



SUCCESS STORY

Mosque Opens Computer Center

Imam was key supporter to bring technology to community's school



Photo: CHF International

The imam at Istaravan's central mosque advocates for economic development through ideas such as a computer center at the community's madrassa.

With support from a USAID program, the central mosque in Istaravan, Tajikistan, began offering computer classes to teach local youth marketable skills and expand their employment opportunities.

USAID is working in Tajikistan to reduce social conflict by creating opportunities for at-risk youth to channel their energies into productive endeavors. The program's community-driven approach to conflict mitigation rallies various community stakeholders to work together for economic development.

Religious leaders play a key role in the program, serving on advisory councils, participating in discussion groups, and announcing and explaining program activities. In Istaravan, the imam of the central mosque has been particularly active with the program's Economic Opportunity Center. Concerned over the growing influence of an Islamic group that rejected modernity and sought to re-establish lifestyles of bygone eras, he actively guides and promotes the center's activities to demonstrate the compatibility of religious and modern economic tools.

The imam and the center collaborated to establish a computer center as part of the madrassa serving the Istaravan community. The mosque purchased three computers for the center and also used the center's partner company to rent three additional computers through a "rent to own" arrangement, wherein the title will be transferred to the mosque when the rent period is over. The rent agreement includes maintenance of the three rented computers as well as maintenance of the mosque's own computers free of charge.

The center is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday through Thursday, and to date, 72 youth have graduated from the program's computer training classes at the computer center. Besides the computers themselves, the mosque contributed a heated room, tables and chairs, a board and other materials necessary for the computer classes. The facilities and trainings are advertised at the Friday sermons, which draw about 1,500 people, of which more than 60% are youth.

When the USAID program is completed, the mosque will independently organize computer training classes at its facility to sustain this important community resource.