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AFGHANISTAN



CASE STUDY

Meaningful Alternatives to Insurgency

Irrigation projects offer residents a meaningful alternative to work with insurgent groups



Photo: USAID/CDP/CADG

Laborers pause while excavating a damaged section of canal that runs through the Khas Kunar district center.

CHALLENGE Roughly 120,000 residents from Kunar Province in Afghanistan travel to Pakistan in search of work each year. 97 percent of these residents are men in their twenties and thirties. Most of them will spend less than a year in Pakistan, waiting for the return of seasonal farming jobs in their home country. In Pakistan, the average worker will earn \$120 per month in wages, saving only \$16 after room and board expenses. These savings can cover the expense of weddings, fertilizer loans, or family medical emergencies. As a result, financial pressures have led some young men in Kunar toward work with insurgent groups, some of whom pay as much as \$120 to any farmer willing to plant an explosive device along one of Kunar's roadways.

INITIATIVE USAID launched an irrigation project in the province along Afghanistan's eastern border in Khas Kunar District. Implemented by Central Asia Development Group, the project employed 3,237 men from villages throughout the district to rebuild canals and walls that protect more than 8,000 ha of farmland. Skilled laborers were paid \$10 per day for the duration of the 150-day project, while unskilled laborers received \$5 per day for 50-day periods. Each evening, the workforce returned home for a cooked meal instead of eating at a stall or canteen. As a result, workers were able to save \$100 to \$300 per month.

RESULTS Far fewer young men traveled to Pakistan during the project's duration. Muhammad Nasim is one of the dozens of ex-Taliban who gave up the life of an insurgent to work on USAID projects. He said that people were actually returning from Pakistan to seek work on project sites. "Villagers prefer to stay at home when farms yield good crops and when flooding is controlled," said Nasim. "If work opportunities are available, people resist insurgent recruitment, even if they are promised far more than local daily wages."

Nasim spends his spare time sending a similar message to his ex-comrades in the area. "I tell them, if there is work, if there is good farming, then we have enough and we should not join the insurgents who want to destroy Afghanistan."