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UNV Community Volunteer Coordinator Maksuda Muhsinbaeva (centre) during a joint volunteer training event with the Uzbekistan Red Crescent in Namangan, Uzbekistan. (UNDP Europe and Central Asia, 2013)

Strengthening community action and volunteerism

Maksuda Muhsinbaeva is serving as a UNV Community Volunteer Coordinator in Namangan. The project she is part of, Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan, aims to create an environment that is more supportive of youth volunteerism and civic engagement. It's satisfying but challenging work. In addition to representing the project at a local level, a Community Volunteer Coordinator's responsibilities include many other elements, such as training volunteer leaders and civil society organizations, facilitating local volunteer initiatives, or partnering with local administrations and stakeholders to promote community development.

Maksuda Muhsinbaeva is serving as a UNV Community Volunteer Coordinator in Namangan, the most populous city of the Fergana Valley in Eastern Uzbekistan. She has a background in psychology, a decade-long record in community development with both local and international organizations, and is now one of several national UN Volunteers working in Uzbekistan.

The project that Maksuda is part of, Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan, is led jointly by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its mission is to create an environment that is more supportive of youth volunteerism and civic engagement, and to encourage the use of innovative approaches to tackle community challenges.

The project is based in the capital, Tashkent, and it has no national counterpart, so bringing the project's benefits outside the capital is a challenge. Given that there is a considerable opportunity gap between the well-developed metropolitan area of Tashkent and the provincial cities - not to mention more rural regions -, it is essential to ensure that the project reaches these areas too.

This is where Community Volunteer Coordinators like Maksuda come in. They help deliver the benefits of initiatives like small grants schemes, social innovation workshops or youth-run debating clubs to the rest of the country.

It's satisfying but challenging work. In addition to representing the project at a local level, a Community Volunteer Coordinator's responsibilities include many other elements, such as training volunteer leaders, civil society organizations and local authorities on various aspects of community action and development; facilitating local volunteer initiatives through participatory village development planning; or partnering with local administrations and stakeholders to promote community development and support for volunteer initiatives.

Maksuda enjoys doing her job and being able to make a difference in the Fergana Valley. "Volunteers are people whose kindness and compassion come through in any situation and who always stay true to themselves and others, radiating confidence and warmth. One cannot help but feel deep respect for them."

A priority for Maksuda is to strengthen the culture of volunteerism in the region. She thinks it is important to bring volunteers together, so they can share their experiences and support each other, while showcasing their accomplishments to the wider population.

"Much of the population is still unaware of the important work volunteers do. Volunteers engaged in organizations are vulnerable because there is no specific documentation protecting their rights," Maksuda points out. "If we can protect, educate, and unite volunteers and increase the number of long-term volunteers, I think it will make a valuable contribution to the development of volunteerism and to the development of our region more generally."

Sustainable Development Goal: