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Creating Jobs for Returnees and Preventing IDPs



Locally-hired day laborers work to clean mud and other debris from Sar-e-Pul canals.

Sayid Hamrah fled Pesta Mazar Village, Sar-e-Pul Province to Iran from the Taliban. “They killed my brother-in-law and looted my harvest including 700 kg of wheat and barley,” said Hamrah.

Life in Iran was very difficult for Hamrah and other Afghan refugees who worked hard to earn a meager living. Hamra returned to Sar-e-Pul from Iran earlier this year, but feared he would have to return to Iran, not because of the Taliban, but because he could not find work. Fortunately he heard about a short-term cash-for-work job for unskilled workers from Azam, a member of the local Service Delivery Advisory Group (a volunteer group of Sar-e-Pul citizens providing advisory support to the municipality). As he was from one of the areas affected by the flooding, he was eligible to work on the project and was fortunate enough to be selected by the municipality to do so.

The job involved cleaning the Sar-e-Pul canal that provides irrigation and washing water for 20,000 families in Sar-e-Pul and surrounding villages. Due to a devastating flood earlier in the year, the canal had become blocked and was full of mud and debris. The flood also caused extensive damage to roads, bridges culverts and houses. Since May, Sar-e-Pul municipality has been working hard to restore the damaged areas and it reached out for international support.

USAID-funded Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations – Regional Command North’s (RAMP UP North) team, visited Sar-e-Pul and developed a proposal to USAID to help the municipality rebuild. The municipality, with the support of RAMP UP North, are working on several projects to repair the damage caused by the flood, including canal cleaning, road graveling, vehicle bridge construction and footbridge construction .

According to Jalaluddin Qiyam, Sar-e-Pul Municipality Construction Manager, the canal cleaning is important. The project covers nearly 20 km of canal and helps with irrigation water. Since the flood, some villages could not use the canal at all as it was not only blocked with mud but also full of plastic bags, bottles and other garbage. Gardens were drying out and trees were dying. Once the canal cleaning began water once again started running to villages and gardens.

Because of USAID’s support of post-flood reconstruction projects in Sar-e-Pul, Hamra was able to find work helping to protect his community. According to Azam, the canal cleaning project has had several benefits for the people of Sar-e-Pul. It has created short-term opportunities for some IDPs and returnees of Iran, it has restored the gardens and farming lands destroyed by the flood and has prevented farmers from becoming IDPs – not only to Sar-e-pul center and to Mazar, but also has kept them from becoming refugees in Iran.

Azam is happy to have found work in Afghanistan and is proud of the work that is being done. “The canal is being cleaned very well,” said Azam. “It was not getting this deep cleaning in the last 30 years!”

Telling Our Story

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