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Afghan Agricultural Research & Extension Development (AGRED)



AGRED Final Report

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Roots of Peace

Implementing Partner for:

Afghan Agricultural Research & Extension Development (AGRED)

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Cover photo: DAIL staff meet with farmers during an extension visit to discuss issues on the raised bed method (Kunar region)

Table of Contents

Program Overview	1
Executive Summary	3
<i>Implementation mechanisms</i>	3
<i>Revised work plan</i>	3
<i>Report Structure</i>	4
Implementation mechanisms	5
<i>On-budget and off-budget support</i>	5
<i>Mini project overview</i>	5
<i>Moving beyond the mini project model</i>	8
Expected result 1- more effective communication with Afghan farmers	9
<i>Demonstration plots</i>	9
<i>On-farm trainings, farmer field days, extension visits, and exposure visits</i>	10
<i>A snapshot: improved service delivery, more accurate reporting</i>	14
Expected result 2- improved applied research and extension infrastructure	15
<i>2013 research and extension center inventory</i>	15
<i>2014 Research center functional review</i>	15
Expected result 3- training and capacity building of MAIL / DAIL staff	17
<i>DAIL staff training</i>	17
<i>2014: Improved DAIL engagement</i>	18
<i>MAIL training and administrative systems building</i>	19
Expected result 4- applied research and extension grants	21
Cross-cutting: Gender	22
<i>Gender: looking towards 2014</i>	22
PMP Indicators	24
AGRED Partnership	25
<i>Afghan Agricultural Extension Project (AAEP)</i>	25
<i>Capacity Building Change Management Program (CBCMP)</i>	25
<i>International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)</i>	25
<i>eAfghan Ag (e-AA)</i>	26
<i>Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)</i>	26
‘Lessons Learned’ & Recommendations	27
<i>On-Budget can be successful</i>	27
<i>Development of the on-budget mechanism</i>	27
<i>GIRoA is not a contractor</i>	27
<i>Managing expectations</i>	27
<i>A phased approach</i>	28
<i>Staffing for management</i>	28
<i>USAID staffing transitions</i>	29
Financial Report	30
ANNEX 1: Index of AGRED Reports	
<i>Administrative</i>	
<i>Technical</i>	
ANNEX 2: mini projects handover plan	

Program Overview

The purpose of this program was to increase agricultural productivity and income through the application of science and technology. The Afghan Agricultural Research & Extension Development (AGRED) program built the capacity of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's (GIROA) Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAIL) to sustainably procure / develop and deploy productivity-enhancing technologies and best practices.

AGRED was designed to provide technical support to the Government of Afghanistan as it implemented a companion agreement, funded through an Implementation Letter negotiated between the Government of Afghanistan and USAID and implemented by MAIL. The Implementation Letter would outline formal requirements to receive planned on-budget assistance to support research and extension activities. Roots of Peace, as USAID AGRED contractor, was responsible for preparing MAIL to receive funds "on-budget," and throughout the Implementation Letter process.

AGRED sought to facilitate farmers' access to productivity-enhancing technologies and knowledge, institutionalize an integrated research and extension system, and rebuild critical assets of selected research and extension centers and stations.

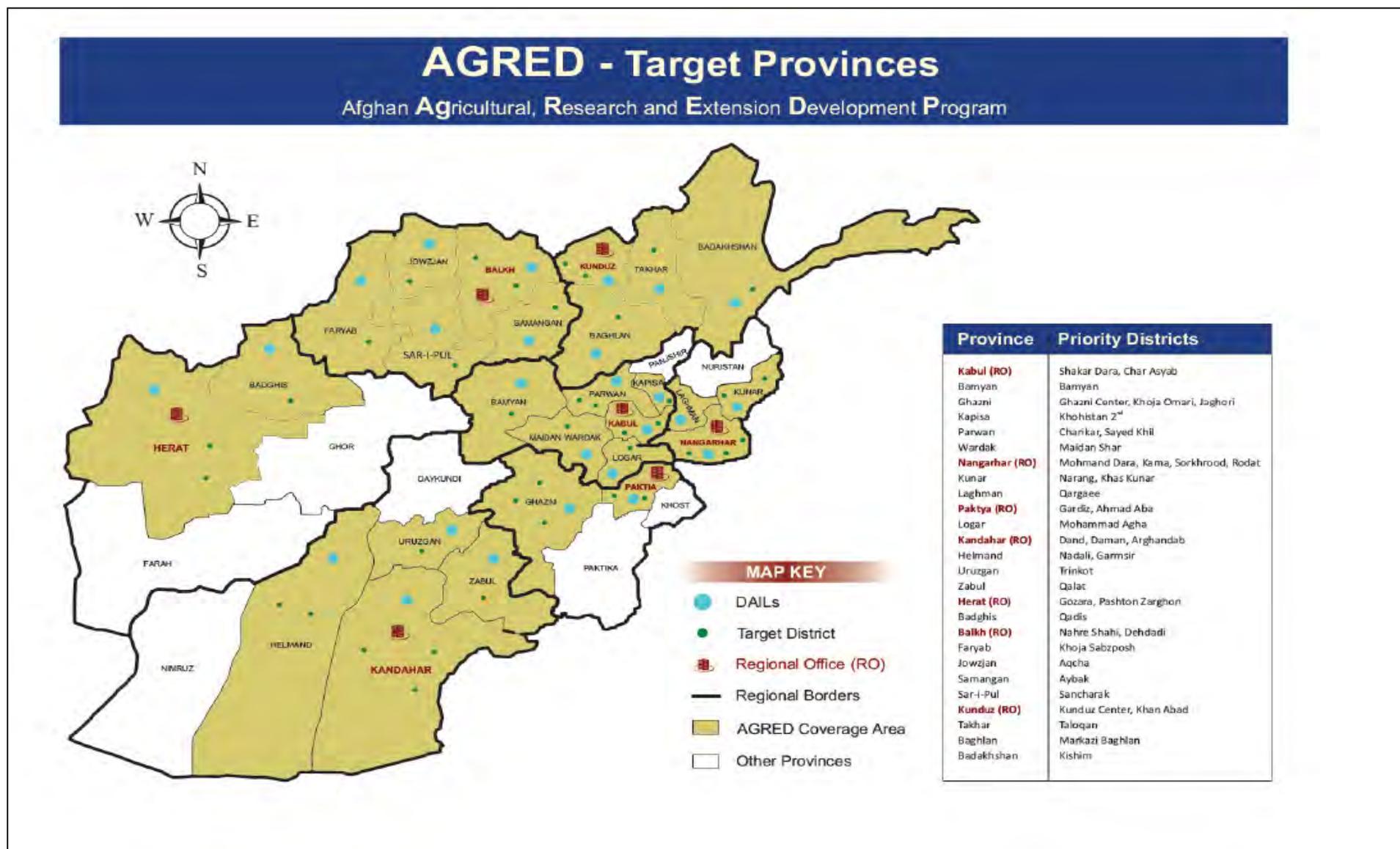
AGRED sought to achieve the program objective by accomplishing four Expected Results:

1. More effective communication with and increased access to improved technologies, knowledge, and education with emphasis on agriculture best practices by Afghan farmers.
2. Improved applied research and extension infrastructure in seven 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.

The capacity development work focused on MAIL and 26 DAILs as well as the Research Stations in the seven provinces of Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Nangarhar and Paktya. The facilitation of access to technologies and knowledge was designed to be implemented in 50 MAIL priority districts in the seven target provinces, as well as in Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Faryab, Ghazni, Hirat, Jowzjan, Kabul, Kunduz, Parwan, Samangan, Takhar, and Zabul.

In December 2013, USAID and MAIL eliminated the on-budget component. AGRED was reoriented to be implemented through off-budget,

Figure 1- AGRED target provinces and districts



Executive Summary

Stated in its simplest form, AGRED was designed to contribute to the long-term growth and independence of MAIL and DAILs; to help them deliver more relevant, tailored services to Afghan farmers. AGRED was originally designed to accomplish this through On-budget support, which provided MAIL direct financial resources—overseen by AGRED off-budget contract—to carry out activities towards the Expected Results, and ultimately, the program objective.

Implementation mechanisms

The On-budget component was outlined in a draft Implementation plan that was developed and negotiated between MAIL, USAID and ROP / AGRED , primarily in Program Year (PY) 1. USAID developed the structure of nine Strategic Goals and 27 Benchmarks half way through PY 1 from which AGRED’s On-budget progress would be measured. While the IL was yet to be formally approved by USAID, AGRED moved forward under this structure and began incorporating it into programming, data collection, and reporting systems.

However, the On-budget component was eliminated. This elimination had very real implications on how AGRED approached accomplishing its Expected Results (particularly Expected Results 2 and 4) solely through its Off-budget resources.

The mini project approach was initially designed as a “quick start” activity to engage DAILs early in the project. However, given the delays and ultimate cancellation of On-budget funding, the mini projects became the primary activity for delivering services. In the immediate term, AGRED developed a mechanism which would ensure that resources and technical services continued to flow to MAIL, DAILs, and farmers amidst uncertainty around the On-budget component. The mini project approach became the principle system for delivering services. as larger administrative issues were addressed between USAID and ROP / AGRED.

At the time of closing, AGRED had completed, initiated, and planned (for 2014 / PY3) over 80 mini projects that were developed at the field level by DAILs, with oversight by AGRED. These extension and research projects focused largely on utilizing existing farming plots which served as “comparative demonstration plots” to show farmers firsthand how new technologies, seed varieties, and techniques could result in higher yields. DAIL staff were typically the lead designers, organizers, and implementers of these projects with substantial training and on the job support from AGRED off-budget field staff. Ultimately, the goal was to build the DAIL’s capacity to directly access financial resources from MAIL’s budget and re-build the strong relationship between DAILs and farmers that they had until the 1970s.

Within the mini project approach, AGRED was making progress towards achieving Expected Result 1 (increased farmer communications) and Expected Result 2 (improved MAIL / DAIL capacity building). Mini projects included a number of different interventions that, collectively, built towards the larger objectives. For example, AGRED and DAIL staff established over 200 demonstration plots, and in the process, engaged over 1,800 male and female farmers (expected result 1) through interactions such as farmer field days, extension visits, on-farm trainings, and exposure visits. AGRED focused its efforts on direct training of DAIL staff (expected result 2), where they delivered over 30 technical and administrative (i.e., proposal writing) trainings to over 700 DAIL participants. AGRED made further progress by working directly with MAIL, where they introduced a professionally accepted staff training tool at the MAIL level.

Revised work plan

In the longer-term, AGRED recognized the need for a clearer outlook that would address the needs of the program’s interested parties. AGRED undertook this effort in late 2013 (PY 2), which was

articulated in a revised Work Plan (and complementary GANTT chart), submitted to USAID in December, 2013.

The revised Work Plan reflected a recognition by AGRED in two strategic areas. Firstly, AGRED focused on diversifying its services beyond just the mini project approach to broaden impact and achieve the expected results. Secondly, AGRED sought to improve the way in which it captured and articulated field-level progress. These two areas constituted major tenets of AGRED's plans in 2014. While the revised Work Plan continued to be reviewed into January 2014, AGRED moved forward—particularly in February and March—to begin incorporating these tenets more aggressively into the program.

AGRED was confident in the positive steps it made as staff planned for the 2014 growing season (PY 3). The report provides 'snapshots' of these positive steps.

Report Structure

The body of this report provides greater detail and figures in each of these areas. The first section provides an overview of the On-budget history and the mini project approach, including regional segmentation and analysis. The four subsequent sections provide details specifically related to AGRED's progress in accomplishing each Expected Result. The fifth section provides all PMP data from the AGRED M&E team.

The sixth section provides a summary of all partners engaged and a brief description of the type of partnership explored. The seventh section offers honest insight into some of the lessons learned from AGRED and outlines direction in addressing challenges.

Finally, the Annex provides information for reference purposes.

Implementation mechanisms

This section provides an overview of the mechanisms through which AGRED and MAIL / DAILs delivered its services in order to produce the Expected Results, and ultimately, accomplish the program objective.

On-budget and off-budget support

The program was designed based on both On-budget (activities implemented by MAIL / DAILs) and Off-budget (activities implemented by AGRED in support of On-budget) support. USAID proposed in an IL the terms and structure of how the On-budget component would be implemented. The initial results of these terms were nine Strategic Goals and 27 Benchmarks that were to guide program delivery, M&E / PMP data collection, and reporting / external communications.

The IL remained in draft form for an extended period of time. In the meantime, AGRED had to ensure that resources and technical assistance were still being delivered on schedule. In PY2, AGRED initiated its mini project approach to ensure that resources and technical services continued to flow to farmers and DAIL staff. (More on mini projects in the following sub-section).

The On-budget component (and thus, the IL and Strategic Goal / Benchmark structure) was eliminated in the fall of PY2. This had an immediate impact on AGRED's ability to accomplish its program objective; particularly related to progress towards Expected Results 2 and 4, which were highly capital intensive (MAIL infrastructure development and MAIL grant distribution, respectively).



Farmers and DAIL staff tend a nursery as part of maintenance of a demo plot under a mini project (Khakee village, Nangarhar region)

With the elimination of the On-budget component, AGRED shifted its focus to Expected Results 1 and 3 (improved farmer communications and increased DAIL capacity building, respectively), which relied less heavily on the On-budget component. AGRED continued with the mini projects as the primary means for delivering services as an immediate response to the elimination of the On-budget component. As the report later explains, AGRED recognized in the longer term that it would need expand their funding of MAIL and DAIL extension initiatives beyond just mini projects.

Mini project overview

Mini projects were a mechanism to deliver technical training, material resources, and capacity building opportunities to both farmers and DAIL staff. This same mechanism could be used in the long term for DAILs to effectively obtain and implement projects utilizing MAIL's own budget. The projects offered small sums of money (not exceeding \$ 10,000) for projects that were developed by MAIL / DAILs.

AGRED's mini project mechanism was comprehensive in that it delivered technical capacity building services to farmers via DAIL staff throughout the entire project design (problem identification, concept development, proposal creation, approval), implementation (monitoring visits, field days, trainings), administrative management (report writing, basic organization), and M&E (data collection, reporting) process. This comprehensive approach reflected AGRED's commitment to helping facilitate more long-term ownership by DAIL of its service delivery. To ignore the critical learning opportunity of identifying needs and developing viable projects (largely an administrative exercise), and only provide financial support, would ultimately undermine MAIL / DAIL's ability to effectively address Afghan farmers' needs in the long-term. The mini project approach includes activities that contribute to both Expected Result 1 and Expected Result 3.

A total of 84 mini projects across the Research, Extension, and Gender technical teams were either 'completed', 'handed over to DAIL' (ongoing projects), or 'approved for 2014'. Of these, 56% (47) were completed by April 30, 2014, or had been handed over to DAILs for their continued management. The remaining 44% (37) of mini projects, which had been approved by DAILs and AGRED for 2014, were terminated once the program was closed. The following table provides more details on the AGRED mini projects.

Table 1- Mini project close out figures, by technical team

	Completed by April 30	Handed over to DAIL	Approved for 2014	Total
Extension	12	22	12	46
Research	3	6	7	16
Gender	0	4	18	22
Total	15	32	37	84

A complete listing of all mini projects, including project scope, location, and their status is included in Annex 2. The following sub-sections provide regionally aggregated data, by each category.

Completed projects

The 15 completed projects were those primarily completed during the 2013 growing season (PY 2). Since these projects were closed out by AGRED and MAIL / DAILs in 2013, the premature closing of the program had no negative consequences.

Table 2- Completed mini projects, by region

	Region	# mini projects	Project examples
1	Kabul	2	Introduction of improved grape vine varieties
2	Kandahar	4	Introduction of improved corn variety and yield production
3	Herat	2	Introduction of improved mung bean varieties
4	Balkh	None completed	None
5	Kunduz	1	Melon fly control and management
6	Nangarhar	4	Promotion and demonstration of JICA- developed and adapted improved rice varieties
7	Paktya	1	Introduction of improves saffron varieties and production practices
	Total	15	

Handed over to DAIL

The 32 ongoing mini projects handed over to DAILs represent progress made towards the ultimate goal of AGRED— to facilitate greater ownership of the service delivery process of MAIL / DAILs directly to farmers. AGRED provided handover support through AGRED's regional and provincial

level staff, who coordinated with DAILs concerning documentation, addressing concerns, and providing advice on the transition. The following table provides a listing of the mini projects handed over to the DAIL by April 30, 2014.

Table 3- Mini projects handed over to DAIL, by region

	Region	# mini projects	Project examples
1	Kabul	4	Introduction of improved tomato and eggplant varieties
2	Kandahar	5	Introduction of improved wheat varieties and techniques
3	Herat	1	Introduction of improved wheat varieties and techniques
4	Balkh	7	Promotion of off-season production (greenhouse)
5	Kunduz	7	Introduction of improved onion varieties
6	Nangarhar	6	Introduction of improved eggplant and okra varieties
7	Paktya	2	Expansion of red clover varieties
	Total	32	

Approved for 2014

AGRED and the respective DAILs had approved 32 mini projects to be implemented for the 2014 growing season. With the news that AGRED would be closing prematurely, these project plans were terminated without any previous financial commitment. AGRED informed MAIL and DAILs on the situation and addressed their questions. Further, AGRED encouraged MAIL / DAILs staff to continue seeking funding from other sources for these viable projects.

The increased number of approved mini projects was a strong indicator of how much capacity had been built within MAIL / DAILs in comparison to the previous year. This increase reflected an improved capacity at the MAIL and DAIL level to obtain beneficiary input, identify needs, develop concepts, and transform those concepts into viable initiatives. These are fundamental administrative systems which MAIL / DAILs can use as the basis for future grant or other funding mechanisms targeting farmers. AGRED leaves MAIL / DAILs with over 35 viable projects which are tailored for the unique needs of the farmers in each province. The following table provides a listing of the DAIL approved projects.

Table 4- Mini projects approved for 2014, by region

	Region	# mini projects	Project examples
1	Kabul	7	Introduction of higher yielding apple varieties
2	Kandahar	10	Introduction of improved okra varieties
3	Herat	5	Introduction of improved onion varieties
4	Balkh	5	Introduction of improved sesame seed varieties
5	Kunduz	5	Yield comparison of four tomato varieties
6	Nangarhar	1	Introduction of improved varieties and techniques for vegetable production
7	Paktya	4	Yield trials of different tomato varieties
	Total	37	

Moving beyond the mini project model

In late 2013, USAID requested a revised AGRED Work Plan which would reflect the decision to eliminate the On-budget portion of the program. In developing this new Work Plan, AGRED focused broadly on two major areas: improving its services to its beneficiaries (increased diversity) and improving how it communicated AGRED services (improved definition).

Increased diversity of services

In its revised Work Plan, AGRED proposed a wider variety of initiatives, largely because the mini project approach was never intended as the primary mechanism for delivering services. AGRED laid out a number of new pilot initiatives in its Work Plan which focused on how digital technology could help DAILs deliver more current and relevant information to farmers. For example, Digital Green, which proposed to deliver grass-roots level extension information via community-driven videos (displayed using battery operated projectors). Another example was a pilot utilizing tablet computers for extension services that was to be done in conjunction with e-Afghan Ag and the digital library they were developing with MAIL. AGRED further introduced plans to organize Farmer Field Schools, where farmers convened over a period of time to systematically learn new farming techniques as part of a larger process.

The revised Work Plan also placed a greater emphasis on incorporating Gender more seamlessly into the program. With new initiatives such as gender-based educational kits and strengthening gender based networks, the AGRED Gender component was ready to build on the modest progress made in PY2.

Further, AGRED made a critical hire to augment its Institutional Strengthening (IS) team, which introduced more formal systems at the MAIL level, focusing on MAIL staff training and productivity. AGRED was confident that this mix of services would more completely address the needs of MAIL / DAILs and Afghan farmers as it entered the 2014 growing season.

Improved definition (and communication) of services

AGRED also saw an opportunity to improve how it captured and communicated these activities as it looked forward into PY3. For example, instead of claiming that ‘technical assistance had been delivered’, AGRED sought to provide more detail about the nature of this assistance, explanations of the technical components, and how it fit into the larger process. Further, AGRED sought to distinguish and explain the subtleties of different activities and how each activity led to knowledge transfer and relationship building opportunities between DAIL staff and farmers.

In December 2013, AGRED began to better align its field reporting templates and systems with the newly revised Work Plan. The philosophy was that as AGRED diversified its services, so too did it need to better educate USAID and its other partners on how and why it was providing technical services to MAIL / DAILs and Afghan farmers. The result was a more defined list of field activities which reflected what AGRED had largely already been doing as part of the mini project process, as well as the newly proposed activities.

Expected result 1- more effective communication with Afghan farmers

This result is ultimately about engaging directly with Afghan farmers through DAILs. Activities under this result focused on answering the big question of how to improve MAIL / DAIL's ability to respond to farmers' needs and develop tailored services which address those needs. AGRED's approach was to improve access to information and material resources on new technologies (i.e., seed varieties, tools, etc.) and new techniques (i.e., irrigation, planting, harvesting, etc.). At each stage in this process, AGRED's work was designed to build the capacity of MAIL / DAILs, who in turn could engage directly with the farmers and deliver improved agricultural services.

Demonstration plots

AGRED's technical services were based on showing farmers firsthand how new techniques or technologies lead to higher yields and then allowing farmers to compare the results with traditional methods and inputs. Using farmers' existing plots helped ensure a more organic and credible exchange of information within the community. A farmer is more likely to attend a field day at their neighbor's plot—and ultimately, adopt improved techniques and technologies—than travel to a facility in a neighboring district or province.



Farmers and DAIL staff prepare a raised bed nursery as part of the follow up to establishing a demo plot (Kunar region)

A majority of the mini projects discussed in the previous section were based on this principle, and therefore, resulted in establishing a demonstration plot. All plots established were in existing farmer plots; the term 'established plot' only refers to its inclusion under the AGRED and DAIL support. The plot would often be sectioned off, one portion showing traditional seeds and techniques, the other growing newly introduced seeds and techniques. As a consequence, farmers could firsthand see the differences in growth speed, health, crop density, and other indicators of greater end yields.

AGRED and DAILs established 218 demonstration plots. The following table provides data on these plots, by region and plot type.

Table 5- Established demonstration plots, by region and type

	Region	# demo plots	Demo plot types (# of each)
1	Kabul	16	-Grapes/ Vineyard (1) -Tomato and Eggplant Cultivation under Drip Irrigation System (3) -Improved Wheat Varieties (12)
2	Kandahar	42	- Hybrid Corn Seed/ Rise bed System (12) - Mungbean/ Rise bed System (6) - Improved Wheat Varieties (24)
3	Herat	20	-Mungbean/ Rise bed System (10) -Improved Wheat Varieties (10)
4	Balkh	38	-Plastic Tunnel and Vegetable varieties- Cucumber and Tomato (10) -Vegetable Forcing: Cucumber/Tomato Plastic Tunnel (6) -Improved Wheat Varieties (22)

	Region	# demo plots	Demo plot types (# of each)
5	Kunduz	40	-Introduction of improved tomato varieties and raise bed nursery in plastic tunnel (12) -Raised bed, broad cast and line system cultivation of onion (12) -Improved Wheat Varieties (6) -Improved Wheat Varieties with Wheat Intensification system (10)
6	Nangarhar	45	-Hybrid Corn Seed/ Rise bed System (12) -System Rice Intensification /Improved Rice Varieties (6) -Tomato, Eggplant, Okra (24)
7	Paktya	17	-Red Clover/ Rise bed System (8) -Saffron with Best Production Method (3) -Vegetable Forcing/Cucumber/Tomato Plastic Tunnel (6)
	Total	218	

In addition to the obvious practicalities of using existing farmers' land for demonstration purposes, the plots provided a platform, or a physical location to convene farmers and promote a greater transfer of knowledge about new techniques and technologies. The transfer of knowledge—both formally (i.e., through a farmer field day) and informally (i.e., farmers sharing information over a cup of tea)—amongst farmers was a critical component of the AGRED demonstration plot approach. AGRED focused on this concept of exchanging information as a priority in its revised Work Plan.

For example, AGRED began in March 2014 developing a strategy for a series of mass media campaigns (largely through radio) which would capture key results arising out of AGRED and DAIL demonstration plots and educate a much wider audience on practicalities and implications of those results; information exchange on a much larger scale. Additionally, AGRED sought to better demonstrate the nature and outcomes of DAIL staff and farmers exchanging information and building relationships (i.e., success stories, video documentaries, photographic displays).

The following section provides further explanation and specific data on these information exchange opportunities.

On-farm trainings, farmer field days, extension visits, and exposure visits

Trainings discussed in this section are those delivered to farmers, which contribute to Expected Result 1 (increased communications with farmers). Trainings which were delivered to MAIL / DAIL staff are discussed in the section Expected Result 3.

While on-farm trainings, farmer field days, extension visits, and exposure visits resulted in different outcomes and were relevant at different stages of the mini project cycle, they shared a commonality: each provided an essential opportunity to directly link DAIL farmers and Afghan farmers. One step further, DAIL staff and farmers used each engagement to transfer knowledge; to understand the challenges of the other, discuss best practices, and craft solutions. Practically, this engagement



Farmers take a rest to survey a demonstration plot nursery as part of an on-farm training (Kunar region)

is important to manage the mini project, ensure proper techniques, and ultimately, to maximize harvest yields. But there are larger implications in the Afghan context: DAIL and farmer trust building. Building this relationship at an institutional level will be a significant factor in determining the success of MAIL / DAILs in taking ownership of its service delivery.

This section provides offers more explanation of each activity and provides disaggregated data by region. All figures cited in this section span from the beginning of the program through January, 2014. As previously noted, AGRED altered how it defined and reported on these activities in February and March, 2014.

The implication is that activities reported up to January 2014 are largely understated. This is because the reporting structure previously did not lend itself to segmenting different activities and highlighting the importance of each as part of a larger process. For example, until February 2014, field teams didn't report consistently on farmer extension visits, even though these were taking place on a regular basis and were an essential point of contact for exchanging information between DAIL staff and farmers.

Table 6- On-Farm trainings, by activity

Activity	# of Total Activities	# of Farmers engaged		
		Female	Male	Total
On-farm training	78	235	717	952
Farmer Field Day	32	175	451	626
Extension Visit	30	66	159	225
Exposure Visit	8	73	12	85
<i>Total</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>549</i>	<i>1,339</i>	<i>1,888</i>

On-farm training

<i>Defining the activity</i>	These trainings are less formal and are held on-site for DAIL staff, farmers, and sometimes university students. The information is practical, allowing trainees to familiarize themselves with farm management practices. In this kind of trainings the farmer has the opportunity to see how things are done, practically apply lessons learned, and receive immediate feedback from facilitators. The trainings differ from extension visits in that they are more structured and focused on a specific topic (as opposed to more open conversations with farmers during an extension visit). In some instances, the same farmers may be counted in both on-farm training and extension visits (i.e. training needs identified during an extension visit and followed up with the focused training on a separate visit).
<i>Why it's important</i>	These trainings are an important part of the learning process in which DAIL staff can react quickly to farmers' field needs without having to be slowed down by formal trainings restrictions (i.e. budget, curriculum development). The hands on process promotes higher adoption rates and greater success rates when farmers implement the outcomes on their own farms. For DAIL staff, this type of practical training is crucial for relationship building and transfer of technical knowledge.

AGRED conducted a total of 78 on-farm trainings, engaging a total of 952 farmers. The following table provides the regional break-down of these trainings.

Table 7- On-Farm trainings, by region

Region	# of On-Farm Trainings	# of Farmers engaged		
		Female	Male	Total
Kabul	2	0	51	51
Kandahar	8	94	6	100
Herat	19	104	342	446
Balkh	0	0	0	0
Kunduz	33	5	148	153
Nangarhar	13	32	131	163
Paktya	3	0	39	39
<i>Total</i>	78	235	717	952

Farmer Field Day

<i>Defining the activity</i>	Farmer Field Days are associated with demo plots and other types of demonstrations. They are used as an awareness tool to show specific techniques or methods as a crop progresses through the growth cycle. The typical length of a field day event can be from two hours to an entire day. The field days are largely planned to coincide with important stages of the farming calendar. These events are identified and outlined by DAIL staff in most mini-project proposals.
<i>Why it's important</i>	Field days provide an additional opportunity for exchanging information about improved varieties and new techniques and facilities greater DAIL agents and farmers engagement. Farmers can also share common challenges and discuss potential solutions to be applied to their own plots.

AGRED and DAILs conducted 32 farmer field day events. The events engaged over 600 farmers, roughly 28% of which were female. The following table provides a break-down of these events, by region.

Table 8- Farmer Field Day events, by region

Region	# of Field Day events	# of Farmers engaged		
		Female	Male	Total
Kabul	2	0	38	38
Kandahar	7	13	122	135
Herat	1	0	11	11
Balkh	3	70	0	70
Kunduz	2	0	26	26
Nangarhar	12	92	155	247
Paktya	5	0	99	99
<i>Total</i>	32	175	451	626

Extension visit

<i>Defining the activity</i>	AGRED extension staff work with DAIL Extension agents to visit individual or small groups of farmers. Ideally the visits take place on farmers' land. These visits differ from farmer field day visits because they are less task oriented (i.e. to collect information or to help set up an irrigation system), instead they are focused on discussions with farmers about challenges and possible solutions.
<i>Why it's important</i>	These visits will allow the DAIL agents to build rapport with local farmers, gain insights into problems, and receive practice in engaging farmers in informal teachable moments.

AGRED and DAIL staff conducted 30 documented extension visits through January 2014, engaging over 220 farmers.

Table 9- Extension visits, by region

Region	# of Extension Visits	# of Farmers engaged		
		Female	Male	Total
Kabul	3	0	2	2
Kandahar	0	0	0	0
Herat	7	12	59	71
Balkh	0	0	0	0
Kunduz	19	34	98	132
Nangarhar	1	20		20
Paktya	0	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	30	66	159	225

Exposure visit

<i>Defining the activity</i>	The purpose is to invite farmers from various parts of the district and introduce them to a new technique, crop or technology that is proving to be a success in other areas. These visits tend to take place on centrally located plots (to the extent possible) to maximize participation. The main objective of an exposure visit is to see if a new intervention is something that the farmer would want to introduce in his own fields. The exposure visit can be as close as a neighboring district or as far as a neighboring country. In some instances, these exposure visits are coordinated / organized by other collaborators.
<i>Why it's important</i>	If the exposure visit is successful, a demo plot in the area will be considered as the next step. The value of the visit is that new technologies are demonstrated without farmers having to commit to an unknown outcome.

AGRED emphasized exposure visits later in PY2 as AGRED continued to improve the program. The following table shows that AGRED conducted exposure visits sparingly through January 2014. This was largely because they required greater planning and farmer mobilization.

Table 10- Exposure visits, by region

Region	# of Exposure Visits	# of Farmers engaged		
		Female	Male	Total
Kabul	0	0	0	0
Kandahar	1	35	0	35
Herat	0	0	0	0
Balkh	1	4	0	4
Kunduz	4	17	12	29
Nangarhar	2	17	0	17
Paktya	0	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	8	73	12	85

A snapshot: improved service delivery, more accurate reporting

Through February and March 2014, AGRED operated under a revised reporting framework which more effectively captured and articulated field progress. The following table provides a ‘snapshot’ of progress made under the new model during these two months.

Table 11- Snapshot of activities conducted (February and March, 2014)

Activity	# activities conducted (all regions, two months)
Demo plot (established)	35
Demo plot (maintenance & monitoring)	111
Farmer field day	4
Farmer Field School (FFS)	6
Exposure visit	4
Extension visit	108
On farm training	68
[training department] Training	4
Research trials	2

Expected result 2- improved applied research and extension infrastructure

This expected result is based on providing direct support to MAIL to improve DAIL infrastructure to complement technical services to Afghan farmers. For example, a DAIL may invest in certain equipment to carry out a long-term research study, the results of which would form the basis for a new extension initiative that could be rolled out regionally or nationally.

The original program design and Work Plan relied almost entirely on On-budget resources to accomplish this expected result. Using non-On-budget resources, AGRED completed two assessments which provided MAIL with a formal inventory for future infrastructure initiatives.

2013 research and extension center inventory

In February 2013, AGRED provincial and regional staff, in collaboration with MAIL and DAIL staff, conducted an inventory of 26 extension and nine research centers to assess physical assets and map-out human resources of the centers in the targeted provinces. AGRED and MAIL used the assessment results as preparation for On-budget funding (at the time it had not been eliminated) to refurbish the centers, and as a baseline for other activities (including training and capacity building for DAIL staff). AGRED inventoried items such as: physical infrastructure; office equipment; agricultural tools and machinery; agricultural inputs; and laboratories and equipment, among others.

AGRED submitted the complete report to USAID in February 2013. The reports concluded that:

In sum, research and extension stations are highly variable in their inventories. One or two are well-equipped with adequate agricultural land, laboratory equipment, Internet access, office furniture, agricultural inputs and machinery, motorbikes and several qualified staff who make extension visits and keep records. Other centers struggle with just one or two staff, no support staff or furniture, no agricultural land and no agriculture-related inputs, machinery or meaningful extension activities. Most, however, had a mix — a center might have agricultural land but no machinery, or a laboratory but very little equipment or qualified staff. Most lacked any concrete plan for extension activities and research. The availability of resources does not appear to be correlated with the number of extension visits to farmers. Khas Kunar Extension Center, for example, reported that it has no furniture and little equipment, but still works with 300 farmers per month.

These highly variable conditions at the centers shows an overall lack of direction and management of existing resources, both centrally from MAIL and within the centers themselves. The recommendations below will help to standardize facilities in terms of activities and resources, and provide common platforms across provinces and districts to provide meaningful, high-quality extension services in districts and communities.

2014 Research center functional review

In February 2014, the AGRED IS Specialist initiated a follow up functional review of the seven AGRED research centers. The purpose of the review was to capture what opportunities existed for MAIL as they considered upgrading existing research infrastructure. AGRED completed this review in line with Off-budget contractual obligations and with an express understanding by MAIL that no On-budget resources would be available through AGRED to complete infrastructure upgrades.

The IS Specialist trained the seven AGRED Regional Research Coordinators to carry out the assessments, in close collaboration with relevant DAIL staff, Research Managers, and MAIL Infrastructure staff. The team began the site surveys in February after making the necessary

desktop review of the previous infrastructure analysis (mentioned above). The review team broke the assessment into the following processes:

- Security
- Enabling infrastructure
- Testing and laboratories
- Data storage and archiving
- General storage and coverage
- Machinery and equipment
- Staffing

AGRED submitted a complete draft report of the results to USAID in March. Sample recommendations from that review include:

- ✓ **Power:** Recommend to commissioning of 20Kw generators at those Research centers, where no auxiliary power plant exists, these being Kandahar, Kunduz and Paktya. It is suggested to conduct a formal power survey at sites identified as a power need, and considering alternative power solutions before making investment decisions.
- ✓ **Irrigation:** Recommend refurbishing research center irrigation and pumping water system that do not exist or have fallen into disrepair, namely Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz and Paktya. It is further suggested that research centers develop a funding plan for the maintenance and/or refurbishment of functioning irrigation systems at each center before making investment decisions.
- ✓ **Technical Improvements:** Recommend all future capital/technical donations include an appropriate operations and maintenance-training contract particularly in relation capital assets such laboratory testing instruments, headers, and seeders.
- ✓ **Laboratory Testing:** Recommend considering a system wide research laboratory management plan including outsourcing options to regional agricultural universities for testing and training.

Expected result 3- training and capacity building of MAIL / DAIL staff

Complementing capacity building efforts targeting farmers, AGRED directly built the capacity of MAIL and DAIL staff through various mechanisms. Activities under this Expected Result contributed to longer term-sustainability of MAIL / DAILs with the expectation that they would be better able to take increased ownership of technical and administrative facets of delivering services to Afghan farmers.

DAIL staff training

DAIL staff trainings were an essential component of AGRED’s service delivery. The trainings supported transfer of knowledge and built relationships between AGRED and MAIL / DAILs. AGRED developed tailored trainings for topics as identified by DAILs and farmers in each region. These



Farmers receive technical input on nursery / greenhouse irrigation techniques as part of on-farm trainings (Nangarhar province)

trainings were largely developed for DAIL staff so that they, in turn, could transfer the same technical skills and approaches to farmers.

AGRED facilitated 31 formal trainings to 706 farmers (658 male / 48 female). In the early stages of AGRED, trainings focused on setting up basic administrative systems at DAILs in order to design and manage mini projects. For example, AGRED led several early trainings in project design and proposal writing (to implement viable mini projects). Subsequently, AGRED introduced trainings which focused more on the technical aspects of farming (i.e., best practices for maize production, improved grape management, improved poultry management, etc.). The following

table provides a listing of all formal trainings conducted for DAIL staff.

Table 12- AGRED formal trainings

	Training title	Region	Date	Length (days)	# Male participants	# Female participants
1-3	Enhanced Proposal Writing Training	Kabul	29-Apr-13	3	49	11
		Kandahar	11-May-2013	1	20	0
		Kunduz	11-May-2013	1	38	0
4	Application of Best Agriculture Practice in Maize Production Training	Kandahar	19-May-13	1	31	2
5	Improved Rice Cultivation and Production Training	Nangahar	21-May-13	1	21	0
6	Enhanced Proposal Writing Training	Paktya	21-May-13	2	31	4
7	Improved Grape Management Training	Kunduz	06-Jul-13	2	18	2
8	Improved Poultry Farm Management Training	Kabul	20-Jul-13	3	18	2

	Training title	Region	Date	Length (days)	# Male participants	# Female participants
9	Best Cultural Practices in Saffron Production Training	Paktya	23-Jul-13	2	11	0
10	Best Cultural Practices in Mung Bean Production	Herat	25-Aug-13	2	16	5
11 - 16	Improved Poultry Farm Management Training	Kabul	17-Aug-13	3	10	0
		Kunduz	24-Aug-13	3	15	13
		Kunduz	27-Aug-13	3	14	8
		Kunduz	31-Aug-13	3	10	10
		Kunduz	03-Sep-13	3	19	2
		Kabul	16-Sep-13	3	20	0
17	Enhanced Proposal Writing Workshop	Balkh	20-Oct-13	3	8	2
18	Improved Poultry Farm Management Training	Kabul	21-Oct-13	3	30	0
19	Need Assessment Training (project development)	Kabul	22-Oct-13	2	26	7
20	Improved Saffron Production Training	Balkh	11-Nov-13	2	11	0
21	Pre- and post- Apple Harvesting Workshop	Kabul	11-Nov-13	3	20	0
22	Lime Sulfur Training	Kabul	09-Feb-14	1	20	0
23	Livestock Management Training	Kabul	16-Feb-14	3	14	1
24	Wheat Cultivation Training	Kandahar	23-Feb-14	1	27	3
25	Lime Sulphur Training	Kandahar	19-Feb-14	2	80	5
26	Bordeaux Mixture Training Course	Kabul	9-Mar-14	1	20	0
27	Urea Block Molasses Wardak	Kabul	15-Mar-14	1	16	0
28	Vegetable Production Technical Training	Nangarhar	16-Mar-14	2	14	0
29	Vegetable Production Technical Training	Nangarhar	16-Mar-14	1	5	0
30	Livestock Management Wardak	Kabul	24-Mar-14	3	18	0
31	Urea Block Molasses Kapisa	Kabul	4-Apr-14	1	8	7
			Sub Total	65	658	48
			Total			706

2014: Improved DAIL engagement

AGRED also delivered on-the-job trainings and on-site consultations in DAIL offices. These interventions addressed DAIL needs as they arose and were managed almost entirely at the regional and provincial levels. They were meant to complement formal trainings and often followed up on specific topics coming out of these trainings. These most often required no budget nor did they need approval from AGRED headquarters. Many of these interventions focused on setting up administrative systems within the DAILs to manage mini projects.

For example, DAIL staff may request of AGRED regional or provincial staff to be trained on basic Microsoft Word skills in order to develop a coherent mini project proposal. These types of interventions were particularly important during down times in the growing calendar when on-farm activities were limited.

AGRED field staff had been carrying out these interventions throughout the life of the project and saw opportunities to better explain how and why these interventions were important. As mentioned in previous sections, in late 2013 and early 2014 AGRED sought to improve how it defined its activities and communicated those activities to its partners.

AGRED gave on-the-job trainings more relevance and definition as well as incorporated it explicitly into the monthly field reporting requirements. The following table shows the number of activities in these two months alone.

Table 13- Snapshot of DAIL targeted activities, February and March 2014

Activity	# activities conducted (all regions, two months)
On job training (DAILs)	64
Working group & other coordination meetings (DAILs)	143

MAIL training and administrative systems building

Capacity building at the MAIL level was an critical component of the program as well. The emphasis of these efforts was on managerial tools which could improve MAIL staff’s ability to deliver services. AGRED focused on two areas in particular: 1) improved tracking and decision making concerning MAIL staff training and staff allocation, and 2) improved tracking and evaluation of MAIL staff productivity.

Training Assessment Matrix (TAM)

The TAM allows management teams to formally compare the number of qualified staff against the number of total staff required to effectively carry out a single activity / service. The calculation indicates where additional training may be needed and how to reorganize staff to maximize service delivery to farmers.

AGRED’s IS Specialist began introducing the TAM concept to MAIL in December and January, 2014. After several meetings with senior staff, they agreed that this was a valuable tool and agreed in concept to move forward with its implementation. The AGRED IS Specialist would continue to lead that process until MAIL could carry out its own management of the tool.

Capacity Development Department (MAIL HR)		Need Assessment (TNA - TAM)	Development Curriculum & Course Design	Budgets & Costing Training	MAE of Trainings & HR Statistics Collected (TAM)	Program - Training of Trainers	Annual MAIL Training/Scholarship Plan	Scholarships Selection Management	Scholarships Pre-Departure	Scholarships - Incountry	Scholarships - Return mangt	Ethics - Code of Conduct	Annual Workplan Section Plan	Business English	IT Excel Training	Induction Training	Laws and Regulations - Training	Planning & Organising	Report Writing	Proposal Writing	Individual Efficiency Points	Individual Efficiency PERCENTAGE (%)
Module Rating		2	2	2	3	5	5	2	3	2	2	3	4	5	4	4	3	2	2	1	56	2.9
Name	Grade																					
Sayed Asadullah Hashimi	4	0	T	C	T	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	T	T	0	T	T	T	T	T	0	1 5%
Vacant	4	0	T	T	T	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	T	0	0	T	T	T	T	T	0	0 0%
Shafiqullah	5	T	0	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	T	0	C	0	0	T	T	T	1	1 5%
Zahra Nabawi	5	0	0	T	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	T	0	0	0	0	C	T	T	2	1 5%
Mahboobullah Sadeq - AG	4	0	0	T	0	0	T	C	T	T	T	T	T	T	0	0	0	C	T	T	2	10%
Hijratullah Hijran	5	T	0	T	0	0	T	T	T	T	T	T	0	T	0	0	0	C	T	T	1	1 5%
		0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	
		8	5	15	8	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	6	2	3	6	2	6	6	6	3	
		0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	
		16	10	30	24	10	10	4	6	4	4	18	8	15	24	8	18	12	12	3		
		0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	7%	
		0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	7%	

Subsequently, AGRED carried out a training in February 2014. AGRED’s training provided an overview of how the tool can be used as well as a practical session in which participants created their own MS Excel TAM template. Based on this training, MAIL agreed that they could immediately begin implementing the tool on their own accord, with ongoing support from AGRED. The AGRED IS Specialist provided follow up support after the training.

Example of the TAM output, which evaluates staff productivity. MAIL participants developed a similar template for use as part of their training.

While MAIL staff will certainly miss the opportunity for ongoing support

by AGRED, the program’s closure should not preclude MAIL from moving forward with implementing the tool. The training and subsequent follow up meetings provided MAIL with enough of a basis to implement the tool.

Workforce Indicators of Staffing Needs (WISN)

Managers at MAIL and DAIL struggle daily with how to manage staffing and time allocation. The WISN method is based on an extension or research worker's workload, with activity (time) standards applied for each significant workload component. The WISN method is a human resource management tool that:

- Determines how many extension workers of a particular type are required to cope with the workload of a given extension and research facility.
- Assesses the workload pressure of the extension workers in that facility.

The AGRED IS Specialist introduced WISN as a complementary tool to the TAM; it was accepted in principle by MAIL. However, given the novelty of both tools, the two parties agreed that only one should be introduced at a time. AGRED planned for the WISN to be introduced later in 2014, once TAM has been implemented.

Expected result 4- applied research and extension grants

To complement the capacity building component of the program, Expected Result 4 was designed to offer grants to fund independent research from the academic community and private sector. These grants were to be funded by the On-budget component, and would be designed, rolled out, and implemented by MAIL / DAILs to benefit Afghan farmers to accomplish various outcomes.

Implementation of these activities was based on the approval of the IL and entirely on On-budget availability. Once the On-budget component was eliminated, alternative funding for these grants was under consideration by AGRED and MAIL at the time of the program's closure.

Cross-cutting: Gender

AGRED sought to integrate gender participation seamlessly into its delivery of services to MAIL / DAILs and farmers. As reported in the previous section, the Gender team and respective DAILs had approved 18 mini projects for 2014 and handed over four to DAILs at the time of AGRED's closing. AGRED Gender and DAIL staff:

- ✓ Engaged 175 females farmers through farmer field day events
- ✓ Engaged 66 female farmers through extension visits
- ✓ Engaged 235 female farmers through on-farm trainings
- ✓ Engaged 73 female farmers through exposure visits

(549) / **30**- percentage of female farmers engaged through AGRED's mini project activities

- farmer field days
- extension visits
- on-farm trainings
- exposure visits

Gender: looking towards 2014

In parallel with AGRED's outlook for PY3, the AGRED Gender team set out a series of new initiatives which sought to broaden the team's impact on DAIL and women farmers. These initiatives were outlined out in the revised Work Plan; the major tenets have been provided below.

AGRED Gender Strategy and Policy

The AGRED Gender team planned on formalizing a Gender strategy which aligned itself with the program's new steps, particularly related to institutional strengthening and capacity building at the MAIL and DAIL levels. The Strategy was based on broad-based coordination to enhance the role of MAIL Home Economy and Gender staff in the decision making process with respect to research and extension planning and programs. The AGRED Gender team also planned to produce a toolkit which would help MAIL and DAIL extension and research departments to address the gender concerns.

Grounding the strategy, AGRED's Gender team committed to establishing more concrete policies which would guide AGRED's operations as well as provide the basis for exploring policy options with MAIL / DAILs. AGRED's policies stressed greater accountability mechanisms and performance indicators.

Implementation of the Gender Strategy

The AGRED Gender team committed in the revised Work Plan to implement the Gender Strategy in the AGRED country office and within the regional and provincial offices. The Gender team would ensure that all departments promote gender equality and equity, as well as develop indicators of success and allocation of resources in all work plans. Each regional and provincial office was expected to carry out its own exercise of developing and implementing a Gender Strategy.



DAIL Home Economy staff take part in a practical, training on food preservation and safety that can be subsequently delivered to farmers and other DAIL staff (Balkh province)

Establish a network of female regional coordinators

The Gender team planned to establish a network of Female Regional Coordinators (FRCs) at Regional AGRED offices. The FRC would assist and develop staff capacity regarding gender and would plan the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. These staff would play a critical role in ensuring that the strategy and policies were implemented properly.

AGRED included each of these initiatives in the revised Work Plan GANTT chart.

PMP Indicators

This section presents all AGRED PMP indicators, per the approved PMP document.

Figure 2- AGRED PMP outcomes

Indicator Name and Number (and disaggregation by gender)	Baseline	Q2 FY 2013 (total for this quarter only)		Q3 FY2013 (total for this quarter only)		Q4 FY2013 (total for this quarter only)		Q1 FY2014 (total for this quarter only)		Q2 FY2014 (total for this quarter only)		TOTAL Cumulative figures for FY 2013	TOTAL Cumulative To Date (since project began)	Target for FY 2014	Target for FY 2015	Target for FY 2016
		Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Actual	Actual	Target	Target	Target
Percentage change in production of key crops by the target farmers as compared to non-beneficiary farmers	Rice =3.01 MT/ha Corn = 2.79 MT/ha Wheat = 2.47 MT/ha Onion = 12.8 MT/ha Grapes = 8.6 MT/ha Almond =2.00 MT/ha Apple = 8.64 MT/ha								Mung bean = 20%, Rice = 66% - 130% Corn= 55%				Mung bean = 20%, Rice = 66% - 130% Corn= 55%	10%	--	15%
Number of Afghan farmers accessing extension services.				TBD	76	TBD	190	TBD	292		1939	266	2497	TBD	TBD	TBD
Males					76		145		292		1356	221	1869			
Females					0		45		0		583	45	628			
Number of new technologies made available for transfer as a result of USG assistance		TBD	1	TBD	10	TBD	7	TBD	2		10	18	30	TBD	TBD	TBD
Percent of MAIL/DAIL staff trained who are competent in skill taught.*					66%		72%		60%		77%	69%	71%	60%	60%	60%
Males					66%		73%		63%		77%	69%	72%			
Females							67%		29%		73%	67%	64%			
Number of MAIL/DAIL staff trained in job				25	85	25	159	25	86		410	244	740	100	150	200
Males					84		126		78		354	210	642			
Females					1		33		8		56	34	98			
Number of national research centers / extension centers and laboratories assisted through USG assistance				--	1	--		1	1			1	2	5	6	7

AGRED Partnership

This section outlines specific partners with whom AGRED engaged with and provides an overview of the nature of the relationship. AGRED partnership development followed a similar trend as many of the program implementation activities: it was hampered by the delay in the IL approval, the subsequent decision to remove the On-budget component, and the need to revise the AGRED Work Plan. Consequently, AGRED could only focus its partnership development efforts on educating partners on the proposed changes to the Work and could not progress until the Work Plan had been approved and a more detailed definition of the partnership defined. The following list of partner represents those which had been engaged and fully educated on plans outlined in the revised Work Plan, but which remained non-committal until the Work Plan was approved.

Afghan Agricultural Extension Project (AAEP)

From the beginning AGRED and AAEP worked very closely. Given the similarity between the two, and common subcontractors, it was a natural partnership. AAEP was well underway at the time AGRED started, with a strong traction for activities and good relationships at DAILs. AAEP advised AGRED on a number of aspects through the early months of AGRED to include staffing and training, mini project processes and interaction with DAILs. On occasion, the two projects found points of conflict given differing end goals, or even because goals were too similar suggesting activities that would have been redundant.

Collaboration between the two programs had always been intended, though it was expected that AAEP would end in 2014 and AGRED would support activities by bridging support until DAILs were able to take a stronger lead. Prior to notice of AGRED's closure, AGRED planned to absorb AAEP staffing to ensure continuity of activities and to maintain the good relationships that AAEP staff had developed. Additionally, the AAEP annual conference was to be taken over by AGRED to ensure that the event continued and was eventually absorbed into MAIL/DAIL annual planning.

Capacity Building Change Management Program (CBCMP)

CBCMP was also an early collaborator for AGRED, providing introductions at MAIL and advice during development of the IL and Strategic Goals / Benchmarks. CBCMP staff was highly collaborative; however, it was often difficult to determine whether work produced by MAIL was the product of staff designated to CBCMP or the ministry. This made it difficult to forge relationships and build staff capacity when workers were reporting to an external project, or labeling information as that of or produced by CBCMP instead of being a product of MAIL. As was the case with AAEP, on occasion AGRED and CBCMP found points of conflict when goals were too similar or objectives overlapped.

Expected to close in April 2014, CBCMP offered a natural pool of qualified staff who had been working in similar areas as AGRED. The two parties explored ways in which CBCMP staff could be absorbed into AGRED once CBCMP closed.

International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)

AGRED and CIMMYT coordinated information exchange in areas such as CIMMYT's newly released seed varieties and improved techniques. AGRED used that information as the basis for new mini projects and other extension efforts. AGRED and CIMMYT had negotiated a more formal relationship and made progress towards signing a MoU. It was not signed at the time of AGRED's closure.

eAfghan Ag (e-AA)

AGRED and e-AA developed multiple areas of collaboration, including a joint project with Digital Green to contribute to a Knowledge Center, and a strategy to increase access to critical research and extension information at DAILS. The MoU had not been signed at the time of AGRED's closure.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

JICA and AGRED identified natural areas of collaboration, particularly related to implementing JICA's rice research findings through broader scale extension activities coordinated by AGRED and conducted through the DAILS. AGRED and JICA had agreed in principle that a MoU was necessary to formalize their relationship. The MoU was not signed at the time of AGRED's closure.

In early 2014, AGRED began engaging new organizations / programs to educate each other on their work and make initial steps towards coordinating field work. These were very preliminary conversations and progress with these specific organizations should not be overstated. However, the continued outreach in this area is another indicator of AGRED's commitment to improving the program into PY3. These organizations included:

- Mercy Corps
- Afghanistan Institutional Development (AFIDS) Project
- Regional Agricultural Development Project- South (RADP-South)

‘Lessons Learned’ & Recommendations

This section captures the most relevant lessons and experiences of the AGRED technical and administrative teams. Based on the lessons learned, the report provides recommendations (in italics) for consideration by USAID and other partners in any future design efforts.

On-Budget can be successful

On-budget projects can be successful if they are in line with GIRoA policies and procedures and the ground work is laid before the project’s start. GIRoA has policies and procedures in place that have been developed over the last ten years by donors, namely the World Bank. The process used by AGRED for mini projects proved effective in delivering funds to implement projects at the DAIL level. The mini projects allowed MAIL / DAILs to build the supporting systems and staff to manage projects and it allowed AGRED to manage procurements.

Before starting or even issuing the RFP, USAID and GIRoA should consider how to obtain a better understanding of each other’s processes, procedures, and requirements as well as a better understanding of GIRoA’s strength and weaknesses in each department. USAID should consider the process adopted by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for funding programs at the ministerial level. USAID’s concept to place funds in the general budget of a ministry is a potential second step, only after a ministry had proven the ability to manage programs with the World Bank approach. Moving directly to delivering funds through MoF to MAIL could have led to abuse and mismanagement.

Development of the on-budget mechanism

Key elements to the On-budget funding mechanism were under development throughout Y1 and Y2. This greatly challenged planning and implementation, leaving AGRED staff to respond and redirect efforts as new elements were introduced. Both MAIL and AGRED were forced to re-work plans repetitively. With each successive change USAID, ROP, and AGRED lost credibility in the eyes of MAIL and the DAILs.

This process and the associated elements should be completed and included in the program contract to serve as guiding documents from the beginning of project implementation.

GIRoA is not a contractor

GIRoA is not organized to support USAID contract requirements, information requests, and cash reimbursement cash flows. GIRoA cannot respond to questions on short notice because it takes time to clear things through different departments and department heads.

USAID should consider establishing a two-phase project implementation approach. The first phase would be to identify and document the project activities, staff development needs and program inputs. This first phase would then provide GIRoA the needed time to incorporate the program funding into their annual budgets. The second phase would be to implement the project by providing Off-budget consulting specialist and On-budget funding for program inputs and grants to be run through MoF and paid directly to vendors, not through MAIL budget.

Managing expectations

Early in AGRED, DAILs expected to receive On-budget funding and benefits from the start of the project, this was also a common misconception among USG personnel in field offices. Though AGRED funded small proposals at DAILs, the delayed impact and expectations of larger amounts of inputs caused frustrations and negative perceptions of the program at DAILs.

Utilizing a staged approach for program roll-out will help manage expectations of MAIL and DAILs, other donor programs, and USG field personnel. Secondly, careful messaging and communications will help to inform all stakeholders.

A phased approach

Though the concept and objectives of AGRED are spelled out in the contract between USAID and ROP, the systems and mechanisms for On-budget funding were under development throughout PY1. This includes the framework for the Implementation Letters, which include an extensive list of the conditions (Strategic Goals and benchmarks) under which MAIL will receive On-budget funds. As such, for the majority of Y1, ROP was conducting assessments and studies of MAIL systems and personnel in preparation of On-budget funds.

Roots of Peace established AGRED based upon the objectives of the program stated in the contract. In retrospect, ROP / AGRED would propose a phased program roll-out.

Phase 1- (Year 1)

- *Building relationships at MAIL;*
- *Off-budget funding is sole source of financing;*
- *Identify POCs; and advocate for additional personnel as needed;*
- *Research ministry systems and processes;*
- *Establishing benchmarks based on needs identified and negotiated;*
- *Planning for program implementation.*
- *AGRED staff skills are in evaluation, writing, diplomacy, management.*

Phase 2- (Years 2-5)

- *Program Implementation;*
- *On-budget money begins to flow;*
- *Increased focus on DAILs*
- *AGRED hires support team. Staff skills are in training, capacity building, monitoring.*

Furthermore, rather than trying to instantly cover the entire geographic area from the beginning, a more targeted approach should be considered whereby human resources and attention are concentrated in smaller areas in order to learn what works and what does not. Afterwards a well thought out roll out should happen over time.

The same can be said for hiring personnel, not all positions need to be filled immediately and can cause problems later both in damaging the image of the program and creating lethargic staff. Hiring needs to be a staged approach that only brings on staff when there is work for them to do. Field staff should have been hired in limited levels only after funds are available for projects. Full field staff should not have been fielded until on-budget funding mechanism was implemented.

Staffing for management

AGRED personnel turnover was a major challenge throughout Y1. The COP initially hired for the program was a technical expert, which proved to be a mismatch for the early needs of the program.

The AGRED team was led to believe that USAID would complete the On-budget funding process within three months. The On-budget work dominated the focus of the COP throughout the

program life. Future programming would benefit from recruiting primarily for strong management skills and secondarily for the relevant technical skills.

USAID staffing transitions

A majority of USAID staff rotate in and out of Kabul on an annual basis. The first OAG staff rotated out after one year and a complete replacement OAG staff came in with little background on the program and differing strategic approaches.

USAID should time transitions such that the Director and Deputy Director of Agriculture Office do not rotate in at the same time. A brief overlap period would help to transfer knowledge to the new team.

Financial Report

The final AGRED financial report is in the process of being developed by the Finance team. It will be submitted to USAID as a separate report.

ANNEX 1: Index of AGRED Reports

This Annex contains all available reports, assessments, and administrative documents developed over the life of the program.

Administrative

- AGRED Work Plan (revised January 2014, but not approved by USAID)
- Work Plan GANTT chart (revised January 2014, but not approved by USAID)
- Draft Implementation Letter (2013)
- Monthly reports (July 2012 – February 2014)
- Quarterly reports (July 2012 – December 2013)
- Demobilization plan (2014)
- Branding and Marking Plan (revised February 2014 and approved)
- Communications strategy (draft)

Technical

- Baseline Survey of Afghan farmers (2013)
- Research and Extension Center Inventory (2013)
- Mini project close out reports (2013-2014)
- Functional Review of Research Centers (2014)
- TAM presentation / manual (2014)
- Economic Impact Study: improved rice varieties / improved techniques (2014)

ANNEX 2: mini projects handover plan

This document has been submitted as a separate Excel file.