



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/community-associations-empower-smallholder-farmers-manage-water-resources-agriculture>

Community Associations Empower Smallholder Farmers to Manage Water Resources for Agriculture



Jessica Dunckel, USAID

A member of the Obi Vaksh-1 water users association in Tajikistan shows off the drainage system the group rehabilitated to improve conditions for its community.

In Tajikistan, a small Central Asian country that used to be part of the Soviet Union, rainfall is very limited, and more than two thirds of the country's arable land requires irrigation in order to be cultivated by farmers. This means that there is a high demand among Tajik farmers for water to irrigate crops—a staggering 90 percent of water in Tajikistan is used for agriculture.

Without reliable irrigation, farmers cannot sustainably increase the agricultural production that is needed to improve food security, nutrition and income levels in Tajikistan. Lack of access to clean water and good sanitation also exacerbates undernutrition and makes women and children in particular more susceptible to illness.

Unfortunately, years of civil war and declining infrastructure have taken their toll on water systems in Tajikistan, which were centrally managed under the Soviet Union and have since fallen into disrepair.

That's why Feed the Future is helping place water management back into the hands of farming communities and local governments for the first time in nearly a century, and developing their capacity to peacefully and sustainably build and maintain irrigation systems that underpin growth in Tajikistan's agriculture sector.

To accomplish this goal, Feed the Future supports community-based water users associations, groups of farmers who work together to plan how the community will deliver water to its crops. Under Feed the Future, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) trains the associations in governance, business management and other skills, and provides small grants to help the associations build offices and purchase equipment that water users can employ to rehabilitate irrigation canals and other infrastructure.

Over four years, USAID aims to establish and build support for 60 water users associations in Tajikistan's Khatlon Province, where poverty and undernutrition are concentrated.

In Khatlon's Jilikul district, the 317 members of a new water users association called Obi Vaksh-1 have cleaned and rehabilitated more than 13 kilometers of a local drainage system since the association was launched earlier this year. Dodarov Rahmidin, the chairman of Obi Vaksh-1, which serves 2,475 hectares of irrigated farmland, says the repaired

drainage system has improved soil conditions and increased yields for farmers by lowering the water table, which was so high that it was killing trees in the community and even causing problems with latrines in people's homes. The repaired drainage system now helps the community address the challenge of managing Tajikistan's abundant surface water.

"Our main expectation when we started this water users association was to improve the well-being of residents in the area," Rahmidin says. "Now that we have cleaned the drainage system, the water levels are back to normal and people are very happy."

The Obi Vaksh-1 association is also repairing old water gates and aims to benefit approximately 18,000 people with improved access to water for agriculture.

As a result of climate change, droughts in the coming years are predicted to become more frequent and intense in Tajikistan, and it will be even more critical for farmers to effectively manage land and water resources. Without appropriate irrigation and drainage, soil in this dry, mountainous country can become waterlogged, salinized and degraded to the point that it is unfit for agriculture. Conversely, increased access to reliable irrigation in Tajikistan could rehabilitate hundreds of thousands of hectares of currently non-arable land and make it available for crops that would increase food security and incomes for smallholder farmers and their families.

By supporting community-managed water resources, Feed the Future is empowering Tajik farmers to become more resilient to weather and climate-related threats and mitigating the effects of climate change on the most vulnerable families.