

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS ON TV: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR REACHING ENTREPRENEURS IN TAJIKISTAN

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Improving the regulatory environment – i.e., producing business-friendly regulations – is often seen as the main goal of business enabling environment programs. However, an effective regulatory framework is not enough by itself: entrepreneurs and public officials have to be aware of the new regulations in order to apply them to their day-to-day business activity and ensure impact. The Tajikistan Business Enabling Environment Project took a unique approach to increasing public awareness by creating a series of public service announcements (PSAs) for television.

The new law

In July 2006 the Government of Tajikistan, with help from the IFC Tajikistan Business Enabling Environment Project, adopted the country's first ever law regulating inspections of businesses. By doing so the government demonstrated to the public at large and the business community in particular that it was committed to putting in place business-friendly regulations. The law clearly identified the bodies entitled to carry out inspections and laid out inspection procedures aimed at bringing transparency into the inspections process and reducing corruption. At the same time, the law introduced the concept of risk-based inspections. For example, a company that has never committed a serious violation of the fire regulations or is operating in a sector that does not pose serious fire concerns is considered a low-risk entity and as such is subject to less frequent fire inspections.



Challenges to making the law real

Although the project team recognized that the Tajik government had taken a great step toward improving the regulatory environment in Tajikistan, it was not until we began to work with the government to implement the law that we realized the extent of the challenges that still needed to be overcome. For example, when we began producing checklists to be used during fire inspections, we discovered that the government had just one copy of these regulations (dating back to Soviet times) available for inspectors in the entire country. Clearly, if even inspectors had limited access to the regulations, there was no way for entrepreneurs to access them – even if they were aware of their existence and wanted to comply.

At the same time, the government faced the broader and more fundamental issue of how to make entrepreneurs and public officials aware of the new law on inspection. The normal practice in Tajikistan is that the government publishes newly adopted laws in the national newspapers. These newspapers, which come out weekly, are neither widespread nor widely read. The laws are publicized as originally drafted and are often difficult to read by entrepreneurs with limited legal knowledge. In the case of business regulations, there is the added issue of there being few journalists with knowledge of business issues to help the public make sense of laws and regulations. The fact that laws, which are written in the formal Tajik language, often include words that are basically unknown to the average entrepreneur compounds the challenge. We had a chance to test this out during our “fire inspection regulation” awareness events held in marketplaces all around the country: while distributing brochures and fire inspection checklists to attendees, we realized that many of them had not heard of the word “entrepreneur” and did not know what it meant. This was because the word used in the law differed from the common language used by merchants in the bazaars.

The way forward - Develop a strong communication strategy

We developed two separate communication strategies to support our twin goals:

- To have all public inspectors in the country informed about the law and made knowledgeable about how to apply it to their inspection work.
- Have the business community, and in particular small and medium enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs all over the country, be aware of the law, its benefits to their businesses, and where they could go to learn more about its provisions if they were interested.

Informing inspectors, although a complex task, was a manageable one. Indeed even before the proposed reforms to business inspection became law, the project had been piloting the application of their procedures with two government agencies (the Fire Department and the Sanitary and Epidemiological Services). We started by training their officials. Then we created a pool of Trainer of Trainers, who received additional training. The project then supported their deployment as trainers of fire inspectors and sanitary inspectors around the country. The pilot was a success, and its approach has since been adopted by other government agencies.

Informing SMEs, however, was the real challenge...

Lesson 1: A critical mass of entrepreneurs needs to be aware of the laws for them to have impact

We did not rely on the print media for creating public awareness. Instead, our initial communication strategy was to work with and educate nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and business associations that train SMEs directly – i.e., a “train the trainers” program managed by IFC local partners. They were tasked with creating awareness of the existence of the law among SMEs and explaining its provisions. Although this approach had worked well for us in the past, we soon realized its limitations. Not enough entrepreneurs were attending these events to allow us to achieve our goal, which was to create knowledge of the law among a critical mass of SME entrepreneurs and the wider business community.

We needed to find a way to get entrepreneurs aware of the law and sufficiently interested in its potential benefits to want to attend our events and learn more. We adjusted our strategy and decided to create a series of public service announcements for television where we could explain the *main principles* of the new inspections law and *why* the law might be beneficial for SMEs.

The approach we adopted was as follows:

- Stage 1: PSAs created the minimum awareness level about the law and provided the basic tools for entrepreneurs to use some of the provisions of the law to protect their rights. Once aware of the law, some of them could independently obtain more detailed information;
- Step 2: SMEs that would be interested to learn more and would not be able to do so independently could enroll in the training sessions provided by our partners and be made fully aware of the details of the law. We felt that this was the winning communication strategy that would get people’s attention, increase knowledge of the new law, and maximize its impact among people in our target group.

We chose television because the concept of using public service announcements for advertising on TV had just come on the advertising scene in Tajikistan and was being used by the private sector. We thought that audiences would be attracted to the new “advertising” tool even if, as in this case, it was being used by the government to broadcast information about a new law. .

The choice of broadcasting on the state TV station was deliberate: Channel One is one of only two television stations, with national coverage (it covers 99 percent of the country) and the only public

Why PSAs in Tajikistan?

- No strong press
- Legal jargon inaccessible for entrepreneurs
- Limited legal awareness of entrepreneurs
- One government TV station covering the entire country

station. By airing the PSAs on state TV, we would reach a wide audience with information on the new law as well as signal the government's commitment to the message of the PSAs.

Lesson 2: Get government support and participation from the beginning

Identify a private sector champion in government and work as partners from concept development to final product. We knew that government buy-in and strong collaboration are critical to the success of any communication strategy. We had tried to work with state-run TV stations in other countries but encountered serious delays and obstacles in convincing the government to run IFC-sponsored programs or advertisements.

In Tajikistan, we tried a different approach. We identified the State Investment Committee (SIC) as the private sector champion within the Tajik government, then sought and won their support for the communication strategy. Together we began the process of developing the PSA component of the strategy. From the start, they were really very hands-on and involved in every aspect. We designed the concept of the PSAs in-house with government input and discussed each of the plots and the initial project draft with the SIC.

It was not a short process – 3 months to develop and finalize the concepts alone. But this iterative process of multiple exchanges allowed us to obtain a product that both sides were very happy with: not only fully compliant with our requirements, but also “ready to be aired” on national TV. So happy, in fact, that the SIC, while acknowledging the support of IFC and our donor (the Swiss Government – SECO), branded the PSA message as its own. It then went further and used its influence to get Channel One management to agree to broadcast the PSA series during prime time for free and according to our predefined sequence.

Total cost of the entire product, taking into account the free air time provided by the Tajik government: less than \$10,000.

Lesson 3: Air a series of PSAs to build momentum and retain interest

This is important. We created a total of four PSAs. They were scheduled in sequence, so that after the first PSA was aired, each subsequent PSA could build upon its messages. Special attention was paid to translate the provisions of the law into simple messages easily understood by the general public and entrepreneurs alike. Over a two-month period they were aired four times a day during prime time (7:30am, 8:25pm, 9pm, and 9:55pm). In addition to the airings on Channel One TV, the PSAs were played on large public television screens around Dushanbe, such as the airport and public squares. A second series is planned to be broadcasted in the next months to reinforce the message.

Watch the PSAs online: at <http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/tajikistansme.nsf/Content/Awareness>

On the next page, you will see the abbreviated storyboard for our announcements.

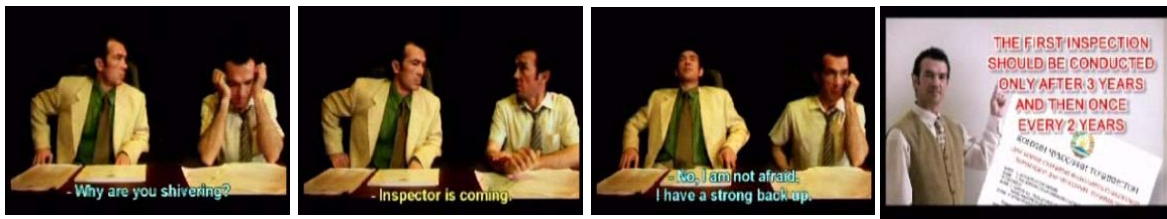
Benefits of working with the government

- Sends a message to officials as well as entrepreneurs about state support
- Government-branded PSAs show that government is leading the process
- Free airtime

Why not pay for airtime?

The advertising costs on Tajik TV were quite low (around \$10,000). However, we insisted on not paying for airtime. Why?

- IFC policy does not allow payment for communication services (although this case was somewhat different). ;
- We wanted the full government commitment to the initiative, not only to us but also to the general public.



The first PSA, “the law is my back-up”, focused on informing entrepreneurs of the new law, and making sure that they knew they could trust the new law to protect their rights. As an example, the PSA showed one of the main provisions of the new law: frequency of inspections.



The second PSA informed entrepreneurs of one of the inspection law’s main tenets: 3 days advance notice is required before each inspection.



The third PSA informed about the newly introduced inspections checklists: the comprehensive tool to be used by entrepreneurs and inspectors. A checklist should summarize all the requirements to be fulfilled in order to ensure compliance.



The final PSA reinforced the messages of the previous PSAs: there is a new Inspections Law, and entrepreneurs should know their rights under the new law.



Lesson 4: Combine PSAs for television and on-the-ground learning-the-law events, to gain maximum impact

In order for the events to better complement the PSAs, the team developed a new and more comprehensive “train-the-trainers” program that could organize more effective learning events for entrepreneurs. The project developed a specific training module addressed to the partners’ trainers, as well as a detailed brochure to be distributed to SMEs at events. Specific support to the trainers in delivering the messages and a monitoring tool to measure the results complemented the train-the-trainers initiative.

We partnered with four main organizations to roll out the improved program (international organizations as well as local NGOs) implementing SME programs around the country. They were chosen because they had in place an extensive network of local trainers, which when combined gave us adequate coverage of the entire country. This was the winning communication strategy that got people’s attention, increased knowledge of the law, and maximized its impact among our target group.

Results to date

In September 2007, we surveyed 230 entrepreneurs to get a high-level assessment of the impact of the PSAs. Of those surveyed, more than 25 percent had seen the PSAs, and almost half of those remembered the key takeaways: “Advance notice is needed 3 days before an inspection” and “No more than 1 inspection every 2 years.” The team was satisfied with this feedback. We had invested heavily in the product. From hiring the film maker (an international consultant with a specialization in photography and film-making) to identifying a local market where to shoot the movie, we participated in the shooting, hired one of Tajikistan’s most popular film stars as the hero of the entire sequence, and even had some of the IFC staff featured in it.

The Fire Department, one of our pilot agencies in implementing inspection reform, was particularly impressed by the result of our PSAs. In fact, they requested our support in developing a specific PSA focused on fire prevention rules. In December, their PSA was broadcast as well, complementing the work done on inspection reform.

Trainers participating in our learning-the-law programs who saw the broadcast PSAs were in most cases extremely enthusiastic about them. We have also begun to use PSAs during our training events. We have found them an effective tool when talking to attendees about what they should expect “before,” “during,” and “after” an inspection.

We expect to see a higher attendance at the specific training events organized by the project and its partners on the provisions of the new law.

As we stated in the beginning, the key to long-term, successful change in the business inspection regime in Tajikistan is a new category of well-informed entrepreneurs and inspectors, spearheading the application of its laws and regulations to their work and businesses.

About the Authors

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