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Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED)



December Monthly Report

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Roots of Peace

Implementing Partner for:

Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED)

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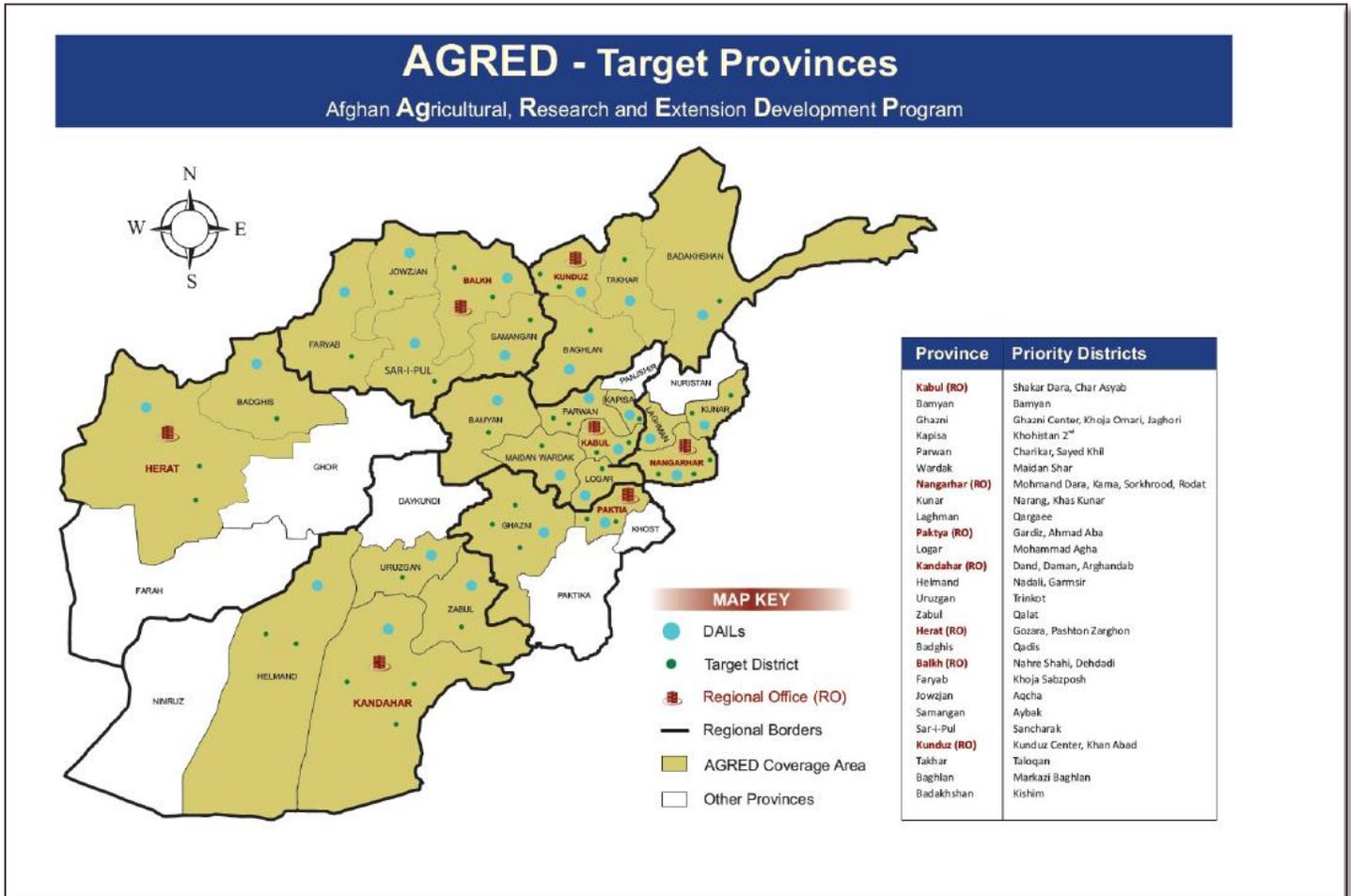
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Program Overview

Roots of Peace is the lead implementing partner for USAID’s Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) program. AGRED is a five-year program in partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). Currently in its second year, AGRED will build enduring and effective research and extension systems to attain the overarching goal of increasing agricultural productivity and income through the application of science and technology.

Implementation of AGRED’s work is directed by four Expected Results, generally covering Research, Extension, Infrastructure, and Capacity Building. Further explanation of these Results will be covered in subsequent sections of this month’s report.



Transitioning from On-Budget to Expected Results reporting

In previous monthly reports AGRED’s activities were reported against nine strategic goals and 27 Sub-Benchmarks. These Goals and Sub-Benchmarks were the anticipated structure for measuring and reporting on On-Budget Implementation. In December, USAID determined that the On-Budget portion of the program would be cut, thus eliminating the need for Strategic Goals and Sub-Benchmarks as a reporting structure (and the need to differentiate On- and Off-Budget support). Therefore AGRED is currently reporting program progress according to the four Expected Results outlined in the signed AGRED / USAID contract. These Expected Results in full are:

1. More effective communication with and increase access to improved technologies, knowledge, and education with emphasis on agriculture best practices by Afghan farmers.
2. Improved applied research and extension infrastructure in 7 target sub-national research stations and fifty target districts
3. Training and capacity building of research and extension staff to deliver services to Afghan farm communities.
4. Applied research and extension grants to support and sustain Afghanistan's capacity to improve production in its agricultural economy.

What this means for the December report

It's crucial to understand that since their adoption, these Expected Results have been guiding AGRED's organizational structure as well as the design and implementation of AGRED activities. This is strictly a reporting change—instead of being presented through the lens of nine Strategic Goals and 27 Sub-Benchmarks, monthly progress is now, and will be in the future, reported explicitly against the four Expected Results outlined above. Any reference to On- and / or Off-Budget support in this month's report is meant only to ensure the reader's understanding of the transition.

Additionally, the report will continue to highlight important meetings, events, and negotiations towards stronger collaborations and strategic linkages, which in turn improve AGRED's ability to achieve each Expected Result. Relevant cross-cutting activities within the AGRED structure will also be reported to highlight its contribution.

Highlight of December Achievements

AGRED works to more seamlessly integrate Gender into its technical support and program collaboration

Over the past few months in particular, AGRED and its Gender team have focused on a question that is straightforward in concept, but complex in practical application: how to integrate pressing gender farming issues into AGRED's service delivery.

One way is through supporting the USAID OAG Implementing Partner Gender Working Group (IPGWG), which seeks to improve networking amongst USAID implementers, strengthen communication, and increase sharing of good practices (among other objectives). The creation of this platform is a key component to AGRED's overall effort to continually strengthen collaboration opportunities and strategic linkages amongst agricultural-based actors in Afghanistan.

Additionally, AGRED's Gender team—in close coordination with its Research and Extension teams—has been involved in providing direct technical support to DAILs as well as farmers. In December alone, the team provided training to 30 women farmers on off-season vegetable techniques. It also provided training to 12 DAIL-Herat staff on improving their ability to develop and manage viable mini-projects and other similar funding mechanisms.

In this, and in future reports, AGRED is committed to highlighting how the Gender team is not just a stand-alone unit, but serves as a valuable addition in delivering crucial services and contributing to overall collaboration efforts.

For all highlights, more detailed explanations can be found in subsequent sections of the report.

Collaboration and strategic linkages. The AGRED senior management team, technical teams, and Gender team (see breakout) coordinated and participated in a number of meetings and workshops with the goal of continuing to build stronger linkages amongst relevant, agricultural-based actors within Afghanistan.

Of note, the Chief of Party met with USDA's Afghan Agricultural Extension Program (AAEP) to develop a transition plan for when the program closes, and to discuss areas of collaboration in the meantime. The senior management team also met with eAfghan Ag (eAA) to discuss technology-based pilot initiatives aimed at improving field level information access for DAILs and farmers.

Various technical team members participated in an Agricultural Technical Working Group meeting where it presented to national and international NGOs and other actors. Technical team members also participated in a service providers' fair and traveled to Pakistan for an exchange workshop that exposed them to different extension techniques and networking opportunities.

AGRED technical support to MAIL, DAIL, farmers. Most of the technical activities in December were aligned with Expected Result 1 (improved extension for improved agriculture) through the mini-projects. Progress was made in the mini-projects at different stages of the project cycle: start-up (i.e. training / orientation, site / farmer selection, and input / tool distribution); implementation (i.e. cultivation, demonstrations / field days, in-depth training); and close-out (i.e. reporting, assessment / evaluation). Much of the progress made in December in these areas was on wheat, maize, and off-season vegetable farming.

AGRED made progress towards Expected Result 3 (improved capacity at MAIL / DAILs) where AGRED teams provided critical training to DAIL staff focused on creating stronger capacities to develop and manage mini-projects (i.e. concept

development, proposal writing, project management). Towards Expected Result 4 (improved research for improved agriculture), technical teams made progress through follow-up monitoring visits to the Chasma Maran and Dehdahi research plots.

Monitoring & Evaluation. AGRED has made efforts to strengthen its reporting on environmental compliance matters and will continue to emphasize this area based on USAID feedback.

Greater Impact through Collaboration and Strategic Linkages

Collaborating with agricultural-based actors to help improve services and facilitate greater field-level impact is an area AGRED is committed to building upon as the program progresses. The AGRED senior management, technical, and Gender teams were active in December pursuing various opportunities towards this end.

AGRED COP and DCOP collaboration meetings

Meeting with USDA Afghan Agricultural Extension Program (AAEP). In anticipation of the AAEP program ending on September 30, 2014, AGRED and AAEP developed a transition plan to ensure AGRED's continuation of best practices and open the possibility of expanding these proven techniques to additional provinces in Afghanistan. AGRED and AAEP will collaborate in each of the provinces where overlap exists. Two AGRED staff from Parwan and Kapisa provinces attended a five day workshop at the end of December organized by AAEP for their new field staff. AGRED will jointly collaborate on a large extension conference in February so that AGRED can potentially take over this event in 2015. Discussions are also underway to absorb some of AAEPs top staff into AGRED, including at least one of their expatriate DCOPs.

Meeting with USDA Capacity Building Change Management Program (CBCMP) and AAEP. AGRED met with the two USDA programs to discuss how the three projects can potentially collaborate over the next few months (CBCMP will be ending in April 2014). While there were no significant outcomes from this meeting, a foundation was laid that will be expanded upon in January.

Meeting with Digital Green. AGRED met with Digital Green three times in December to continue discussions from November. Digital Green submitted their proposal to AGRED in late December and it's currently under review. Since much of the training will take place in India and much of the support will be remote, the AGRED COP will visit Digital Green in February at their facilities in India to finalize negotiations and review the process first hand. During this same trip, the AGRED COP is expected to meet with two other organizations from the Innovation Fair (held in Kabul) to follow up on initial conversations from that event.

Discussions with eAfghan Ag (eAA). AGRED and eAA held a conference call in December to discuss possible collaborations as they were also rumored to be planning a pilot with Digital Green; additionally they are overseeing the e-library at MAIL. Through this call and an exchange of emails, the two parties will work closely together on a Digital Green pilot scheduled for March 2014, in Kabul Province. AGRED will subsequently hold their own pilot in two additional provinces, most likely in Herat and Nangarhar. In the interim, AGRED will begin using existing videos from other sources to gauge farmer interest in potential pilot areas to determine the most suitable village. This initial activity will begin in late January.

In addition to the Digital Green pilot, eAA and AGRED are exploring collaboration opportunities around an e-library concept that eAA has already begun establishing at MAIL. Since the e-library was initially developed for the Agricultural Development Teams (ADTs) at the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRTs), most of the documents and the entire index are in English. AGRED is planning to use this same digital library to support DAILs with access to the e-library through pre-loaded desktop computers and mobile tablets; discussions are underway about collaborating on making the e-library more user friendly to Dari and Pashtu speakers. Discussions will continue when eAA senior staff returns to Afghanistan in mid-January.

Meeting with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). On December 10 and 25, AGRED's DCOP and technical team met with JICA's Institutional Development and Rice and Wheat Improvement teams to discuss possible areas of collaboration. JICA shared with AGRED their capacity development framework for the extension and research sector they developed for MAIL. AGRED uses this framework as a reference for

development of its capacity building program. AGRED also accessed a list of recommended rice varieties for different regions. Information on newly recommended higher yielding rice varieties will enable AGRED to work with the Extension Directorate and DAILs to expand these varieties to different farming areas to increase rice growers' income.

Meeting with MAIL Deputy Minister, Agricultural Affairs. On December 23, the AGRED COP and DCOP met with MAIL's Deputy Minister for Agricultural Affairs. During this meeting, AGRED updated the Deputy Minister on the latest about the AGRED program as well as on the recent changes in the implementation mechanism of the program (i.e. On- and Off- Budget change). The AGRED team highlighted key points concerning the AGRED draft annual work plan and informed the Deputy Minister about the anticipated pilot initiatives. The Deputy Minister is in agreement with AGRED's planned activities.

Meeting with MAIL Director of General Planning Policy and Programs and the Strategic Planning Director. On December 24, the AGRED COP and DCOP met with MAIL's Director of General Planning, Policy and Programs and Strategic Planning Director. AGRED discussed the latest changes in the implementation mechanism of the program. The Director emphasized that since the program is returning to more direct technical support, frequent coordination meetings would be needed with technical directorates such as the Directorate of Extension and Research. AGRED agreed and will make the necessary arrangements moving forward.

Meeting with MAIL Acting General Director of Extension. On December 24, AGRED's DCOP met with MAIL's new Acting General Director of Extension. The main goals of this meeting were to update the Acting General Director on AGRED achievements, and to gain a better sense of his priorities for 2014. The General Director indicated that AGRED has done good work in the field and that now is the time to communicate these successes with the senior officials at MAIL. He committed to facilitating a presentation on AGRED's accomplishments to MAIL senior officials in January.

Meeting with MAIL Director of Research. On December 29, AGRED's DCOP and technical team representatives met with the Research Director. The Director was briefed on AGRED's accomplishments and he shared priorities for his directorate with the AGRED team. The Director also requested that AGRED support his directorates in establishing a research coordination forum to better understand the various roles and responsibilities of agricultural interests. The parties agreed that at the next meeting, additional discussions on how to work this out would take place.

Technical team networking, information sharing, and capacity building

The AGRED technical teams also contributed to creating stronger strategic linkages through two notable events in December. The events offered AGRED staff an opportunity to gain an understanding of agricultural extension and research efforts as well as educate the wider agricultural community on AGRED's own impact.

Agricultural technical working group. On December 24 - 25, AGRED staff participated in an Agricultural Technical Working Group (ATWG) meeting sponsored by the DAIL Agricultural Department, representing Kunar, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Laghman provinces. The participants represented a wide range of national and international NGOs and UN agencies (UNAMA, CBCMP, NEPA, Economic directorate, PHDP, DRRD, USAID, etc.). The purpose of the sessions was to congregate agricultural-based interests and share some of the challenges faced and solutions generated towards Afghanistan's most pressing agricultural needs.

AGRED Regional Coordinators and Provincial Extension Coordinators presented strategic directions and ongoing project activities to participants in the meeting. Participating staff subsequently briefed the

broader AGRED team on lessons learned and potential areas that could be integrated into the program's implementation.

Service in Key Areas (SIKA) service providers' fair. On December 3 and 4, AGRED staff participated in a two day service providers' fair in Paktya province. The fair drew a variety of participants, including national and international NGOs, government directorates, private sector companies, select community development council (CDC) representatives, and farmers. The purpose of the fair was for participants to showcase their work and contributions to agricultural development. The AGRED team participated fully in the event and was active in educating participants about its impact through distribution of written materials, discussions, and informal networking / relationship building.

AF-PAK young professionals extension workshop. From December 16-20, the USDA conducted a workshop at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), Pakistan. A diverse group of professionals working in American universities, the University of Faisalabad, and agricultural experts working in Pakistan's government sector presented and participated in the workshop. Thirteen (9 men and 4 women) AGRED staff traveled and actively participated in the workshop. The workshop focused on sharing new extension methodologies that can be replicated in the field, and facilitated a number of networking opportunities. AGRED participants briefed the AGRED senior management team on the workshop and will be exploring how to incorporate some of the lessons learned into AGRED's own field work.

Gender-focused coordination and working group meetings

Coordination meetings with USAID OAG Gender Team on the next OAG IPGWG meeting. In December, AGRED conducted coordination meetings with the USAID OAG Gender team and MAIL's Home Economy and Gender departments to continue planning for its next Implementing Partner Gender Working Group (IPGWG) meeting. The coordination meetings in December focused largely on finalizing an agenda, coordinating logistics, finalizing attendee lists, and confirming attendance.

USAID OAG IPGWG meeting at MAIL. Following the mentioned coordination meetings, the IPGWG met to discuss a way forward for partnering with MAIL in light of the Working Group's strategy and activities. During the meeting, MAIL expressed keen interest in expanding the current Working Group's membership, revising the terms of reference (TOR) to incorporate relevant elements from the TORs of MAIL's Home Economy and Gender Departments, and operating the group at a policy level. The resulting recommendations present a framework for a future gender working group under MAIL's leadership with technical support from implementing partners. A complete list of the recommendations is available upon request.

Technical Support Delivered

Previously referred to as 'Off-Budget Support', this section reports on AGRED's technical support delivered directly to MAIL, DAILs, and farmers, this section is now using the four Expected Results outlined above. Technical support is delivered through AGRED's Research, Extension, Training, and Gender teams.

Expected Result I- Improved extension for improved agriculture

Mini-project start-up: training, construction, and input distribution

AGRED made progress on a number of mini-projects that seek to introduce and demonstrate the value of improved varieties and new methods to increase crop yields.



Demonstration plots—like the mung bean plot shown above—are critical tools which not only directly benefit farmers (i.e. higher yields), but also spur formal and informal information / technique sharing (Urozgan province)

Wheat: On December 1, AGRED's provincial extension team, in collaboration with respective DAIL upper management staff, distributed inputs and tools to 24 farmers across four provinces (Kandahar, Helmand, Urozgan, and Zabul). In total, 24 shovels, 1,200 kg. of diammonium phosphate (DAP), and 1,200 kg. of urea were distributed amongst the 24 farmers to initiate the project implementation stage within those provinces.



In two separate projects, women (left) and men (right) receive farming inputs as part of a larger effort to establish demonstration plots, which educate farmers on new seed varieties and techniques (Helmand and Kandahar provinces, left to right)

Ensuring adequate wheat farming opportunities for women as well, the AGRED Gender team selected two wheat demonstration plots in Helmand and provided five female farmers (who work on these plots) with similar tools and inputs (shovels, fertilizers). The goal is to not only to increase yields using improved seed varieties and techniques, but also promote both formal and informal information sharing amongst local female networks.

In Kapisa province, AGRED provincial extension staff, in collaboration with DAIL-Kapisa extension staff, selected six demonstration plots and signed contracts with the selected farmers. Subsequently, inputs totaling 300 kg. of six different wheat varieties (Mazar 99, Herat 99, PBW, Gull 96, Sollah 2002, and Ghory 96) and 300 kg. of DAP were purchased and distributed to the six farmers to initiate the mini-project implementation.

The distribution of these tools and inputs is a crucial component of the DAIL capacity building approach as it reinforces amongst farmers of the commitment of DAIL (through AGRED) in offering relevant and timely services to their constituents.

In Gozara district (Herat province), AGRED staff, along with Gozara district extension workers, held a workshop on December 28 - 29 for 53 wheat farmers in Kondilan and Qale Mirgul villages. The two day workshop focused on improving land preparation, fertilizer, seed selection, and irrigation techniques. It represented the training component of a wheat demonstration mini-project that seeks to introduce new varieties and improved techniques.

Off-season vegetables: Following a baseline survey and selection of farmers for six off-season vegetables in November, six plastic tunnel (greenhouse) demonstration plots in Gardiz and Ahmad Aba districts were constructed in December. Following a strict procurement and bidding process, the awarded company installed six plastic tunnels according to project requirements. The completion of the construction allows the project to proceed as a full demonstration and research plot.

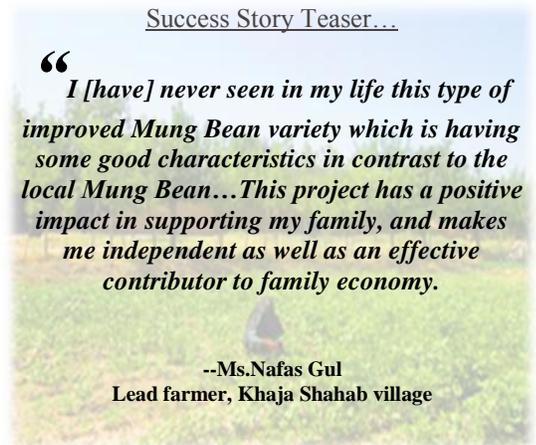
On December 28, the AGRED Regional Gender coordinator, in collaboration with DAIL Home Economy staff, conducted a training in Herat province for 30 female farmers to increase their knowledge about land preparation, fertilizer application, cultivation, harvesting, and packaging of off-season vegetables during the winter season. The training represented a crucial component in building DAILs' own technical capacity in these areas as well as fortifying positive farmer perceptions about the value of DAIL.

Mini-project implementation: cultivation

Wheat: From December 3 - 6, AGRED’s provincial team provided technical support to farmers in collaboration with respective DAIL representatives on the cultivation of 24 separate demonstration plots using a seeder machine in Kandahar, Helmand, Urozgan, and Zabul provinces. In total, AGRED staff practically trained 48 farmers and seven DAIL extension managers and on wheat cultivation.

On December 8, 10, and 16, AGRED’s provincial extension staff—in collaboration with DAIL extension staff from Faryab, Bulkh, and Samangan provinces—cultivated 16 wheat demonstration plots in various districts across the three provinces. Completing the cultivation stage now allows AGRED staff to proceed with practical, on-site training and demonstration opportunities.

Maize: In mid-December, AGRED provincial staff and DAIL extension staff assisted farmers with the cultivation of 12 maize demonstration plots in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The results of those and follow-up visits demonstrated that improved seed varieties and new raised bed-methods resulted in substantial increases in output. In Helmand province, the data show that annual production increased as a result of the improved seed varieties and methods from 800 kg. / jerib to 2,000 kg. / jerib; in Kandahar, that increase was even greater, yielding an annual figure of 2,300 kg. / jerib.



Mini-project completion

Two mini-projects were completed and have yielded some preliminary results found in the below table.

Table 1- Recently completed mini-projects, important findings

Improved varieties and new techniques for...		Province(s)	Important findings
Mung bean cultivation	Demonstration / research plot	Kandahar	The per jerib yield of the improved variety was 19.5% more than the local variety
Rice cultivation	Demonstration / research plot	Nangahar	The improved rice variety yielded 8.05 ton / hectare, while the local variety yielded 4.5 ton / hectare

Complete reports are available including methodologies and further details of the cited figures.

Expected Result 2- Improved infrastructure at MAIL / DAILS

Carrying out activities towards this Expected Result has been placed on hold until the budget and contract modification and AGRED Work Plan are approved.

Expected Result 3- Improved capacity at MAIL / DAILS

On December 24 - 25, AGRED provincial extension staff conducted a workshop for Gozara district extension staff (DAIL) that focused on improving proposal writing, extension communications skills, and designing extension demonstration plots. Focusing on these areas is intended to assist the DAILS in developing stronger internal administrative mechanisms to design, deliver, and manage mini-projects (or similar funding mechanisms) that directly benefit farmers. In total, five extension farmers were trained. Out of the

workshop, extension staff generated ideas and completed first steps in drafting viable mini-proposals. Subsequent progress in submitting and approval of mini-projects for this district will be documented.

The AGRED Gender team also conducted a training on planning, reporting, and proposal writing which included 12 DAIL- Herat Home Economy and Extension staff. The purpose of the training was to build capacity and confidence within the unit to capably develop proposal concepts into viable mini-project proposals. From the training, participants generated new ideas and initiated the proposal writing process in anticipation of securing future resources through the AGRED mini-project framework, and ultimately, other self-generated funding mechanisms.

Expected Result 4- Improved research for improved agriculture

In December, research on the impact of improved wheat varieties constituted a majority of work towards Expected Result 4. On December 25, AGRED and DAIL research staff visited the Chasma Maran wheat research farm in Paktya province to collect ongoing data on mini-project demonstration plots. The data showed that 30% of the wheat seeds were germinated and that the remaining seeds were in the 'emergence' stage. Based on the observations of AGRED and DAIL staff, it's estimated that roughly 90% of the seeds will germinate; however, they are expected to do so more slowly than usual given colder temperatures.

Additionally, AGRED provincial staff in Balkh province conducted follow-up monitoring visits to measure wheat varieties yields at the Dehdahi research center. The data showed that 60%-70% of the wheat seeds germinated at the time of the assessment; these figures largely reflect a particularly cold winter.

Cross-Cutting Support

AGRED is committed to also reporting on notable progress from its support departments.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Environmental compliance

The M&E team submitted 13 environmental review documents (using the old format) to USAID's Environmental Officer. AGRED's M&E team is following up on remaining environmental review forms and will also work closely with technical teams to ensure that all new USAID environmental forms will be used moving forward.

Of the ten total AGRED research and extension interventions, all used small plots and none used ammonium or pesticides; most relied on irrigated water. Therefore, the Environmental Screening results were "Moderate or Unknown Risk". The M&E team will continue to monitor and assess environmental impacts as the mini-projects progress as well as provide more specific environmental compliance and GPS locations in future reports.

Communicating field successes

In an effort to continually improve how it captures and articulates the impact of its work, AGRED is committed to producing compelling success stories of how its interventions have improved the lives of individuals and communities. The AGRED Communications Department is currently developing stronger systems and tools for gathering, producing, and disseminating success stories and case studies.

AGRED submitted a success story ('Improved rice yield—seeing is believing for Afghan farmers') to USAID in December for its consideration. AGRED is available to discuss any feedback. A 'teaser' story concept has been included in the previous section ('Technical Support Delivered') of this report.

Annex 1-Complete list of AGRED mini-projects

This document is available as an Excel file and has been attached with the report submission

Annex 2- Complete list of AGRED trainings

This document is available as an Excel file and has been attached with the report submission.