



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Mark Dillen

Phone: +93 (0) 794 858 541

Email: mdillen@state.gov

First Womens' Market Opens in Mazari Sharif

MAZAR-I-SHARIF, AFGHANISTAN | APRIL 16, 2011 – In response to the need to create more business opportunities for Afghan women, Balkh provincial leaders and local female entrepreneurs today celebrated the opening of a Women's Market in Mazari Sharif. The new market is a joint effort between USAID, the Balkh Provincial Women's Affairs Department, and the World Women Association. The ceremony highlighted the importance of empowering women to play a role in Afghanistan's economic development.

The women's market, the only market of its kind in Mazari Sharif, houses 20 women-owned stores that sell a range of goods from handicrafts to beauty supplies and photography equipment. The shops will provide employment for more than 80 local women.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Minister of Women Affairs Palwasha Shaheed Kakar said, "The establishment of markets and business facilities to empower women plays a vital role and helps them gain economic freedom and help support their families. We appreciate USAID for supporting Rabia Balkhi Women's Market and all the businesswomen in Balkh."

Responding to a request from the Women's Affairs Department and the World Women Association to support income generation opportunities for local women, USAID provided two grants totaling \$58,700 to rehabilitate the market building, to purchase basic equipment to help the women open their shops, and to unite and train the shop owners through the creation of the World Women Association. An Afghan firm completed construction work on the marketplace structure.

"I never had a shop before this because there was no women's market and this was a serious obstacle because culturally, women are not supposed to do business with men," said Shafiq, a market shop owner. "The new market is now an appropriate and suitable location for all women. We can share business related challenges and issues and can find workable solutions. The monthly income from the business will allow me to pay monthly household expenses."

USAID's Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development project increases opportunities for trade, employment, and investment by improving private sector productivity, targeting small and medium enterprises and their supporting private sector institutions through grants and a full range of business development services. To date, the USAID project has established and/or renovated 82 marketplaces, trained more than 4,900 entrepreneurs, and helped 390 business associations to provide better service to their members. # # #

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