



CASE STUDY

Reviving Hope in a Safe Environment

USAID makes schools in Tajikistan safer



Parvina Asadova

Participants, above, illustrate the complexities of the referral process for students who have experienced violence.

Challenge Tajikistan, a post-conflict country in Central Asia, faces the challenge of high student drop-out rates, particularly among girls. Schools are overcrowded and often incapable of satisfying students' social and emotional needs for support. Because it is common for adults to migrate abroad for work, children often lack support from immediate family members. The UNICEF Global School-based Student Health survey indicated that 23.3% of students in Tajikistan feel a daily sense of hopelessness, and 12% have even considered suicide. Additionally, 25% of students do not attend school because they felt unsafe, which, in most cases, is related to school-based violence.

Initiative In September 2009, USAID initiated the two-year Safe Schools project to satisfy Tajik students' need for basic safety. The main objective of the project was to train community members on how to prevent and respond to the gender-related violence at schools. The project's holistic approach included training teachers, parents, students and government officials in education, health and social welfare, and about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work with women and children. A specially designed training against gender-based violence was adapted by USAID and introduced to all 769 project participants, along with developing a Teachers' Code of Conduct.

Result The overall understanding of gender issues has improved across communities by almost 25%. Teachers and community leaders have expressed the willingness to react to and prevent violence not just in the classrooms, but also within their families. As a result of the new violence management skills, local attitudes are slowly changing.

The next challenging task for the Government of Tajikistan is to spread these new policies system wide. Ms. Irina Kholova, the President of the Tajikistan Academy of Education noted, "Schools must become like a home for each student, where they feel safe to share insights and develop. We hope that in partnership with USAID, each Tajik school will turn into a home for their students."