

CHF-USAID Launch Five-Year Project

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In recognition of recent changes in Georgia's political environment, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has committed USD \$19 million to support a five-year development project designed to improve essential infrastructure services and generate income for a socially and economically empowered citizenry in Georgia.

This project has been created and managed by CHF International, one of the largest US-based development organizations and aims to stimulate economic activity through partnership between communities, the private sector, and local government representatives in more than 400 communities throughout Georgia.

On December 10, the USAID Mission Director and the CHF International Country Director arranged a press conference at the CHF International office in Tbilisi to announce the launch of this innovative project.

The project, called the Georgia Employment and Infrastructure Initiative (GEII), was launched in October 2004 and is expected to continue through September 2009.

It is funded by USAID and GEII staff members are working directly with communities to improve economic services and infrastructure, such as roads, potable water and irrigation systems, gas and electric systems, and public marketplaces. Coordinating closely with the private sector, local government and other development partners, communities are taking leadership roles and working to prioritize and implement *demand-driven* economic and social community projects that generate income and create long-term jobs for local citizens.

The harvest was disastrous this year in the village of Ivliita, in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The irrigation system had broken down and a lack of rainfall resulted in a huge loss of income for the farmers and their families. These eighty families, in partnership with CHF, are working together to repair the electric transformer and water pump in order to provide proper cultivation of their fields. Ivliita leaders establish that crop output will rise dramatically next year, yielding an extra 600 GEL for each family. Community leader Guram Gikoshvili said: "With the repaired irrigation system, we'll be able to better provide for our families with our work."

Denny Robertson, the director of the USAID Caucasus Mission, told journalists: "We'll see many other projects by CHF in Georgia, but this is the first time the program has been funded by USAID. CHF will be working at the community level, private sector and also with local government. We'll be working in two regions prominently: Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, because, not only do they share the same large scale economic development, but they are very important regions for ethnic relations. But most importantly, USAID is implementing modern equipment in the regions. We're working very closely with the central government and that is important for the regions for sharing economic fruits. I've been involved in this business for twenty years and have been impressed by CHF's work throughout the world - in Africa, in the former Soviet Union, etc. Their ability to build partnerships with Georgians will be appreciated."

Patrick Somerville, Country Director of CHF International, commented briefly about the organization and GEII program: "CHF was established in 1952. We are a nonprofit organization with headquarters in Silver Springs Maryland. CHF operates in over 30 countries around the world. CHF stands for Community Habitat and Finance. The key principles of this GEII project are: it's demand-driven nature - meaning that community priorities are reflected through the mutual choice of GEII partnering communities to work together. Further more, strong contributions and

motivation from the communities we work with are expected. The second principle of the project is its economic emphasis. The project focuses on creating jobs, promoting savings, and generating income for the long-term livelihood of communities with which we work. Finally, there is the importance of partnership. GEII will work intensively with 420 communities across Georgia and numerous partners from the government, the private sector and NGOs. Nearly 1,000 micro projects will be initiated by communities, which range in value from USD 3,000 to 25,000. These micro-projects are anticipated to benefit more than 300,000 people."

Hundreds of similar community projects will be completed by CHF International during the five-year GEII project. Offices have been established in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Telavi and Akhaltsikhe, and 20 community projects are already underway in six regions of the country. CHF International anticipates that the GEII project will help to advance regional stability and restore economic infrastructure in Georgian communities, providing citizens a chance to increase their incomes and create new, long-term jobs.