



## SUCCESS STORY

### Building capacity and cooperation among female entrepreneurs



Photo by REC

Representatives of the “ASIA” Association, ARGO and REC during the Astana Economic Forum. Astana, May 21, 2015



Photo by REC

Participants signed letters of intent to work together on a variety of ventures. Astana, May 22, 2015



Photo by REC

“ASIA” Association members during capacity building training. Almaty, June 5, 2015

*“We are very grateful to USAID’s REC Project for the support they provided to the “ASIA” Association, which allows us to promote women’s economic empowerment in the region. Business connections established by members of our association during various events will provide greater economic opportunities and long-lasting economic cooperation in the region”.*

*Gulnara Kushmurzina, Executive Director, Business Association of Women-Entrepreneurs “ASIA”*

Gender equality and female empowerment are core objectives for USAID, and fundamental to sustainable development in Central Asia. This is one reason USAID seeks to integrate gender programming into all of its activities.

A recent example of USAID’s commitment to this important goal took place in April 2015, when USAID through its Regional Economic Cooperation Project (REC) awarded a grant to the Business Association of Women-entrepreneurs “ASIA” (the “ASIA” Association), which comprises more than 40 women’s organizations from Central Asia and Afghanistan, including the Association of Business Women of Uzbekistan, the Union of Women Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan, the “Kodbonu” National Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Tajikistan, and the “KURAK” Women’s Forum of Kyrgyzstan.

REC assists the “ASIA” Association by helping build its capacity to expand economic opportunities and cooperation among female entrepreneurs in Central Asia and Afghanistan and to create economic linkages, which will ultimately contribute to female economic empowerment in the region.

On May 21-22, 2015, the “ASIA” Association held two sessions on gender policy and strengthening women’s economic cooperation in the region. The sessions were held in the framework of the Astana Economic Forum - a global annual forum of leading experts that brings together over 10,000 participants from 150 countries. Participants of these two sessions discussed current gender issues and opportunities and worked out practical recommendations on how to run businesses. They also received firsthand information on state and donor support for women’s entrepreneurship from representatives of the Kazakhstan Government, UNDP, Central Asian women’s organizations, and international donor organizations.

During the two-day event, participants established business contacts with fellow female entrepreneurs in Central Asia. As a result, participating members of the “ASIA” Association signed letters of intent totaling nearly \$100,000 to organize trainings, fairs, supply handicraft and art products, and provide informational support. A Kyrgyz member of the “ASIA” Association, the Steppe Learning company, signed several letters of intent with two Kazakh counterparts to organize and hold business trainings for their staff and members; a Tajik member, the Haft Paikar Fund, intends to sell its handicraft products to the Union of Women Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Women Forum “KURAK”; and a Kazakh member, the magazine “Women: East-West” plans to provide informational support to other members of the “ASIA” Association by

promoting them and arranging publicity for them through its magazine and partnering media outlets.

In addition, REC facilitated a partnership between the “ASIA” Association and the “ARGO” Civil Society Development Association, based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. As a result, REC and ARGO organized a three-day training from June 3-6, 2015 to build the capacity of twelve Central Asian members of the “ASIA” Association. The training topics included organizational development, finance, development of a membership base, marketing, and public relations. The skills and knowledge obtained at the capacity building sessions will contribute to the long-term sustainability of the “ASIA” Association and its members in Central Asia and Afghanistan.