

Agriculture Projects Have Quick Impact



Photo by USAID

USAID has carried out over 7,000 projects to rehabilitate small scale agricultural water infrastructure including drilling wells, cleaning canals and irrigation tunnels, and building small dams and other catchment structures.

Agriculture is a way of life for 70% of Afghanistan's people and traditionally the largest and most important sector of the Afghan economy. But instability, coupled with the region's four-year drought, has devastated the country's food production capacity and impoverished farmers. Farmers and small business owners became deeply indebted during years of drought and instability, driving them to cultivate poppy for drug trafficking and force their young daughters into marriage.

USAID is helping farmers reestablish production and become more profitable and efficient through a program that rehabilitates irrigation systems and provides tools, agricultural equipment, fertilizer, and seed for spring planting. Lack of water is the most critical constraint to reviving Afghanistan's agriculture. The USAID program funds the drilling of wells, the reconstruction of local irrigation systems, the rehabilitation of the water supply, and water conservation projects. USAID also will fund a nationwide water-resource assessment to better understand and respond to the effects of four years of drought.

USAID is revitalizing the rural economy by promoting the cultivation of high-value crops, such as raisins, fruits, and vegetables. Cash-for-work projects employ residents to rehabilitate critical infrastructure such as farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems. In Helmand Province, for example, farmers who formerly grew opium poppy have responded favorably to USAID's program to help farmers re-enter legitimate export markets lost during the conflict, which include cotton, peanut, and vegetable seed.