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## SUCCESS STORY

# Defending a widow's right to land and property

### The Land Reform Project in Tajikistan helps return a home to its legal owner



Photo: Chemonics / Fozil Abdurashidov

*Fayzinisso Ashurova thanks Legal Aid Director Nodira Sidykova at the project's office in Khujand.*

**“My faith was tested when my husband died and we lost our house, but then Nodira and the Land Reform Project gave me and my children hope.” – Fayzinisso Ashurova**

*Fayzinisso and her five children were unjustly evicted from their home after her husband passed away. The USAID Land Reform Project took Fayzinisso's case to the Supreme Court, which decided in her favor.*

In Tajikistan, as in many developing countries, a range of cultural, social, and political factors combined with a lack of awareness regarding legal issues prevent women from enjoying their rights to land and property, often subjecting them to unjust and sometimes fraudulent practices.

Ms. Fayzinisso Ashurova and her husband purchased a house near Khujand in 1998. The seller, Mr. Kubilov, took Fayzinisso's money and promised to finalize the necessary paperwork in a few days time. However, Kubilov unexpectedly moved to Uzbekistan and never provided Fayzinisso with the proper title to the house.

Fayzinisso tried to find the seller for years, but to no avail. Having learned that Fayzinisso was widowed in 2008, Kubilov, still in Uzbekistan, sought to take advantage of the situation. Kubilov gave power of attorney to his friend, who in turn drafted a purchase agreement granting the title of Fayzinisso's house to Parvina, the friend's daughter. Parvina then immediately evicted Fayzinisso and her five children.

“I did not know where to turn for help” said Fayzinisso. Her son suggested that she contact the USAID Land Reform Project in Khujand having heard that the project provides legal services to farmers and rural citizens. “I had nothing to lose, so I prayed and went to the office” said Fayzinisso.

Legal Aid Director Ms. Nodira Sidykova interviewed Fayzinisso and reviewed all her documents. After a thorough study of the documents and the relevant legislation and international conventions, Nodira took the case all the way to the Supreme Court of Tajikistan on Fayzinisso's behalf. Court records reveal that the documents granting title to Parvina were void, based upon fraud and collusion. On June 18, 2010 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Fayzinisso and returned the house to her and her children. Fayzinisso exclaimed “I can't thank Nodira and USAID enough!”

The USAID Land Reform Project is one of the many assistance projects the American people, through USAID, have provided in support of the people of Tajikistan. Since 1992, the American people have provided approximately \$900 million in programs that support Tajikistan's democratic institutions, health care, education and economic growth.