



SUCCESS STORY

Imam Involves Community in Updating Mosque

Imam adopts new practices after meeting American religious leaders



Photo: Furkat Murnunov

Mahamatkarim Matmuratov, District Imam – Hatib of Leilek District in Batken Region, in his mosque.

“Being a teacher requires ... learning from those you teach ... Feedback is more effective when your students are open,” said Imam Matmuratov.

A USAID-sponsored study tour in the U.S. has inspired multiple changes in the Leilek District Mosque, located in the remote town of Isfana in southern Kyrgyzstan.

The changes were spearheaded by Chief Imam of the Leilek District Mahamatkarim Matmuratov who was one of ten representatives of religious organizations that spent three weeks in Detroit, Michigan, meeting with American religious leaders. The study tour was arranged by the USAID Community Connections program and focused on the role of religion in the secular society.

Upon returning home, Matmuratov introduced several new ideas in his own mosque. One of them was involving the community in modernizing the mosque. He learned from his meetings with American religious leaders that fundraising and community efforts finance places of worship in the U.S. Impressed by the well-maintained buildings and grounds of places of worship in the U.S., Matmuratov organized a fundraising that paid for renovation of the washbasins for worshippers at the mosque. With community support, he is now planning several more projects to beautify his mosque and its surroundings.

He also introduced a box for anonymous suggestions and questions that the imam saw used in American mosques. “After I placed this box out in the mosque, people have submitted many interesting questions that I have never considered before,” the imam said.

Matmuratov feels that imams should talk with their congregations about such questions. “Being a teacher requires not only teaching but also learning from those you teach,” he said. “Feedback is more effective when your students are open in some way.”

Matmuratov is also sharing his experiences in the U.S. with other Imams from his district and from the neighboring countries of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The first group he reached out to included more than 50 imams of the Leilek District who work with a population of more than 117,000 people. He wants to make sure that the message of tolerance among different religious groups spreads not only among other imams but to the broader populations.