



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

June 1-June 15, 2010

HEALTH

National Immunization Days Fight Polio:

Afghanistan is one of four countries still suffering from active transmission of the polio virus. Although polio cases have decreased since 2001, there were still 23 documented cases of this preventable disease as of October 2009. To halt disease transmission, the Afghan Government conducts eight regional polio vaccination campaigns each year for children under five.

With support from USAID, Afghanistan conducted an immunization campaign in the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan from June 7-9. The campaign reached 2.9 million children. Those Afghan families unable to travel to health facilities to obtain vaccinations for their children benefit from the mobile approach of national immunization days, as it ensures that as many children as possible are protected against polio. As the official campaign slogan states, "Every child counts, every drop helps."



A 12-year-old boy, crippled by polio five years ago, helps to vaccinate a young child against the disease.

PHOTO: Afghan Ministry of Public Health



Community leaders and project staff select well locations based on village needs.

PHOTO: USAID/SWSS

INFRASTRUCTURE

Laghman Residents Gain Access to Potable Water:

Many people throughout Afghanistan do not have access to the clean water needed for drinking, cooking, and bathing. To improve health and sanitation for rural Afghans, USAID's Afghan Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation (SWSS) project recently started to build 15 new wells in Qarghaee District of Laghman Province. USAID worked with community development councils to select the wells' locations in accordance with community needs.

More than 300 households will benefit from the new wells. According to Qarghaee residents, access to clean water is an urgent need because their children frequently suffer from waterborne diseases. Abdul Wakil, a resident of Qarghaee District, explained, "We have to walk a long way to get potable water, but now with these new wells we will have water pumps within our own house boundaries." SWSS also teaches communities how to care for their newly built infrastructure. Communities assign members to care for the new wells and users contribute a nominal sum to ensure that spare parts can be purchased should the need arise.



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SWSS seeks to increase access to potable water supply and sanitation services in poor communities, decrease the prevalence of water-related diseases through household hygiene interventions, and improve the sustainable management of potable water quality and quantity in project-assisted communities. SWSS plans to build 1,800 wells throughout Afghanistan in its first year of operations to provide potable water to thousands of households currently suffering from waterborne diseases and lacking safe toilets.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Increased Efficiency at Da Afghanistan Bank: Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB, the Central Bank) recently implemented Core Banking System (CBS) operations at teller service windows, a move that will significantly reduce customer transaction processing times and posting errors. Before installation, back office operators entered transactions into the CBS based on a hand-written voucher. With workstations at service windows, the teller completes transaction processing and voucher printing, which will reduce processing times from 25 minutes to 10 minutes.



A Da Afghanistan Bank teller prints a CBS-issued voucher following a client transaction.

PHOTO: USAID/EGGI

USAID's Economic Growth and Governance Initiative is supporting DAB with these CBS improvements, which will continue to enhance accounting, financial reporting, and payment transfer services. The new CBS procedures have also been implemented in DAB zone offices in Kunduz, Mazar-i Sharif, and Jalalabad, with more branches expected to come online in the next few months.



Participants of the Baseline Assessment Survey of Women and Young Entrepreneurs workshop in Kabul.

PHOTO: USAID/TAFA

Assisting Women and Young Entrepreneurs: To address the unique challenges facing youth and women in business in Afghanistan, USAID recently held a two-day workshop titled "Baseline Assessment Survey of Women and Young Entrepreneurs" for the Afghan Women's Business Federation (AWBF). Participants included young entrepreneurs and businesswomen identified through their work with the AWBF and its member organizations.

The workshop provided an opportunity for youth and women to express their concerns related to trade facilitation and trade reform, and identify areas where trade issues affect their livelihoods. Participants



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enjoyed presentations on trade and tariff policy reform, barriers to trade, and benefits of improved trade processes in Afghanistan, such as improved standards of goods to reach international markets. The workshop raised a number of key issues to be addressed, such as exemption from income taxes, annual custom tax procedures, the identification of international markets for Afghan goods, and the need for government and international financial and technical support for young entrepreneurs.

Moving forward, USAID's Trade and Accession Facilitation (TAF) program will use the feedback gathered from the participants to structure programs that address the needs of women and youth. TAF will also follow its workshop participants to identify how their perceptions towards trade issues change over time, and if the trade issues affecting their livelihoods improve over time.

Aqcha Islamic Investment and Finance

Cooperative Turns Three: On April 25, the Jawzjan-based Aqcha Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative (AIIFC) celebrated its third anniversary at its annual general assembly meeting. Since its launch in April 2007, the AIIFC's highly motivated and committed employees served as volunteers, formulating and adopting the governing laws and articles of incorporation, and developing the policies that govern the cooperative's overall operations.

Today, the AIIFC is one of Afghanistan's most successful IIFCs, due to its strong business operations and outstanding performance that yields strong income growth. Through extending crop production and livelihood projects and providing its members with a micro-credit program, the AIIFC increased its net income by 45 percent from March 2009 to March 2010, a record one-year net income improvement. With the increased income, AIIFC members are receiving a larger share in the form of dividends credited directly to their member shares and savings accounts.



The Aqcha Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative celebrates its third anniversary.

PHOTO: USAID/RUFCOD

Cool Storage Facility Opens in Panjsher Province: On April 27, the Koh-e-Tolkha Cooperative in Panjsher Province celebrated the opening of a new cool storage facility. USAID's Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development Program provided a grant to finance construction of the facility and to train farmers on proper produce storage techniques.



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In the past, local farmers' profitability was limited by the lack of product storage facilities. The farmers had to sell their products when harvested, flooding the market with fresh produce and sharply reducing its price, leaving farmers with great profit losses. In addition, about 30 percent of the produce was lost due to spoilage. The new facility can hold 50 metric tons of fresh fruit and other agricultural products, allowing farmers to store their produce and sell it when prices and demand increase during post-harvest months.

STABILIZATION

Bakery Raises Dough, Extra Time for Residents of

Gujerekhil: Thanks to USAID's Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) program, residents of Gujerekhil Village in Parwan Province now have a local bakery. LGCD provided bakery equipment and supplies, which led to the opening of the first bread bakery in the Gujerekhil area. Since June 3, the bakery has been operating six days a week, five hours a day. The bakery is run by a resident, who was selected by the community because he previously owned a bakery in Pakistan. The owner provided the building for the bakery, and LGCD provided the oven, necessary equipment, and an initial supply of flour.



Gujerekhil community members celebrate their new bakery.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

This project provides increased access to affordable bread for an area that includes 250 families (a population of 1,750). The community is very happy about this project, and residents stated that having a bread bakery was an important priority for the community. Now, women are able to drop off their dough to be baked and can spend time on other activities.



Arghandab residents listen to the first radio broadcast.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Tuning in to Good Governance with Arghandab

Radio: June 9 marked the opening of a new radio station in the Arghandab District Center in Kandahar Province. This initiative was a result of cooperation among the local government, USAID, and the military. District Development Assembly (DDA) members were excited about the radio station and said it would bring better security and a new era of open communication in the district.

Currently, the station has a broadcast radius of 25 kilometers, with plans to expand in the near future. Radio personnel are receiving training, and more staff



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is expected to join the team in the near future through USAID's Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI) program. The station's initial programming consists of news, public service announcements, security updates, weather forecasts, and music. Programming will soon expand with content such as interviews, cooking shows, agricultural news, and messages from district leaders in order to reach a broader audience.

During the next DDA shura, village elders will receive radios so their constituents can hear about new developments in the district. Arghandab Radio is a step toward increasing transparency in local government and making representatives more accountable to the population.

EDUCATION

Active Lessons for Future Doctors: Afghan medical English teachers from six provinces learned how to create student-centered classrooms and inject fun into their lessons during a training course facilitated by the USAID-funded Higher Education Project (HEP). Eight English faculty members from medical schools in Kabul, Balkh, Kandahar, Kapisa, Khost, and Nangarhar participated in the training from May-June 2010, learning how to use modern methodology and create a more active learning environment.

English teachers in Afghanistan's medical schools have to battle with large class numbers, lack of facilities, and few teaching materials. A lively learning environment and access to modern resources will produce doctors better equipped to improve healthcare delivery in Afghanistan. The faculty members who participated in the HEP course will implement their new skill set in the medical school classroom to encourage students. A specialized *Medical English Resource Book* written by project staff will be available to the teachers in July 2010.

A faculty member from Khost said, "I learned a lot about methodology and will use the new ideas to make my lessons more interesting for the students." HEP trainers will visit each of the provinces regularly to observe the teachers' progress and provide guidance.

Communities Bank on New Financial Institution: A crowd of more than 80 gathered in Qalat Ruy Deh Village in Panjsher Province on June 9 to witness the grand opening of the Isteqlal Community Bank, the first community bank in Panjsher. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and luncheon celebration, provided by the local villagers, demonstrated support and



A trainee learns to use a word jumble exercise to make English lessons more engaging.

PHOTO: USAID/HEP



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enthusiasm for the new bank, which was funded through the USAID Learning for Community Empowerment Program-2 (LCEP-2). To increase Afghans' access to capital, LCEP-2 integrates literacy and numeracy education with vocational and business development skills and helps establish savings and investment groups who invest in microenterprises and livelihood activities. With USAID support, these groups are federated to form community banks, which foster community economic empowerment and promote self-employment for Afghans.

In compliance with Sharia law, the Isteqlal Community Bank does not collect interest. The bank's system of administration includes representatives chosen from among 19 separate male and female self-help groups that are currently depositing money into the bank. Their hope is to use the bank as an opportunity to create community wealth and to support a variety of individual and group local economic opportunities. Concurrent with the event, 14 women gathered in a nearby school for an LCEP-2 train-the-trainer session to enhance their knowledge of financial literacy to provide instruction for local self-help groups.