



asia

## AFGHANISTAN: MULLAHS HELP PROMOTE CIVIL SOCIETY IN MESSAGES TO FOLLOWERS



MULLAH MAULAVI AMIN IS AMONG SEVERAL MULLAHS WHO HELP PROMOTE THE PRINCIPLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY TO FOLLOWERS THROUGH THE INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY, I-PACS.

**T**he mullahs agree: Traditions of civil society have long existed in Afghan culture, but under different names.

From the shura council of elders who resolve conflicts to the custom of aashar where community members unite for the common good during disasters or the harvest, notions of civil society are deeply rooted in traditional Afghan culture.

According to statements made by 26 religious leaders known as mullahs, over the course of 12 roundtable gatherings sponsored by the Creative Associates-implemented media component of the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS), led by Counterpart International.

To these mullahs, to successfully promote civil society, local and international actors need to ground their activities in local Afghan customs. In this way, misperceptions that civil society is a Western creation imposed by outside forces can be reconciled with Afghan traditions and Islamic law. It also allows misguided beliefs, such as the recent mistreatment of women, to be redirected

and the Koran's teachings on women reevaluated, as notions of civil rights are debated within the community through awareness raising efforts with media as partners.

The aim "is to develop a network of mullahs who will speak to their followers, either during Friday prayers or in schools about the value of civil society," said Halim Fidai, I-PACS' media and communications program coordinator. "The ultimate goal is to give people a voice on issues affecting their lives."

Maulavi Mahmadullah Amin, 33, is a mullah at the Ghous-ul-Azam Dastageer Congregational Mosque in Kabul City. He attended the first of the monthly I-PACS roundtables organized on the "Ulema's Perceptions of Civil Society and their Role in its Development." The ulema are the learned elders of the Muslim religion.

As a result of the I-PACS roundtables, Amin recently gave a 45-minute speech to highlight the concepts, values and role of civil society to nearly 500 followers at his mosque. "In civil society, the spirit of

## CREATIVE ESTABLISHES EDUCATION MINISTRY'S FIRST HR SYSTEM

**O**n a typical school day in villages across Afghanistan, school children eagerly await their teacher. But in some school rooms, children wait in vain, because their teacher does not show up on a regular basis, or ever.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) calls this a phenomenon of "ghost teachers"—teachers who continue to receive a salary even if they don't work—because the MOE's old human resource system relies on manual inputs and fails to effectively track teachers' attendance.

But that's changing thanks to the Building Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) project, implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, BESST is helping to rebuild Afghanistan's tattered education infrastructure including the establishment of systems to track teachers and standards to assess teacher and ministry staff credentials.

BESST, a five-year project, is scheduled to end in 2011.

Currently, the Ministry of Education has an estimated 200,000 employees. Staff salaries take up 90 percent of the education budget and this number includes many "ghost teachers" who are on the payroll but may have stopped teaching, yet still collect payment or somehow allow their salary payments to be delivered to someone else.

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washington, dc

# ‘ELECTIONS AT RISK’ – CREATIVE PANEL URGES PREPAREDNESS FOR ELECTIONS IN CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS



PHOTO BY: LAZARINA TODOROVA

CREATIVE PRESIDENT AND CEO, M. CHARITO KRUVANT, CONCLUDES CREATIVE’S ELECTIONS AT RISK PANEL. LEFT TO RIGHT ARE ELECTIONS EXPERTS, STEPHEN ANDERTON, JARRETT BLANC AND JEFF FISCHER

Creative Associates International, Inc. recently hosted “Elections at Risk,” a panel discussion that benefited from the insights of three experts – Jeff Fischer, Jarrett Blanc and Stephen Anderton – who revealed the latest findings on how the international community can – by ensuring security – help assure successful elections in conflict and post-conflict environments.

“Elections at Risk” was a joint undertaking by the Creative Center for Security and Stabilization (C2S2) and ArmorGroup International, a security firm. With increasing recognition that development often takes place in environments compromised by conflict, Creative founded C2S2 to advance policy on the correlation between security and development.

As a new initiative, C2S2 seeks to identify critical intersections of the development and security nexus to better design and implement development activities worldwide. Because elections are considered to be a policy instrument to address conflict, C2S2’s April 4th event sought to delineate how the military, civilians and international experts can collaborate to create safe environments, where emerging democracies can elect new and legitimate leadership.

Held at Creative’s headquarters, “Elections at Risk” was moderated by Professor John Stuart Blackton, Senior Advisor to C2S2.

Calling “Elections at Risk” a “timely” topic, Blanc, an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said that the dynamics of elections and insecurity begs the question: How might elections effect the overall security environment?

All three experts agreed that incentives – political, developmental and financial – can play a key role in mitigating unwanted responses to holding free and fair elections in societies emerging from conflict. But according to Blanc – some situations require “overwhelming military force” such as in Afghanistan, which has a disconnect between warring factions and the electoral process. Military intervention in such instances can give policy makers a range of options as to where, when and how elections can take place. Otherwise “more limited military interventions can limit this range,” said Blanc, who is currently researching elections conducted during civil conflict.

Fischer, who is Team Leader for Elections and Political Processes at Creative Associates, cautions: “As forces demobilize, how

do we determine who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, and how do we segregate the groups?”

Citing Haiti, Fischer noted, “those loyal to Duvalier were prevented from contesting elections for 10 years after he was ousted.” He added that “punitive actions must be backed up by an institution so as to validate the exclusion.”

To Blanc, there are different kinds of insecure environments which might cause electoral violence. They include ongoing conflict such as civil war, incipient and post-conflict states and failure of the rule of law.

Blanc referred to Lebanon as a post-conflict state and believes that “elections there will probably force a return to civil war,” largely due to shortfalls in the power sharing arrangement. [The Taif Accord ended Lebanon’s 15-year civil and international war.] For elections to occur, international actors must consider the power-sharing arrangements Lebanon’s political structure is based on, along with existing political leverage that would allow for the stabilization of the causes of insecurity. “There is still a need to mediate power

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sharing between different political forces,” Blanc added.

While the typology for carrying out elections in difficult environments is still evolving, Fischer advised international actors to methodically examine electoral threats. Prior to planning an election, an assessment of the situation is needed so that an appropriate response to potential violence can be put in place.

As a security specialist, Anderton echoed Fischer’s advice for prior analyses of sources of threats, and underscored the need for “the management of security,” to respond to these threats. Anderton is director of projects at ArmorGroup, where he leads the coordination and development of the company’s capability in Security Sector Reform and Management. He noted that “security planning needs to be developed as part of the whole election plan.” “Assessments of risk and vulnerability

enable security elements to coordinate responsibilities and to define the roles of state, security and international actors,” Anderton said. “Planning will require establishing processes and procedures to include joint operation centers with security officers who are neutral and respect the rule of law.”

Also essential, Anderton said, is the training and mentoring of local security forces, especially where there is a history of the use of force, to ensure that the election environment is free of intimidation. Helpful tactics include establishing leadership and an understanding of the local culture – this inclusive process also allows for cooperation with NGOs, women’s groups, traditional structures and helps to establish legitimacy. Pointing to the elections in Basra, Iraq as a successful example of this strategy, Anderton described how international actors conducted security risks analysis prior to elections and were

then able to advise police on the kinds of security needed at ballot stations.

Since all three experts agreed that planning timelines for elections are significant to their success, moderator Professor Blackton asked: “When elections are expected to be dicey what is a good time-frame for foreign entities to contract for security advice?”

Fischer responded saying “the earlier the planning begins for an intervention, the better, as it allows for precise allocation of resources and the planning of the entire scope of the intervention.”

Anderton noted that in Iraq it took 18 months of preparation and that an approximate time frame for planning can range from 12 to 24 months.

–Alexandra Pratt



## CREATIVE’S ELECTIONS EXPERT TO SUPPORT HIGH ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF IRAQ

Creative’s Jeff Fischer will support the efforts of the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) Office of Electoral Assistance to help nine new appointees to the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC) manage elections over the next five years.

JEFF FISCHER, CREATIVE’S ELECTIONS & POLITICAL PROCESSES TEAM LEADER ADDRESSES ELECTION THREATS IN CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS.



The orientation will present IHEC members with the principles of elections and electoral administration to support their duties to prepare, conduct and oversee the elections in accordance with the Iraqi legal framework and international elections standards.

The commissioners also will be presented with various case studies requiring crucial decisions to provide them with an understanding of the operational requirements associated with conducting voter registration and polling and a clear understanding of the different roles assumed by the board and the electoral administration. Focus will be on the board’s operational and administrative role and likely decisions it may confront given the management and structural issues faced during the 2005 elections.

Case studies from other electoral commissions in the region, including the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC) and the Supreme Electoral Commission of Yemen will also be examined to identify potential challenges and lessons learned that may apply to Iraq.

Fischer, who is Creative’s Team Leader for Elections and Political Processes, will lead

a session on Defining the Iraqi Electorate. Identifying the Iraqi electorate is expected to present a particular set of challenges to the IHEC, as many Iraqis lack legal documentation, and many others now live outside the country. In short, the question of who can vote, or how to identify who can vote, will loom large in the country’s future elections.

With assistance from international electoral experts such as Fischer, UNAMI’s Office of Electoral Assistance, along with its Capacity Building Team, will host the 7-day orientation workshop for the commissioners, in New Delhi, India, hosted by the Election Commission of India.

Fischer also will discuss the mechanisms and planning needs that facilitate elections in conflict-ridden environments such as election security and planning, a topic that is being advanced by the Creative Center for Security and Stabilization, known as C2S2. It seeks to help bridge the gap in development between security and civil society. Fischer also will speak on the costs of elections.

–Alexandra Pratt

PHOTO BY: LAZARINA TODOROVA



## AFGHANISTAN: MULLAHS HELP PROMOTE CIVIL SOCIETY IN MESSAGES TO FOLLOWERS

cooperation among the citizens, volunteerism and understanding of the rights, roles and responsibilities are the axes of building partnerships for achieving a shared goal. [This] is the key to the development of Afghanistan,” Amin told the congregation.

Though in agreement with the broad values of civil society, Amin and other mullahs, relayed their concerns that the laws of Sharia and Afghan traditions could be undermined by Western notions of government.

According to Fidai, the mullahs’ view is that a key difference between Afghan society and Western democracy is that the source of law is the people.

In Islam, the source of law is divine revelation. For the mullahs, democracy and newly emerging social concepts including gender and civil society, should be treated from an Islamic point of view and defined within the Afghan and Islamic context. For instance, the mullahs agreed that while women should be treated equitably, women and men are by nature not the same. And they noted that social justice should be the goal of civil society building, instead of equality.

“Nothing in our religion is contradictory with the fundamentals of civil society. Therefore, it [Islamic law] is an opportunity to promote civil society through Islamic teachings,” said Maulavi Ghulam Serwar Manzoor, a mullah from Balkh, situated in the north of Afghanistan and one of the country’s 34 provinces.

During the roundtables the mullahs identified specific principles and values from Islamic teachings that apply to civil society. They cited cooperation, mutual support, respect, and trust as central to Islam and democratic values along with human rights. All participants agreed that mullahs, who reach every village of the country, can play a significant role in spreading civil society concepts and fostering dialogue among their followers.

Amin plans to continue disseminating the concepts and values he has learned through the roundtable discussions. “I am committed to deliver more sessions on civil society to my followers at least once a month to increase their awareness about their rights and responsibilities of citizens towards each other and their society,” he said.

Creative’s I-PACS media outreach awareness campaigns aim to improve the role and visibility of civil society in Afghanistan. Creative supports all aspects of design and implementation of I-PACS media and public outreach programming.

A three-year project scheduled to end in 2008, I-PACS is made possible by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

— Alexandra Pratt with assistance from Kim Clark

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## CREATIVE ESTABLISHES EDUCATION MINISTRY’S FIRST HR SYSTEM



BESST’S SABIR HAZRATZAI PRESENTS A NEW HUMAN RESOURCES DATABASE TO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION STAFF.

PHOTO BY: BESST TEAM

The Ministry of Education cannot manage its teachers and personnel under a manual system, says Sabir Hazratzai, BESST’s technical assistant and designer of the new human resource database which he presented to MOE senior staff in early May. “Now, the HR department will be able to solve the issue of the ghost employee, computerize the payroll system, create an account of goods, and create a budget and expenditure system,” Hazratzai said.

The new MOE database will also complement the human resources process for recruiting teachers designed by BESST’s Deputy Chief of Party, Sara Amiryar. Like the new database, the new HR recruitment process is a significant achievement given that there was no system in place when Amiryar started and many teaching positions were filled through favors or bribes, rather than a system of selection based on merit.

“There should be a structure, departments, a way to determine how many positions to fill, a system for screen-

ing applications,” Amiryar said. There should be a committee to interview, also terms of reference, a scope of work, probationary period, yearly evaluations and merit increases.”

Since designing the ministry’s HR procedures, Amiryar has also provided management training to the provincial education directors of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces and school principals, all of whom were hired in a transparent recruitment process. Amiryar’s management training addresses duties and responsibilities and job performance factors, such as having knowledge of the ministry’s rules and regulations, a capacity to communicate meaningfully with all members of the school administration and community, gather information and analyze data.

“Our HR system and database will be the first system in the ministry’s history. There is no data manipulation at all,” Amiryar said.

—Alexandra Pratt with assistance from BESST staff in Kabul.



africa

# MOROCCO: CREATIVE PILOT PROJECT ENABLES TRANSPARENCY, STUDENT RETENTION EFFORTS

PHOTO BY: CREATIVE ASSOCIATES



*“The NEA is a tool that’s important since Creative always tries to build capacity in everything that it does...”*

**Phyllis Forbes**  
Senior Associate  
NEA Project

WITH THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ACCOUNT, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CAN TRACK HUMAN RESOURCES AND STUDENT RETENTION.

Morocco’s education system has become more transparent through the efforts of a Creative Associates’ pilot project that enables Ministry of Education officials to collect hard data to address urgent challenges.

“From a pilot project, a national institutionalization process was born, said Creative Senior Associate, Phyllis Forbes, who directed the NEA project.

The pilot project, known as the Morocco National Education Account (NEA), implemented by Creative and Abt Associates, was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development through the Basic Education Policy Support (BEPS) activity.

The NEA produced hard data on how the Morocco MOE’s resources flow through the system to enable officials to meet the country’s education objectives.

The efforts also reinforce the fundamental idea that local ownership is key to sustainability – a core tenet of Creative’s approach to project implementation. The NEA was created through a strong collaboration with Moroccan technical experts who worked with the international technical team. The Morocco team also developed the database which was critical to NEA findings and data analysis.

“The NEA is a tool that’s important since Creative always tries to build capacity in everything that it does,” Forbes said. “The Moroccan NEA required the active participation of the ministry of education so that they may know how to use the tool for the future.”

Launched in July 2004, the NEA’s results were presented last March to 200 stakeholders including senior MOE officials, donors, diplomats and the U.S. Ambassador. Completed in February 2006, the NEA provides data on the public, private, donor and household contributions to education and how these funds are used and indicate whether they are meeting Morocco’s targets for education reform.

For instance, since launching its reforms in 1999, the Morocco MOE identifies quality objectives for each school year. At the time of the NEA, the issue of student retention was a priority.

According to NEA findings, the poorest and mostly rural families spend 70 percent of their non-food income on educating their children. Of this ratio, 40 percent accounts for transportation costs to and from school. In urban areas, however, household resources were used for tuition, books and tutors. Not only did these findings indicate the disparities between rural and urban actualities, but also strongly

suggested that failures of retention could be the result of the high cost of education to parents.

“This flows into policy making. We expect that the issue of the high cost to parents of putting their children in classrooms will have to be addressed to meet retention rate targets,” Forbes said.

The NEA’s conclusions were derived from 12 surveys. Of these, three were primary surveys and the rest existing surveys. Thanks to the relational database set up by the Morocco team, the older surveys were able to yield new information. The use of a relational database for the NEA was particularly innovative because it allowed cross-checking of data; matrices also could be expanded for more detail and measurement of variables.

Another impact important to Creative’s philosophy is that such a framework opens the channels to participation. “To influence government decisions, people need to participate, but to do that people need the tools to understand what their systems are doing –if they don’t have this information, they can’t influence. National Education Accounts have provided that kind of information to constituents and ministries,” Forbes said.

— Alexandra Pratt



# ALBANIA: CREATIVE EFFORTS HELP PREVENT RE-TRAFFICKING OF VICTIMS

PHOTO BY: ALEXANDRA PRATT



SERIJE PEPA, SHELTER COUNSELOR, STANDS BEFORE ARTS AND CRAFTS MADE BY D&E'S TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS.

**A**t the D&E shelter, known as Different & Equal, a 15-year-old trafficking victim is provided with a personal counselor, who helps ensure her reintegration into society through a tried and true strategy that builds trust and allows for healthy human interaction.

One of D&E's residents, who we'll call Filipa to protect her real identity, is considered among the more fortunate because she managed to find her way to D&E, Tirana's only long-term shelter for trafficked victims. On this day, Filipa is beaming as she has just registered for seventh-grade to finish her basic education.

For long-term results, survivors, like Filipa, are encouraged to resume their studies and learn vocational skills, so that they may one day be gainfully employed.

D&E began with the assistance of The Albanian Initiative: Coordinated Action Against Human Trafficking (CAAHT), a Creative Associates-implemented project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"The CAAHT staff is particularly glad to have been able to support D&E in becoming

an independent and locally managed NGO." says Sarah Stephens, CAAHT Chief of Party. "The heart of anti-trafficking work lies in what they do – restoring the well-being of the women and children who are the victims of this horrendous crime."

CAAHT is working to eradicate trafficking through activities that include awareness raising, rehabilitation and reintegration services to ensure that formerly trafficked victims are not re-trafficked. CAAHT also provides NGOs with technical expertise to improve the management of their organizations for their long-term viability. D&E is one among 22 CAAHT-supported grantees across Albania.

"Reintegration is very difficult. There is some re-trafficking," said Serije Pepa, a D&E social worker who counsels the shelter's residents. The threats of being re-trafficked are also a pervasive problem.

No one knows the exact number of victims who are re-trafficked. But stories told to counselors and police by victims reveal that those who have no support system when they return to Albania are highly vulnerable to falling prey, again, to traffickers' ploys. The existence of a

shelter like D&E, which provides a safe haven for victims, can be a significant deterrent to incidents of re-trafficking.

D&E's reintegration process involves three phases. First, a client is stabilized and undergoes intense counseling. Her psychological and emotional states and level of education and skills are assessed and a plan for her recovery developed. Vocational training and education are provided along with recreational activities. D&E offers hairdressing, tailoring, cooking, computer and other classes. When possible, minors are enrolled in the formal school system, while those over the age of 18 are provided with distance-learning education.

Trafficking victims who are illiterate are tutored by one of the shelter's teachers, so that they may gain basic literacy in reading and writing.

"Each case is different and so we must mold our techniques to each one," said Amarielda Nakuci, a D&E social worker who works directly with shelter residents. "When they arrive at the shelter, they are pessimistic, they think everything is over. Most have sexually transmitted diseases and are also emotionally abused. They have poor speech, they are very confused. They're dependent and act on others' decisions."

Like many trafficking victims, Filipa was unaware of the tactics that traffickers used on girls like herself.

"I didn't know they were traffickers," said Filipa. "We have been neighbors and I didn't know what they did, I didn't see them very often. They behaved politely." Filipa looks to Pepa, who is also her D&E counselor, for reassurance. Pepa gently pushes back Filipa's hair and asks what she likes best about the shelter. "Going to the beach, of course," Filipa says, laughing.

After her father's death when she was 14, life at home with her mother and an older domineering brother became unbearable. Filipa ran away and spent a few weeks living with a friend. She then met two former neighbors who promised to take her to Greece to join a cousin who was living there. During the journey, the two men raped her and forced her to work as a prostitute in Greece.

“When asked what they want to talk about, the clients often want to talk about family, abuse, rape and most importantly, they want to know why they had to live through such an experience, why it happened to them,” said Pepa, adding that the stories are “horrible.”

Clients are referred to D&E by other shelters which lack long-term facilities or by the police. D&E employs six social workers, two teachers, a psychiatrist, a driver, administrative assistant, job facilitator and a doctor who is on call. Each social worker works three day-shifts and one night shift.

In their first 24 hours at the shelter, clients are stabilized – provided with a meal and a shower. Many have spent several days being transferred from immigration officials to the border police and finally to the anti-trafficking police and have not had a proper meal or a chance to wash themselves.

In Filipa’s case, she was first held by the Greek police and transferred to various authorities until reaching the Albanian anti-trafficking police which sent her to D&E. In general, victims are referred to D&E by the police, other temporary shelters and some-

times religious organizations which take in victims. CAAHT helped gather organizations that work in anti-trafficking so they could share their expertise, and also form a network that channels trafficking victims to the appropriate social services agency in the network.

Arriving at the shelter is only the beginning of the long journey victims face in rebuilding new lives.

“It’s a long process to independence, clients have to learn how to manage finances, communicate, basic housekeeping,” said Pepa. “If I think of it, my daughter is 14 – she doesn’t know anything. She doesn’t cook, manage her finances, why should these girls – because they are very young also.”

On average, a client’s first phase of reintegration takes six months to a year, although minors such as Filipa can remain in the care of D&E at its shelter until they reach 18. In phase two of the reintegration process, clients are helped in finding jobs and are coached about the interviewing process and their employers’ expectations of them.

In the second phase, a client moves to D&E’s halfway apartments and lives there for a year, maintaining daily contact with shelter staff. Outsiders, even family members, are not permitted in the apartments and clients must be in by 11 p.m.

After one year in the halfway apartment, a client must find her own apartment that is subsidized by the shelter for the first three months and then she is on her own.

Reintegrated clients sometimes maintain contact with shelter staff members who become like family.

“But we [D&E social workers] discuss how to greet clients who have left the shelter. We have decided that if we run into them, we don’t initiate contact but let them do so,” Nakuci explains. “I had a case. She is now at the Faculty of Social Work. I sometimes see her, we do not talk, she chooses not to, but I think we both feel good about her progress. She is a successful case.”

Asked what she now fears most, Filipa laughs again and answers, “I fear only God.”

– Alexandra Pratt



## GUATEMALA: ‘CHALLENGE 100’ GIVES EX-GANG MEMBERS A FRESH START

Through the Youth Alliance Program, implemented by Creative Associates and funded in part, by the U.S. Agency for International Development, at-risk youth are provided opportunities to get jobs and second chances.

Challenge 100 – Peace for Guatemala is the Youth Alliance Program’s latest effort; it matches 100 former gang members with local businesses for on-the-job training and employment. The Youth Alliance Program’s efforts are supported by partnerships with faith-based organizations, community councils and local businesses. Creative Associates, through Challenge 100, has built an alliance with the Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras (CACIF), an umbrella organization for 9 associations of private business to offer jobs to both young men and women former gang members.

The following is 26-year old Hector Gabriel Rovolorio’s story. It illustrates how quickly

life can degenerate for youths without guidance or outlets. Hector’s story is, ultimately, a success story, but he is one among thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, in need of an opportunity such as that provided by Challenge 100, where opportunity complements responsibility for self, commitment and a drive to build a better life.

### Hector’s Story

For then 15-year old Hector Gabriel Rovolorio computer games and soccer provided a break from his father’s violent drinking bouts. “I used to leave the house to forget what was going on there. I was sitting at a corner, doing nothing with a bunch of friends. But, we were a group of kids who only spent the time playing ball, to pass the time and that’s when it all started,” said Hector.

His involvement with gangs began after a fight at a soccer match. Though Hector

and teammates fled, a teammate was attacked a few days later by a rival, leaving him hospitalized for two weeks.

Hector and teammates avenged their friend against two rivals with bottles and machetes. Afterward, we were “terrified by what we had just done, but at the same time with a feeling of power and joy to have taken revenge for what they had done to our friend,” Hector recalled.

Retaliation came soon at a disco. Hector and his mates ran, except for their friend, Willy, who died in a pool of blood. For protection, a search for weapons ensued. Someone suggested that they borrow weapons from an offshoot group of the 18th Street gang in the Villa Nueva neighborhood.

“A tattooed guy showed up, looked at us and said ‘We can give them [weapons] all to you, but you have to join us if you want this. We can help you to stay alive’. We

**CHALLENGE 100 helps young ex-gang members with the will to change and reintegrate into society.**



PHOTO BY: YOUTH ALLIANCE PROJECT TEAM

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A FORMER GANG MEMBER SPEAKS TO MEDIA DURING THE LAUNCH OF CHALLENGE 100.

were anxious to get these weapons, but terrified [that] we had been invited to join 18 Street,” said Hector, as he recalled his entry into gang life.

By age 16, Hector belonged to the 18th Street gang called the SPL from Mezquitital. Along came drug use, unspeakable criminal acts, and tattoos – the symbols of gang life. “We were no longer the same people,” Hector said. “We were now the youngsters that everyone feared and we started to commit crimes. People would lock themselves up when they would hear us coming. It turned out to be not just a struggle for one soccer game, but became a struggle to live or die. You kill or you die.”

Lost in gang life, Hector’s father now feared his son’s violent ways; his sisters and parents watched as he sank deeper into gang activities. Meanwhile, SPL was growing in gang stature.

Gang mates told Hector he was getting soft. He had to prove himself, but was slowly coming around to realizing that gang life was a dead end.

“I felt pressured. I no longer wanted to do anything bad, I wanted to change, but I would have to die – if I decided to change,” Hector said. He was given an order to kill members of Mara Salvatrucha

to prove himself. During a shootout, Hector was arrested and spent 10 days in jail.

Then he met a young woman who taught him to pray. “As we were praying, I felt my body heat up from head to toe. I closed my eyes and soon I was crying for my lost years since I was 15.”

The next day, Hector left the gang. He would face assassination attempts for leaving but he persevered. Still, opportunities to find a job and reintegrate into society proved difficult. Few employers trusted him as a former gang member and former gang associates wouldn’t stop trying to kill him.

He soon learned about Challenge 100.

Challenge 100 helps young ex-gang members with the will to change and reintegrate into society.

“I was not fully convinced,” Hector said. “I knew of other organizations that claimed to help ex-gang members, but they only led them to their deaths. Gangs would hide behind these organizations to collect names, addresses and other information. Later they would go to these ex-gang members’ houses to get them.”

After a series of tests, the Challenge 100 team gathered Hector and other gang

members in a meeting. Looking across the room, Hector recognized the faces of rival gang members.

“I thought that these guys could kill me, but then I think they probably thought the same of me. We kept looking at each other without speaking,” Hector said.

Out of that meeting came opportunities. “We wanted to show society that they had been wrong about us, and that we would not end up dying with bullet holes in our chest, with people looking and saying that it was time that they got rid of us,” Hector said.

“God opened doors for many of us,” Hector said. “Many businesses in Guatemala wanted to give us a chance, an opportunity to work. Through Challenge 100, I have a job that I like, working with computers. I feel a part of society. I know that I am a citizen. I pay taxes. I contribute to expenses in my house and I don’t think about the past. Thanks to the Youth Alliance Program that believed in us and helped us the way no one had ever done before – to change our lives.”

—Alexandra Pratt, reporting by Juan Jose Hernandez in Guatemala, translation by Marie-Helene P. Bricknell.



# LIBERIA: ACCELERATED LEARNING CLASSES DRAW STUDENTS OF ALL AGES

For Liberian youth now coming of age, the journey from childhood to young adulthood has been measurably bleak – as many as 70 per cent of youth are former combatants and many have had little to no access to gaining basic literacy. And since nearly 50 percent of the country is below the age of 20, revitalizing the country means giving its youth a second chance.

Through implementation of the Accelerated Learning Program Plus (ALPP), Liberian youth are finding hope for a better future. ALPP is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc.

ALPP's youth component serves youths and young adults aged 15 to 35 years old in six of the country's 15 counties and enables participants to acquire basic primary education plus life skills training in three years.

Without ALPP, basic elementary education would take six years. Also, since many students are overage, they would also face the embarrassment of learning to read and write in classes with children six, seven and eight years old.

"I am 18 years old now and with a daughter who is three. Six years is too long for me to stay in school, and who will take

care of my baby, if I don't work and have to go to school in the morning. If we have night school here, my mother will help me," said Mamie, an ALPP student at the Morris's Farm Public School.

The program is also helping youth feel a sense of belonging; it addresses various needs of a community once shunned by society because of its roles as combatants in the civil war. ALPP is providing youth with a curriculum that includes topics such as community involvement, HIV/AIDS awareness, conflict transformation, rule of law, women's rights, reproductive health, childcare and civic education. With these new concepts added to the curriculum, ALPP's aim is to arm Liberia's future leaders with solid civic values that will help sustain the peace.

Even more, completion of the ALPP course permits these previously disenfranchised youth to sit for the West Africa Education Certificate (WAEC), opening doors to jobs, vocational training and other formal education opportunities.

ALPP's beneficiaries extend even to the older generations. ALPP Youth organizers were inspired when the 55-year old Chief of Dekergar town, John Qussie, who reads and writes in the local Bassa language, expressed his strong interest in becoming a student of the ALPP Youth program, so

that he can learn English. Chief Qussie's interest in education exemplified to the community that learning is for everyone, regardless of status or age. Qussie's enrollment into the ALPP has motivated other older people like 56-year-old Charles Martin as well as the youth of his community to join the course. Youth who felt they were too old to learn saw the older folks as role models and have helped the program meet its target number for enrollment in the Dekegar Community.

According to ALPP staff, the genuine enthusiasm for ALPP classes indicates that Liberians are regaining hope that the future is worth preparing for. The Banjor community has already started the program without waiting for ALPP's implementing partner to launch activities. "We will start even before you are ready, because we don't want the momentum to die!" said Joshua Kamanda, vice principal for the Banjor school administration.

In collaboration with the ministry of education, ALPP also supports learning resource centers in five of the six counties where it is active. And there are plans to open another learning resource center in a sixth county. Recently the centers received donated computers.

"We are glad to be able to provide these 75 desktop computers to ALPP for use in the six county Learning Resource Centers," noted Hon. James Roberts, Deputy Minister for Planning at the Ministry of Education. The computers were donated to the MOE by a group of Liberians in America who call themselves the Liberia Development Fund.

—Princetta Varmah, ALPP staff in Liberia and Alexandra Pratt



PHOTO BY: ALPP

CREATIVE'S ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM PLUS IS HELPING LIBERIANS OF ALL AGES.

*The program is also helping youth feel a sense of belonging; it addresses various needs of a community once shunned by a society because of its roles as combatants in the civil war.*



**Creative's President and CEO, M. Charito Kruvant met First Lady Laura Bush** at the Community Foundation of the National Capital Region's Celebration of Civic Spirit, held at the Ronald Reagan Center in Washington, D.C. on April 24.

Mrs. Kruvant was among those who honored Mrs. Bush for her dedication to education, literacy, women's health and wellness and for her efforts through the Laura Bush Foundation in helping restore libraries in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Mrs. Kruvant is chairwoman of the board of trustees of the Community Foundation, whose common goal is to make the Washington region a better place to live, work and play. It works with donors, nonprofits, other foundations, businesses and community leaders to create a permanent source of philanthropic capital.

The event also commemorated the Linowes Leadership Awards Program – named for R. Robert Linowes, emeritus board member and former chairman of The Community Foundation – which recognizes the efforts of unsung heroes working to improve communities throughout the metropolitan area and to encourage others to follow their example.

In May, the Small Business Administration Washington District Office honored Mrs. Kruvant with the District Director's Award for her dedication to the SBA and entrepreneurs.

The May issue of **The Washington Diplomat** features Mrs. Kruvant and her dedication through Creative Associates to restoring educational opportunities for children and youths in conflict and post-conflict countries. The story about Creative was published in the education section. To view this feature visit: [www.washdiplomat.com](http://www.washdiplomat.com).

**Creative's Senior Strategic Advisor, Professor John Stuart Blackton**, was re-elected in May to the Executive Committee of the International Peace Operations Association (IPOA). Professor Blackton has been a member of the IPOA board of directors since 2005.

Creative's corporate engagement with the International Peace Operations Association is an outgrowth of its Center for Security and Stabilization, also known as C2S2. This initiative seeks to identify critical intersections of the development and security nexus, in order to more effectively design and implement development activities worldwide that are sustainable.

C2S2 seeks to play a leadership role in both the intellectual and operational roles of this emerging and important new dimension in foreign assistance. It has led to an expanded engagement with firms that have been traditionally vendors for the Department of Defense, many of whom are IPOA members.



PHOTO BY: CFNCR

LEFT TO RIGHT, GEORGE VRADENBURG, FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH, TERRI LEE FREEMAN, AND CREATIVE'S PRESIDENT & CEO, M. CHARITO KRUVANT.



PHOTO BY: LUIS AGUILAR

MRS. KRUVANT IS PICTURED WITH SBA WASHINGTON DISTRICT DIRECTOR JOSEPH P. LODDO AND REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR STEPHANIE A. WATKINS.

Creative brings to the IPOA group significant experience – both at the policy and tactical levels – collaborating with U.S. military and multi-national forces, in conflict and post-conflict environments. More than helping to bridge the cultural divide between civilian and military entities – which often pursue parallel initiatives at best, and frequently counter-productive efforts – Creative staff have designed programs that serve both short-term force protection needs and lay the foundation for longer-term sustainable development.

**Creative Senior Advisor Nuran Kolan** presented a statement on the firm's success in serving over-age and underserved children and youths through the Afghanistan Primary Education Program and its Accelerated Learning component to the U.S. House of Representatives Human Rights Caucus on April 17, 2007. To view the statement go to [www.caii.com/creativetimes](http://www.caii.com/creativetimes).

APEP was implemented between 2003-2006 and made possible by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

# NEW FACES WASHINGTON, D.C., SUDAN AND KENYA



**Roger Plath** returns to Creative to join the Information Management unit as a Field IT Engineer.

Roger is a familiar face at Creative. He previously established IT infrastructure for operations, technical support and procurement for Creative's offices in Iraq, Kuwait, Albania, Liberia and Afghanistan.

Roger has 12 years of information technology experience in development. He served as Country Chief of Communications and IT for the International Organization for Migration. Before that, he was the Chief of Information Technology for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Pristina, Kosovo where he planned a \$3 million IT infrastructure and services project for 15 OSCE offices and 1,500 users.

Fluent in Spanish, Roger received a bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

**Kwaja Yai Arop** joins the Education Mobilization and Communications division as Chief of Party for HEAR Sudan, a task order of the USAID-funded Basic Education/Linkages to Education and Health initiative, known as ABE/LINK. Kwaja will be responsible for the overall management, program implementation and quality insurance for the three-year project. A native of Sudan, he has managed and coordinated programs for more than 25 years for donors including USAID, DFID, DANIDA, CIDA and The World Bank.



Before Creative, he worked with Save the Children as the education specialist desk officer managing, leading and initiating new education projects focusing on conflict transformation and education for war- and drought- displaced youths in Sudan. He established Save the Children's country plan for Sudan resulting in the Global Challenge Program, which opened education opportunities to millions of out-of-school children worldwide, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

Before that, he directed a Khartoum-area program to implement integrated services for Internally Displaced Persons, covering primary education, primary health care, water and sanitation, and child protection.

Kwaja received a bachelor's degree from the University of Khartoum. He is fluent in Dinka, English and Arabic.



**Tassew Zewdie** joins Creative's East Africa Regional Office in Nairobi, as a Senior Associate for the Education Mobilization and Communications division. Tassew will provide technical input and management to activities in Sudan and strategic direction for business development activities in the region. He is a more than 30-year veteran of education development in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Tassew has extensive experience in education project management as a chief of party, deputy chief of party, team leader and technical advisor. He also possesses technical skills in the areas of teacher professional development, institutional capacity building, planning, school management and leadership, community-school partnerships, whole school development and non-formal education.

Tassew received both a master's degree and doctorate degree in education from Panjab University, Chandigarh, India. He received his bachelor's degree in education from Bahir Dar Teachers College, Addis Ababa University. A native of Ethiopia, he is fluent in Amharic and English.

# NEW FACES

# CREATIVE TIMES

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

SPRING 2007

## PHOTO OF THE SEASON



PHOTO BY: SYLVIA ELLISON

Creative Associates International, Inc. is implementing the Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program, known as ASAP, a task order of the Assistance to Basic Education/Basic Education (ABE/BE) IQC. In partnership with the Christian Children's Fund and the International Youth Foundation, Creative is strengthening the capacity of private- and public-sector training institutions to deliver quality training, job counseling and placement assistance and school-to-work services to improve employment opportunities for ASAP participants. Pictured is ASAP's target group — youth between the ages of 15 and 25 — on a school field trip at a memorial site in Colombo.

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Creative Associates International Inc., is a private, professional services firm headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since its inception in 1977, Creative has assisted governments, communities, NGOs, and private companies worldwide to lead and to manage change.

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