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PAKISTAN

CASE STUDY

Building Paths to Better Lives

Earthquake survivors build wider mountain paths to improve access



Photo: USAID/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

On this new trail, Mandan Khan of Koray village in Pakistan's northern Battagram District can lead his livestock safely down the mountain in one hour. Before this trail was built, it took two days.

"If our people take care of it, this path will last forever. I may die, but this path will go on," said Hijab Khan, a village elder from Shorh. He helped map out a broad mountain trail to replace treacherous tracks less than a foot wide.

Telling Our Story
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Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Challenge

Before the devastating October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan destroyed their homes and killed their livestock, the people of Battagram District in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province faced a daily challenge: navigating narrow, treacherous paths to their homes on the precipitous mountainside. Parents hesitated to send children to school, especially when the paths were slick with rainfall. Carrying a sick person to the hospital was risky, and grazing cattle sometimes slipped to their death. Bringing livestock to market took days, with herders camping out on the open mountain when night fell. After the earthquake, these paths were even more treacherous.

Initiative

After spending the winter in relief camps in a nearby valley, residents returned to rebuild their villages. To aid the return and improve access to markets, schools, and hospitals, USAID started a cash-for-work program to build six-foot-wide mountain trails from the villages to the Indus River and to paved roads. Three trails, totaling nine kilometers, were completed in the early spring. Some 400 men from nearby villages and from Mehra Camp, where many displaced families spent the winter, worked on the paths six days a week, earning between \$4 and \$6.50 per day. Working thousands of feet above sea level, they use spades, shovels and picks to clear wide paths, imbed large flat stones as steps on dirt inclines, and break rocks blocking the way.

Results

"The villagers tell us this is a blessing," said Saif-ur-Rehman of Rashang village, who earns up to \$150 monthly as a path construction supervisor. Rukhsana Bibi of Shorh village agreed, saying the paths have improved women's lives as well. "Now we can even go the hospital," she said. "And the kids go to school happily." As earthquake survivors work to improve their roads, the income they earn from the cash-for-work program is helping them rebuild their lives and their economy too.