

14 Greater Opportunities through Vocational Training

— Activities to Empower the People of Tajikistan —



Tajikistan, located in Central Asia, has the lowest GDP per capita of all the former republics of the Soviet Union. The civil war which broke out after their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 made their living condition even more difficult. The war is now over, but there has yet to be established an employment system for those who are out of work, and it is not easy to find a stable job. Many men go to Russia or Kazakhstan in search of work, but some end up in precarious jobs and are forced to work for many hours, or not being paid their wages, as they often lack vocational skills or the ability to speak Russian. It is not rare for the women and children left behind to fall into serious financial hardship due to long periods of absence on the part of the family's bread-earner.

Since 2007, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have implemented a project to improve such situations in Tajikistan. This program provides the vocational training necessary for men to work abroad under better conditions, and helps women left behind to achieve financial independence*¹. This project is being implemented with the assistance of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, which the government of Japan established. Ms. Tomoko Matsuzawa serves as the program officer of ILO for this project. Although Ms. Matsuzawa is based in Geneva, she has actively worked in the field on a number of initiatives for this project, including the establishment of a project office in Tajikistan, staff recruitment, negotiations with the government of Tajikistan, project activities, training sessions, and holding of seminars. Ms. Matsuzawa comments, "Watching the people of Tajikistan struggle to get

by despite their hard living condition made me want to try and help these people!" Ms. Matsuzawa has made every effort to travel to Tajikistan meet the people involved in the project in order to ensure its implementation. There have been times when she was not able to travel to project sites due to terrible road conditions, danger, landslides, or harsh weather such as snow storms, which forced Ms. Matsuzawa to meet the people of Tajikistan in different places from those originally planned. As Ms. Matsuzawa talks of her hope for better life in Tajikistan and the importance of the project passionately, they listen to her dedication like they weave Tajikistan's beautiful textiles and move into action.

There are already many success stories which have emerged thanks to the passionate work of Ms. Matsuzawa and the people of Tajikistan. Training sessions on entrepreneurship and microcredit has been implemented for female entrepreneurs. One participant, Ms. Mirzoyeva, was successful in opening a popular cafeteria after receiving training, and expresses her appreciation. "The training program taught me how to draw up business plans and select an optimal location for cafeteria. My cafeteria has become very popular, thanks to the advice of trainers. I am now working together with many women who came from other areas of Tajikistan also work here. The success of my cafeteria has given confidence to us all."

Hearing such statements gives Ms. Matsuzawa hope for the future of Tajikistan, "I really feel that this project has been successful when I see graduates of vocational training find better jobs, and when I hear about women who can now make a living on their own discovering confidence in themselves."



Ms. Matsuzawa attending a conference on human security (Photo: Ms. Tomoko Matsuzawa)



Vocational training for men (Photo: Ms. Tomoko Matsuzawa)

*1 Project title: Community Development through Employment Creation and Improved Migration Management (implemented from 2007 to 2009)