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KYRGYZSTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Changing Perceptions in Rural Kyrgyz

USAID study tour participant shares her new ideas about the United States with her countrymen

Thousands of Kyrgyz are learning to appreciate diversity, women's rights, and the United States thanks to a woman who participated in a USAID study tour in the United States.

Roza Zhumaeva, Deputy Akim (District Government Administrator) of Naryn District in the central part of the country spent three weeks in the United States through a USAID program on religious diversity.

This short program has had a profound impact on her thinking on a number of topics.



Roza Zhumaeva, Deputy Head of Naryn District speaking at presentation on her United States experience

"I have become more tolerant towards all followers of religious confessions," she says. "Before visiting the United States, my attitudes to those Kyrgyz who did not follow Islam were negative. Now, I see it is as freedom of faith."

She also used this trip to fill in the information vacuum on the United States in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Upon her return home, Zhumaeva was determined to share her experience with the people of Kyrgyzstan.

Together with her fellow study tour participants, including the District Imam and representatives of the Women's Council, Council of Aksakals (Honored Elderly People), youth, and local government, she gave presentations in 15 remote mountainous villages throughout Naryn District. In each village, Zhumaeva and her colleagues shared their impressions about life in the United States, as well as multiculturalism, religious diversity, freedom of faith, democracy, family values, and women's rights.

"Thanks to USAID, I have become more tolerant towards all followers of religious confessions. Before visiting the USA, my attitudes to those Kyrgyz who did not follow Islam were negative. Now, I see it as freedom of faith," Roza Zhumaeva said.

In remote areas of Kyrgyz Republic, people are not well-informed about United States society, culture, and professional life. Many rural Kyrgyz have negative impressions of the United States. Through their lectures, Zhumaeva and her colleagues have presented people around Naryn district an opportunity to hear about the United States from respected and trusted members of their own community.

Zhumaeva hopes that these presentations will help spread the message of religious tolerance throughout her district, so that her experience during the USAID study tour has a wide and lasting impact on the lives of the Kyrgyz people.