational English and community leadership. A fulltime curriculum prepares mothers to pass the Palestinian high school equivalency test, opening the door for graduates to study at the nearby Al-Quds Open University.

"I want to create a generation of women who will go to school instead of staying in the streets," says Mrs. Hmidan. The privilege of coming together and learning in the newly furnished center has given the women of Biddu a sense of dignity. What's more, it has altered Biddu's political dynamics, raising the profile of women within their own community.

What women who participate in center programs learn far exceeds the content of their classes: they now know what is happening on the local council. The village men have discovered that the information their wives bring home enables them to weigh in effectively on municipal decisions. Consequently, Biddu men have become champions of women's continuing education, many happily paying their wives' tuition.

"Women never used to come to the local council," says Mayor Ismail Qadan sitting on the third floor of Biddu's local council building, which houses the center. "Now women attend open town hall meetings three times a month. [Mrs. Hmidan] is an example. People throughout the village see how active she is. She works nonstop resolving conflicts and raising money for the center. I'm proud of her and commend her activism. I wish Biddu had other women who are as engaging as she is."

Mayor Qadan may not have to wait long. The women of Biddu are carefully watching and learning. After spending time at the Center, several women said they would run for seats on the local council at the next elections.

— Ben Orbach & Gideon Culman



Richard "Dick" McCall

Stabilization & Development: Getting to Local, Long-term Solutions



James "Spike" Stephenson

An insurgency has been raging for some time and threatens to extend beyond its borders, drawing an entire region into conflict. The U.S. Government, led by the State Department, USAID, and the Defense Department debates how to address the situation. What role should the military and civilian nation-building experts play in this explosive geo-political environment? Who will care for refugees, disarm combatants?

Creative's Richard "Dick" McCall and James "Spike" Stephenson are now supporting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in developing a web and CD based training tool to prepare soldiers for the complex challenges faced by failed and failing states. These virtual training scenarios, which can be used anytime and anywhere, are intended to "broaden the thinking process" of those on the ground or about to be deployed.

McCall and Stephenson are working with Creative's Center for Stabilization & Development under contract to APTIMA, a Boston-based firm specializing in human performance and user-centered technology and training systems. McCall and Stephenson's combined experience extends from helping negotiate peace between the government and the guerrillas in El Salvador to mediating between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda and developing the groundwork for the stabilization of Iraq.

Both advisors share a strong belief that engaging local populations is the critical factor in deploying U.S. personnel and money to help people secure stability and sow the seeds for development in their nations. "All of us are fairly critical of recent interventions which have been top down," said Stephenson, who led the U.S. Agency for International Development Mission in Baghdad from 2004-2005. McCall, who chairs Creative's Council of Senior Advisors, added "Those who undertake these operations need to

be flexible to address local dynamics on the ground and have an inherent understanding of the situation so as to recognize what adjustments need to be made that will reflect the local reality."

The complexity of stabilization and reconstruction has tested the efforts of various U.S. agencies for decades. Interventions have yielded mixed results. Frequently, coordinating the work of various agencies has bedeviled these efforts, resulting in misaligned resources and even, at times, doubling of efforts.

In the past few years, many have debated which parts of the U.S. interagency should take the lead in these efforts. But, McCall and Stephenson emphasize that deploying skilled and experienced individuals with the right tools and strategies is what really matters in making the transition to a stable civil society that delivers long-term results. "There is a need for actually having a strategy rather than just throwing dollars at people," said Stephenson. "There is a need to use conflict analysis tools before you develop a strategy. This is difficult but there has to be a process and you cannot use people without any background or, experience to do that kind of work. Practitioners must be highly specialized. It's folly to think you can describe the process and choose anyone to implement the plan."

McCall underscores the value of working with local stakeholders to combine resources and develop long-term solutions: "What is unique is realizing that there is social capital in communities," said McCall. "We're not proving anything to ourselves, but are proving to local populations themselves that they can manage their communities—this is the real way to build democratic practices. What you need to do in these situations is to mobilize social capital."

James Schmitt is Creative's Vice President and Director of the Center for Stabilization & Development

COORDINATED ACTION AGAINST
HUMAN TRAFFICKING

achievements

Over 740 victims of trafficking received assistance and reintegration services;

More than 2,800 vulnerable women and children received prevention services;

Over 59,800 people participated in awareness raising activities;

Almost 400 government and 500 civil society representatives cooperated in CAAHT coordination;

Over 2,100 government and 210 civil society actors were trained in anti-trafficking and management skills.

ALBANIA Video Postcards: Grantees carry on Struggle Against Human Trafficking

USAID’s Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking program, implemented by Creative Associates, released a series of video postcards featuring selected community organizations and their contributions to fighting trafficking. For five years, the project helped non-governmental organizations throughout Albania provide shelter, vocational classes and awareness-raising to victims and those at-risk of being trafficked.

Though obscured by the camera to protect her identity, a young woman, who was helped under the program, recalls how at 19 she met her first true love. They married and he took her across the Adriatic to Italy where he trafficked her for four years. Escaping, she returned to Albania in 2005 and eventually found her way to “In Protection of Urban and Rural Women’s Rights of Berati,” an organization supported under the USAID project’s umbrella.

But, her escape and return to Albania was only the beginning of a long process of reintegration into society. Like many victims, family and friends were reluctant to accept her. “It was very difficult for my family to accept me after they learned what had happened to me.”

After a time, she married a kind young man and had two children. The scars incurred by trafficking victims heal slowly. Some who learn a victim’s story can be unforgiving. Fate turned on the young woman again when her mother-in-law learned about her past and forced her husband to seek a divorce. Today, with continued support from an organization that benefitted from the program, the young woman hopes to continue her education so that she can support her children.

This compelling video postcard provides a glimpse of the challenges the project’s grantees work to overcome in helping victims of trafficking. The videos provide them with a striking example of their work to present to other donors.



In another postcard about the Vatra Psycho-social Center in Vlora, filmmaker Lazarina Todorova interweaves voices of students, teachers and local outreach organizations who discuss prevention strategies for at-risk young women.

Since 1999, the Vatra Center, with Support from USAID, has helped more than 1,600 young women to heal and rebuild their lives. The Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking program supported over 30 Albanian private organizations and government institutions in the fight against trafficking of women and children.

To view the series of video postcards, visit Creative’s YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/user/CreativeAssociates08

Toolkit Provides “Clear Guide” for Anti-Trafficking Community

A toolkit developed under USAID’s Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking (CAAHT) project promises to help local partners continue the struggle against trafficking in human beings.

The Albania Initiative: Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking’s fifth and final conference on September 16th unveiled the



Toolkit of Good Practices to Counter Human Trafficking. It was delivered to more than 350 government and civil society anti-trafficking actors from around the nation, capturing key lessons from the project. “The challenge remains today, and becomes even more critical.. While the program will end, traffickers will not voluntarily abandon their criminal behaviors,” said USAID/Albania Mission Director, Roberta Mahoney.

The Toolkit highlights the many activities conducted by civil society organizations across Albania supported with USAID grant funds. The Toolkit includes a 25-minute video and written materials that present proven techniques and methodologies from the project. “[The Toolkit] is a clear guide for the daily work and continuing activities carried out by the anti-trafficking community,” said Arian Çala, Executive Director of Another Vision, a longtime CAAHT partner.

More than 2,100 government and 210 civil society actors were trained in anti-trafficking and

management skills through conferences, technical training workshops and capacity building by CAAHT staff for local partners.

“The Toolkit captures good principles and broad strokes of good ideas,” said Sarah Stephens, Creative Associates’ Chief of Party for the project during its six years of implementation. “Stephens underscored the need for continued engagement by Albanians, saying “Despite an elaborated national anti-trafficking strategy, much of it remains on paper. There is insufficient political and administrative will to encourage government employees to recognize their responsibilities as outlined in the national anti-trafficking strategies. Government entities have yet to ensure adequate budgeting for activities. This is where the fragility remains at the close of the program,” said Stephens.

For more information about CAAHT, visit www.caaht.com.

—Alexandra Pratt

KYRGYZSTAN: USAID Project Trainee Voted “Best Teacher of 2009”

Nurmiza Kenjenbaeva is making a difference. On “Educators Day,” Kurmanbek Bakiev, the President of Kyrgyzstan, personally presented Kenjenbaeva with the nation’s Best Teacher of 2009 award. Just six years into her teaching career, Kenjenbaeva, a USAID Quality Learning Project trainee, represents a new wave in Kyrgyz education that is moving beyond Soviet-style teacher training methods. Kenjenbaeva credits USAID’s Quality Learning Project with making a “big difference,” in her capacity to teach and motivate her students.

“I learned new methods of teaching and approaches, better planning, how to develop effective questions for students and how to correctly direct the student towards the aim of the lesson,” said Kenjenbaeva. “These things make the course very important and unique.” Quality Learning Project trainees also emphasize that, unlike other international cooperation efforts, USAID’s training is delivered in their native language.

Kenjenbaeva finds that her students are very open to the new student-centered teaching

[continues on next page>](#)



Nurmiza Kenjenbaeva with students.

Kenjenbaeva's use of student-centered techniques encourages pupils to voice their opinions.



methods she acquired through USAID's project. "I just started to use the student-centered methodology in my classes, right after the training I got from the Quality Learning Project," said Kenjenbaeva. "In my classes, I divide the students into the groups, develop a proper questioning strategy, revise the lesson plan based on the guidance I received from the course, give the students my advice and give the information on the topic according to students' level and skills."

Kenjenbaeva says her students felt "lectured to" and bored under the old style of teaching. Now, she reports, students feel motivated and are more likely to ask questions and engage in discussions with their teachers and peers that promote higher order analytical skills. "I see myself as a person who gives direction and not a person with a pointer in hand," says Kenjenbaeva.

The Quality Learning Project is helping Kyrgyz teachers like Kenjenbaeva use computers with projectors to convey presentations in the classroom. Teachers are learning how to videotape classes to show students what has been accomplished, especially when they are divided into working groups. "These things very effectively help the students to remember the information they receive, help their socialization and development process as individuals, allowing them to work on their weaknesses," said Kenjenbaeva. "Also, this method gives the chance for students to rely on their own experience, on what they see outside the classroom, not only what the teacher says."

Kenjenbaeva is among nearly 600 teachers trained by the Quality Learning Project in these new teaching methods this past summer. The real impact of this training will be in improv-

ing the higher order thinking skills of Kyrgyz students. Teachers using these tools will reach a projected 32,831 students in 2009. By formally embracing these reforms, Kyrgyz education authorities are committing to using modern, active teaching methods to reach 73,554 more students in 2010, 128,546 in 2011 and 153,124 in 2012.

Asked about being selected best teacher of the year, Kenjenbaeva briefly reflected then said, "For me it is not only a 'Victory', but also a great responsibility. I feel, realize and recognize that I have to be a model to others, to develop my skills further, and work to better improve and develop my knowledge and share it with other teachers. But most important is to be a really good teacher for my students."

Kyrgyz Academy of Education President Abakir Mamytov, who was a member of the award selection committee, noted that Kenjenbaeva far outpaced the second and third position holders for this year's best teacher award, winning 31 points out of 40, while the second and third place contestants had scores of 9 and 6 respectively. The Kyrgyz Academy of Education recently unanimously voted to adopt the Quality Learning Project's training methodologies into their institutes, ensuring Kenjenbaeva and her colleagues will continue to get support that makes a difference to preparing their students for the future.



TAJIKISTAN: Educator Passionate About Helping Fellow Teachers

Fayziddin Niyozov counts Don Quixote among his literary heroes, but his positive impact on teachers in his native Tajikistan can hardly be called whimsical. Now the Teacher Training and Assessment Specialist for USAID's Quality Learning Project implemented by Creative Associates, Niyozov was at the core of developing materials used to train 1017 Tajik teachers in modern pedagogy in August.

"As a student, my professors only used the lecturing approach and so as a teacher I based my lessons on topics without clear objectives and goals, not, in effect, on focusing on learning outcomes," Niyozov said.

A former English teacher, Niyozov is passionate about helping Tajik teachers and other stakeholders rethink attitudes towards teaching and learning. His goal is to move from rote learning to higher order thinking skills to make the teaching and learning process "flow smoothly."

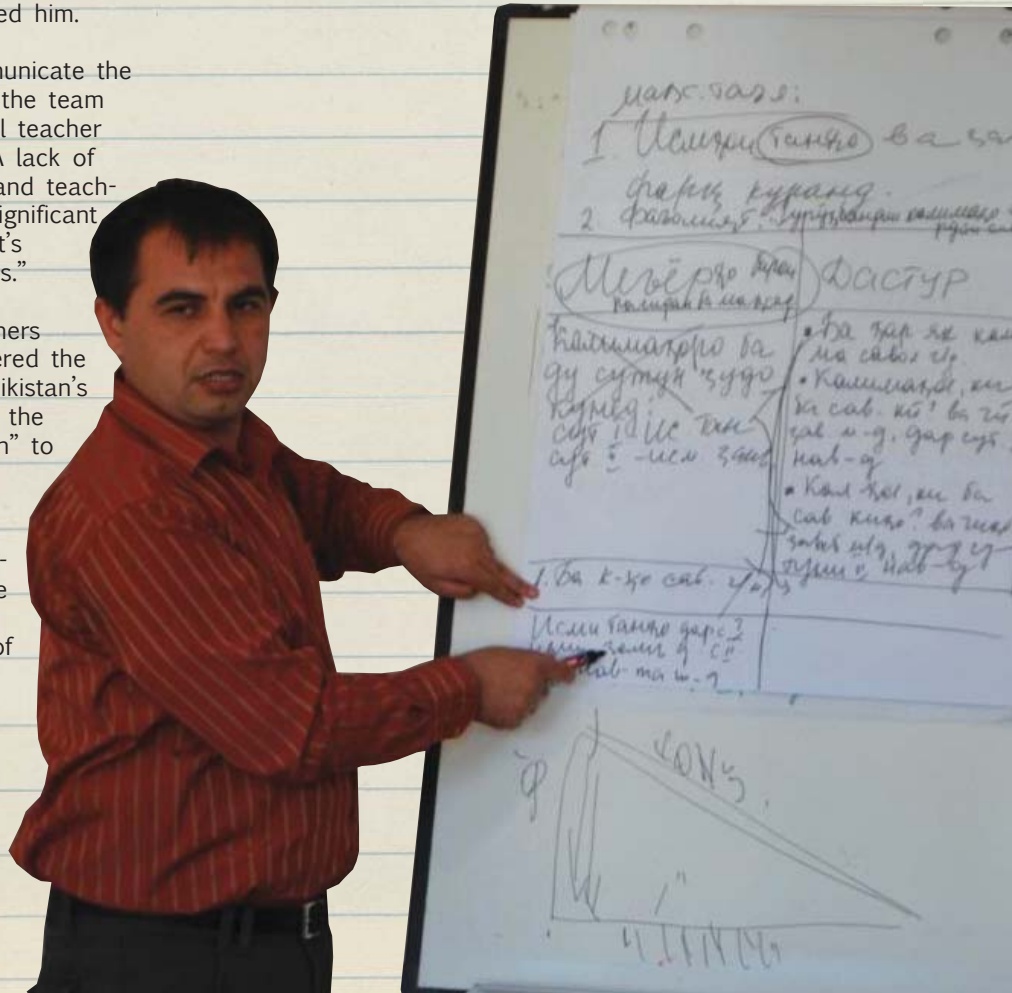
Unlike Don Quixote, who fought windmills to keep change at bay, Niyozov has sought meaningful and tangible change. Success has not eluded him.

"At the beginning it was hard to communicate the new teaching techniques and ideas to the team charged with developing primary school teacher training modules," Niyozov admitted. "A lack of skills in the development of reflective and teacher-friendly training materials required significant effort from the Quality Learning Project's team to build the developers' capacities."

The expert training of over 1,000 teachers by Niyozov and project staff has garnered the attention of Abdujabbor Rahmonov, Tajikistan's Minister of Education. On October 7th, the Minister drafted "Letters of Appreciation" to the Project's participants for their hard work developing fifty-five modules for primary and secondary teachers and three for school principals and accountants. The Minister plans to present the training materials to the President of Tajikistan as evidence of the Ministry of

Education's work with the donor community bringing positive change to the nation's teacher training system.

As a teacher, Niyozov always aspired to improve the quality of classroom learning. Niyozov overcame the lack of teaching resources at his former school by developing his own activities and tasks for students that linked to learning objectives. This led to a grant from the Open Society Institute Tajikistan in 2000. This allowed Niyozov to develop a ground-breaking Tajik activity dictionary that provided students with vocabulary, self-learning activities and evaluation tests, such as quizzes and crossword puzzles. And just this month, an English textbook Niyozov co-authored was published for nationwide use. One can scarcely say he's been "tilting at windmills" in his quest to better education in Tajikistan.



Fayziddin Niyozov

NIGERIA: 30 Percent Almajiri Students are Girls, USAID Study Reveals

USAID recently funded a study using the Creative Associates's State Education Sub-Accounts methodology in Nigeria's northern capital cities of Kano and Gusau. In a striking result, 30 percent of the 1.6 million students attending Almajiri (Qur'anic) schools are girls, revealing that parents in certain communities are willing to pay to give their daughters a religious education.

Based on the State Education Account (SEA) methodology, the USAID study in Kano and Gusau assessed education expenditures in the non-formal Almajiri school system for the 2007-2008 school year. Financing for these schools fall mostly to parents and communities because the Almajiri schools offer religious education.

"Almajiri schools are usually male only schools," said Deepika Chawla, Senior Associate at Creative Associates International, which implemented the Education Account on behalf of USAID. "In fact, when we got the results the immediate reaction was that it was impossible. There were 'no' girls in the Almajiri system."

At first dismissed as incorrect data, the team had to further inquire with Imams as to the validity of results showing girl students at Almajiri schools. Since additional inquiries proved the data correct, the Education Account carried out in Kano and Gusau provide the first documentation that girls are receiving religious education.

According to Phyllis Forbes, a Creative technical director who helped direct the study, policy planning for the religious education sector was carried out based on ad hoc information suggesting that girls were excluded. Therefore, it was difficult to formulate policy to meet the country's education goals without adequate facts about where why and how education expenditures flow.

"The Education Account gave Nigerian policymakers and donors, including USAID, hard data on the 'financial pulse' of the Almajiri school sector on which to review and base education policy decisions," Forbes said.



In the Kano metropolitan area, the USAID-funded Education Account found that 98 percent of financing came from the private sector and only 2 percent of expenditures were provided by the public sector. Private sector funding in Kano accounted for teacher stipends, upkeep and provision of shelter including boarding facilities (for males only) and educational resources. In Gusau, the capital of Zamfara and a predominantly Shia state, however, the study showed that the public sector contributed more than half of the financial support provided to Almajiri schools. Still, in both Kano and Gusau over 70 percent of private expenditures came from households.

"To date, all accounts of students in schools have had a gap where females were unaccounted for," said Chawla. "These findings can have impact on policy. If these girls are attending Almajiri schools, it may be worthwhile for the government to work with Imams to have lay teachers come in to teach literacy and other subjects."

NIGERIA: Tests Show Jump in Achievement with Radio Instruction

A passerby at a humble rural school in Nigeria's Kano state would have heard grade three school children singing "we come to make you happy learning, learning, as we go." The deep resonant voice of their "teacher" would have belonged to "Mr. Learning Tree," booming from an ordinary radio with a lesson on the present tense in English.

When this U.S. Agency for international Development project ended in May 2009, assessment

results proved that exposure to these radio lessons helped children improve their scores in Nigeria's mathematics and basic literacy curriculum. Working through USAID, the American people helped a remarkable seventy-five percent of the children surveyed in these schools improve their literacy and numeracy skills significantly. For example, fourth grade students in rural schools improved their test results by a statistically significant eight percentage points.

Mr. Learning Tree is the main character in an interactive basic education radio program launched in 2004 by USAID in Nigeria's states of Kano, Nasawara and Lagos. Mr. Learning Tree is joined by his cohorts Rabbit and Tortoise, delighting children with these familiar Nigerian folklore characters and helping teachers bring mathematics and basic literacy to life. The radio lessons aired three times weekly and reached 700,000 pupils and 21,104 teachers in 1,400 schools.

"The Interactive Radio Instruction programs helped schools improve the skills of untrained teachers especially in Islamiyya schools (which provide religious and secular education) and mitigated the effect of the lack of availability of instructional materials," said Semere Solomon, Creative's director of the Basic Education component of the COMPASS USAID-funded project.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. With 44.3 percent of its population under the age of 15, Nigeria illustrates the economic and security imperatives for realizing universal education. Nigeria and other countries are striving to achieve universal education by 2015. Radio instruction provides one proven and tangible solution to address access, equity and quality of education in an interactive and child-friendly way.

The broadcasts for grades 1 and 2 were produced in the Hausa and Yoruba languages while those for children in grades 3 to 6 were in English in line with Nigerian curriculum standards. The interactive radio program complemented and reinforced training teachers in modern instructional methodologies. Practical steps such as building separate toilets encouraged girls to go to school.

Radio broadcasts integrated health messages throughout the series of 90 programs emphasizing good practices including hand washing, sleeping under treated mosquito nets, and getting immunized.



The broadcasts will continue to enrich teachers and children beyond the life span of the project. The project trained 87 interactive radio instruction professionals (script writers, sound engineers, producers, formative evaluators, actors, musicians, and curriculum experts) who now serve as a resource for educational radio projects in Nigeria.



LIBERIA: Self-Adjusting Glasses Prove Visionary for World's Poor

Our view of the world and our possibilities are shaped by our ability to see what's before us – literally and figuratively. Yet, the World Health Organization estimates that 153 million people live in a blurred world – at substantial cost to themselves and their communities.

The problem is uncorrected refractive error — shortsightedness or farsightedness — and it is quite widespread. In the developed world alone, some 60 to 70 percent of the population need eyeglasses.

Global Vision 2020 executive director Kevin White, a former marine, is on a mission to distribute liquid eyeglasses invented by Oxford atomic physicist Joshua Silver. The spectacles can be fitted to correct an individual's eyesight within seconds.

"It takes eight years to create an ophthalmologist and that's after a high school degree," said White emphasizing a basic obstacle to getting enough specialists to attend to the millions in the developing world who need eye care. The developed world has one ophthalmologist per eight thousand individuals, while the developing world has one ophthalmologist per one million. The consequences can be tragic. White estimates that uncorrected vision leads as many as six persons per 100,000 in the developing world to die in traffic accidents.

A Maryland native, White recently distributed 500 eyeglasses in four days to his state's sister city of Monrovia, Liberia. "The biggest barrier to distributing the glasses is distribution," says White, who taps existing networks such as churches and NGOs to train volunteers to assist clients with outfitting themselves with the liquid eyeglasses. Using these

existing networks also helps keep costs down. The glasses sell for about \$19 dollars per pair.

In Monrovia, Creative Associates International, a supporter of public-private alliances, joined forces with White, providing staff and facilities for training and distribution of the glasses. Creative was implementing the USAID-funded Accelerated Learning Program PLUS, which provided six years of primary schooling to more than 55,000 youth forced out of schools during Liberia's civil war. ALP PLUS Chief of Party, Simon James facilitated the partnership with Global Vision 2020. "If we can eliminate refractive error as a reason why kids are not doing well in school, it will have an immediate impact on productivity as kids will be less likely to drop-out," says White.

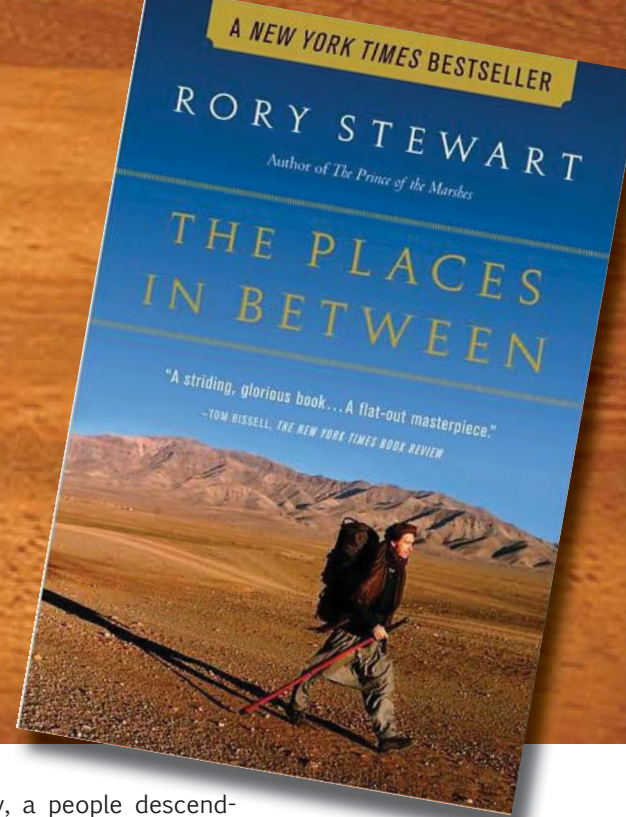
White described the transformation in the life of a 57-year old grandmother from Rwanda whose world was a blur. White says she became a burden to her family as she could not clean the rice for the daily meal, or sew to contribute to the family's income. The day she got her eyeglasses she cried. "She could recognize people, places and could cook and sew again, making her a contributing member of the family," said White.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the mystic and Jesuit priest once said, "The whole of life lies in the verb *seeing*." He meant of course the inner eye, but for those who have just recovered their sight with liquid spectacles, it's literally a life-changing event.



THE PLACES IN BETWEEN

A book review by Alexandra Pratt



Some reviewers compare Rory Stewart to Lawrence of Arabia for his daring, others simply thought he was an urban legend. He is neither. In 2002, Stewart spent five months of a 19-month journey walking across Afghanistan's snow covered mountains accompanied only by a semi-domesticated mastiff dog, a backpack and his wits. His book, *The Places In Between* is an account of this journey.

"... Afghanistan was the missing section of my walk, the place in between the deserts and the Himalayas, between Persian, Hellenic, and Hindu culture, between Islam and Buddhism, between mystical and militant Islam. I wanted to see where these cultures merged into one another or touched the global world," writes Stewart in *The Places In Between*.

A Scotsman, Oxford graduate and former British civil servant in Iraq, Stewart, also journeyed through Iran, Pakistan, India and Nepal walking 25-miles per day. He brings to mind one of those 19th Century adventurers who immersed themselves among remote peoples learning their language and customs with an openness and curiosity to understand the subtleties of their cultures.

From mountains to valleys, Stewart drags and nudges his hungry and cold mastiff, Babur, named after the Uzbek prince who captured Kabul in the fifteenth century and continued to Herat, then the most civilized city in the Islamic world. Unlike Prince Babur, Stewart walked in the opposite direction from Herat to Kabul, but like Babur crossed the Afghan mountains in the dead of winter sometimes battling 9-foot snowdrifts. Walking by day, he found shelter at night relying mostly on the kindness of strangers who provided a spot on the mud floors of their modest homes for him to sleep. Occasionally, he slept in mosques or in the more luxurious homes of village heads and feudal lords from whom he learns how daring his undertaking is.

"For twenty-five years we have not been able to walk from end to end of the road that you are walking. It is only safe because you are a stranger," Stewart is told by the twenty-year old nephew of a feudal lord somewhere in the

Hazara territory, a people descended from the Mongols who invaded parts of Afghanistan.

Still Stewart's journey is hardly without peril.

Along his way, he faces death either from the extreme harshness of the terrain and the elements and chance encounters with not so friendly Taliban. Stewart paints for the reader the vivid landscape he crosses and the individuals he meets along the way. Each encounter cements for him that Afghanistan's hills and valleys are inhabited by clans and tribes with genealogies and histories that are quite different from one another. The story he weaves from these distinctions makes palpable to the reader the difficulty of bridging tribal differences to unify the Afghan nation. As much as a travel book, *The Places In Between* is also a statement against generalities about Afghanistan and simplistic notions of how that society might be freed from conflict. As for international reconstruction and development efforts, Stewart describes how the contributions of expatriates knowledgeable about Afghanistan and its peoples were lost.

"The agreement setting up the future shape of Afghanistan had been signed in Bonn a month earlier... Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN Special Representative...had staffed his Political Affairs Office with some of the most competent expatriates in Afghanistan: people who spoke Dari or Pashto well, had worked in Afghanistan for years, and had experience with village culture. But these few people had to manage the conflicting interests of foreign governments, other UN agencies, warlords, international organizations, and Afghan technocrats. They knew too much of the reality on the ground to be popular with the new Afghan Government or the international bureaucracy. By the end of the year they had been moved into almost meaningless jobs," notes Stewart.

The Places In Between should be required reading for any development worker, civil servant or military personnel intending to spend time in Afghanistan.

WASHINGTON, DC and WORLDWIDE



LEFT TO RIGHT:

Alexandra Simonians joins Creative's Center for Stabilization and Development as a Technical Manager. In partnership with the Division Director, she will lead program operations, providing day-to-day oversight and support for stabilization activities.

Amaury Cooper joins Creative as Technical Manager in the Office of Development and Administration, where he will coordinate and manage corporate-wide comprehensive security and emergency planning for headquarters and the field. In this capacity, Amaury will report to Charles Alliman, the Director of Security and Logistics.

Ban Saraf joins Creative as Resident Country Director for the Community Leadership Empowerment Program in the West Bank, which is supported by the U.S. Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative.

Jeffrey Carlson joins Creative as a Management Associate in the Communities in Transition division. Jeffrey will provide extensive support to Creative's elections team, including comprehensive approaches to political finance.

Carla da Rosa Borges joins Creative as Chief of Party of the Ambassador's Small Grants Program to Support Gender Equality in Afghanistan.

Donald "Larry" Sampler, Jr. joins Creative as the Vice President and Director of the Communities in Transition division. He brings extensive U.S. Government experience with comprehensive approaches to complex operations in, among other places, Iraq, Afghanistan and the West Bank and Gaza.

Jerrold Keilson joins Creative as Vice President for Planning and Program Development in the Office of Development and Administration where he will lead the firm's business development initiatives.

new faces



LEFT TO RIGHT:

Joel E. Schlesinger joins Creative as the Vice President and Director of the Education, Mobilization and Communication division. He brings 30-years of extensive U.S. Government, private sector and NGO experience in North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean and brings to Creative a keen understanding of how social, cultural and historical influences in the developing world shape policy formulation and institutional effectiveness.

Lena Ryspekova joins Creative as a Program Associate in the Communities in Transition division. Lena will provide headquarters support to the Ambassador's Small Grants Program to Support Gender and Equality in Afghanistan.

Marcos Altuna joins Creative's Office of Development and Administration as an Internet and Network Engineer. In this capacity, he will help to maintain and repair the Creative network, ensuring its reliability at headquarters and in the field.

Meredith J. Richardson joins Creative as Deputy Chief of Party of Programs for the Ambassador's Small Grants Program to Support Gender Equality in Afghanistan.

Richard John joins Creative as Deputy Chief of Party of Operations for the Ambassador's Small Grants Program to Support Gender Equality in Afghanistan.

Yembeka Joyce Kapakasa joins the Office of Finance and Contracts as an Associate Contract Administrator, where she will support contract management, bids and proposal preparations.

Creative's mission is to support people around the world to realize the positive change they seek.

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