

**1. Background of the Project**

- Country: Kyrgyz Republic
- Project Name: Community Empowerment Project through Small Business Promotion by One Village One Product Approach in Issyk-Kul Region
- Corporation Period: 2012–2015
- Implementing Organization: Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic; Issyk-Kul State Government

The Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic had been engaged in agriculture and livestock industries under the planned economy of the Soviet Union. The Kyrgyz Republic, established after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, pursued democratization and transition to a market-oriented economy. It is arguably the country that has made the most progress toward a market-oriented economy in Central Asia. However, the rapid liberalization wore out the existing industries, and the collapse of socialism and planned economy spread negative views of joint work. Amid the reform of the economic regime, the functions of communities, i.e., the basic unit of social and economic activities in rural areas, were left in decay. For the weakness of interpersonal ties and communities that implement production and distribution efficiently, regional economic activities stagnated, and poverty increased.

Therefore, the Kyrgyz Government enacted the Community Organization Act in 2005 to rebuild community-based organizations for social and economic development of the country's regions. The government is undertaking various measures for regional development through strengthening communities with support from overseas.

**2. Activities of the Project**

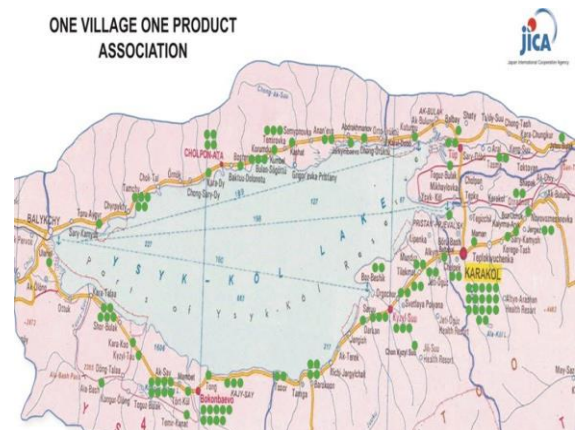
In Issyk-Kul State, various initiatives based on the Japanese experiences in the One Village One Product movement (OVOP) have been implemented to reinvigorate regional economic activities and community-based organizations. The purpose of the initiatives is to establish a model for supporting sustainably small business activities by community-based organizations.

The OVOP Association managing the groups implementing OVOP activities aims to earn revenues

from the products that the groups develop and design, serve as a basis of OVOP movement promotion with public administration, and establish and sustain a business promotion model in the long term. The number of group members that had been 190 in 46 groups at the inception of the association increased to over 1,000 in 117 groups by 2013. The OVOP Association commercialized local agricultural products and established the value chain in all the steps of production, processing, and distribution. A part of the association's activities was to prepare an efficient production system by building production bases and setting up a joint procurement system of raw materials and ingredients. As a result of the association's active marketing in and out of the country, the number of domestic clients has increased, and export of the groups' products started in cooperation with private firms. The annual sales of the OVOP activities in 2013 were USD 62,000, and the revenue was 1.6 times that of the previous year.



Activities of OVOP Association: annual meeting



Community organizations around Issyk-Kul Lake that participate in the OVOP activities

### Products of Issyk-Kul State

Among the processed foods using local foodstuffs, jams, juices, and dried fruits are the main products in summer and autumn. As products to sell in winter, honey, jerky, and cookies featuring Jeti-Oguz Rocks, a sightseeing spot, have been developed. Various handicrafts such as products made of plant-dyed felts have also been produced and sold. The OVOP Association is working to improve the quality of products, and has the Issyk-Kul brand certified with the state government as the main certification body. Through such value addition, the Project is setting a clear difference between the OVOP products and other generic Kyrgyz products.



Wool yarn balls dyed with local plants

### **3. Impacts of the Project from the Gender Perspective**

In rural areas of the Kyrgyz Republic, most people engage in livestock grazing. Men tend to be away from home for grazing while women engage in cropping and harvesting fruits as well as housework and childcare at home. Thus women have hardly any opportunity to earn income, and have little say at home or in the region.

With the slogan of “Anyone Can Participate,” the Project welcomed to the production activities anyone who was motivated including women and the handicapped. It turned out that women accounted for 70% of the participants in the activities. The main reason may be that women found opportunities in the OVOP activities to use the time and manual techniques that they used at

home while men stayed with the traditional livestock grazing. However, the participation of men is increasing as the OVOP activities are becoming livelier.

The participation in the OVOP activities brought cash income to women who had hardly any experience of earning income in exchange for their own production activities and business. The income also allowed them to cover a part of their living expenses. As women came to earn income regularly, family members who were at first not in favor of the OVOP activities started helping them with housework, and the presence of women at home increased. Women became proud of their activities, and the sphere of their activities and networks grew. Here are a few comments by women who took part in the OVOP activities: “I can now go out of the village to buy necessary goods and participate in meetings with confidence”; “My interpersonal relations have expanded since having started talking to women in other villages and groups”; and “I gained confidence through sales promotion in Bishkek for the first time with no appointment, and was thrilled when my products were highly evaluated.”

Through the OVOP activities led by women, products that use local resources efficiently have been sold not only in the Kyrgyz Republic but also abroad including Japan. The activities brought about not only economic effects such as development of business skills, but also other ones including the improvement of self-confidence as well as expression of opinion of women, the strengthening of community networks, and the revival of regional traditions.



Women who make felt products