

# Opening the doors to knowledge: rebuilding schools in Tajikistan



Islamic Development Bank

*Together we build a better future*



The collapse of the Soviet Union followed by a devastating civil war severely impaired the quality, as well as the reach, of education in Tajikistan – a country which used to have some of the best levels of education in Central Asia. Following a request from the Republic of Tajikistan, in 1998 the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) began to finance a reconstruction project of secondary schools in rural areas of the country. The most acute challenges that the education sector faces are the poor state of educational facilities and the quality of education itself. This project addresses both of these issues by reconstructing the razed schools and putting trained teachers back into classrooms.

So far, through the IsDB investments, 13 schools and one orphanage have been reconstructed in 13 rural areas of Tajikistan. These not only opened over 300 classroom doors to more than 10,000 students, but also provided jobs for over 1,000 local teachers.



### A sudden downturn

Prior to 1991, Tajikistan had a literacy rate of 99% – one of the highest in the region. However, the situation drastically changed when Tajikistan fell into civil war. The country's economy suffered a massive downfall which paralysed the education system altogether.

Moreover, many of Tajikistan's schools were destroyed in the war, and in some cases in natural disasters. This reduced the number of available seats for students, who were in some parts of the country forced to study in three shifts per day. A short supply of school teachers (50% of whom did not have higher education qualifications) and very limited or no electricity in some rural areas, made the situation even worse. In addition, the growing need for education in a country where two thirds of the population is under the age of 25 put further strain on the education system (Millennium Development Goals reports state that there will be a 40% increase in the number of students by 2015).

### Together for a better future

In order to get the education system back on track, the Government of Tajikistan has set an ambitious plan to reconstruct about 168 secondary schools which were destroyed by the civil war in the early 1990s, and increase the overall capacity of the school system. Their objective is to develop and promote a solid base for higher and secondary education which will result in stronger intellectual potential nationwide; this will be instrumental to the overall process of reconstructing the country. In aid of this, and within the framework of the IsDB 1440H Vision to universalise primary and secondary education, the Islamic Development Bank stepped in to assist the Government of Tajikistan's Education Sector Strategy in improving access, quality and relevance of secondary education.

Since the Secondary School Reconstruction and Completion Project began back in 1998, IsDB has rebuilt in rural areas 13 schools out of the 23 planned. IsDB's participation in the project has given a huge boost towards the Government's goal of achieving universal primary education, and has also contributed to developing human resources, which is of great importance to Tajikistan's economic development.

### Better schools for more children

The project consists of three phases and has an estimated value of US\$20.04 million. By the end of the project, IsDB will have contributed a total of US\$17.49 million while the Government of Tajikistan will have contributed US\$2.25 million.

The first phase (1998–2005) of the project, with a total budget of US\$11.39 million, granted access to basic education for some 5,098 school children in Dangara, Hissar, Bokhtar, Sovetskiy, Fayzabad and Leninskiy Districts as it rebuilt and fully furnished six schools in this south-eastern part of Tajikistan. Also during this phase, over 150 orphaned children found a better home when the project reconstructed an orphanage in the Tanobchi area of Sovetskaya District.

The second phase of the project (2009–2013) reconstructed a further seven schools in Vaksh, Fayzabad, Hissar, Rudaki, Hamadoni, Jomi and Dangara Districts of Tajikistan, opening new, fully equipped classes for 4,852 school children. It also created jobs for over 1,000 teachers and other school support staff. The total budget for the second phase was US\$13.02 million – with US\$10.55 million provided by IsDB and US\$2.47 million by the Government of Tajikistan.

### More than just a classroom

All of the schools reconstructed within this project are not merely improved and equipped facilities where school children are now able to study; they are seen by the students as a gateway to realising their childhood dreams such as becoming a lawyer, medical doctor or craftsman. Many of the schools' graduates end up pursuing higher education in Tajikistan's prominent universities. Some students are even accepted into prestigious international universities.

Skill development classes offered throughout all reconstructed schools equip students with hands-on experience and enhance their practical skills in artesian craftsmanship, tailoring, engineering, design and cooking. Moreover, schools offer after-class additional sessions so that students have the opportunity to delve further into any subject they desire.



Alidin is a six year old from Istiqlol Village, Jomi District. His father is a labour migrant and his mother found employment in the newly reconstructed school #62 of Azerbaijan rayon, Jomi District. Alidin attends the same school within the framework of the Early Childhood Development programme. He is truly happy that the new school gives him the opportunity to meet new friends and can make his dream of becoming a policeman come true.





"I want to become a literature teacher. However, a young woman needs to possess more than one skill. That is why I like the skill development classes offered in this new school where now I can learn how to sew and design clothes." Sayohat, 8th class local student, Charatar Village School #59, Fayzabad District.

Competitive secondary education is not the only positive outcome of the project; a healthy lifestyle is yet another great benefit that students at rebuilt schools enjoy. Some of the alumni have received nationwide recognition in sports, winning bronze, silver and gold medals in national competitions – just one example is an alumnus of 2012 from school #59 of Charatar Village, Aini District, who became a national gold medal-winning wrestling champion during his senior year.

### A sustainable system

To ensure that the project's work is sustainable, the Government of Tajikistan, through its District Government budget, allocates funds every year to each completed school for both routine and periodic maintenance.

Local communities have also realised the vital importance of secondary education, which they perceive as a ticket to a better future for their youth. This has led to a bottom-up approach with communities contributing towards the project's sustainability. To back up the Government's support for the schools, the students' parents have voluntarily formed 'Students' Parents Associations'. These associations fill in the small funding gaps needed for a school's maintenance (through fundraising among parents who can afford to donate money), provide volunteer services, and also monitor the academic endeavours of the schools. Additionally, the schools' staff seek funding from local community donors as yet another fundraising mechanism, and receive both monetary and in-kind donations.

According to Sunatullo Ashurov – an exemplary Principal of school #62, Jomi District, some of the schools own land where the staff members grow vegetables with the help of the students. The harvest is then shared among the faculty or given to students from low-income families. In some cases, the schools cultivate broom shrubs to make brooms that are later sold at market – the profit then goes to the school budget.

### Above and beyond the call

Some of the schools, having bound official agreements with local higher education academia, have also become community vocational training centres. These schools provide local community members other than school children with technical training courses in which they can develop theoretical knowledge and become better equipped with practical skills. The improved professional skills that can be earned here can drastically increase the chances of getting a better job within local, national and even international labour markets. Knowledge of English and computer applications are crucial selection criteria for employers so IT and English courses are the most popular at the centres and impact greatly on people's livelihoods.

One of these community education training centres is in school #63, Jomi District. The school, reconstructed under the project, signed an agreement with the local Kurgan-Tube State University and now provides community members with professional training in IT and English. After completing one- and three-month courses, participants receive certificates without having to travel outside of their area, which not only saves them money on travel costs, but also allows more flexibility for personal time management. Most of the residents are bound to their local businesses as a source of income and usually cannot afford either the time or money to travel if they wish to advance their knowledge or skills – the learning centres are an ideal solution.

### Strengthening the platform first

An adequately prepared younger generation is instrumental in obtaining quality elementary and secondary school education. Acting on this principle, the administrations of the schools reconstructed within the project have started to employ an Early Childhood Development methodology. Some of the schools now take on up to 20 children at a time from the local communities to standardise their pre-school basic



"Besides getting my school diploma, I also want to become a national wrestling champion just like an alumnus from last year. Now in this new school we have bigger classrooms, more books and a much better gym, so I think I have all the chances I need to reach my goal." Hojisafar, a 5th class student from the Charatar Village school #59, Fayzabad District.



literacy level and better prepare them psychologically for the next academic year. This approach helps to build a more robust secondary school education.

### Keeping up the momentum

Thus far, the Islamic Development Bank has finished financing two out of three phases of the Secondary School Reconstruction and Completion Project. The successful completion of these phases has significantly increased access and equity in Tajikistan's secondary school system, but there are more benefits to come.

The third phase of the project has already started. The main target of this phase is to reconstruct seven additional schools in Kulyab, Shugnon, Panjakent, Muminabad, Hamadoni, Pyanj and Hissar Districts. The third phase also aims to build teachers' capacity with training on how best to teach the use of modern technology and on up-to-date teaching methods. Furthermore, IsDB will provide funding to develop the curricula in response to labour market needs, and funding to print key textbooks. About 6,000 students and 400 teachers will directly benefit from phase three.



School children playing basketball in school #62, Jomi District

## Success factors

### Continuous commitment

Robust leadership at the local Project Management Unit has guaranteed continued commitment from the critical staff; the majority of the members have been involved with the project for over a decade throughout all three phases since its inception in 1998. The non-stop involvement of the staff members, who have become continuously more experienced, has been of extreme importance to the success of the project to date.

### Building on the existing

The project capitalises on the existing infrastructure that was either unfinished or destroyed during the civil war. It is quicker and cheaper to rebuild and expand than it is to start on new sites from scratch, and it ensures that resources used in the past are not put to waste.

### International partnership

The project's approach combines local technical capacity through the local Project Management Unit and international expertise through engineering and supervision consultancy firms. This helps to ensure that the project is implemented as effectively as possible.

## Acknowledgements

This success story document is based on the Report and Recommendations of the President on the Proposed Loan Financing for the Secondary School Development Project in the Republic of Tajikistan (December 1997; July 2005; December 2011) prepared by IsDB and the Final Project Report (February 2012) prepared by the Government of Tajikistan. The story was supplemented by additional material from field visits by Mr Mohammed Shahid Parwez and Mr Shodi Abdulvasiev (March 2013).

The preparation of this success story was managed by Dr Intizar Hussain and Br Faisal Siddik of the IsDB's Operations Policy and Compliance (OPC) Division of the Operations Policy and Services Department (OPSD). All direct and indirect contributions by the colleagues, in particular Dr Mohammed Abderrahmane Beddi and Br Mohamed Suhail of the Education Division of the Human Development Department, and partners of IsDB for the successful implementation and evaluation of the project, and for the preparation of this document, are gratefully acknowledged.

### Contact for any query

Manager, Operations Policy and Compliance (OPC) Division  
Operations Policy and Services Department (OPSD)  
Islamic Development Bank Group  
13th Floor, Main Building  
PO Box 5925, Jeddah 21432, Saudi Arabia

Email: [ihussain@isdb.org](mailto:ihussain@isdb.org)

Tel: (+966 2) 646 6907

Fax: (+966 2) 646 6966

[www.isdb.org](http://www.isdb.org)

Writing, design and layout by Scriptoria Sustainable Development Communications

[www.scriptoria.co.uk](http://www.scriptoria.co.uk)

