

# Reconstruction Accelerates

Private and State projects build hotels, roads, schools

**T**rucks loaded with building stone, bricks and gravel speed over the newly-paved highways into Kabul and other cities as Afghanistan rushes headlong to recover from three

decades of war and stagnation.

On the outskirts of Kabul, traffic slows to a crawl in the colorful chaos of fruit markets and taxi stands crowding the streets because sidewalks are dug up for new pipes.

A forest of reinforced steel bars probes the skyline as building after building—most of them privately built hotels, houses and

Syed Jan Sibaroom/USAID



May '03

Child census, polio vaccination campaign begin

Spanish forces die in plane crash

USAID begins construction of 14 Women's Centers

June '03

USAID provides seed and fertilizer for 100,000 farmers

FAO predicts best harvest in 25 years

Asian Development Bank approves \$150 million infrastructure loan

Afghan Constitution Commission sets up offices in every province

Int. Olympic Committee lifts ban on Afghanistan

Niswan Girls' School opens in Gardez

markets—rise amid the ruins left by war.

Trucks unload endless piles of freshly-made bricks at building sites where men wield shovels, backhoes, hammers, saws, and other tools in the shadow of the cranes creating a new Afghanistan.

Foreign aid is fueling part of the building boom, paving roads, grading secondary

roads, and funding clinics, schools and district centers. But much is driven by the Afghans themselves, including some of the 3.7 million refugees who returned from Pakistan, Iran, and the United States, bringing their money and know how with them.



Three million refugees returned in the past two years and new construction is booming in Kabul.

July '03

Afghan military demobilization program begins

First major combat operation for Afghan troops

Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to use GPS to identify border

August '03

NATO takes control of Kabul security

First graduates from Afghan Women's Business Center training

Ministry of Health begins treating well water

## Rebuilding Afghanistan

### Ring Road Sealed

The foundation for reconstruction was the repair of the country's most important highway, running 300 miles from Kabul to Kandahar. The road was originally paved in the 1960s by U.S. foreign aid grants. But during the anti-Soviet war and the period of factional fighting and Taliban control, the road deteriorated into a bone-jarring series of potholes and washouts, damaging vehicles and slowing traffic to less than 10 miles per hour in places.

Today, the ribbon of new asphalt winds through the hills south of Kabul en route to Ghazni, makes a final bend, before streaking southwest straight as an arrow over flat land towards Kandahar. On either side, villages drape their greenery over the landscape, nourished by wells, canals, and the ancient underground karezes carrying water hundreds of miles to fields. The road is used by farmers sending ripe tomatoes and melons to Kabul's markets, by women heading to maternity hospitals to give birth, by students beginning the semester at Kabul University.

The next major project is rebuilding the road from Kandahar to Herat. On the road north from Kabul to Mazar-i Sharif, repairs are underway at the 11,000 foot high Salang Tunnel through the Hindu Kush Mountains—a chokepoint linking the North and South and an eventual trade link between South and Central Asia. Most of the Afghan people live within 30 miles of the Ring Road, which links its four major cities.

But not all the reconstruction projects are huge ones such as the Ring Road or, for example, the \$9 million Women's Dormitory nearly completed at Kabul University. The Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development (MRRD) says that 4,000 communities have formed local councils, or shuras, which decide on projects and are given small grants of about \$30,000 to \$60,000 to carry them out. Bridges, roads, culverts, schools, water systems, and training centers for weaving and tailoring are among these projects. A visit to Jalalabad and the villages around it give one a sense of the reconstruction as it takes root in the countryside where most Afghans live.

Standing down in the trench where he is installing a hydroelectric generator, Ulam Habib, 40, puts a final dab of cement on his trowel, lays yet another brick, and stands up to greet a visitor to his village in the Kama District of Nangarhar Province near the Pakistan Border.

"This project will be great," he said, looking over the swift flow of water through a cement channel as it passed through a diversion around the construction site. "It will give us fans to get rid of the mosquitoes that cause malaria. We will get lights, freezers, washing machines."



The Kabul to Kandahar road has been one of President Karzai's highest priorities.

The 300-mile road, linking the major population centers of the country, was re-

opened in December, 2003. USAID had originally built the road in the 1960s.

The 10 kilowatt generator serving about 3,000 people at a cost of \$13,000 is typical of thousands of small projects funded by the U.S. civilian and military assistance programs. A few kilometers away, a wide canal funnels swift waters past fields full of corn and vegetables. A \$2 million USAID grant paid for dredging 61 kilometers of the canal carrying water from a dam on the Kunar River and fixing metal gates that regulate the flow into side channels reaching farmland.

In Kama itself, a U.S. grant of \$160,000 is paying to build a district center which will house the local government offices, now based in a few rooms at the school. Workmen mix and pour cement as the project takes shape inside ancient-looking ruined mud walls.

Over a lunch of nan flat bread and stewed meat, USAID Program Officer Michelle Parker, based at the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Jalalabad, tells Kama deputy governor Mohammad Ali that the Agency is willing to pave the center of Kama and other district centers. Ali smiles and says the paving will help cut down on dust, disease, water-borne parasites, mosquitoes, and other problems.

A few miles away, grading has begun on the 122-kilometer road linking Jalalabad

and Asmar near the Pakistan border. "It used to take 30 minutes to get to the Kama Bridge south of here—now it takes 10 minutes," said Sharifullah, 20, who lives near site where yellow machines have been grinding the abundant stone of the region into gravel. Cars now reach 80 kilometers per hour on the road. Grading and paving are being carried out by the U.N. Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and by contractor Louis Berger over the next 12 months, said Berger engineer Sardar Ahmed.

Around the country, construction of schools, clinics, government buildings, wells, canals, drains, and roads is changing the face of the country. The MRRD says that under one program alone, 1.5 million people have benefited from 204 water and sanitation projects in 2003 costing \$11 million. This included 3,387 wells, 1,712 water tanks in schools, 1,042 latrines, and 26 water supply networks. Funding came from the U.S. government, which is spending \$2.3 billion in 2004, as well as UNICEF and Japan.

Other major projects include new bases for the new Afghan National Army. These will be built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with Afghan workers hired through local contractors. (see page 18).

Among the largest private construction



A new auditorium is under construction at Balkh University in Mazar-i Sharif, paid for by U.S. grants.

Ben Barber/USAID

**Results**

- Repaired, graded and paved 300 miles of the Kabul to Kandahar Road.
- Work begun on the Kandahar to Herat section of the Ring Road.
- Reopened the Salang Tunnel, keeping the main road north of Kabul open during winter. Permanent repairs are underway.
- Hundreds of miles of secondary roads are being graded or paved.
- Completed over 6,100 water-related projects, including wells, irrigation canals, karezes, dams, reservoirs, and potable water systems.
- Thousands of smaller reconstruction projects completed and under-way including district centers, schools and clinics, providing jobs for thousands of Afghans.
- Built 119 markets in key villages and cities throughout the country.



Afghans discuss local aid project. Roads, schools, health services, and water projects are the most commonly requested.

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**“Now we have the clinic. Soon the school will be done. When we have the mosque as well then everyone will return and we will have a normal life again.”**

Head of builders at mosque project, Charikar

projects are the new Hyatt Hotel and the new U.S. Embassy Chancery and Apartments rising opposite each other in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood of central Kabul. They're being built by the Afghan Reconstruction Company, which was formed by several Afghan-American investors and Turkish contractors and has already built major portions of the Ring Road.

The whole range of reconstruction can be seen at one small village in the Shomali Plains north of Kabul, which was badly damaged by warfare. While U.S. assistance paid for a new clinic and the foundation has been laid for a new school, local people returning since the Taliban was overthrown are building on their own.

Across from the clinic, builders mix and pour cement as they build a three story house, which will include a store, a warehouse, and upstairs living quarters. Farther down the twisting lanes of the village, a dozen workmen sit under a tree sharing their lunch. Next to them opens a large foundation for a mosque they are building. "Now we have the clinic," said the head of the builders. "Soon, the school will be done. When we have the mosque as well, then everyone will return and we will have a normal life again."

**Water and Health**

Nothing is more vital to people's health than clean water. Millions of Afghans face sickness from unclean water, a problem made worse by years of drought. CARE has been providing clean water to 600,000 people in Kabul under USAID projects even under the Taliban. Returning refugees have tripled the city's population to 3-4 million. Many will lack clean water, says CARE's Dad Mohammed Bakeer.

Straining to meet the new demand in August, a yellow backhoe digs a trench along a major avenue near the CARE water treatment plant, searching for a pipe leading under the street to another well. Water from the plant is pumped up to a reservoir on a

hill above the city. At one tap, a dozen children stand in line to fill containers for their households. One young man, Abdullah, walks up and says he'd returned to the country from Pakistan because "there is freedom, it's peaceful and I wanted to return to my own country."

"How long will I stay in a strange country? Now the situation is very much improved here, thank God." Although he can earn 120 to 150 Afghans per day (\$2.50 to \$3.00) on construction work, housing is hard to find with all the new people moving into the city he said.

CARE also works on the drains needed to remove waste from the city and drain away breeding pools for mosquitoes that spread malaria. Bakeer brings a visitor to a vacant lot where widows earn \$2 per day separating organic from inorganic trash cleaned out of a drainage ditch. "This job has a bad smell but we enjoy it because we clean up disease and smells," says Fazil Rahman, 65, who was elected by the neighborhood to a council overseeing the cleanup.

Says teacher Abdul Hai, 40: "In 10 years this is the first time people come to clean this area. There is a change in attitude. Now people don't put rubbish in the street. We are becoming self-reliant."



Children collect water for their homes from a public pump in Kabul. The water is surprisingly pure, even in the center of the city.

Jonas Doydenas/USAID

**November '03**

Proposed constitution presented to Karzai

AINA, new TV Station, begins broadcasting in Sheberghan

UN staffer killed in Ghazni

Central Government linked to all 32 provinces through USAID codan radio project

**December '03**

USAID completes Kabul-Kandahar road

3.4 million children receive polio vaccine

Voter registration centers open in 8 cities