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TAJIKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

On the Leading Edge of Land Reform

Together, Nodira Sidykova and USAID-supported legal aid centers represent thousands of Tajik farmers in court cases each year



Photo: Land Reform Project

Nodira responds to journalists at a press conference following meetings with farmers who received assistance from the USAID Land Reform Project.

“My faith was tested when my husband died, and we lost our house. But, then Nodira and the USAID Land Reform Project gave me and my children hope. Work, often at considerable personal sacrifice, is a very key component of the overall land reform effort.”

-Fayzisso Ashurova

As an innovative and tenacious young lawyer, Nodira Sidykova has played an increasingly prominent role in land reform in Tajikistan for more than 10 years. But even with her wealth of knowledge and experience, she admits that “there were many problems no one knew how to solve.” With the assistance of USAID, however, she and others have begun to discover various approaches to help deal with many of the difficult land issues facing Tajikistan.

Nodira grew up hoping that she would one day become a judge. In post-Soviet Tajikistan, however, she began to realize she could have a much broader impact on land reform in Tajikistan as an advocate. She began her work with USAID in 2005 on a USAID project and, throughout the project’s lifespan, assisted its legal aid centers in conducting 47 court cases. As the legal aid director for USAID’s Land Reform Project in Tajikistan, Nodira’s legal aid centers in northern Tajikistan have not lost a case.

In one recent case, the project’s legal aid center—supported directly by Nodira—represented a woman, whose house had been improperly seized by the previous owner’s friend. Nodira shepherded the case all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the woman and returned the house to her and her five children. Nodira is at the forefront of land reform in Tajikistan, and with the help of USAID, she is empowering other Tajiks to take greater ownership over their land use rights. Since 2005, Nodira and the project’s legal aid centers have helped roughly 30,000 beneficiaries and conducted 140 court cases to protect farmers’ rights in Tajikistan.

As Tajikistan has transitioned from a system of large state-owned collectives to private family farms, and powerful special interests continue to complicate an already complex legal climate, many judges and lawyers have failed to raise their standards to keep pace with progressive legislative reforms. Nodira, however, has continued to progress and develop with Tajikistan’s evolving legislative landscape.