



Quick Impact Projects Create Cash for Work

Four months passed without a steady job for 42-year-old Agha Mohammed. He began to worry about his wife and six children. It had been four months without a certain source of food. A long time to be idle he thought to himself.

"I sent my boys into the village to find work because I could not," he says, as his tinted eyeglasses—covered with thick bulbs of tape at each joint—bow with his head in shame.

"Children need school, not work."

Agha Mohammed searched for a job in vain and was losing hope. Then he heard by word of mouth in the Charikar village that there may be work for skilled masons at the Shamali Plain irrigation project funded by USAID. Friends encouraged him to apply for a job on the project.

This was a great opportunity for Agha and his villagers as it would provide a much needed increase in water supply. The three water diversion dams and four canals along the Ghorband River compose a lifeline for the region, supplying water to 82 villages and roughly 30,000 hectares of arable land. Those benefiting downstream number close to 300,000—nearly 39,000 households. The river has never been fully utilized for water supply until USAID provided funding to implement the project.



Photo: Matt Herrick

Site mason Agha Mohammed, 42, at the Ghorband River dam project.

USAID's funding of this project includes wages. As a mason, Agha receives \$3.80 per day. Laborers receive about \$2.25 to \$3 per day, and already the dam project has generated nearly 25,000 person-days of labor for the community. In three and a half months, Agha has earned roughly \$300, almost double the per-capita GDP for Afghanistan. With the cash-for-work program, USAID has continuously met the unique needs of Afghans building for their own futures.

Since October 2002, approximately 100 to 200 workers per day, including masons, engineers, night guards, water pump technicians, and general laborers, have participated in the cash-for-work project.

Agha works regularly, 7am to 4:30pm, as do the other men in his village. The numbers — not to mention immediate and sustainable benefits to local farmer — are astounding with over 24,000 person-days so far.

On the worksite, Agha joins the men as they swing picks down at the river bed, while others slam huge hammers against boulders to create foundation rock, and the rest dig sharp spades into the wet and rocky soil or carry silt and rock from the riverbed on stretchers or in metal pails. He does not mind the tiring work because he knows his family at home has food and his children are back in school.

In fact, a brief survey of the site and its employees indicates that many are area farmers — working to invest time and energy into sustainable irrigation. They give effort and sweat for wages, and with the pay they can support families and help sick relatives. Probably most important, the project has enabled the men to regain dignity through work.

