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SNAPSHOT

'Problem' Village Unites For Solution

A village in southeastern Afghanistan repairs its canals and reservoirs in defiance of insurgents



Zamarai Kot village turns out to repair a canal

Photo Credit: USAID/CADG

Zamarai Kot is locally dubbed Mushkil because the Dari word means problem and the village has so many of them, not least its location in an area rife with insurgent activity

There's a reason that Zamarai Kot is locally dubbed 'Mushkil'. The Dari word means problem and Zamarai Kot village, in Paktika province in southeastern Afghanistan, has long been beset by multiple problems. Damaged irrigation infrastructure has meant low crop yield and the village is in an area affected by insurgent activity.

When local Afghan officials sought to help, Zamarai Kot village was faced with yet another problem. The plan was for villagers to rebuild their reservoir and nine kilometers of canals with support from the local authorities and USAID, but the insurgents demanded there be no collaboration with the Afghan government. "They threatened to kidnap and torture us if we worked on the project," says Haji Mohammed Akber, recalling the difficult decision his village faced.

"We realized that if we reconstructed the intake and irrigation canals, it would protect us from floods and greatly improve the economy of our community," he declared, "but to do so would defy the insurgents' diktat and would be a break with the past.

Zamarai Kot decided to stand united against the insurgents, with more than 500 villagers joining 20 Afghan government representatives, including the Provincial Governor, at the project's official launch. Haji Akber says it has been a lesson in strength through solidarity. "Implementing this project has awakened in us the desire to work to improve our country. It has taught us that if we work together we really can make a difference."