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PRESS RELEASE

Afghan Women's Contributions in Agricultural Value Chains

MAZAR-E-SHARIF, AFGHANISTAN –Afghan government officials, joined by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), recognized the importance of women in the agriculture sector during a two-day conference. The purpose of the conference was to explore means to strengthen women's contributions in each stage of value-added processes – from the farm to market and ultimately to consumer.

USAID's Regional Agriculture Development Project, North (RADP-North) sponsored the conference to organize women into business networks to achieve higher productivity and profitability in agricultural value chains. More than 160 women representing private business, government agencies and civil society organizations from Balkh, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Jowzjan, Kunduz, and Samangan provinces participated.

USAID Mission Director Herbert Smith said USAID and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock share a common goal of accelerating the advancement of women in Afghanistan's agricultural value chains.

"Women's contributions in agriculture are important for advancing food and economic security for Afghanistan," Smith said. "Including women in the sector enables local economies to function more efficiently. Everyone benefits – families, communities and ultimately the country of Afghanistan."

Kateb Shams, director for the MAIL's Balkh provincial office, said the objective of the conference is to identify challenges faced by women in the agriculture sector, and how those can be overcome.

"Women farmers don't have adequate equipment or marketing skills to bring their products to market," Shams said. "We are working with the (MAIL) and donor agencies to resolve this, for example by providing agribusiness training and cold-storage facilities."

USAID's RADP-North is a five-year program focusing on wheat, high-value crops such as grapes and almonds, and livestock. It helps producers, associations, traders, and agribusinesses to respond to market demand and help create market links between farmers and small, medium, and large businesses that allow the private sector to improve and grow.

The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 50 years."