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PAKISTAN

CASE STUDY

Clearing the Way for Recovery

Local farmers clear rubble-choked irrigation canals in time for spring



Photo: USAID/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Villagers and farmers work together to clear this 3.5 kilometer long irrigation canal in the village of Sir Ajmaira, in Pakistan's northern Battagram District. Once cleared, it will irrigate 375 acres of wheat, rice, and vegetables.

“Our fields are getting water, so we are happy,” says farmer Abdul Ghafoor of Sir Ajmaira village in northern Pakistan. He lost his previous harvest because of a blocked irrigation canal.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
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Challenge

The devastating October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan did more than destroy houses and take lives. In Battagram District, a region in northern Pakistan, rubble fell into irrigation canals that run through town markets and into nearby farming areas. Already clogged by silt deposits, the canals flooded some fields and ran dry in others. Local farmers, who were dealing with the more immediate need of finding shelter for the winter, were not able to clear the irrigation canals. As spring planting season approached, the broken canal system risked leaving farmers without the water they needed to harvest crops.

Initiative

To clear the irrigation system in time for rice and wheat planting, USAID funded an effort to hire local villagers to clear the canals. The department of water management helped identify the worst-hit canals, and work began immediately on three canals that provide water to more than 810 acres of farmland, benefiting 750 farmers and their families. About 30 men work on each canal six days a week, making around \$3 a day or \$5 a day as supervisors. They clear rubble, remove plastic bags and trash, and dig up accumulated silt from the canal beds, opening the way for water to flow from a stream connected to the Indus River.

Results

“We’re earning money, my fields are getting water and other people’s fields are getting water,” said Abdul Ghafoor, a farmer from Sir Ajmaira village who worked to clear two canals with other farmers and villagers. Sher Ali, a man from the same village who lost a child in the quake, said he worked as a supervisor to clear the canals because he needed to grow rice, wheat, and corn for his six remaining children. “If we don’t do this, what will we eat?” Ali asked. By early spring, nine kilometers of irrigation canals had been cleared and more were awaiting clean-up. Now, farmers can once more grow crops to feed their families and to sell at the market as they strive to achieve normalcy.