



## Meet the new Murghab Eco-Tourism Association (META) team

On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2012, the members of META held an extraordinary general meeting to restructure their organisation. META members have boldly decided to return META's scope to its original objectives of tourism development, ceasing all commercial tour operations with immediate effect.

Said Ubaidulla Mamadiev, a founding member of META since its inception in 2003 and outgoing President, *"It is an important step for META to demerge the commercial and non-commercial aspects of our association. Whilst growth and successful delivery of tour operations is crucial to the economy of Tajikistan, these cannot compromise the delivery of projects that conserve our biological diversity and preserve the local cultures."*

### The original objectives of META have been re-published and are to:

- Develop and support community-based tourism activities that educate community members and tourists to build capacity and increase knowledge of biodiversity, traditional culture and the flora & fauna of the East Pamir;
- Maximize benefits to the local communities by developing linkages between tourism and other businesses related to the sustainable management of natural resources and livestock breeding in the local economy.



Incoming President of META, Januzak Turdukulov has been working on META projects since 2003. He also is employed as an experienced guide and driver throughout the tourist season. *"I have long-held a vision for META to further expand its tourism development and community initiatives. The members of META have put their trust in me and I want to demonstrate my potential through co-operation with partners in Tajikistan and across the world. I look forward to being part of this democratic organisation and discussing issues and priorities with the META members."* Januzak particularly wants to develop people living in the local communities, including those from the poorer families, through work experience and training, thereby building resource capacity in the tourism sector.

Gulnara Apandieva was also born in Murghab and now takes the challenging role of Executive Director. In 2006 she graduated from Osh State University's Department of World Languages, with a major in English language and French as a second language. She spent a year as a volunteer for the Soros Foundation before returning to Tajikistan where she worked as an Assistant Manager in a business in Dushanbe, and participated in various training courses in Khorog with Milal Inter and at a US centre in Osh. Gulnara has worked with Operation Mercy and GIZ as a translator and a project assistant as well as with ACTED as area administrator and community mobiliser. She has been aware of META for some time and was very keen to work with them. Her main interest is to work on community-based projects and help develop tourism in the Eastern Pamir.



A new Executive Committee was also created, including Saitali Gaibuldaev, owner of Pamir Guides, Junus Jupovs, a home-stay provider from Murghab and Ismail Joshbaev, a representative of the 'tour driver' community. This executive team provides the new META association with a breadth of experience from all aspects of the tourism sector along with a depth of knowledge of the sector and the social and environment aspects of the region itself.

Some of the initial ideas for projects that the new META team are now working on include:

- Identify potential sponsors and partners for funding of META's projects. It is recognised that this is the priority for META in order for them to establish a firm financial foundation.
- Establish the administration needed to support the organisation and its members.
- Develop a website to promote and market their work in tourism development in the region.
- Follow up on capacity building training, which was delivered in early May by Aiymgul Kalandarkhonova, owner of the 'Pamir Experience' tour operator business. Identify further support requirements.
- Create and print maps of Murghab and Rangkul with all the key sites located on them as well as details of the home stays/guest houses and tour operators.
- Support etc4CA on their wind power project in Murghab, Toktamish, Rangkul and Karakul.
- Produce a 'responsible tourism' short film, in conjunction with etc4CA, which will be premiered at the forthcoming 2012 World Travel Market in London, November 2012.