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AFGHANISTAN: SAVING LIVES AND PREPARING COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE DISASTERS THROUGH EMERGENCY PLANNING

Emergency Water Grants in Afghanistan

Duration: 2015–2017

Challenge

In April and May of 2014, 17 provinces in northern Afghanistan experienced the worst seasonal flooding the country has suffered in 100 years. The floods killed more than 200 people, wiped out homes, and destroyed or contaminated sources of safe water. Some of the most severely affected communities were also the most remote, making them hard to reach during times of crisis. Heavy rain and snowfall in 2015 compounded the disaster, resulting in almost 300 additional fatalities. Making matters worse, the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan has created a growing population of internally displaced persons—civilians who have fled their homes to escape the violence.

Afghanistan is extremely prone to disasters, both natural and man-made. When disaster strikes, one of the most urgent tasks for emergency responders is to restore access to safe drinking water. Clean water staves off waterborne disease outbreaks, such as cholera, that often follow crises.

Opportunity

To help those living in vulnerable conditions affected by the unprecedented flooding between 2014 and 2015, USAID partnered with UNICEF, the French NGO ACTED, and the

USAID works on the ground with the NGO ACTED in Kunduz, Afghanistan, to distribute hygiene and water kits to conflict-affected families. Photo credit: USAID/Afghanistan

Dutch relief organization ZOA to provide emergency water, hygiene, and sanitation in the hardest hit areas. Together the partners rehabilitated damaged wells, constructed new wells, erected latrines, and provided instruction on proper hygiene. To prepare communities for the future, emergency supplies were prepositioned in areas where future emergencies were likely to occur.

Abdul, a 37-year-old farmer in Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan, says he and his neighbors did not have access to safe drinking water after severe floods in the region. “My children were getting sick frequently because they had to drink contaminated water and lacked a latrine,” he said. With the help of USAID and its partners, Abdul says his family now has a toilet, the rate of diarrhea in the village has been reduced, and people practice better hygiene.

USAID’s partnership with UNICEF, ACTED, and ZOA saved lives, prevented disease from spreading, and helped communities prepare for future disasters. All three partners continue to reach out to those in need; to finish the construction of water and hygiene facilities; and to stockpile emergency aid supplies. Emergency planning will remain critical for Afghanistan, a country that continues to suffer from natural and man-made disasters that destroy homes and lives.