



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

March 1-March 15, 2010

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

International Women's Day Celebrations Highlight Opportunities for Afghan Women:

Throughout Afghanistan, communities and local government officials came together in early March to celebrate International Women's Day. The celebrations attracted thousands of women and their families and reinforced the credibility of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in fostering women's empowerment and providing a safe venue for such public events. The U.S. Government is committed to fostering opportunities for women, from education to community leadership. Celebrations in some of Afghanistan's most insecure provinces demonstrate that the efforts of USAID and the Afghan Government are providing a better environment for women.



The governor of Hilmand presents a gift on the occasion of International Women's Day.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

Hilmand – A year ago, barely 50 women dared attend an International Women's Day celebration in the contested southern province of Hilmand. However, if the celebration honoring this year's Women's Day is any indication, hope is beginning to trump fear. Approximately 600 women attended a celebration in Lashkar Gah, organized by the Department of Women's Affairs with support from USAID. The governor of Hilmand encouraged the participation of women in leadership roles, and media covered the event, demonstrating that the Afghan Government was able to provide a safe, secure environment to celebrate the important role of women in Afghan society.

Kandahar – More than 600 women braved security threats to celebrate International Women's Day in Kandahar city. The governor, parliament and provincial council members, members of civil society and international organizations, the director of Women's Affairs, media representatives, teachers, and students actively participated in the event. The celebration included songs and speeches that highlighted women's achievements and the challenges they face. The governor of Kandahar highlighted his support for women in his speech, saying, "I encourage more meetings to be held on women's issues and the challenges they face in our society." The Department of Women's Affairs organized the event in cooperation with the Afghanistan Independent Human Right Commission, UNAMA, and USAID.

Uruzgan – Despite serious security concerns, USAID supported two Women's Day events in Tirin Kot. On March 10, approximately 400 women attended the larger of the two events. All participants received gift bags that included health and hygiene items, and an additional 100 gift bags will be distributed to women unable to attend.



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AGRICULTURE

Reforestation Improves Environment and Diet:

Reforestation improves the environment and provides healthier spaces for Afghan citizens. USAID is helping to reforest the country with a variety of trees, including fruit trees, to provide both greenery and income-generation opportunities. Additionally, USAID is planting trees at schools to increase environmental awareness, and is planting along roads or canals to decrease erosion and reduce water loss.

Recently, USAID reforested public areas including schools, city parks, and industrial parks. Girls and boys schools, industrial parks, and Jalalabad municipality received 1,950 trees. Nearly 2,500 local farmers received forest saplings and fruit trees, the products of which – fruit and wood – will become a renewable source of income. Currently, more than 9,500 families in three refugee camps are receiving 42,000 trees, which they will plant around their homes to provide greenery and a source of fruit to their diets.



An Afghan farmer plants a tree sapling.

PHOTO: USAID/IDEA-NEW



Science professors at Kabul Education University use the outdoor environment to find creative ways to teach science.

PHOTO: Fiona Rowand

EDUCATION

New Ideas for Teaching Science: Science instruction in Afghanistan has been reenergized thanks to a USAID-supported professional development program for university education science faculty members. “Injecting Inquiry into the Classroom” is one of a series of science seminars that uses active experimentation and gives participants first-hand knowledge of how to make science fun by using local materials. The videos, which are filmed in U.S. classrooms, dubbed into Dari, and subtitled in Pashto, are also used to show how active lessons benefit learners and trainers.

In the most recent round of seminars, 201 science professors (64 women) from 17 faculties of education across the country received training in 11 workshops. The previous round, which included professors from Kabul, Paktya, and Kandahar, ran in late February.



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Participants from Kabul Education University used the university grounds to look for ways to turn their surrounding environment into research ideas. One participant commented, “Before this seminar, we saw science teaching as simply transferring knowledge, but now we see it as a continuous process of discovery.”

New Research Provides Insight into Student Politics: In late 2009, USAID funded the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) to study the role that student politics play within the larger political sphere. The recently published research paper gives a historical picture of Afghan student politics from the 1960s until today and connects these student movements to the development of political parties in Afghanistan.

The research is based upon approximately 100 interviews with students and political activists in Kabul, Hirat, Mazari Sharif, and Jalalabad, as well as interviews with former student activists from the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the key findings of the study include:

- The number of students actively involved in “rebellious” activities is much lower than in 2001, although it is gradually rising.
- The first signs of radicalism have started to appear among non-Pashtun students. However, only a very small numbers of educated Afghans and recent university graduates have been involved in anti-government activities to date.
- Afghan Government recognition of youth activist organizations as legitimate civil society groups will help strengthen democracy.



The full report is available online at <http://www.areas.org.af/> under “Latest Publications.”



The anti-corruption committee drafts its policy, supported by technical assistance from USAID.

PHOTO: USAID/BESST

Ministry of Education Drafts Anti-corruption Policy: Combating corruption is a top priority for the Afghan and U.S. governments. A letter issued from President Karzai’s office in January 2010 instructed all ministries to design strategies to eliminate corruption, and the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) Human Resources Department established a committee to draft an anti-corruption policy for its department. USAID’s Building Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) project provided technical assistance and supported the process.



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The committee, consisting of four high-ranking officials from the Human Resources Department, formulated two documents: “Anti-Corruption Policy and Implementation Plan for the MoE’s Human Resources Department” and “Procedures to Review Complaints of All MoE Personnel.” The new policies and procedures will take effect after review by the general director of Human Resources Department and approval by the minister of education.

The new policies will help the Human Resources Department to tackle corruption effectively and to establish a work environment that ensures fairness for all employees. One member of the Human Resources Department, eager to see the new policy take effect, stated, “Corruption is a very unprofessional act; the strict enforcement of this policy will make employees realize that corruption is not acceptable in the workplace anymore. The procedure to review complaints will provide an opportunity for employees to stand for their rights.”

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Hirat Mustofiat Medium Taxpayer Office Launches Operations: On February 20, the Hirat Mustofiat (provincial unit of the Ministry of Finance) graduated 26 Afghan tax officers, marking the completion of four weeks of intensive training in Afghanistan’s new tax laws. Through its Economic Growth and Governance Initiative (EGGI), USAID supported the training, in partnership with the United Kingdom Department for International Development/Adam Smith International.



Case preparation at the new Taxpayer Service Center in Hirat.

PHOTO: USAID/EGGI

USAID will continue to provide advisory services to these 26 tax officers as they begin their assignments in Hirat’s Medium Taxpayer Office (MTO) – the office that handles tax collection for medium-sized businesses, educational institutions, and international organizations. Immediately following graduation, the MTO director led his staff into the creation of a Taxpayer Service Center with completion anticipated in 30 days. The Taxpayer Service Center will provide educational seminars to an initial inventory of 900 taxpayer cases before the start of the income tax filing season, which is scheduled to commence on March 22, 2010.

AWAZ Communication Launches Afghan Successes: On February 11, USAID’s Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development (ASMED) program signed a Global Development Alliance (GDA) with AWAZ Communications to produce a weekly, primetime business and economics newsmagazine called *Afghan Successes*. The 30-minute television and radio program will highlight successful Afghan enterprises, while visually demonstrating the many business opportunities Afghanistan can offer. The overall goal of the program will be to encourage private investment, primarily targeting the Afghan business community.



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In order to attract as wide an audience as possible – ranging from young entrepreneurs to farmers and women – the program will be broadcast in both Dari and Pashto, and will package business information in entertaining formats, such as interviews, reports, portraits, and business tips. An important component of the program will be a weekly segment featuring Afghan businesswomen. Hosted by a moderator, the show will include guests and participants from the private sector, leading political figures, and key members from the business community to provide commentary and analysis. The first episode will feature the graduation ceremony of the first class of students from the Turquoise Mountain Institute of Afghan Arts and Architecture.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Practical Training Builds Better Engineers: Ninety engineering students in Kabul Polytechnic University's Power Department recently had a rare practical training opportunity to better prepare them for employment. In early 2010, the students completed six weeks of on-the-job training across the electrical power sector spectrum. Accompanied by three professors, the seniors spent time at power plants, substations, a junction station, and the Kabul dispatch center, learning the operation and maintenance skills needed at each type of installation.



Kabul Polytechnic University seniors who participated in USAID-sponsored practical training.

PHOTO: USAID/AECB

After the training, the students were tested on their new skills and knowledge. At the graduation ceremony on March 4, two students gave presentations that acknowledged how much this training had enhanced their insight into the power sector, since most of their engineering studies had been theoretical. "KPU gratefully appreciated USAID's work in this educational effort," stated Chancellor of Kabul Polytechnic University Dr. Ezatullah Aamed. Professor Qais observed, "Our students have really benefited from this USAID program, as well as the professors that accompanied them." Essentially all students agreed this experience would have a positive impact on their career choices and motivation in their future jobs. Several students expressed they would seek future employment at power sector sites in the private sector or the Afghan Electric Utility, requesting technical assignments rather than administrative duties.

Reliable Power for Kandahar Hospital: Until recently, Mirwais Hospital in Kandahar received electricity for only ten hours a day. With 350 beds and international professional staff, Mirwais is the only source of advanced medical care for three million Afghans in Hilmand, Kandahar, Zabul, and Uruzgan Provinces. Thanks to the dedication of the staff of the local electric utility and to USAID's infrastructure program, the hospital has had 24-hour power all winter. The new power comes from the Kajaki Hydropower Plant, where USAID's



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repairs increased electrical generation, and supplements diesel power from generators donated and maintained by USAID, but run entirely on fuel provided by the Afghan Government. An assessment of how to best improve power distribution within Kandahar is to be completed in a few weeks. Plans are ready to install additional capacity at Kajaki, as soon as the security situation permits.