

**BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)**

**SUCCESS STORY:
LENDING HOPE TO CRISIS-AFFECTED GHOR PROVINCE**

Ravaged by recurring natural disasters and years of conflict, Ghor Province, western Afghanistan, faces an uncertain future and its people the daunting task of picking up enough pieces to stem the tide of perpetual hardship and repeated reversions into crisis. Providing one needed catalyst to the process, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS) initiated cash-for-work (CFW) programs in the rural, mountainous province in early 2009. To date, projects have increased the purchasing power and food security of nearly 4,000 Ghor families, who have earned a total of more than \$429,000, and helped entire communities build resilience to disasters and achieve a semblance of stability. CFW beneficiaries now also include female-headed households—a positive step forward in expanding the benefits of community-based interventions.



Above and below: Talai villagers collaborate to rehabilitate their 2,000-year-old irrigation canal prior to the spring 2009 floods (Courtesy of CRS).

ORIGINS OF A CRISIS

The lingering effects of five droughts, record cold and snowfall during the 2007/2008 winter, and sudden global food price increases precipitated a humanitarian crisis in western Afghanistan in early 2008. The sixth consecutive drought—the worst in 10 years—soon followed, deepening the food insecurity crisis and resulting in significant livestock, seed stock, and household asset losses for many Ghor families. Furthermore, lack of employment prompted many male family members to migrate to urban centers or find sustenance through illicit activities or by joining the insurgency. The proliferation of widow- and female-headed households with limited livelihood opportunities exacerbated the vulnerabilities of the province as a whole.



In 2009, forecasts finally called for above-average rainfall, providing farming families with a ray of hope for a reversal of fortunes. In the spring, however, exceptional rain and snowmelt resulted in flash floods in 13 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. In Ghor, localized flooding damaged homes, agricultural lands, irrigation canals, and roads.

USAID/OFDA PARTNER HELPS TURN FLOODS INTO BOON

Due in part to an existing USAID/OFDA-funded CFW program, the floods failed to diminish the ray of hope in Ghor and even reaped significant benefits for one Chaghcharan District village.

In the short term, all CFW projects initiated since February in response to food insecurity provide vulnerable families an initial income base on which to build, and protect market access by addressing poor infrastructure. In the medium term, projects support agriculture recovery by fortifying or constructing

irrigation canals and flood-retention walls. In the aftermath of the spring floods, CRS engaged communities in activities to repair damaged irrigation canals, roads, and bridges—all in a rapid manner to protect and sustain the progress made to date. More importantly, projects completed prior to the floods mitigated risks to rain-fed crops and, in fact, yielded substantial dividends for families of Talai village, Chaghcharan District.

Families in Talai prioritized the repair of a 2,000-year-old irrigation canal as a CFW project. Dysfunctional for generations due to conflict and poverty, the canal was a reminder of difficult times, and a revival would represent a hopeful step forward. Utilizing all available CFW resources and equipment, the 117 participating families completed 13 out of 20 total kilometers. Recognizing the shortfall, remaining community members banded together and donated additional labor hours or served as guards during non-working hours to protect the canal. The in-kind contributions and continued commitment of CRS engineers and foremen ensured a completed canal just in time for the spring floods. The canal successfully prevented flood waters from inundating fields, but still ensured enough water flow to irrigate all cultivated farmland in the area. As a result of the first successful irrigation in living memory, the community looks forward to a bountiful summer harvest and, more importantly, has taken a significant step toward enduring food security.



Talai villagers rehabilitate their 2,000-year-old irrigation canal prior to the spring 2009 floods (Courtesy of CRS).

INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO CFW: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES AND TAKING A SMALL STEP TOWARDS CHANGING ATTITUDES

The positive developments continue in Chaghcharan District. CRS recently reported a tremendous step forward in efforts to include women in CFW programs. In Sumak and Dara villages, while conducting surveys to determine household eligibility for USAID/OFDA-supported CFW projects, CRS identified numerous young, capable widows eager to work. Typically, female-headed households receive vouchers to purchase emergency food and non-food items, in accordance with local mores that discourage women's work outside the home. CRS approached Shura Council members to discuss cultural sensitivities and potential female participation in CFW. The Shura Council agreed to allow the women to assume non-manual labor duties, including serving tea to male laborers. Three Sumak and Dara women are participating in the program, and many more have registered. Additional communities in Chaghcharan have expressed strong interest in participating as well, and efforts to expand the program would advance progress towards meaningful integration of women into work opportunities.

LOOKING AHEAD

USAID/OFDA recognizes that significant challenges and work lie ahead in Ghor Province, and for this reason, plans to maintain consistent support through CFW and other humanitarian interventions. CFW not only alleviates humanitarian consequences in the short term by increasing household purchasing power and food security, but also promotes community stability by supporting agriculture recovery and other livelihood opportunities, including for women. The expansion of economic opportunities prevents survival migration and keeps young men engaged in promising livelihoods, rather than illicit activities. In fiscal year 2009 alone, USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$5 million to CRS to implement CFW projects in western Afghanistan that promote early recovery from crisis.