



SUCCESS STORY

Drinking Water Brings Hope

USAID supports village to bring safe clean drinking water to its citizens



Thanks to USAID, this elderly man of Zuvai Village enjoys clean drinking water. Photo: Urban Institute

USAID has helped communities build and improve drinking water supply systems all across Tajikistan. Through technical assistance and citizen participation, these water projects promote improved public health, financial sustainability, as well as local government transparency and accountability.

The village of Zuvai (population 350) in the mountainous central part of Tajikistan faced enormous difficulties in getting safe drinking water. The village is located 2,000 meters (about 6,400 feet) above sea level, and there are no rivers and ponds

anywhere close to it. Historically, all citizens, young and old, had to haul water by hand from a creek 3,500 meters (2.1 miles) away. The burden fell mostly on women and children who made the daily arduous trek on donkeys, oftentimes at the expense of other household chores and children's schooling. In winter, when the path to the creek was blocked with knee-deep snow, residents frequently melted snow for drinking and consumption, thus using scarce fuel supplies and increasing environmental degradation through de-forestation.

In an attempt to ease the hardship for the Zuvai residents, the local government of Tavildara District in which Zuvai is located approached USAID for help in bringing drinking water to the village. USAID provided a \$11,662 grant through its Local Governance and Citizen Participation Project, while residents pledged their labor

and in-kind materials for a new pipeline. Together with the village authorities, residents dug trenches, laid 3,500 meters of pipe, and installed seven communal standpipes around the village. To ensure long-term maintenance of the system, USAID's project taught local specialists and officials how to develop a cost-recovery tariff system. Local administration held public meetings with Zuvai residents to explain the project budget and the ways that fees would support maintenance and repairs. Public hearings also helped clarify the roles and responsibilities of officials and citizens and elicited community input into the decision-making process. Government officials also organized public education events to promote health, hygiene, and responsible use of water.

The new water system was launched in April 2009 and was marked by Zuvai Village as a day of happiness and hope. Not only the villagers obtained access to clean safe drinking water, but established a constructive dialogue with their local government on how to improve their lives. *"It showed us that the local government and the community can work together openly to find solutions and improve the standard of life,"* said Khikmatsho Gairatov, Chairman of Tavildara District at the opening ceremony.