



**AROUND THE VEGA OFFICE**

**ANNOUNCING NEW CHIEFS OF PARTY FOR THE SUDAN, WEST AFRICA, AND SOUTH AFRICA PROGRAMS**



**Scott Allen** joined VEGA's **Sudan/AMED** program during the second week of May to take the position of Chief of Party following Greg Olson's departure earlier this year. Scott joins the VEGA team from Bearing Point, where he served as Chief of Party and Trade Policy Advisor for a USAID-funded program associated with the East and Central Africa Trade Hub in Nairobi, Kenya. He has a consecutive work history of involvement in Africa going back to 1990 with the past 14 years in residence in East & Central Africa. Additionally, he earlier served in the Peace Corps in Liberia. His work history with Africa includes occupation as an economist, policy advisor, private sector advisor, and analyst with USAID and the USDA. He clearly brings an understanding of the difficulties and promise of the region and comes to VEGA with a knowledge of some of the actors in economic development in Southern Sudan. We welcome Scott to our team and trust he will be able to continue the success achieved to date.



VEGA operations are commencing in **West Africa**, with the West Africa Trade Hub (WATH), on a project titled Improved Access to Credit for SMEs. This is a one-year program based in Accra, Ghana, and headed by a Ghanaian Chief of Party, **Ernest Jecty**. Mr. Jecty has roughly 30 years' experience in private-sector work, public-sector work related to the development of the private sector, and has been the head of a Ghanaian business consulting company since its establishment in 1991. He brings a wealth of experience spanning the macro- and micro-levels, especially as relates to financial and technology management. With a Master's in Finance from Purdue University, work experience as a financial analyst, a business manager, and a consultant on a wide variety of projects, Mr. Jecty brings the knowledge and experience to make this project successful for the Ghanaian small-business community and the banks which will serve this important economic sector.



Ms. Dana Mullins, the current Chief of Party for the **VEGA South Africa** program, will be resigning from her position as of June 30, 2007; **Ms. MK Cope** has been selected as the successor for this position. Ms. Cope has 17 years experience in international economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa, serving since 2002 as International Executive Service Corp's (IESC) Vice President for Africa, based in Johannesburg and Nairobi. Prior to that, she served as IESC's Chief of Party in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and as Deputy Chief of Party for Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. In these positions she has been responsible for the implementation of innovative approaches for working with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and related business associations, the development of trade facilitation programs, and management of USAID funds and implementation of a regional business development program. Ms. Cope also counts decades of experience on training at both Micro and SME levels, which is a vital component in VEGA/SAAGA.



**STAFFING ANNOUNCEMENT AT VEGA**



**Administrative Assistant Michelle Mowery** will be leaving VEGA in early September 2007 to begin a year-long Masters Degree program in Global Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). LSE is a prestigious university, internationally renowned for its concentration of teaching and research across the full range of social, political and economic sciences. The Global Politics program is based in the Department of Government, but has the advantage of interdisciplinary teaching carried out across the departments of International Relations, Development Studies Institute, the European Institute, as well as Government. Prior to joining the VEGA staff in August 2006, Michelle received her Bachelor of Arts in Government and International Relations from the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, in 2005. As she embarks upon her first overseas study experience, we thank Michelle for her excellent work at VEGA, and wish her all possible success in

her studies at LSE - and a great living experience in London! VEGA will recruit a new Administrative Assistant to begin work not later than August 1. The job advertisement will be published in VEGA's July Newsletter.

### VEGA MEMBER ORGANIZATION STAFF CONDUCT TRAININGS AND WORKSHOPS IN SOUTHERN SUDAN



*Gitau Mbure and Paul Guenette meet with Mr. Michael Gony Mario, Director of Cooperatives for Western Bahr el Ghazal State, and his Deputy, Mr. Lino Juma Marcelino*

ACDI/VOCA home office staff, **Paul Guenette**, Technical Managing Director Sub-Saharan Africa, and **Gitau Mbure**, Associate Director Sub-Saharan Africa, visited Southern Sudan in April to review and promote market-oriented agricultural development in Southern Sudan. Paul and Gitau led a stakeholders' workshop organized by VEGA and the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and included participants from the GOSS, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), NGOs, cooperatives, and farmer groups. The aim of the workshop was to bring together stakeholders in agricultural sector in South Sudan to discuss opportunities, challenges and lessons learned in promoting market-oriented agricultural development within the relief to development continuum. The scope and purpose of the AMED project was highlighted, as well as project activities to date. Key participants provided input on the structure of future activities. Among the key issues discussed at the workshop were:

- An introduction to the value chain approach (VCA) to agricultural market development including an overview of success stories from neighboring countries
- An overview of the AMED project and activities geared towards agricultural market development including lessons learned and the way forward
- Opportunities and constraints for agricultural market development in South Sudan and how the VCA can be used to enhance growth

Paul and Gitau, accompanied by VEGA Senior Field Operations Manager **Peter Lominit**, also traveled to Wau and met with officials from the Directorate of Cooperatives, for Western Bahr el Ghazal State to discuss ways of revitalizing the cooperative movement in the state. A previous VEGA volunteer successfully facilitated a workshop in Wau for key staff of the Directorate of Cooperatives on the subjects of cooperative development, management and leadership skills training. Additionally, arrangements are underway for a volunteer to facilitate a training of trainers' workshop for cooperative officers to focus on community sensitization and mobilization, and formation of cooperative societies in Western Bahr el Ghazal. Cooperatives can be an effective way of promoting broad-based economic development and the VEGA program is providing technical assistance to ensure viability of the cooperative movement by facilitating the establishment and growth of business-minded associations.

As part of their trip to Wau, the VEGA team also visited **Natabo Farmers Group**, a nascent association that has recently received training on farming as a business through the VEGA program. The team visited the farmers' production fields and discussed opportunities for enhancing production and marketing of key commodities to be marketed through a cooperative approach in the fast growing town of Wau. Members of Natabo Farmers Group have a unique advantage in that the area has a high water table enabling low cost irrigation and off-season production of fresh vegetables such as tomatoes, green peppers and cauliflower, which in turn fetch much higher prices during the dry season when the supply is low. However, poor access to extension services and proper inputs coupled with a poor understanding of markets have meant that the group is unable to take advantage of the heightened demand in close-by Wau where there is a continued influx of returnees and NGOs staff including UN operations. As a result, the VEGA program has pledged to continue providing support for the association to link them to profitable markets. Subsequent volunteer assignments are planned to assist the farmers to formalize their cooperative and develop a business plan geared towards exploiting the new market opportunities and improving livelihoods for the 30 members and their households.



*Selling produce in Wau, Sudan. The Natabo Farmers Group received training on farming as a business through VEGA*

## PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS (CONTINUED)

### LONG TERM BUSINESS ADVISORS TACKLE POST-SOVIET CHALLENGES IN ARMENIA

In late November 2006, four volunteers sponsored by VEGA implementing organization Institute of International Education's (IIE) Emerging Markets Development Advisers Program (EMDAP) were fielded to assist USAID projects working with the Government of Armenia and NGOs in Yerevan and Gyumri, Armenia, meeting the challenges of a post-Soviet economy. Just past the halfway mark in their 10-month assignments, **Jeff Standley**, **Tony Woodham**, **Sarah Gray**, and **Marshall Chase** report on their progress.

#### REBUILDING IN GYUMRI

The **Shirak Competitiveness Center (SCC)**, with support from USAID, was founded in the aftermath of the devastating 1988 earthquake in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city. **Jeff Standley's** challenge as a business consultant to the SCC is to help move this business service provider towards sustainability in the face of a challenging business environment marked by high unemployment and continued rebuilding in the region. In his first four months with the SCC, Jeff met with 23 for-profit, non-profit, and government agencies engaged in diverse enterprises including dairy, shoe production, and stone cutting. In conjunction with this research, he conducted an internal analysis to identify SCC staff capabilities and a value chain. Jeff is gratified that SCC staff have agreed with the recommendations and are eager to develop a professional and demand-driven organization which can continue to make a difference in the Gyumri business community.

#### INCREASING TAX COLLECTIONS THROUGH TAX IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

**Tony Woodham** and **Sarah Gray** provide technical and financial advice in collaboration with **Booz Allen Hamilton** on USAID's **Armenia Tax Improvement Project (ATIP)** in Yerevan to increase efficiency and rationalize the tax structure to reflect a new economic environment of the country's State Tax Service (STS) operations while increasing tax revenues. The goal of the project ultimately is to create a fully functional and strategically conceived taxpayer services division which would solve most of the STS's client interface problems. Towards this end, Tony and Sarah are currently engaged in a behavioral analysis. One of their major accomplishments to date has been their collaboration with the deputy head of the STS and external stakeholders to develop the agency's first ever Triennial Strategic Plan. Providing two VEGA volunteers to a project facing a wide range of needs identified by the STS has enabled ATIP to enhance its communication and decision-making without impacting modest project resources.

#### MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES TO AMERICAN INVESTORS

While the **American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia (AmCham)** is the leading representative of international business interests in Armenia, it is nonetheless a small organization with limited resources. As advisor to AmCham in Yerevan, **Marshall Chase** has helped enhance the organization's internal capacity and its advocacy efforts by systematizing policies and practices and instituting improved communications between the Chamber, its members, and the general public. (See the AmCham Newsletter at [www.amcham.am/AmCham%20Newsletter.pdf](http://www.amcham.am/AmCham%20Newsletter.pdf), which Marshall initiated). In particular, Marshall has helped AmCham gather information from its members about the difficulties they face when operating in the country. Recently, he conducted a survey of AmCham's membership which will be used to help raise member concerns with the Armenian government and the U.S. Embassy. Marshall notes: "There are great opportunities in Armenia for both international and domestic businesses, but it is an extremely challenging environment to operate in. A lot more can be accomplished if government recalcitrance can be addressed with a common voice, and that's where AmCham can help companies that are otherwise used to competing with one another."



*The EMDAP Advisers all managed to survive the harsh Armenian winter, known as the "freezing fog"*

### VEGA/BTD PRESENTS ITS AUTHENTIC BULGARIA PROJECT AT THE SIETAR CONFERENCE IN SOFIA

With VEGA/BTD's assistance provided to **EcoLogic Consultancy** Ltd. (ELC), the regular Congress of **SIETAR Europa** (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research ([www.sietar-europa.org](http://www.sietar-europa.org))) took place in Sofia from April 25 to 29, 2007. This is the first time the congress has been organized in Southeastern Europe. The theme of the Congress was East, West, North and South: Culture's Influence on Economy, Politics, Ecology and Religion.

EcoLogic Consultancy Ltd. is a Bulgarian consulting company providing services in three major areas: PR and communications, cross-cultural services, and proposal development (grant application, finance facilitation) primarily in the area of nature conservation. Cross cultural advice, training and coaching represents a brand new product area in Bulgaria. Given the increased number of foreigners as well as the number of Bulgarians going abroad, it is believed that this new area of services is one that will be in greater demand as the need for such products represents a growing market niche.

ELC became a member of SIETAR Europa in June 2005 and was invited to take part in the 2005 congress in France by its President, **Mrs. Maria Jicheva**. At that time, VEGA/BTD assisted ELC to attend this congress which was held in France. As a result of their participation in the congress, ELC were able to boost the company's product development and marketing capacity as well as to attract attention to Bulgaria as a potential market for cross-cultural services and a good host for the next congress of the organization. In addition to their formal presentation ELC used the event to network and present Bulgarian cultural traditions. The company representatives attended a meeting of the management board to identify opportunities for the organization of the next annual congress tentatively scheduled to take place in Sofia.

VEGA/BTD used the opportunity the SIETAR Congress offered and presented its Authentic Bulgaria project to the congress participants on April 26. With ELC's assistance VEGA/BTD was able to present the Authentic Bulgaria project in front of the approximately 300 international participants at the conference, most of whom also received copies of the recently produced **Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook** in English and German.

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### VEGA ETHIOPIA AGOA+ CO-SPONSORS US BUYERS TO ETHIOPIA



*Buyers from the US attend a specialized bazaar event where Ethiopian businesses showcase their goods*

With the assistance of the VEGA-Ethiopia AGOA+ program and the US Embassy in Ethiopia about forty women-owned handicraft businesses made fruitful contacts with five US buyers. The buyers came to Ethiopia upon invitation by the US Ambassador to Ethiopia with funding provided by the VEGA-Ethiopia AGOA+ program as well as the US Embassy in Ethiopia.

The delegation was from CharityUSA.com (Seattle), Vici International (Atlanta), Tribal Links (Boston), Ashanti Design (Cape Town), and 10,000 Villages (Philadelphia). During their stay in Ethiopia from May 9-12, 2007, the delegation made on-site company visits to five selected enterprises and was able to learn about Ethiopian product varieties and potentials and workplace safety.

Followed by the visits, the buyers were able to meet producers at a specialized bazaar event held for three days where over 75 exhibitors were able to show their products to the US buyers.

This provided a unique opportunity both for the buyers and the producers to talk to each other regarding product needs, product quality and price negotiations. Following the bazaar, the VEGA-Ethiopia AGOA+ program arranged a half-day workshop that served as a platform for feedbacks from the buyers regarding products, marketing strategy, product quality and price ranges and improvements to be made to meet the specific needs of the US buyers.

The buyer's mission has resulted into on-the-spot deal of about USD \$60,000 as first trial and there are positive signs that the buyers would establish long sustaining relationship with the local producers and make further orders of hand-woven cotton products and various leather articles as well as Ethiopian Jewelry.