



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

December 1-December 15, 2009

GENDER

Ending Violence Against Women: Violence against women is a major problem in Afghanistan, and many women and girls will fall victim to domestic violence during their lifetimes. USAID is supporting Afghanistan’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) in a coordinated effort to raise awareness about domestic violence and women’s rights.



Minister of Women's Affairs Hosn Bano Ghazanfar holds a press conference to mark Elimination of Violence Against Women Day.

PHOTO: USAID/MISPA

On November 25, Minister of Women’s Affairs Hosn Bano Ghazanfar held a press conference to mark Elimination of Violence Against Women Day and distributed food to vulnerable women. Other activities in November and December include the launch of a campaign titled “The Role of Men in the Family,” which uses booklets, posters, and radio spots to educate men about their responsibility to respect women’s rights. Additionally, Salam Watandar radio station is broadcasting a six-episode, five-minute drama series in Pashto and Dari on human trafficking, which will reach listeners in all 34 provinces.

Provincial Departments of Women’s Affairs also hosted local events to raise awareness about violence against women. In Kandahar, more than 300 women participated in a ceremony during which religious leaders and representatives of the Governor’s Office, women’s associations, and community groups spoke out regarding the violence against women in Afghanistan. To end violence against women, ceremony participants recommended enhancing the awareness of male and female community members about women’s rights within an Islamic framework.



USAID and MRRD provided solar lights to Kuchi nomads.

PHOTO: USAID/ACEP

INFRASTRUCTURE

USAID Pilots a Solar Solution for Afghanistan’s Nomads: Afghanistan’s Kuchi nomads have been identified by the United Nations as one of the country’s largest vulnerable populations. There are reportedly three million Kuchis in Afghanistan, with at least 60 percent maintaining a fully nomadic lifestyle. USAID recently partnered with the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) to provide solar lights for Kuchis in Nangarhar province, improving safety and quality of life.

The solar light is a rugged, long-lasting, solar-powered, and rechargeable alternative to the



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expensive kerosene lanterns that many Kuchis currently use. The solar light could potentially save users more than 20 to 30 percent of their monthly income by reducing the need to purchase kerosene. Solar lights also eliminate fine carbon inhalation, injuries from burns due to kerosene spillage, and the risk of fire. As a pilot initiative, 10 solar lights were distributed to a Kuchi community. The community members were asked to evaluate the lights in terms of the adequacy of the light provided, number of hours of use between recharging, and durability. MRRD staff assisted USAID in the distribution and will monitor the viability of the solar lights for broader distribution.

EDUCATION

Communities Rally to Continue Education

Program: USAID's community-based Learning for Community Empowerment Program (LCEP-2) addresses the root causes of poverty and unemployment by integrating literacy education with economic empowerment training. Recently, several participating communities in eastern Afghanistan were faced with threats from insurgents, who demanded the termination of this important education program.

To ensure that community members could continue to participate safely in the program, Community Development Councils united with households, the district governor, and the district security chief to take drastic measures against possible insurgent activities in the district. As a result of their efforts, 2,500 adults have been able to continue attending classes in 50 learning centers.

"We have to support and implement the USAID-funded LCEP in our district because it is not only a reading and writing program, it also [fosters] productive skills and establishment of community banks, which play a vital role in poverty reduction and strengthen the economy," a high-level district official said. The program provides individuals with the opportunity to enroll in literacy classes, gain marketable job skills, attend business development training, and participate in community banking. Throughout Afghanistan, LCEP-2 is improving the livelihoods of 312,000 youth and adults in 20 provinces.

National Higher Education Strategic Plan Launched: With the progress made in enrollment rates in primary and secondary education during the past eight years, expanding access to quality higher education is an urgent challenge in Afghanistan. On December 3, 2009, the Ministry of Higher Education launched its first National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP). Developed with the support of USAID, the World Bank, and UNESCO, the plan advances the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the constitutional



Women gain literacy and business skills thanks to a USAID-funded community education program.

PHOTO: USAID/LCEP-2



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obligation of Afghanistan to provide higher education opportunities to its citizens. Through the NHESP, the Ministry of Higher Education aims to facilitate access to higher education; establish innovative institutions; and produce well-educated graduates who can contribute to the economic growth, social development, and stability of Afghanistan.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

Horticulture and Forestation for Underserved

Populations in Eastern Afghanistan: On December 2, USAID celebrated the successful completion of its horticulture and forestation technical training program in Kunar. The project, implemented in nine districts, provided agricultural training for 875 Afghans in orchard establishment, nurseries, woodlots, and natural resource management. USAID reached out to the entire community through its program, ultimately training farmers, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock staff, school principals, religious elders, and 25 female nursery managers.

As a result, 757 jeribs of orchards and 72 jeribs of woodlots were planted and 25 family-run nurseries were registered with the Nurseries Association. Participants also learned better techniques for planting crops and orchards including apricot, pomegranate, almond, eggplant, persimmon, apple, walnut, and mung bean. At the closing ceremony, Provincial Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) Muhsal Khan thanked USAID for its support and said, "By learning this skill, [the farmers] will be able to maintain their gardens and our MAIL staff will be able to technically monitor the project sites in the future."



During a USAID-funded horticulture and forestation training program in Kunar, a student and trainer inspect a recently planted tree.

PHOTO: USAID/DAI/LGCD

Vocational Training Offers Opportunities for Youth: In three volatile districts in Laghman province, 190 young men recently completed a USAID-funded vocational training program designed to provide marketable jobs skills. The successful training program took place in areas plagued by an intense insurgent recruitment effort, providing unskilled young men with the training they need to find well-paid jobs in metal work; tailoring; and maintenance of motorbikes, bicycles, and generators. Matching skills with community needs, the program is bringing employment to the province while supporting the government's counterinsurgency efforts. USAID plans to expand vocational training to more youth in Laghman and other provinces in eastern Afghanistan.



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Afghan officials, international donors, and community leaders celebrate the launch of the Nangarhar Industrial Park construction.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

USAID-funded Industrial Park Construction Launched in Nangarhar:

On November 18, Afghan officials, international donors, and community leaders came together to launch a USAID-funded industrial park project that will help attract investment to Nangarhar province. The park will expand economic opportunities for 50,000 local residents, create more than 10,000 jobs, and will eventually host more than 300 light industry businesses. Many of these jobs will be filled over the next two years, during the construction of the park.

The November 18 event marked completion of the park's main access road, which USAID constructed.

In attendance were representatives of the provincial and district governments, USAID, as well as project co-sponsors the World Bank and the Afghan Investment Support Agency (AISA). "Without USAID support, it would be impossible for AISA and the Afghan government to implement such projects," said the AISA deputy director.

HEALTH

Afghanistan Celebrates World AIDS Day: On December 1, countries around the world marked World AIDS Day with events to raise awareness about the disease and its prevention. The theme of 2009's World AIDS Day linked healthcare to human rights, advocating that "access for all to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is a critical part of human rights." In Afghanistan, USAID contributed to the global effort by developing advocacy and awareness radio and television messages for all major Afghan TV and radio stations. The messages began airing on World AIDS day, reaching approximately 15 million people.

AGRICULTURE

National Wheat Seed and Fertilizer Distribution Program Begins:

On November 17, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) Mohammed Asif Rahimi launched this year's national wheat seed and fertilizer distribution program, which will help more than two million Afghan farmers. USAID provides vouchers to farmers to purchase high quality inputs such as improved wheat seed and fertilizers.

"Farmers are the backbone of one of the most important sectors in Afghanistan," said USAID Mission



A farmer in Balkh celebrates his bountiful wheat crop in 2009.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



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Director William M. Frej. "USAID is pleased to be part of this effort." USAID expects to provide vouchers to 360,000 farmers in 18 provinces in northern, central and western parts of the country this year, up from 297,000 last year.

The program will further support a Farm Saved Seed project, focusing on production of quality seed, and will provide training on the best ways to store wheat seed for future planting seasons. By improving production and ensuring better yields, farmers are not only able to consume and sell what they harvest, but also use any surplus wheat seeds for future planting seasons or for sale in the market. This contributes to a steady income and sustainable agriculture.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Afghan Products on Display in Russia: From December 9-13, representatives of Afghanistan's most well-known industries participated in the first Moscow Fair of Afghanistan Products. Approximately 50 Afghan businesses showcased their products at the fair in Russia, including carpets, handicrafts, leather products, marble, gemstones, and fresh and dried fruits. Participation in trade fairs allows Afghan traders and craftsmen to promote Afghan products, make valuable international contacts, and generate direct sales and future contracts. USAID provided technical assistance and financial support to businesses participating in the Moscow Fair.



Afghan products on display at the Moscow Fair of Afghanistan Products.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED