

### Defying the Floods

Akakhil, Babanazar and Darwaza are three small villages in the province of Baghlan in northern Afghanistan. The villages are home to between 100 and 200 families, and although they are some distance apart on a single plain, they share some similarities. The residents here make their livelihoods based on wheat and vegetable cultivation and they are regularly confronted with the devastation of their irrigation canals.

Early each year, floor waters caused by melting snow from the surrounding mountains ravage the valley below. The floods not only fill the rivers with water, they bring with them sludge, rubble and stones. This debris settles in the carefully constructed irrigation canals built by the farmers to supply their fields with water. Year after year, the chairpersons of the water user associations have organised teams of volunteers, gathered money and hired equipment in order to clear the canals. This is an ever-recurring burden, as the next round of rain is sure to emerge and restart the process.

Haji Karim, Chairman of the water user association in Babanazar, illustrates the extent of the blocked irrigation canals' impact. 'Sludge and rubble not only settled in the canals. As soon as the canals clogged up, the waters poured onto our fields and flooded into our homes. The waters destroyed our harvests and damaged our personal belongings.'

In close cooperation with the Department for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock in the province of Baghlan, the German government has supported the water user associations in the three villages. This led to the establishment of effective protection systems and modern canals, complete with bridges, which direct water to the fields in a controlled manner even during heavy rain. According to Mr Naheem, Chairman of the water user association in the village of Akakhil, this new infrastructure has had a great impact. 'We now have the floor waters under control and we can irrigate our fields according to our exact needs.' In the past, this was anything but a matter of course. When the canals were blocked following floods, numerous fields were cut off from irrigation. This not only caused the harvests to suffer but also the income earned by the local families. 'This is now a thing of the past,' explains a delighted Naheem. 'With the new canals, we are now able to irrigate even more land, which has led to a rapid rise in our productivity. Additionally, we can now distribute the water fairly among all of the farmers so that everyone has a share.'

Besides the locals, traffic that passes through the area has benefited, too. The floodwaters also affected the roads, leaving rubble, sludge and damage in their wake. This issue has been overcome, emphasises Karim. 'We can drain and distribute the water in a controlled manner. It is now being



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directed to where it belongs: into the irrigation canals and onto our fields.’

The majority of households in Afghanistan depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Against this backdrop, the German government supports other groups including wheat and vegetable farmers so that they can boost their harvests and improve their incomes.

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**Programme objective:** The programme aims at creating new jobs and income opportunities for all Afghans. Activities focus on five value chains, including nuts, dairy, poultry, wheat and vegetables.

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