



PHOTO & CAPTION

Vouchers Boost Local Business



Photo: USAID Islamabad/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Some two dozen shopkeepers in the northern Pakistani town of Rangla in Bagh District saw sales rise when over 400 families affected by the October 2005 earthquake received vouchers worth \$100. Families headed to the market to buy food rations, tools, hardware, and building materials, or to pay off outstanding debt. USAID's program provided vouchers worth a total of \$1 million, benefiting some 10,000 families and helping boost sales for 174 shopkeepers across the earthquake-affected Bagh District.

Shopkeeper Raja Manzoor Ahmed counts out bars of soap that Alizad, the head of an earthquake-affected family, bought with vouchers in northern Pakistan's Bagh District.

Shopkeepers signed contracts vowing to adhere to a code of ethics to participate in the Bagh voucher distribution program. Participating shops are monitored to ensure that store owners do not raise prices unnecessarily for customers paying with vouchers.

Alizad, who heads a family that lost its mud house in the earthquake, bought tools and almost two months' worth of rations for his family, including the bars of soap in the photo. He said he would buy iron sheets to build a winter shelter with his remaining vouchers.

Andrew Parkes, an official in charge of voucher distribution, explained that recipients "have to spend the vouchers here in the local economy. Otherwise the local shops close down for lack of business and these people leave. So it's a cycle."