

USAID INSIGHT

LINC CRIMEAN INITIATIVE: OFF TO A QUICK START

Improvement in the well-being of citizens – the aspiration of any economic development activity – is the paramount goal of USAID’s new project, the Local Investment and National Competitiveness project (LINC). LINC will assist Ukrainian cities and regions to shape a strategic vision and move down the path to community sustainability by enhancing their economic competitiveness and thus creating more jobs and investment opportunities.

The LINC project kicked off in mid-April, and since then it has established itself in Crimea. The LINC Initiative consists of two components: improving the business enabling environment; and enhancing enterprise competitiveness. In Crimea the project aims to improve economic governance, pilot the development of a unified property registry, and undertake a competitiveness enterprise development program.

According to Howard Ockman, LINC’s Chief of Party, “the project will help to build communities whose economies possess competitive potential, and will create jobs and opportunities for years to come. That will mean that Crimea’s young people will stay where they were raised, cities will thrive, and Crimea will be a place with communities as rich as the culture and history of the peninsula itself.”

Since April, LINC has signed protocols of intention with six Crimean cities – Bakhchysaray, Bilohirsk, Feodosia, Kerch, Saky and

Scholhine, as well as Bakhchysaray and Bilohirsk raions – to assist them with the development and implementation of economic development strategies. The goal of these efforts is to make the cities and raions more competitive and appealing for investment, and thereby to ensure their sustainable economic development.

Based on a trilateral protocol signed in July 2009 between by USAID, Ukraine’s State Land Cadastre Centre and Crimea’s Land Resources Committee, the project began developing a pilot unified property registry in Crimea’s Bilohirsk raion. The registry is a single system of ownership rights registration that will provide a complete and accurate database of land plots and buildings, as well as their owners and users. When developed and implemented, the registry will strengthen not only the transparency of the Crimean property market, but also the Republic’s business-enabling environment, making it more attractive to investors.

A streamlined permitting system, in the form of one-stop shops, is also currently in process. LINC is lending a hand to Crimean raions in rendering their one-stop shops into effective units, where entrepreneurs will be able to obtain building permits efficiently and in a timely manner. LINC also plans to help Crimea increase competitiveness of its industries and individual enterprises, and with a focus on the tourism and agriculture sectors.

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USAID-Trained Doctor Helps Combat TB in Feodosia



Irina Alekseenko examines a smear sample for mycobacterium tuberculosis (Photo by V. Matyukhin)

Irina Alekseenko, a bacteriologist and an exemplary laboratory specialist, has been working as the head of the TB lab in Feodosia, Crimea, for 10 years. She vividly remembers the time when chest X-ray was the primary method for diagnosing tuberculosis (TB). Candidly sharing her opinion on the practice, she notes: “This method had questionable efficacy for TB case detection. In addition, resources associated with mass photo-fluorography were far from cost-effective.”

TB is one of the major public health problems in Ukraine today. With an estimated TB case rate of 106 cases per 100,000 people, Ukraine has the eighth highest rate of new TB cases in Europe and Eurasia. TB mortality in Ukraine is high too, with 10,000 Ukrainians dying of TB each year. Crimea is among the regions with the highest mortality rates, with alarming growth in TB-related mortality during recent years, at 24.5 TB deaths per 100,000 people in 2007, up from 14.4 deaths per 100,000 people in 1997. There has also been high growth in the number of new cases of TB during the past decade – from 38.2 new cases per 100,000 people in 1997, to 85.2 cases per 100,000 people in 2007.

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SIMFEROPOL MATERNITY HELPS SPREAD MODERN BIRTH PRACTICES IN CRIMEA

Dr. Oleh Tikholaz, the Head Physician of the Kerch Maternity Hospital, had always strongly believed in traditional Soviet birthing practices and so did not favor Ministry of Health adoption of maternal and child care protocols recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). "I was convinced that traditional maternity practices, including Rakhmanov beds, a husband-free environment in a delivery room and separate nurseries for newborns were the most correct practices to implement, and I was positive that this is the way it should be in every Ukrainian maternity. When I was invited to Simferopol Maternity Hospital #2 for a USAID-supported training course in evidence-based perinatal practices, I was dumbfounded by what I saw. Husbands and relatives were in delivery rooms while women were in labor; infants and mothers were together in the postpartum department; and there were no Rakhmanov beds; instead, women were choosing positions in which to deliver!"

During the training course, however, Dr. Tikholaz gradually began to realize that the ideas that had seemed outrageous at first were starting to make sense. He found especially interesting the story of a trainer from the hospital who had experienced a 180-degree shift in attitude, changing from a "non-believer" to a strong supporter of modern birthing technologies. By the end of the course, Dr. Tikholaz's attitude had changed completely, too. "Thanks to my colleagues in Simferopol, I understand the importance of these new practices. Now I'm certain that upon my return from training I will do my best to introduce these technologies in my maternity, and I will establish individual delivery rooms and throw away Rakhmanov beds."

Evidence-based perinatal care training is an important component of

USAID's Maternal and Infant Health Project, which has been working on reducing maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates in Ukraine since 2003. Simferopol Maternity Hospital # 2 was the first Crimean Maternity to participate in project activities. Today, five years later, the Simferopol facility successfully provides high quality perinatal care, serving as a training site to educate Crimean health professionals in new clinical guidelines. Since 2004, 650 health care providers (ob/gyns, neonatologists, midwives and nurses) have participated in training courses organized by the maternity.



Happy Together. A woman is warming her baby on her chest after the delivery with her husband (Photo: Oleksandr Golubov)

After five years of collaboration with the USAID project, the Simferopol Maternity has achieved measurable results in reducing unnecessary medical interventions during delivery. 89% of deliveries at Simferopol Maternity Hospital #2 are now classified as normal, compared to 32% in 2004. In addition, the use of postpartum anesthesia dropped from 9% in 2004 to 0.9% in 2008; the rate of episiotomy declined from 22% in 2004 to 1.5% in 2008; and the practice of companion deliveries increased from 17% in 2004 to 61% at the end of 2008. The maternity also

successfully reduced the rate of mother-to-child HIV transmission to less than 2% by making elective Caesarean section (C-Section) an option for HIV-positive women. (A scheduled C-Section, which takes place before labor and before the rupture of membranes, reduces exposure of the newborn to maternal blood as it moves through the birth canal).

Results have been seen, in fact, in all project supported facilities in Crimea. For example, effective implementation of warm chain technology, in which a baby is kept warm through either the mother's body heat or warm clothing covering the infant, helped to reduce

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Pushkino Residents Learn to Solve Local Issues through Public Hearing

Crimea often suffers from droughts, but in the case of the Vostochnyi Bulganak River, the drought is man-made. Local residents claim that the river didn't dry up naturally - businessmen from a nearby raion (district) built canals from the river to fill artificial lakes in order to service their private fish breeding business.

The Vostochnyi Bulganak runs through the Sovietsky and Kirovsky raions (districts) in the north-eastern part of Crimea. Local residents recall that five years ago, the flow of the river was so strong and noisy that it was difficult to fall asleep. Now, the riverbed often runs close to dry and is being overtaken by weeds and lizards. Consequently, water levels in the village are also extremely low - hardly sufficient to water even tomato sprouts, and cattle and poultry are also without water.

For approximately 2,000 Pushkino residents, the river is the source for life and well-being. "Can you imagine life in the village without water?" asked Muzafar Karauseinov, the head of the village council, in an interview with STB, a national television channel. "People here live from cattle-breeding and gardening, neither of which is possible without water," he said.

Local residents turned to USAID for assistance to solve this issue after failing to convince their local town council to place the issue on their agenda. Through a USAID project, implemented by the International Republican Institute and the Crimea-based Tatar Youth Center, citizens learned how to conduct a public hearing according to established legal procedures, which in turn, under Ukrainian law, requires that the issue be addressed at the next meeting of the local

council. When councils are not responsive to the needs of local citizens, public hearings are a way that people can force the local government to consider an issue.

After learning how to conduct such hearing, 155 citizens of Pushkino came together and forced the local council to place this item on their agenda. The council has since asked the Crimean Republic's Committee on Water Resources management to look into the issue. Additionally, an interdepartmental commission was established at the republic level which plans to require the fisheries to reverse their re-routing of the river. Citizens are now optimistic that the river will follow its natural boundaries. Local resident Galina Derkach in thanking USAID stated: "This public hearing was possible because of your support. Thank you for helping us protect our rights."

FAUNA NGOs HELPS SAVE BIRDS FROM AVIAN INFLUENZA

Although Avian Influenza (AI) has disappeared from the headlines, it remains a very real threat, particularly in Crimea, Ukraine, a poultry production region at the crossroads of bird migratory routes.

To raise awareness of the continuing potential threat of AI and motivate rural residents and poultry raisers to utilize safe poultry handling practices, USAID and partner organizations implemented several innovative activities. In 2009, for example, the *Rapid Response to Avian Influenza* project con-

ducted a small grant program for Crimean NGOs focused on educating communities about AI threats and encouraging improved poultry handling practices to protect households from AI.

district, an area at high risk of AI outbreaks. Based on local experience, the film told the story of how the residents of Zavet-Leninsky dealt with AI outbreaks in the village during 2006. The film demonstrated how to build wire coops to protect domestic birds from contact with wild birds and how to separate poultry from other animals to minimize the risk of AI infection.

The film also featured a local expert, the Director of the *Naturalist and Environmental Protection Center* Mykola Arsievych, who described how his team preserved the center's exotic birds during the outbreak. In an in-

terview, Mr. Arsievych explains: "By sticking to biosafety rules and practices, not a single bird perished in our park during the Avian Influenza outbreak in 2006." He emphasized how important it was to share these practices with others to increase preparedness for future outbreaks.

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The film and the TV program were broadcast by a local television channel, reaching as many as 30,000 residents of Dzhankoy district. Video materials were also provided to 52 village schools to allow over 15,000 school-children to watch this film before the autumn bird migration. Valentina Pyshkina, a teacher from Dzhankoy described the potential impact of this film, saying "Our schoolchildren are extremely active. In the past, they participated in a youth team competition on AI prevention. I'm sure that after watching



(upper left) Mira Sirotnina of the village Solnechnoye, Simferopol raion, is demonstrating proper poultry handling, which she has introduced after watching the documentary produced by Fauna NGO (Photo by Olena Shevchenko); (upper right) Mykolay Melnik and his son Andriy are reading flyers distributed by an AI mobile team as a part of the awareness campaign in their village of Prydi, Kirovskiy raion (Photo by Olena Shevchenko); (lower left) Director of the *Naturalist and Environmental Protection Center* Mykola Arsievych feeds the birds. By sticking to biosafety rules and practices, all birds have been saved in Center's park during Avian Influenza in 2006 (Photo by Vladimir Danilov)

terview, Mr. Arsievych explains: "By sticking to biosafety rules and practices, not a single bird perished in our park during the Avian Influenza outbreak in 2006." He emphasized how important it was to share these practices with others to increase preparedness for future outbreaks.

In the film, Mykola Bety, the head of the Zavet-Leninsky village council, recalled the situation back in 2006. "We were really frightened then. And though there have not been any cases registered for the last few years, we continue to remind residents about AI risks. The film produced by Fauna is based on our experience, which proved effective in real life situations. After the film, people

the film they will remind their parents and neighbors about AI and its risks."

Lyudmila Yatsishina, the head of the Dzhankoy district veterinary department, expressed deep gratitude to USAID and to Fauna for the film. "It's very timely indeed, as Avian Influenza is a real threat and it exists all the time," she stated. The USAID project was very helpful – in the past we worked together in mobile teams and trained our specialists in veterinary medicine. Now, we continue to promote awareness. Every year, more and more households are turning to safe poultry handling practices. And we, vet practitioners, are proud of our achievements."

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Fauna, a children's NGO working on ecological issues, was one of the grant awardees, proposing a *Public Awareness Campaign on Avian Influenza Prevention in the Sivash Area of Southern Crimea*. The NGO worked in close cooperation with veterinary and emergency services specialists and USAID implementing partner International Relief and Development Inc. to produce a short film and TV program which aimed to raise awareness of AI among the rural residents of Dzhankoy

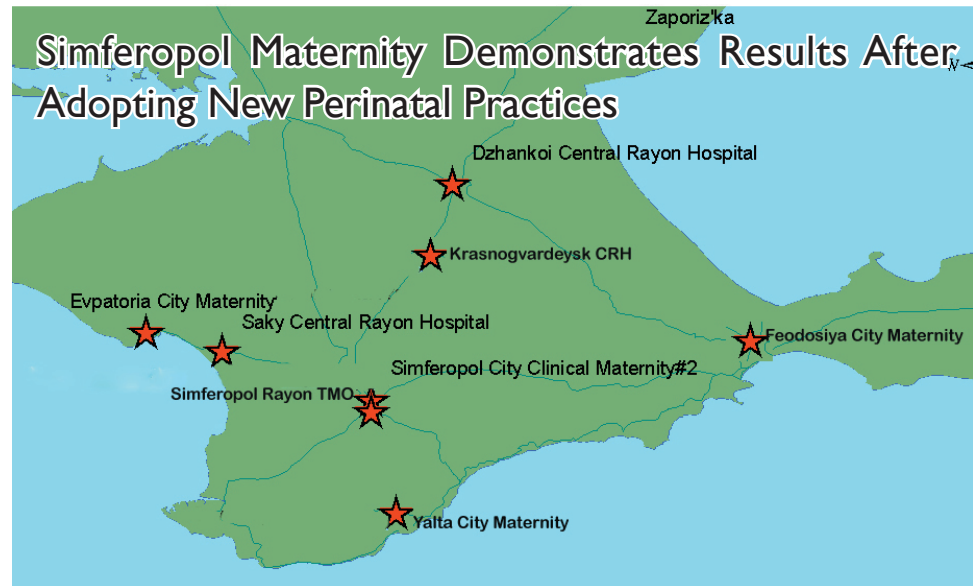
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LINC TO ENHANCE CRIMEA'S ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

→1 In an effort to introduce an industrial park model into Crimea (an area zoned and planned for the purpose of industrial development), LINC sponsored a study tour to the Czech Republic in July for a group of Crimean regional and local level officials. The experience of the Czech Republic in creating and operating industrial parks and attracting foreign direct investment was seen as particularly relevant to Crimea's prospects. As Sevastopol City State Administration Economy Department Head Elimdar Akhtemov told the on-line newspaper *Novy Sevastopol*, the group "had an opportunity to learn what our neighbor, the Czech Republic, has achieved. The country once had been in about the same unenviable plight as Ukraine, so for us it is extremely important to learn what it has done to rise to a modern economic level."

Following the study tour, representatives of the Crimean government and municipalities gathered in Dzhankoi to discuss the development of industrial parks as a strategic approach to creating favorable conditions for investment attraction in Crimea.



→2 hypothemia from 69% in 2004 to 1% in 2008. In addition, improved perinatal care contributed to improved delivery outcomes, with 2008 rates of maternal mortality in USAID project sites averaging 7.6%, compared to the national rate of 25.8%.

Since 2003, the USAID-supported Maternal and Infant Health (MIHP) Project has supported activities aimed at improving maternal and infant health care, particularly during the

perinatal period. In Crimea, the project currently works with 8 (of 22) maternities, 11 women's clinics and 15 pediatric polyclinics. These facilities support approximately 12,500 births, or 44% of the estimated 27,000 deliveries that occur in the Crimean Republic each year. To achieve sustainable implementation of evidence-based perinatal practices in Crimea, the project plans to cover facilities supporting 85% of all births in the region.

Feodosia Introduces Quality Control in TB Labs

→1 USAID has supported a TB control program in Ukraine since 2000. Its current project, *TB Control Partnerships in Ukraine*, covers 10 administrative areas, including Crimea, in an effort to assist the Government of Ukraine to implement international best TB prevention, diagnosis and control practices. High quality laboratory testing is very important for accurate TB diagnosis: therefore, USAID assistance in Crimea gives focus to strengthening laboratory quality control procedures for TB smear microscopy, culture and drug susceptibility testing. Development of skilled lab specialists is also essential to improving the detection both of new TB cases, as well as cases of drug resistant TB, which is growing rapidly in Ukraine.

When USAID-supported activities got underway in Crimea in 2005, Ms. Alekseenko participated in a course aimed at orienting laboratory specialists to international standards for laboratory diagnosis of TB. At the training course, she learned about smear microscopy testing and laboratory quality control procedures. Ms. Alekseenko observes that smear microscopy is one of the most effective methods available today for early diagnosis and confirmation of TB, commenting, "I learned that though an abnormality on a chest X-ray may lead a clinician to suspect TB, he or she cannot confirm whether a person has TB without laboratory confirmation."

Following her training, Ms. Alekseenko effectively applied her new knowledge and skills, reorganizing work processes at her laboratory to meet the standards recommended during training. With the assistance of the chief doctor of Feodosia City TB hospital # 2, she established areas for collecting sputum and showed staff how to prepare smears correctly and ensure reliable laboratory diagnostic results.

During a round table discussion in Feodosia, Ms. Alekseenko gave a speech on the progress achieved at her TB laboratory and showed a video on the innovations she had introduced. It was the first time she had made a presentation to a large audience, and she felt very nervous. "I was really anxious, as for the past 10 years I had never spoken in public. I work in the lab, and bacterium and microbes are my only listeners," she said half-jokingly. "But I liked the experience of my first presentation and started thinking about how to enhance my presentation skills."

Recognizing Ms. Alekseenko's aspiration for further training, USAID

implementing partner PATH invited her to serve as an assistant trainer during several TB microscopy testing and quality-control training courses conducted by bacteriologists who had completed an intensive training-of-trainers (TOT) program. During these courses, Ms. Alekseenko observed how efficiently her colleagues trained other laboratory specialists. Later on, she also participated in a TOT course, becoming acquainted with the challenges of adult learning and practicing how to use adult training methodologies.

As a member of the project training team, Ms. Alekseenko has already conducted multiple training courses for laboratory specialists in primary health care facilities in Feodosia. "Building the skills of doctors and laboratory specialists in primary health care is extremely important, as they are the 'first line resource' for a patient with any symptoms," explained Ms. Alekseenko. "Strengthening their knowledge and expertise leads to timely TB diagnosis and referral of a patient with a smear-positive result to a TB dispensary, which, in turn, helps break the epidemiological chain of the disease."

Thanks to USAID-supported TB training programs, Ms. Alekseenko has achieved two goals. First, she has significantly enhanced her presentation skills and become a qualified trainer who is now invited to train in other project oblasts such as Odessa, Kharkiv and Kherson. Second, with Ms. Alekseenko's assistance, Feodosia's laboratory specialists have all been trained in smear microscopy and quality smear microscopy practices have been established in all TB laboratories in primary health care facilities in Feodosia. Feodosia's laboratory specialists are now more confident in the results they produce. Overall, the improved quality of smear microscopy has had clear results, with the number of smear-positive cases detected in the city increasing tenfold, leading to considerable increases in numbers of patients referred to TB dispensaries.

Ms. Alekseenko stated optimistically, "I am grateful to the USAID project staff for the unique opportunity they provided me to become a trainer on internationally recommended strategies for TB diagnostics. The confidence which I've gained through the project helps me motivate other laboratory staff to perform quality work. I am sure that establishing an effective system of TB diagnosis will lead to successful control of the tuberculosis epidemic both in my city and in Ukraine as a whole."