



Success Story #2: Rotarian helps channel hope in Tajikistan

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Although water may be abundant in cities, Dzalaeva and other Rotarians have struggled to bring it to Tajik farmers.

Photo courtesy of Michal Fidler

Sabina-Margarita Dzalaeva, 26, has broken through many boundaries. She's the youngest member of a new Rotary club in a new Rotary country, Tajikistan. She also manages a Rotarian-led water project that's supplying thousands of villagers with permanent clean-water systems.

Dzalaeva is among the few college-educated, professional women in Tajikistan. She studied economics and management at the University of Dushanbe, located in Tajikistan's capital and Dzalaeva's hometown, where she still lives.

In 1992, a five-year civil war broke out that left the majority of the country's six million citizens living below the poverty line with deteriorating medical care and education.

Dzalaeva always wanted to help others through her work, and she got her chance after meeting Czech geographer Michal Fidler in 2005. He had just arrived from Florida, USA, as part of a Rotarian-led effort to bring fresh running water to Tajik villages.

Sabina knew that many Tajik farmers in isolated mountain villages struggled to survive on the meager harvests of the arid land. Local water systems had eroded or been destroyed during the war, so women spent their days hauling water from the mountain streams to their village gardens.

Fidler told Dzalaeva that Rotarian engineers and experts had worked with the nonprofit organization CARE to construct pipelines in the mountains north of Dushanbe. The systems delivered clean drinking water to almost 3,500 villagers.

Dzalaeva was impressed that the Rotarian teams put the villagers in charge of constructing, maintaining, and managing the water systems. "They learned they could be in control of their lives, something they'd never known before," she said.

The Rotarians wanted to supply nine more villages with clean drinking water in 2006, and they needed help with fundraising and overseeing grant distribution, contracts, and construction.



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Dzalaeva was able to help the Rotarians with this goal when she became a Rotarian herself. In June 2006, she joined the Rotary Club of Dushanbe, which Fidler had helped start in April 2005.

"At first, I found the concept of Rotary beyond Tajikistan hard to understand," she says. But since then, she says Rotary and her work have shown her what community service organizations can achieve together around the world.

She now oversees the construction of water systems for nine more villages north of Dushanbe, partially funded by a [Matching Grant](#) from The Rotary Foundation.

Dzalaeva says she'll never forget how she felt when she visited one of the first villages Rotarians equipped with community water faucets. "I saw green land," she says. "I saw men hurrying from the water faucets to their gardens, carrying buckets of water. I saw men working in their orchards. They used to come to Dushanbe looking for work and ended up sitting in the streets, without hope for a job or money to bring home. Now, their life will be easier with water."