



ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS UPDATE

April 1 – 15, 2005 • Issue 3

Immediate Needs: Cash for Work

In December 2004, USAID's Alternative Livelihoods Program launched a one-year immediate needs program in the key poppy-producing provinces of Helmand and Nangarhar to provide immediate cash infusions to local communities through labor intensive work programs. The programs will galvanize economic growth in poppy-growing communities not only through the multiplier effect of wages spent in local markets, but also through the productivity enhancing rehabilitation of rural infrastructure including irrigation and drainage canals, farm-to-market roads, and *karez*s. Rehabilitation of irrigation systems is critical for the production of high-value cash crop alternatives to poppies.

This immediate needs program targets districts that face eradication or have shown restraint in poppy cultivation. The program also sends a strong message to poppy-growing communities that the Government of Afghanistan, the US Government, and other donors will assist rural Afghan communities with short-term assistance, a social safety net, and improved infrastructure. These immediate needs programs will phase out, however, once the comprehensive development component of the Alternative Livelihoods Program is in place.

To date, in Helmand Province, cash-for-work opportunities have been provided to more than 15,000 local laborers since December 2004. Over \$2 million in wages have been paid and the project will soon be paying \$1 million per month to local laborers. Over 580 km of irrigation canals have been cleaned. To date, activities, including road rehabilitation and community development activities such as vocational training for women and internally displaced persons



The rehabilitation of irrigation systems is indispensable for licit crop production. This underground channel provides drinking and irrigation water to downstream villages, and will increase water availability to both households and farms. The cleaning of this karez in Shinwar District, Nangarhar responds to these key village priorities.

Immediate Needs: Cash for Work

In Nangarhar Province, where the program began in January 2005, cash-for-work activities now employ over 13,000 people daily on 70 projects and have generated almost \$1.3 million in wages to local farmers for irrigation canal cleaning projects.

Rehabilitation of irrigation systems is critical for the production of high-value cash crops as alternatives to poppies. By the end of the project in November 2005, USAID expects to have paid \$20 million in wages and created 5 million days of work in the Provinces of Helmand and Nangarhar.

Afghanistan's poppy problem cannot be solved without the direct support of the people and communities that grow it. Therefore USAID works in close coordination with local *shuras* and councils so that they can help identify which development approaches have the best chance of success. For example, in Nangarhar, a number of *shuras* and local councils recommended combining the work forces of several villages in order to effectively utilize local labor and encourage local leaders to participate directly in the planning and execution of the projects. As a result of this recommendation, *shuras* and representatives of sub tribes and clans are now mobilizing labor, helping to supervise work, resolving problems, and helping to implement projects. This approach is based on a participatory approach to planning and implementation and embraces local expertise and long-established village customs and traditions.



Mohammad Ibrahim

- Foreman on the Marja district (Helmand) drain cleaning activity
- 12th grade graduate and aspiring engineer
- Landless; his primary source of family income is a USAID cash for work project

Alternative Livelihoods Profile

Discussions with Mohammad Ibrahim and his work crew yielded the following observations:

Improvements over the past year:

- Fewer armed burglaries or kidnappings.
- NGOs have been rebuilding essential infrastructure (wells, primary schools).

On alternative livelihoods:

- The degradation of our district's agricultural land has forced farmers to make a living from smaller plots of land.
- Improving the irrigation system will allow farmers to reclaim land and plant crops with a lower cash return per hectare.
- Much less poppy is being grown in the district this year.
- Farmers are aware of the eradication threat. "Only the poorest are planting poppy."
- Many farmers have reportedly left their land fallow this year. Some have claimed that given low yields on degraded land, they would spend more on seeds and fertilizer than they would earn from their crops.