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**TAJIKISTAN**

# FIRST PERSON

## Youth Inspired by Democracy

**Civic education program reaches over 80,000 Tajik students**



Photo: IFES

Shoira, right, observes the voting process during a mock election at the USAID-sponsored Democracy Summer Camp in the Karatag Valley, Tajikistan.

***“I was very happy to be involved in a USAID project again. The training provided me with valuable teaching tools, as well as textbooks for my students,” said Shoira, a young woman inspired by a USAID-sponsored democracy summer camp to become a civics teacher.***

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“Everything started unexpectedly,” says Shoira, a teacher of Civic Education and a university student. She was in tenth grade in Shahritus, Tajikistan, and undecided about her career goals when she saw an advertisement about a USAID-sponsored Democracy Summer Camp. She decided to apply and was selected to participate. Shoira, along with other students and a teacher, traveled to a summer resort in the Karatag Valley for an intensive 10-day workshop on democracy and civic participation.

For a woman in Tajikistan — especially in the more traditional southern regions of Tajikistan — there are few prospects for a life outside of the home. A school-age girl is expected to set her ambitions on home and family, opportunities for career training and higher education are rare, and social pressure against such pursuits can be acute. But for girls like Shoira, the Democracy Summer Camp can open up new doors.

The annual summer camps have become a popular educational program in Tajikistan. Supported by USAID and run in partnership with the International Foundation for Election Systems, the camps have been conducted for five consecutive summers, attracting students from every region of the country. Expert teachers lead classes on issues of democracy and citizenship, including voters’ and human rights, international norms of democracy, and gender issues.

Inspired by the lessons she learned at camp, Shoira decided to major in history and law. She attends university part-time while teaching civic education at her old school in Shahritus. Shoira says the summer camp gave her an edge in gaining admission to the university. Moreover, it introduced her to effective teaching methods for use in her classroom and gave her a solid grounding in the civic education materials that are now part of the national high school curriculum. USAID also supported the drafting, printing, and distribution of the Civic Education textbook she uses and the corresponding teacher’s guide. In her two years of teaching, Shoira has encouraged her students to put their studies to practice and actively participate in their community. “I remember myself as a summer camp participant when I look at my students sometimes,” says Shoira, smiling. It’s easy to imagine that when Shoira’s students look at her, they also see a new world of possibilities for themselves.