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SNAPSHOT

All's Well That Ends Well

Residents work together to improve access to water



Photo: USAID/CDP/CADG

Muhammad Agha residents reinforcing a damaged section of canal.

Repairs to the Muhammad Agha Canal have enabled residents to gain water access for their crops. Families will no longer be forced to pool their money and place risky bets on test wells.

When their supporting irrigation system failed, the villagers of Muhammad Agha District in Logar Province faced the expensive prospect of drilling test wells into the water table. This is a risky prospect in the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan because water pools unevenly below rocky mountain surfaces and probing through layers of granite and limestone can be far more expensive than probing through soil. Often, test wells miss the water table entirely. The process typically costs \$32 per meter, turning the exploration into an expensive gamble for poverty-stricken villages.

During the past eight years, 12 of the 18 villages that comprise the district have taken this gamble. As irrigation systems failed from floods between 2007 and 2010, families in several villages began to save money to drill water wells. Several neighboring households would each contribute 15,000 to 22,000 Afghanis (\$333 to \$490). By pooling their money, it was enough for two test wells. If the test wells worked, the families could develop a working well and improve their chances of a good harvest. Often, however, these wells failed, leaving the families in desperate financial straits.

In late June 2011, the Logar provincial government began work with USAID and its implementing partner, Central Asia Development Group, to repair the worst damage to the Muhammad Agha Canal. The project included lining the most inefficient sections of the canal with a water barrier while reconstructing 18 culverts and repairing 115 water gates. By the end of the project, nearly 14 km of the Muhammad Agha Canal had been reconstructed.

The project employed nearly 1,400 district residents while improving access to water for 1,300 households in the district. Other than the benefit of revenues provided through temporary employment on project teams and the long-term benefit of improved water access, these families have also been freed from the need to pool their money and bet on test wells. This will remove one of many challenges faced by families surviving through subsistence agriculture.