

EUROPE & EURASIA

American Baker Helps Russian Region Produce More Bread



Maurice Kalisky, a baker and businessman from California, works on a new recipe with a Georgiev bakery employee in February 2006.

STAVROPOL, Russia—While record cold February temperatures held Russia in its wintry grip, the ovens at the Georgievsk bakery in this city in the North Caucasus region were burning hot.

Maurice Kalisky, a professional baker and successful U.S. businessman from California, worked with local bakers, project managers, and production staff to make an assessment of the Stavropol-based bakery. Then Kalisky made recommendations on adopting new industry technologies, taught new recipes, and introduced innovative marketing strategies to help the Georgievsk bakery grow.

“The director and managers of the bakery were really happy with the advice—so much so that they asked me to return next October, but they made me promise I wouldn’t advise another bakery within 200 kilometers,” quipped Kalisky.

He is one of numerous U.S. professionals brought to Russia through the North Caucasus Rural Credit Cooperative and Agribusiness Development Program. The \$2.9 million,

two-year initiative builds on the success of two other USAID-funded projects, the Rural Credit Cooperatives (RCC) and the Rural Credit Cooperative Development Fund (RCCDF). As such, the new project is tapping into a now self-sustainable network of more than 800 rural cooperatives. Likewise, the RCCDF has built partnerships, and made loans valued at about \$38 million since 2000.

USAID is now turning towards providing Russian businessmen with advice from counterparts in the United States, such as Kalisky, on how to grow their businesses. The approach is the hallmark of the project implementer, ACDI/VOCA, which provides the expertise of short-term volunteers to developing countries.

The North Caucasus has been historically isolated by geography and decades of political unrest. Although the majority of local districts are relatively peaceful, business development and the growth of civil society are overshadowed by the negative impact of post-conflict issues in Chechnya and, more recently, the

2004 terrorist attack on a school in Beslan.

The new development program is designed to alleviate the region’s historic isolation through its links to RCCs in other regions, which facilitate ongoing collaboration, training and support.

More than half of the North Caucasus population works in agriculture and agribusiness while Stavropol and Krasnodar—two of the larger territories in the area—serve as the agricultural centers.

The USAID-funded project aims to encourage growth in this region, dubbed the “grain belt,” by enhancing access to credit for rural businesses in the region and strengthening local enterprises through training and practical, expert consultations.

In December 2005, the program conducted training courses on the fundamentals of credit and financial analysis for 27 credit cooperative managers from various regions. The training encouraged the integration of credit cooperatives in the North Caucasus with credit cooperatives operating in other geographical areas. ★

ASIA AND THE NEAR EAST

Parents Get Involved in Jordanian Kindergartens

AMMAN, Jordan – For the first time, parents at Jordan’s government-run kindergartens are being actively encouraged to take part in the lives of their children while at school.

The Parent Involvement Initiative is part of the ERfKE Support Project (ESP), which is funded by USAID. ERfKE is short for the Jordanian Ministry of Education’s Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy program, begun in 2003. The goal is to fundamentally change the relationship between parents and the educational system, with children as the ultimate beneficiaries.

Because Jordan’s teachers are already stretched thin in kindergarten classes that average 25 children per class, they need assistance to effectively implement the kindergarten curriculum.

The Parent Involvement Initiative seeks to get parents actively involved in kindergarten education. A by-product of the parent’s increased involvement is that teachers are able to spend more quality time with each child.

It began with open house workshops for parents at each school. After a few training sessions, mothers and other family members were encouraged to volunteer as teachers’ aides. Mothers, grandmothers, and aunts participate as their schedules permit – some are a daily presence

in kindergarten class while others may stop in every other week to help out. Their duties run the gamut: from supervising play-ground activities, reading or telling stories, and keeping classrooms tidy to providing a hug.

“Volunteers have an important role inside the kindergarten classroom,” says Sabha Al Ajouri, a teacher in Al-Jawasrah School in Shouna, South Jordan. “They assist the teacher in implementing different activities and tend to individual children’s needs and group processes.”

This pilot program has been welcomed by Ministry of Education officials who are planning to roll out the initiative to all 400 public kindergartens in Jordan in the coming year. Their views are echoed by parents who are very keen to ensure their children get the best possible start in life through early education.

“I started understanding how important it is to give attention to my children’s education and how important their education in the kindergarten really is,” says Fatima Ismael Salim, a parent volunteer from Al Jabal School School in Jordan.

Ola Ali Abu Tooq, another parent volunteer from Hafsa School, says, “My daughter is pushing me to come every day. She is so proud of me!” ★



This Jordanian mom and daughter learn together as part of a USAID-backed effort to encourage parental involvement in kindergartens.