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SUCCESS STORY

TEACHER BUILDS TUBERCULOSIS AWARENESS AND PATIENT SUPPORT THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Health Committees established by USAID help to detect TB and provide support to TB patients



Photo: USAID TB Control Program

Ozoda Hakimova (center left) teaches women in Rasht District about TB and stigma

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Ozoda Hakimova

Ozoda Hakimova, a history teacher at a secondary school in Tajikistan's Rasht Valley, loves her job. However, history is not the only subject that she is passionate about teaching. Two years ago, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the establishment of a community health committee in Hakimova's district. She was eager to join as a volunteer and receive training from USAID on tuberculosis (TB) awareness outreach, referral, and support.

Tajikistan is a country with a high burden of TB and its drug resistant forms. Access to healthcare in remote and mountainous areas like Rasht Valley can be limited. That is why members of community health committees play a crucial role in bridging the gap between healthcare services and communities by building public awareness of this infectious but curable disease and by supporting residents to get tested for TB and complete treatment.

The training received from USAID gave Hakimova the necessary skills and empowered her to reach schoolchildren and women with important information about TB, which otherwise would not be available to them. By building awareness among her students and their families about TB, Hakimova helps not only individuals who may be impacted by this disease but also ensures a healthy and supportive community.

"Before being trained by the USAID TB Control Program, even as a teacher, I had many misconceptions about the disease, thinking that it is hereditary and therefore incurable. Today, as a TB outreach activist, I can dispel these misconceptions and break the stigma surrounding TB," reflects the schoolteacher.

The stigmatization of those affected by this disease can lead to social isolation. Hakimova recalls a family of a TB patient in a distant village. Neighbors tried to help the family by bringing meals. They would knock on the door, put food down, and leave quickly before the door opened. However, what the family really needed from the neighbors was not food, but support from the community and the knowledge they were not alone.

This is the reason why Hakimova is so committed to working in her community to build support for those impacted by TB. While doing outreach among young people and women, she also knows how to recognize potential TB symptoms and refers residents for TB testing. Moreover, she makes regular visits to health centers to check on the residents she has referred, and encourages those who are reluctant to get tested. In the two years since she has been volunteering, Hakimova has reached almost 600 people and referred 42 of them for testing. As a result,

she has helped detect three cases of TB and now emotionally supports these patients throughout their difficult and lengthy treatment.

Since 2015, USAID has trained nearly 1,500 community outreach volunteers like Ozoda Hakimova to strengthen TB prevention and detection throughout Tajikistan. Together with healthcare providers, they work tirelessly to make their communities healthy, supportive, and resilient.

USAID supports the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in implementing its National TB Program by providing more effective and accessible TB prevention, diagnostics, treatment and care for all, including vulnerable populations. The main objective of the five-year USAID TB Control Program is to reduce the burden of TB and prevent drug-resistant forms of the disease in Tajikistan. The USAID TB Control Program covers a wide range of technical areas, including training medical workers to strengthen the health system, improving interagency coordination and cooperation, and increasing access to diagnosis and treatment. The program runs from 2014 to 2019.