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INTERNEWS

FINAL PROGRAMATIC REPORT

Covering program activities from February 2004 – June 2007

Contact:

Marjorie Rouse
Vice President, ICT Policy, Europe & Eurasia
1640 Rhode Island Avenue 7th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
tel. +1 202 833 5740 ext 304
fax +1 202 833 5745
marjorie@internews.org

Don Allen
Vice President of Administration
P.O. Box 4448
Arcata, CA 95518-4448
tel. +1 707 826 2030 ext 120
fax +1 707 826 2136
don@internews.org

OVERVIEW

This report overviews the impact achieved through the ground-breaking USAID-funded Kids' Crossroads project, one of Internews Network's most vibrant examples of how linking and empowering young people through media can be an effective approach to bridging ethnic divides. The innovative model implemented under this cooperative agreement has been so successful that the project has become the model for a variety of other new Internews initiatives world-wide. In this report, Internews aims to overview activities and results achieved through the USAID grant, which supported the Kids' Crossroads project from February 2004 through July 2007.

The *Kids' Crossroads* pan-Caucasus youth media project is a unique vehicle using journalism to link young people in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The heart of the project is a weekly television program reported, filmed, and edited by teenagers from all three countries and broadcast nationally in each country. Providing information selected and produced by their peers, focused on the issues that are important to teenagers, the broadcasts give young people in the region a new view on the challenges of the tense political environment they will inherit from their parents.

Strong ratings and focus group responses demonstrate that the show is opening minds to learning about neighboring countries. The program continues to build an audience on broadcast television, by far the most influential mass medium in the South Caucasus. This position of popularity and trust creates immense potential for the program to expand its impact using both interactive new media technologies and more traditional outreach, such as work to integrate with school curricula or after-school activities.

TELEVISION PRODUCTION

As the only pan-South Caucasus TV program created explicitly for youth, "Kids Crossroads" has served as an invaluable tool in breaking down barriers and promoting understanding among Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijan adolescents. Since March 2005, Internews Network's partners in the South Caucasus (Internews Armenia, Internews Azerbaijan and Internews Georgia) have worked with youth in their countries to support a television show produced by youths (ages 14-18) for an audience of their peers (ages 12-18).

The television series has served as the only informational source that young audience received directly from neighboring countries without prejudice or antagonistic language through often-nationalistic mainstream press. During the three-year period of this grant, a total of two-hundred and eighty-six (286) weekly run programs have been broadcast on Public TV in all three countries, ranging in length from 12 to 22 minutes, covering a wide range of youth issues examined by each country. In total, Kids' Crossroads has produced more than 89.1 hours of programming during this program.

Table A. Number of television programs produced by country and year

Country	2005	2006	2007	Total
Armenia	23	43	28	94

Azerbaijan	23	43	28	94
Georgia	22	45	31	98
Total	68	131	87	286

Table B. Minutes of television programs produced by country and year

Country	2005	2006	2007	Total
Armenia	276	512	336	1124
Azerbaijan	506	946	616	2068
Georgia	484	990	682	2156
Total	1266	2448	1634	5348

Each segment of the program is created by teen journalists, chosen each year for one-year participation in the show, on Internews' premises. The kids identify and report stories, shoot videotape, and edit each program.

In each of the three countries, the TV program has its own name, design, and local on-screen hosts. The basic content, however, is the same, since the three production teams agree each week on the stories and other materials from each country that will be used. The materials from the other two countries are translated into the local languages for broadcast.

Kids' Crossroads is carried nationally in the three countries on public television. Ratings and Internews research from the capital cities show that the program reaches up to 20 percent of its target audience each week. So far the program has trained four cohorts of young TV journalists in each country. In addition to working with youth in the capital cities, the shows reach out to include young people who live outside the capital. Stories have come from such places as Ganja, Azerbaijan and Gori, Batumi and Akhmeta, Georgia.

YOUTH TRAINING

In order to ensure that the participating youth have the skills they need to contribute to the project, these young journalists receive extensive training in all the skills necessary to air a professional production. In addition to their hands-on work in their own countries, the journalists from the three countries gather in the summer to participate in intensive training sessions and to exchange ideas among themselves.

These summer camps have proved to be extremely successful for a variety of reasons, namely the cross-ethnic relationship building and the intensive journalism training – which go hand-in-hand when using the camp model.

In each year, regional camps were held in various resort towns in Georgia, where youth from all three countries could come and participate in a variety of training and social activities. Prior to each camp, participants were selected through a highly competitive process, which required individual testing, group exercises and interviews. Candidates were evaluated based on their understanding of journalism, their motivation, and their Russian language skills – which were

required to foster cross-ethnic communication. An equal number of participants were selected from each country office.



Once at the camp, participants dove into the journalism training with an early emphasis on theoretical course, which quickly shifted to a heavy focus on practical application. From learning the basics of TV journalism, to reviewing best practices, to discussing journalistic ethics – the classroom work was significant. Practical sessions focused on acquiring or improving skills in areas such as taking interviews, all elements of producing a news story, operating cameras, filling the anchor's role on a talk show, and understanding the roles of engineers, editors and producers.

The skills learned during these camps were vital to youth gaining the capacity to work on production of Kids' Crossroads. However, equally important was that the youth were often engaged in multi-ethnic activities without their even being aware. With the focus on journalism, getting the story, and working as a team – the relationship building was natural and easy. With these relationships then established, the ability to work across distances to jointly contribute to and produce regional programming was not only possible, but something the young journalists were vested in doing.



Table C. Number of journalists trained during program

Armenia	42
Azerbaijan	20
Georgia	48
Total	110

Table D. Number of youth participating in regional summer camps

Armenia	18
Azerbaijan	12
Georgia	18
Total	48

CONTENT CREATED

The Kids' Crossroads program covers a wide range of themes, chosen by the teen-age producers, seeking to draw the interest of their youthful audience. Some of the more notable segments covered the following topics:

- University students in Armenia work three jobs in addition to their studies in order to cover expenses and contribute to paying tuition costs.
- A seminar for school kids in Armenia explained about AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and how to prevent them.
- An international theater group created by young actors from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is touring the three countries with shows that draw the audience into the performance.
- Students at the Medical University of Yerevan continue to eat fast food even though they know it is bad for them.
- With many students in Ganja, Azerbaijan skipping classes, the police have started sweeps of the streets, Internet cafes, and tea houses. Reporters investigated specific cases to see what the students were doing instead of going to school and how fair the police raids were.
- Two teenagers in Azerbaijan run a business collecting discarded bottles and selling them to a bottling factory.
- Teenagers in rural Azerbaijan face chores that urban kids never think about. The story shows the hard work that goes into making various types of food.
- Georgian journalists investigated school repairs, finding that some schools are fully refurbished, while others remain untouched. They examined how the students' surroundings affect the level of their education.
- Journalists in Georgia interviewed young people on what the appropriate age for marriage is.
- A nine-year-old Mongolian girl in Georgia helps her family by begging for food.
- Georgian journalists listed creative ways of spending free time when there are few resources available.

Other programs discussed mobile phones, student loans, the 2004 terrorist massacre of students in Beslan, various news about teens, musical trends, break dancing, what is taught in schools, young criminals, shopping, travel, leisure, and a wide variety of exceptional young people, including talented musicians and artists.

INSTILLING VALUES

One of the main objectives of the program was to provide additional tools to instill values in youth in the Southern Caucasus. Many of the programs produced by youth journalists gravitated towards this objective without needing to be encouraged. The following values, identified in the initial proposal as ideal values to support through this program, reflect how real stories naturally emerged to underscore these qualities and themes throughout the Kids' Crossroads program - without having been forced by editors or the implementing partners.

Compassion	The story focused on the life of a teenager, Nigar, whose parents had divorced some years before. While Nigar has been provided with
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<p>Azerbaijan Episode 53</p>	<p>everything she needs materially, she often feels lonely while her parents live separate lives. The story shows how an adults' divorce can impacts the lives of their children.</p>
<p>Personal Character Armenia Episode 100</p>	<p>Vardan, a handicapped boy, decided to go to regular school regardless of the difficulties he would face trying to fit in and make friends. He insisted on winning his peers over and he has now been very in making friends among the schoolchildren. He is now fully integrated into the "society" of the school.</p>
<p>Political Participation Georgia Episode 55</p>	<p>The story is shot in Marneuli, where the Azerbaijanis are densely populated. The main focus is on the youth living there who do not know the state's official language and how this limits their education and career options. Many are doing what they can to best integrate into society.</p>
<p>Volunteerism Georgia Episode 35</p>	<p>This story is about two teenage girls. One of them is the chairman of the Tbilisi Youth Parliament. She actively participates in her community and tries to help her peers solve their problems. She always tries to go to the orphanage and arrange charity actions for the orphans. By doing this, she tries to make the life better for these children.</p>
<p>Rule of Law Azerbaijan Episode 26</p>	<p>This story spotlights students at school No. 134 in Baku who elect their student body president at school through their own democratic election system. There are codes and guidelines that each must follow and abide by. The main goal is to demonstrate democratic principles for schoolchildren from a very early age.</p>
<p>Health Armenia Episode 26</p>	<p>The story focuses on the dangers caused by fireworks, including sparkers and rockets that teenagers use to celebrate Christmas and New Years. Every year, dozens of children are injured using such fireworks. Several deaths have even occurred. The story underscores the danger of explosives by presenting real life cases.</p>
<p>Tolerance Georgia Episode 55</p>	<p>The story focuses on religious minorities in Georgia, including Baptists. Through the own words of one of the Baptist teenagers interviewed, we learn more about the religion, the boy's hopes and fears, and the discrimination they face regularly based on their religion.</p>
<p>Economizing Armenia Episode 88</p>	<p>The story focuses on the severity of overly extravagant school graduation parties. The story spotlights the so called "graduation parties" for those finishing school. For many, organizing these parties requires that children gather money throughout the whole school year</p>

	in order to buy presents for their teachers, hire scriptwriters and cameramen, etc.
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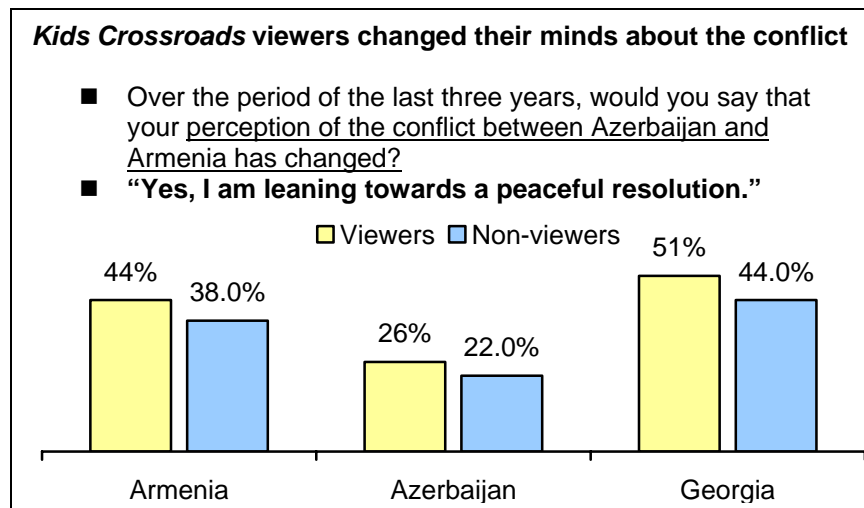
IMPACT

Kids' Crossroads has been successful in reaching its targeted audience of young people. Research shows that nearly half the 12-18 year olds in each country have watched the show and are aware of it:

- Armenia – 46.4%
- Azerbaijan – 40.2%
- Georgia – 42%.

In Armenia, the show attracted an average 16.5 percent share of the audience for its time slot during January-March 2007, according to AGB-Nielsen Armenia. This share is very high, considering that the program is aimed at teenagers. The most popular information program in the country scores 27 percent.

Kids' Crossroads is “unbiased,” “comprehensive,” “from the source,” “trustworthy,” “lively,” and “unique,” according to focus group respondents in each of the countries conducted in June 2006. Participants stressed that there is a lack of quality TV programming for teenagers, making Kids' Crossroads the only attractive broadcast about the lives of teenagers not only in the South Caucasus region, but in their own countries as well.



Viewers in all three countries emphasized that the regular reports from other countries of the South Caucasus are key to the uniqueness of the program. All participants stressed that there is no other source of such information in local media. Most respondents in Armenia and Azerbaijan were reserved, at best, toward the other country, while enthusiastic about information from Georgia.

Nevertheless, despite their suspicions, many expressed satisfaction that Kids' Crossroads allowed them to learn about developments in the opponent's country. One Azerbaijani youth noted that “It is possible that some of the information we receive in this program can be found on the Internet, but not everyone has the opportunity to go on the Internet, and showing this program on TV gives everyone a chance to see it.”

The show also helps to spread ideas across borders, allowing people in one country to borrow the best practices of their neighbors. "It was interesting for me to see the charity concert held to benefit the orphanages. I would like to see similar acts of charity in our country," another Azerbaijani youth noted.

The shows are having a beneficial impact on their local television markets. The respondents praised the high quality of the show's production values, pointing out that they could be used as a benchmark of TV production for local television stations

THREE COUNTRY PERSPECTIVES

The View from Azerbaijan

Focus groups conducted in Azerbaijan during the summer of 2007 revealed that the conflict with Armenia has had an impact on Azeri youngsters, and many do not want to hear about what is happening in Armenia. They stress that it is important that teenagers outside Azerbaijan know their belief that one fifth of their country's lands are occupied by the Armenians. Despite this general situation, several individuals did express interest. Based on what they saw in the shows, the Azerbaijanis were particularly impressed with the Georgian youth and concluded that they were more active than either the Azeri or Armenian youth.



Given this difficult environment, one thing that the show can do is channel the anger about Nagorno-Karabakh into more fruitful directions of competition. For example, one Azeri youth participating in a focus group discussion said: "I think that it makes sense to show the Armenian and Georgian materials here [in Azerbaijan], so that we can learn something useful from them, and in Armenia to show the achievements of our youth."

When discussing what makes Kids' Crossroads unique, youth participants in the focus groups highlighted the educational value of the program and the information they receive while watching. Youth stated that the program helps them learn more about special interests and various occupations. When youth were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the show, participants were impressed with the youth focus of the program and that it focuses on youth not only from Azerbaijan, but also from across the region.

Many teenagers said that they would encourage their peers to watch Kids' Crossroads programs as these programs are education and they provide a lot of interesting information about the young people of the neighboring countries. As they pointed out, from the rubrics shot in Armenia and Georgia, it is clear that there are talented youth there.

The View from Armenia

In Armenia, surveys of youth in 2006 showed that regular viewers of the Armenian Kids' Crossroads have better attitudes towards Georgians and Azeris than the rest of the respondents:

32.9 percent of the regular viewers are favorably inclined towards Georgians (as opposed to 23.1 percent of the rest of the respondents) and 8.3 percent have positive attitudes towards the Azeris (as opposed to only 2.2 percent of the other young people). The data cannot determine whether the broadcast contributed to the improved attitudes or more favorable attitudes made the children interested in the show.



Armenian viewers enjoyed learning about the life of teenagers in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In fact, some said the segments prepared in those countries were more successful than the segments produced by the Armenian contributors because they focused on the everyday life of teenagers and concentrated on the present, while the Armenian-produced segments frequently emphasized the past. The kids were particularly gratified that the broadcast did not focus on political problems.

In the focus group discussions, some of the Armenian viewers argued they would never be able to overcome their hostility to the Azerbaijanis. However, others pointed out “It is not that we have to eliminate the hostility. But we can still communicate with each other.” Still others found the program useful as a way to get to know the “enemy.” As one participant explained, “My hostility will not disappear by watching the program. I am just interested in their lifestyle, in their everyday life, also in what is wrong and what is right for them. You must know your enemy well. This program is strategic in a way.”

Some of the older Armenian teen-agers thought that the show should deal more head-on with the political realities of the situation in the South Caucasus. “If I knew nothing about politics, watching this program I would think that everything is all-right in Georgia and Azerbaijan. But this is not the reality. I did not like this. We shouldn’t think that everything is all-right when in fact there is hostility between us,” one Armenian teen-ager said. Older viewers said they learned that there are “open-minded and modern” youth in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Most of the participants in the focus group discussions said that seeing the programs increased their interest in the other two countries.

The View from Georgia



Young Georgians who watch Kids' Crossroads are more likely to have favorable attitudes toward their neighbors than those who do not. Among the program's regular viewers, 36 percent are positively inclined toward Armenia, compared to only 22 percent of non-viewers. Likewise, 37 percent of viewers are positively inclined toward Azerbaijan, versus 26 percent of non-viewers. Nevertheless, interest among Georgian teenagers in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is relatively low, with only about 20 percent expressing concern about the

conflict in 2007. In fact, more than half have never even heard of the conflict. Of those who have heard about the conflict, 90 percent consider a peaceful resolution possible.

The Georgian young people expressed tolerant attitudes toward other ethnic groups. Perhaps because there is less media freedom in Azerbaijan and Armenia than in Georgia, the Georgians considered the segments from those countries dull and less relevant than the Georgian ones. The Georgians noted that the other country segments were less independent and incisive than the local product. In most cases, the reports made a neutral or negative impression on the Georgian teenagers. They claimed that previously they thought much more highly of the development level of their neighboring countries. "I had a much higher opinion of these countries. I was surprised that the teenagers are so constrained." They complained that the segments did not give a good picture of life in the other countries. But they did express an interest in knowing more about their musical tastes and culture.

In this sense, the show creates a kind of competition between the countries, as viewers in one country compare the different presentations from each of the countries. The Georgians seem to come off the best, with Georgians themselves liking the way that they were presented and winning praise from viewers in the other two countries. The Armenians felt that the Georgians had done a good job of spreading the message that they were more "Europe-oriented and humanistic." The Armenian viewers criticized their own country's segments for not succeeding in getting across a similar message. The Azerbaijani viewers were also complimentary toward the Georgian producers.

Such feelings are natural as the representatives of the different countries look at themselves and their neighbors and start making comparisons among themselves. Such comparisons provide the basis for further interaction and hopefully provoke healthy competition. In particular, seeing what the Georgians have accomplished may inspire the Armenians and Azerbaijanis to push for better portrayals of their own society, a demand that could help improve the local media environments.

INTERACTING WITH AUDIENCE

Audience Feedback

Feedback from early viewers of the show stressed the need to increase the level of interactivity by allowing the audience to more actively participate in the show. To stimulate audience involvement, the Armenian and Georgian shows announced competitions for story ideas on the air, with one winner selected each month and invited to help produce the show.

The Georgian broadcast has already produced several segments based on viewer suggestions received via the Internet. Georgian fans can interact with the show's creators through an on-line forum at: <http://www.teentv.ge/forum/index.php>. The site encourages a wide-ranging dialogue between the show's producers and the audience, allowing the conversation to spill over into topics that were not part of the broadcast.

Members of the focus groups suggested taking these ideas even farther and stressed the need for a new format that would allow for interaction between the show's presenters and the audience on the air. The participants suggested live call-ins to the studio during the broadcast. They also called for more of a talk show format that would allow for a greater exchange of opinions and the expression of different points of view. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani young people suggested inviting guests from the other country to discuss issues on the show.

New Format Ideas

Both Armenian and Georgian viewers thought that it would be interesting for the production team to examine a common theme in each of the three countries. Currently, each of the segments is produced independently and there is no connection between them. Having segments from the three countries on a similar topic would greatly increase Georgian youths' interest in the affairs of other countries because it would provide a hook to bring the topic back to their own situation and give them a basis for comparison. "Yes, it would be really very interesting. For example, Armenian and Azerbaijani teenagers' attitudes toward wearing knives would be interesting to observe," one Georgian youth said.

Another idea suggested by a Georgian youth was to send the teenage journalists from one country to another. For example, send Georgian journalists to Armenia to report on things there and vice-versa. This approach could prove interesting because an outsider would notice things that would not necessarily be interesting to a local. If the security and political situation allows, cross-border reporting between Armenia and Azerbaijan has enormous potential. "I would like our moderators to go there and shoot material and their reporters to come here and shoot shows here, so each of them doesn't present only their best sides," an Armenian youth said.

Much of the feedback naturally focuses on additional topics that could be covered in future shows. In particular, viewers would like to see in-depth coverage of Islam and its traditions, historical profiles of the three capitals and their inhabitants, relationships between kids and parents and kids and teachers in European countries, as well as more music and entertainment related stories.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT SUCCESS

Many of the most exciting results of Kids' Crossroads were related to the individual youth who participated in the project, and whose time at the camps and experience producing the television program has helped propel them to greater things. The following examples stand out:

Armenia

- Artak Vardanyan works for Public Radio of Armenia as a script writer and anchor for the *LaLaFa* youth music program and as an anchor for the *Harry Potter* youth talk show. He produces stories for entertainment programs on the Yerkir Media TV company. In addition, he writes articles for the Aravot newspaper and Internews' website (www.media.am).
- Sona Abrahamyan is the producer of the *Our School* program of the Hayrenik (Homeland) TV company.
- Aelita Chilingaryan works as a journalist for the City FM radio company.

- Nane Sahakyan works as a photojournalist for the *Khabarbzik* youth magazine, published by the Manana Youth Cultural and Educational NGO.

Georgia

- During the project, youth taking part in the program received a good suggestion from UNICEF to broadcast live for the entire two-hour morning program on International Children's Day of Broadcasting on December 11, 2005. Those involved met this challenge well and utilized the experience and skills they received during the trainings under the Kids' Crossroads. They broadcast the entire morning as if they were professionals.
- Two project participants, Natia Akhalaia and Nino Maisuradze, were invited to join the leading TV companies in Georgia to work as journalists.
- Marica Kvantaliani is still working as a journalist on Public TV and has many offers from other TV Companies to take part in different TV projects.

Azerbaijan

- One of first camp participants, Nidjat Khalilov, has taken a position as a producer and anchor for the youth program on "Space TV". The program, *Chardag* (Roof), is very popular and broadcasted across the country, reaching nearly 75 percent of Azerbaijan.
- Adila Suleymanova, one of the second year camp participants, founded a weekly newspaper at school №134 where she studied. As a chief editor, she was closely involved in the design and publication of the 8-page school newspaper. The newspaper entitled "134+" was sold among schoolchildren, with profits financing subsequent issues of the paper.
- Two Kids' Crossroads participants from the first-year and second-year camp groups, Rza Agasiyev and Rustam Aghasiyev, won FLEX scholarships to study in the United States.

Beyond those who found professional success as journalists, many project participants simply obtained communication skills that will help them succeed in whatever avenues they chose in life. The project provided youth the opportunity to find their voice in society, to brainstorm constructive ideas, to learn to cooperate with others, to strengthen self-confidence and be more independent. In the words of one participant's mother:

"Prior to joining the Kids' Crossroads production team, my 16-year-old daughter - Shafiga Aliyeva at time had some difficulties communicating. Yet after getting involved in your project, she has been totally changed and has developed communication skills. Today she gets along with her peers very well, openly expresses her mind, views and expectations when the opportunity presents itself. Apparently, participation in your project was extremely helpful for her to become so active and enthusiastic. Thanks to you all for working with adolescents and doing your best to develop them in the appropriate field". Ofeliya Aliyeva, mother of a participating journalist from Azerbaijan

LESSONS LEARNED

When implementing partners were asked what changes they would make if they were to implement this project again, a number of interesting suggestions were made. In their own

words, local partners from Internews Armenia, Internews Azerbaijan and Internews Georgia suggested the following:

“Increasing the number of summer camp participants from 6 to 10-12. The camp participants are selected from some 15 applicants through an open competition. Given that almost all of these 15 kids continue to work in the project in some capacity, increasing the number of those who participate in the camps would be helpful. Not having met their Azeri and Georgian peers, their cooperation is limited. Their participation in the summer camp would promote better cooperation.”

“More funds available for project promotion. The only thing that this program lacked was better promotion. Having sufficient funds would have made improved our ability to raise public awareness of the project, attracting more youth to take part in the project or watch the program.”

“More announcements of upcoming broadcasts or next week’s topics within other TV programs. It would raise public awareness of the project, familiarize young audience with the work of their peers, challenge audience members to get involved, or promote conflict resolution issues.”

FUTURE PLANS

In Spring of 2007, a consortium of our local implementation partners, Internews Armenia, Internews Azerbaijan and Internews Georgia, received additional funding from the British Government’s Global Conflict Prevention Pool to continue implementation of the Kids’ Crossroads project for another two years. This is an exciting opportunity to continue building on the strong base that USAID funds were able to establish. It is also recognition that the Kids’ Crossroads program and model is an effective tool for reaching the younger generation in the South Caucasus to facilitate dialogue, highlight commonality and establish precedents of ethnic cooperation.

As the program considers how it can increase its impact and build upon the significant market share and brand recognition, a variety of opportunities are now being piloted, and others considered. In some cases, the journalists have sought to expand beyond the medium of television to reach new audiences and build greater interest in their project. The Georgian team, for example, held a charity auction in May 2006 in order to raise funds for a local orphanage. In November the team worked to earn money for another children’s home with an intensive music program that badly needed support to repair its xylophone and purchase a television. Ultimately, the orphans expressed their gratitude by putting on a concert for the journalists.

The young journalists are now exploring a number of ways that they can reach out to currently under-served parts of the youth population. These include:

- tours to schools to lead discussions on a host of timely topics;
- speaking events to teach media literacy and discuss the media climate generally;
- teen-led workshops during school vacations to create new materials for the show;

- increased interactivity by creating a Russian or English language web site, offering translation, where young people from all three countries can make comments and read the opinions of others.

As the Kids' Crossroads project continues to improve its programming, reach broader audiences and help facilitate their multi-ethnic cooperation, Internews Network and our partners will keep USAID apprised of how the project develops and grows, building on the generous support that was extended through this cooperative agreement.