



PRESS-RELEASE

CENTRAL ASIA INVEST PROGRAMME III

Uniting and Strengthening Community Based Tourism Associations in Central Asia

Provisional implementation dates: 01 January 2013 – 31 December 2015

Location: Tajikistan (national) and Kyrgyzstan (national)

Total Budget: 576,102 EUR - EU contribution: 489,687 EUR

Dushanbe, 28 January 2014 - The rugged beauty of Central Asia, with its snow-capped mountains and turquoise lakes, should be an ideal tourism hotspot for European adventurers. However, to date, the former Soviet republics have failed to maximise this opportunity to its full advantage. Community-based tourism (CBT) was first introduced in Kyrgyzstan in 1999, and the Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association (KCBTA) was established as an umbrella organisation for CBTAs in 2003, yet neighbouring Tajikistan is lagging behind in CBT development, despite its stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Sharing dominion over the beautiful cross-border Pamir region, there is a clear scope for coordination and cooperation between Tajik and Kyrgyz CBTAs, benefitting CBT-related enterprises and local communities on both sides of the border, as well as international tourists.

In the frame of the European Union funded Central Asia Invest programme III, the European Commission is partnering with ACTED on the project *Uniting and Strengthening Community Based Tourism Associations in Central Asia*, to develop and strengthen the capacity of Business Intermediary Organisations (BIO) to support SMEs in the community-based tourism (CBT) sector in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. By improving the basic management capacities of BIOs, and developing their sectoral knowledge, these organisations will be better able to support SMEs, and to stimulate the CBT sector. This will benefit not only tourists in search of off-the-beaten-track beauty and adventures, but will also develop the rural economies of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, creating local jobs and improving access to diversified incomes.

Along with partners ECEAT; KATO; TATO; and KCBTA, ACTED will establish a national umbrella organisation for CBTAs in Tajikistan, reinforcing the roles and competencies of these organisations, and encouraging them to act as one unit, giving them greater reach and influence, and enabling them to improve standards, through best practice and knowledge sharing initiatives. Furthermore, ACTED and its partners will develop the capacities of CBTAs in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, encouraging new community based tourism initiatives and establishing new economic activities, such as agro-tourism. In order to increase the quality, as well as quantity, of existing and newly developed CBT operators, training sessions will be organised on quality standards and how to comply with them, targeting local service providers including those working in accommodation and transport, and tour providers. Finally, the project will go on to create mechanisms for communication and coordination between Tajik and Kyrgyz CBTAs, increasing the capacities of these organisations to lobby for a better business climate for the development of CBT, and enabling them to provide a more holistic and high quality tourism service. A regional conference on tourism and rural development will be established, and joint Kyrgyz and Tajik packages and tours will be introduced, uniting CBTAs on both sides of the border.

This project will therefore benefit BIOs and SMEs, as well as rural communities, in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as community-based tourism enterprises develop in both quantity and quality, and opportunities for income generation thrive. As a result of this intervention, international tourists will have the opportunity to experience the unparalleled beauty of Central Asia, with the comfort of improved coordination, communication, and services provided by CBTAs.

A project implemented by:



7, Davstoesky Street
Dushanbe,
Republic of Tajikistan
Tel: (+992) 918 11 66 20
dushanbe@acted.org
<http://www.acted.org>



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Delegation of the European Union
To the Republic of Tajikistan

74 Adhamov Street
734013 Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan
Tel: (+992 37) 221 74 07, 227 10 24
Fax: (+992 37) 221 43 21
Delegation-Tajikistan-Pic@ec.europa.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/tajikistan/index_en.htm

The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders. To this end the EU is active in Tajikistan since 1992 and provides approximately EUR 25 million annually in development assistance.